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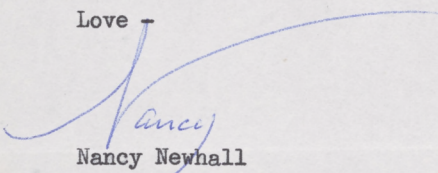
Dear Laura -

It isn't usual to send the author one's review - surprise in print is much more fun!

But just at the moment I don't know quite what to do with this. Not much interest in West or Southwest Indians around here, though I shall tackle our friends among the editors of local papers. Beau called Oliver Jensen of American Heritage, they use only their own staff. Saturday Review maybe? Arizona Highways - no surprise, nor Sierra Club Bulletin. Both would take it. Meanwhile, should you have use for it, here it is. Are illustrations for reviews possible? How's the back? Yours?

If I did it for say Aperture, I would take up your feeling about the mishandling of the relation between the text and the photographic sequence. Just on first look I wished I could have been in there, helping you! I congratulate the University of Texas on the number of illustrations - but what a book this might have been - not just good, which it couldn't help being, coming from Laura Gilpin, but one of the unforgettable great. Delighted it's selling well. How's Betsy?

Love -



Nancy Newhall

Laura Gilpin
409 Camino del Monte Sol
Santa Fe, New Mexico

THE ENDURING NAVAHO

by Laura Gilpin

University of Texas, 1968

203 pages, with many photographs, chronology, bibliography, index. \$17.50

Laura Gilpin is one of the most valiant women I know. And one of the most truly humble and compassionate. She isn't young any more; nobody who graduated from the Clarence White School of Photography in 1917 could be. Born in Colorado, she is a woman of the old West. Duststorms, snowstorms, a bad back or lame leg caused by some fall or other accident, Laura is still out there - out in the desert, with its immense perspectives, down in the stifling jungles of Yucatan, working the whole length of the Rio Grande, exploring the multiple cultures of the Southwest, Mexico, and beyond, - and, in the meantime, carrying on commercial and sometimes governmental assignments.

In addition, she has written four books. The three preceding are: The Pueblos: A Camera Chronicle, Temples in Yucatan, and The Rio Grande: River of History. Now she brings us The Enduring Navaho. Her long and loving acquaintance with this people began in 1930, when she and her friend, Elizabeth Forster, R.N., misdirected and hopelessly lost, ran out of gas in a vast and lonely desert where they could see fifty miles in every direction - and not a sign of man, not even a sheep. Laura started off on what turned out to be a ten-mile hike to the nearest trading post, meeting on the way a Navaho who spoke no English but gave her three cool, delicious peaches. When the trader's wife brought her back, with the gasoline, she saw with alarm the car swarmed over by Navahos, "like bees on a honeycomb." Betsy was playing cards with them! By twos and threes they had appeared out of nowhere to see if they could help. Betsy had fallen in love with them, and they with her. Next year she took a position as field nurse to the Navaho. Laura was understandably concerned; how would or could Betsy survive in such a primitive life, needing always some kind of interpreter and probably in conflict with the medicine man? But the medicine man held up two fingers side by side, sign that they would work together.

Now and then Betsy would get word to Laura that some great ceremonial was to be held; some were nine days long, and neither nurse nor photographer could afford the full time. But, in the interludes of getting to isolated hogans where people were ill, or of photographing some of the most spectacular country in the world, they sometimes managed to attend the assembling and the first rites, or perhaps the climax. Most of the photographs, apart from the idyllic magic images of the old life, made in 1934, were taken between 1950 and 1965. At first glance through the book, they seem redundant, and the color plates, some of them contributed by the architect Nathaniel Owings and his wife Margaret, gifted artist and potent conservationist, are too magenta, even granting this is a red rock and red earth country populated by what are popularly supposed to be red men. "Red men" come in many colors, some are very close to black, but the Navaho, like their cousins the Apache, are a most beautiful people, rather small, lithe as whips when young, and more walnut than mahogany.

Now read the text and you will find the many portraits are part of it, as are the often untitled details or multiple views of ways of life or of ceremonies, or of the transition of a gifted and imaginative people to contemporary life.

Laura Gilpin does not pretend to be an anthropologist, a psychologist, a folklorist, or anything else but a photographer who writes. She has submitted her text to leading authorities for checking. But even to her Navaho friends themselves, those who have become archaeologists or anthropologists or other specialists interested in their own people, much remains in mystery.

The Navaho seem to have been fairly late comers from Asia, and to have learned much from the earlier pueblo peoples - the Cliffdwellers who suddenly abandoned their dwellings up in the wind-and-water hollowed great caves - no one yet is fully certain why - and moved to the high mesas. When the Spanish came, bringing sheep, the Navahos became, for two hundred years, shepherds; their wealth was sheep. Or any stock they could steal from white settlers. A less murderous tribe than the Apaches, they became, nevertheless,

such a nuisance to Americans that Kit Carson was sent to round them up and they spent four years pent up in Fort Sumner, yearning for their great sacred places, such as the Canyon de Chelly and Monument Valley. They were also observing their captors, the Yankees, their clothes, their crafts. They had been weaving cotton when the Spanish found them; now, for a long time, they had been weaving wool, on portable looms, dyeing it with local shrubs and earths. They were excellent and inventive weavers, and according to the photographs of T. H. O'Sullivan, they were wearing their blankets around them, with necklaces of stones or shells, but, as late as 1870, few or none of silver, or of turquoise. When at last they were free to go back to their own places and spaces, they wanted to be shepherders again, wandering through the seasons with their flocks, building their domed hogans, always with a hole in the center for smoke and light; round, hexagonal, octagonal, usually of wood easily available, but sometimes of stone, solid against the winter, or ramadas, shady, open shelters, roofed with branches, cool in the heats of summer.

The wide rustling skirts and tight bodices of the Yankee women, their use of braid and buttons, became a theme from which Navaho women could extrapolate; their lovely, now traditional dress, no longer bears much resemblance to what the wives of post-Civil War army officers' wives were wearing. Same with the men, who liked the lean dark blue and epauletted elegance of the officers.

Bodices and jackets became loose tunics, comfortable to work in in the desert, and belted in with sashes and silver belts. There seems to have been little silversmithing among the Navaho until the 1870s, when suddenly the craft began proliferating, possibly because the traders and missionaries encouraged it, brought in ingots of silver and opened to the Navaho the turquoise mines below Santa Fe. The designs they used were basically Spanish, even Moorish and Egyptian, in origin, but here again the skill and imagination of this people began to transcend the early models. Coral, iridescent abalone shells, polished petrified wood, even cannel coal, were also used as gems. The simple, massive and heavy pieces were at first made for their friends and kin, and so they became jewelry made and

designed for individuals; they also became their money, as the gold and silver in saris is part of the wealth of women in India. Any trader would lend money on a good piece, and if, after a certain number of years, it was not reclaimed, the trader could sell it. The Anglos, as Yankees are known in the Southwest, became increasingly excited about their strong and subtle beauty.

Suddenly the Navaho, who still counted their wealth in sheep, horses, mules, burros and goats were ordered to decrease their flocks and herds and could not understand why. They saw no connection between these grazing animals and the vanishing gramma grass and other edible herbage, the increasing erosion of slopes, the flooding and trenching of streams, and the longer and longer distances they must drive their flocks to water. But the Anglos, both on the range and in Washington, did, and, further, what next for the Navaho?

The discovery of oil helped; some twenty years later, so did the discovery of uranium. Meanwhile the Navaho, during two World Wars, often off the Reservation for the first time, had proved themselves not only as warriors but as workers, with the totally unknown and complicated mechanisms and systems of the white man. These seemed to come as easily to their comprehension and their skills as weaving or silversmithing.

They are a most valuable people, like the Mohawks who build the highest towers in Manhattan, walking surefooted and unperturbed along girders over deeper and deeper abysses. And the Navaho and the Mohawk are not alone. There are many other tribes gifted perhaps in different ways than these. But where the Navaho are increasing in numbers and in wealth, many others are decreasing, both in numbers and in lands once granted them but now coveted by industry and other forms of exploitation.

Not the least part of what these peoples can give us is their needing to be in harmony with life and all the elemental forces that influence it. The "He" rain is the huge storm that drives the seed into the earth; the "She" rain is the long, gentle shower that makes the seed to grow. The Blessing and Healing ceremonies for instance, not to mention

here the seasonal great peaks which are like Christmas or Easter, Ramadan, Yom Kippur, Chanukah, with other faiths. Who, being ill and in danger of dying, would not revive, at least a little, when kin or friends you may not have seen for many years come hundreds of lonely desert miles with their wives and children just to be with you? Then the medicine men come; the chants begin, and the magic sand paintings. Perhaps you also need surgery, or other things the Anglos can give you, and thereby a few more years of life. But the wonderful assurance that you are loved and wanted? Where is that, in most contemporary societies?

Laura Gilpin can tell you much more about all this, for hers is not merely the "visual record" any perceptive photographer might have done, especially with nearly forty years of occasional opportunity, but "an interpretation of a wonderful people just as I found them, a people having great pride, dignity and ability, who deserve our sincere respect."

Nancy Newhall