

**University of New Mexico**  
**UNM Digital Repository**

---

American Studies ETDs

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

1-30-2012

# Colonizing Chaco Canyon: Mapping Antiquity in the Territorial Southwest

Berenika Byszewski

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/amst\\_etds](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/amst_etds)

---

## Recommended Citation

Byszewski, Berenika. "Colonizing Chaco Canyon: Mapping Antiquity in the Territorial Southwest." (2012).  
[https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/amst\\_etds/5](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/amst_etds/5)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Studies ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

Berenika Byszewski

*Candidate*

American Studies

*Department*

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Thesis Committee:*

Alyosha Goldstein, Chairperson

Maria Lane

Christopher Wilson

**COLONIZING CHACO CANYON: MAPPING ANTIQUITY IN THE  
TERRITORIAL SOUTHWEST**

**BY**

**BERENIKA BYSZEWSKI**

Bachelor of Arts, Anthropology, New York University

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
American Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**December, 2011**

Colonizing Chaco Canyon: Mapping Antiquity in the Territorial Southwest  
Berenika Byszewski  
BA, Anthropology, New York University  
MA, American Studies, University of New Mexico

ABSTRACT

The 1849 Navajo Expedition was the first official US military mapping of Navajoland after the Mexican Cession, and has been recognized by historians as the first sustained window into the region and its people. Lieutenant James H. Simpson of the US Topographical Corps of Engineers was ordered to accompany the punitive expedition to document the route. Captivated by the stone ruins of Chaco Canyon, Simpson made a side excursion to record and map the structures, and contributed to the way Chaco is interpreted and imagined to this day.

In this paper, I follow Lieutenant Simpson's survey party, tracing their "discovery" and mapping of Chaco Canyon. Through an analysis of Simpson's map and journal, I argue that the mapping effort served to fix Chaco in a new geography of antiquity that redrew the history and future of the nation, and attempted to discipline unfamiliar peoples and landscapes into the national body. This mapping constructed Chaco as a national resource, fixing its significance in both prehistory and the moment of its discovery. Tracing the particular ways this knowledge was produced through the discovery and mapping of Chaco shows how both colonial cartographies and notions of antiquity are foundational to the ongoing project of settler colonialism.

## Table of Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	The Navajo Expedition.....	5
1.2	On maps and ruins.....	7
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Mapping the Borderlands.....</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1	Navajoland.....	13
2.2	Borderland cartographies .....	17
2.3	Silences, heteroglossia, and indigenous mapping.....	22
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Fixing Chaco through the Traverse Map.....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1	“By means of which the world was to be enlightened” .....	26
3.2	Finding “facts on the ground” .....	29
3.3	The traverse map as journey .....	31
3.4	Naming ruins .....	32
3.5	Making the nation through the Topographical Corps, 1838-1863.....	33
3.6	Unsettling the traverse map .....	39
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Natural and Nomadic Landscapes.....</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1	Making national landscapes.....	43
4.2	Mapping subjects .....	45
4.3	Nomadic landscapes.....	49
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Documenting Chaco as Science and Art .....</b>	<b>50</b>
5.1	Measuring the beauty of ruin .....	51
5.2	Aesthetics and civilization .....	52
5.3	Discourses of antiquity .....	54
5.4	Preserving and reconstructing ruins.....	56
5.5	Conquering ruins .....	58
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>66</b>
	<b>Figure Appendix</b>	

## 1.0 Introduction

On August 14, 1849, just as he arrived in Santa Fe after mapping a wagon route from Fort Smith, Arkansas, Lieutenant James H. Simpson of the US Topographical Corps of Engineers was ordered to accompany a punitive expedition into the Navajo borderlands, to “make such a survey of the country as the movements of the troops would permit.”<sup>1</sup> This was the first official US mapping of this part of the Southwest after the Mexican Cession, and has been recognized by historians as the first sustained window into the region and its people (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Captivated by the stone ruins of Chaco Canyon, Simpson made a side excursion to document and map the structures, remarking that, “they discover in the materials of which they are composed, as well as in the grandeur of their design and superiority of their workmanship, a condition of architectural excellence beyond the power of the Indians or New Mexicans of the present day to exhibit.”<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I follow Lieutenant Simpson’s survey party, tracing their “discovery” and mapping of Chaco Canyon. Through an analysis of Simpson’s map and journal, I argue that the mapping effort served to fix Chaco in a new geography of antiquity that redrew the history and future of the nation, and attempted to discipline

---

<sup>1</sup> James H. Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the Navajo Country, Made with the Troops under Command of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel John M. Washington, Chief of Ninth Military Department, and Governor of New Mexico, in 1849* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1852), 2. Simpson’s journal first appeared in the *Reports of the Secretary of War* (Washington, DC, Senate Ex. Doc. 64, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1850). The map, included in both printings, is drawn by Edward Kern and entitled, *Map of the Route pursued in 1849 by the US Troops, under the command of Bvt. Lieut. Col. Jno. M. Washington, Governor of New Mexico, in an expedition against the Navajos Indians* (Philadelphia: Duval, 1849). The journal was reprinted in 1964 as *The Navaho Expedition: Journal of a Military Reconnaissance from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the Navajo Country, made in 1849 by Lieutenant James H. Simpson*, annotated and edited by Frank McNitt (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964, reprinted by Red River Books, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Carl I. Wheat, *Mapping the Trans-Mississippi West, 1540-1861*; (Mansfield Centre: Martino Publishing, 2004) and William Geertzmann, *Exploration and Empire: the Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> Simpson, *Journal*, 45.

unfamiliar peoples and landscapes into the national body. This mapping constructed Chaco as a national resource, fixing its significance in both prehistory and the moment of its discovery, and laid the foundation for ongoing forms of colonial knowledge production and bureaucratic protectionism that reinforce the logic of Native removal.

While numerous studies have examined the exploration and mapping of the US Southwest, few have considered how the mapping of antiquity worked in the project of Native dispossession and the development of the nation.<sup>4</sup> Through their implicit claims of representing an objective reality, colonial cartographies obscure the violence of colonial power relations that contribute to the production and deployment of cartographic knowledge. “Maps...tend to desocialize the territory they represent,” writes critical cartographer Brian Harley, “the abstract quality of the map, lessens the burden of conscience about people in the landscape.”<sup>5</sup> In Simpson’s mapping of the Southwest, notions of antiquity were embedded in the logic of the map, and ideas of nation and civilization were worked through the interpretation of ruins. Tracing the particular ways this knowledge was produced through the discovery and mapping of Chaco shows how both colonial cartographies and notions of antiquity were foundational to the ongoing project of settler colonialism.

At its height about a thousand years ago, Chaco Canyon was the major center of ceremony and trade in a region that extended throughout the Southwest and northern

---

<sup>4</sup> For essays about the history of cartography in the Southwest, see *Mapping and Empire: Soldier-Engineers on the Southwestern Frontier*, edited by Dennis Reinhartz and Gerald D. Saxon (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2005). For an analysis of antiquity and empire in Napoleon’s mapping of Egypt, see Anne Godlewska, “Map, Text, and Image: the Mentality of Enlightened Conquerors: A New Look at the Description de l’Egypte,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995): 5–28.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, edited by Paul Laxton (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 81.

Mexico (Figure 2). A cluster of massive, master-planned stone buildings formed a central complex in the canyon, with an extensive road network linking numerous outlying structures hundreds of miles away. Archaeologists and Native American descendent communities both tell of the diversity of Chaco's inhabitants, and describe it as confluence of cultures and power unparalleled in the prehistoric Southwest.<sup>6</sup> In the 1100s, due to a combination of environmental and social factors that remain the subject of much debate among Chaco scholars, the Chacoan world collapsed. People dispersed to form different communities and strategies of survival, and the monumental stone city in the canyon began its slow descent into ruin. Although it remained in cognitive geographies and mythical lore over the centuries, the 1849 discovery of the ruins reconfigured its meaning in ways that continue to be contested today. If "struggles over meaning are inevitably struggles over resources,"<sup>7</sup> then the contested mappings of Chaco can be seen as a battle over ownership of the past, a past made manifest as both knowledge and territory.

The ruins are currently within 34,000 acres of Chaco Culture National Historical Park, which manages multiple meanings of place as part of its mission (Figure 3). The aesthetics of maintaining the ruins to evoke a mythical moment of discovery serve as the dominant logic of a Chaco imaginary, one that is now being rearticulated through a current conflict over improving the main access road to the park. The park's Master Plan states, "the primary objective should be to maintain the area, as much as possible, in the

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Kendrick Frazier, *People of Chaco: A Canyon and its Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), and David Grant Noble, *New Light on Chaco Canyon* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> George Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies," *American Quarterly*, 42 No. 4 (December 1990): 615.



condition which existed when first seen by the early explorers. Other signs of man's activities...should be hidden."<sup>8</sup> In addition to hiding signs of modernity, however, this management objective elides the history, politics and cycles of Native removal that went into the making of Chaco. This commitment to timeless antiquity initiated the forced removal of Navajo families from the park boundaries in the 1930s under the logic of protecting the ruins, and also serves to silence competing claims to a Chacoan present by two dozen culturally affiliated Native communities.

By focusing on the initial mapping of Chaco, I show how this mythical moment of discovery is embedded in the history of colonial encounter, and I consider the ways mapping contributed to dominant meanings of the ruins that reinforce the logic of Native removal. I examine the role of mapping in the making of Chaco Canyon as a place—a cradle of Southwest archaeology, a national resource, and a contested site of cultural knowledge. As technical and cultural documents, the map and journal from the Navajo Expedition reflect rapidly transforming ideas about national territory and history. In this context, interpretations of antiquity were based on the deployment of spatial knowledge and the active colonization of the Southwest, and the US discovery of Chaco Canyon was worked through the settler-colonial logic of Native removal. As the transnational turn in American studies may serve to elide the persistent forms of colonialism within the US, particularly in relation to indigenous people, my focus on the ruinscapes of the Southwest positions places like Chaco as contested sites of knowledge production that shape social relations and identities in addition to notions of prehistory and a national past.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Chaco Culture National Historical Park Management Plan*, National Park Service, 1968.

In what follows, I introduce the Navajo Expedition and the journal and map it produced, as well as the theoretical contours of my inquiry, which I elaborate throughout my analysis. After the Introduction, the paper is divided into four main sections. In the first section, I consider the Navajo borderlands as it was translated on maps prior to the Navajo Expedition. The following three sections focus on an analysis of Simpson's map and journal, where I trace the fixing of the Chaco ruins through 1) the technology of the traverse map, 2) the construction of natural and nomadic landscapes, and 3) the discourse of ruins. Lastly, I conclude by considering how the mapping of ruins laid the foundation for cycles of Native removal from Chaco and propose areas for further research.

### ***1.1 The Navajo Expedition***

In 1848 the United States emerged victorious from the Mexican War and acquired vast regions in the American West, much of which had been within the imperial reach of Spain and the Mexican state in name only (See Figure 2). The military mapping conducted by the US Topographical Corps of Engineers was instrumental to the war effort and proved to be even more important in its aftermath.<sup>9</sup> After the US had secured the treaty with Mexico, its interests in the Southwest changed rhetorically from conquest to nation building. But its military tactics remained largely the same, with the target merely shifting from an external enemy to the autonomous or 'wild' Indians within its new borders. A cartographic imperative accompanied the feverish expression of Manifest Destiny into the uncharted terrain of the Southwest; in this context, mapping functioned

---

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Geotzmann, *Exploration and Empire*.

as a process, tool and text of territorialization, helping to incorporate unfamiliar landscapes and peoples into the changing contours of the nation.

In August 1849, Lieutenant James H. Simpson of the US Corps of Topographical Engineers arrived in Santa Fe after mapping a wagon route there from Fort Smith, Arkansas. He was immediately ordered to accompany Colonel John M. Washington's month-long punitive expedition into the Navajo borderlands to document the route. Simpson enlisted the help of two notable illustrators, Edward and Richard Kern, who had just returned from Fremont's failed fourth expedition in search of a Western passage.<sup>10</sup> Simpson's interest in ancient ruins led him to take side excursions when feasible, twice detaching from the expedition altogether to focus on the objects of antiquity. Most captivating for Simpson was Chaco Canyon, where immense stone ruins of a distant age seemed to be none other than the mythical lost city of the Aztecs. His "discovery" and documentation of the ruins positioned Chaco as a cradle of Southwest archaeology, with Simpson as its first archaeologist.

The Navajo Expedition resulted in the production of a map and associated journal. It was one of the first surveys to be submitted following a new Senate resolution from June 8, 1850, which called for "copies of the journals of all reconnaissances returned to the Topographical Bureau by officers of the United States making such surveys within the last year...together with copies of the maps and sketches belonging to said reconnaissances."<sup>11</sup> Congress printed 3,000 copies of the journal in 1850 as part of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Congressional Reports, 300 of which were to be reserved for the Corps of

---

<sup>10</sup>David J. Weber, *Richard H. Kern: Expeditionary Artist in the Far Southwest, 1848-1853* (Albuquerque, UNM Press, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> *Reports of the Secretary of War* (Washington, DC, Senate Ex. Doc. 64, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1850).

Topographical Engineers. In 1852, Lippincott, Grambo and Company of Philadelphia reprinted the journal for a popular audience, which included 75 chromolithographs created by a new steam-press technology that enabled the mechanical mass production of color prints.<sup>12</sup> The journal was intended for a broad audience, including the government, scientists, armchair explorers, and “lovers of nature.”<sup>13</sup> At the time, it was common for such military journals to be consumed alongside travel literature by east-coast publics.<sup>14</sup> Other contemporaneous publications advertised in the back of the 1852 edition, for example, included captivity narratives, etiquette manuals, military volunteer diaries, travel guides, and technical medical books.<sup>15</sup> Since that time, information from the journal has been sporadically rediscovered and recycled in commercial maps, encyclopedias, and popular and scientific literature. The combination of the journal’s wide reach and its continued relative obscurity position it both at the center and periphery of discourses about the Southwest. This ambiguous discursive location enables assertions of Chaco’s importance and protection, while creating the ongoing conditions for its mystery and perpetual rediscovery.

### ***1.2 On maps and ruins***

In his now-classic study of Southeast Asia, Benedict Anderson suggests that the colonial-state, and later the nation-state, attached itself to antiquity through cartographic discourse.<sup>16</sup> Initially, this served the purpose of legitimizing conquest through the

---

<sup>12</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*.

<sup>13</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 67.

<sup>14</sup> Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*.

<sup>15</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, back matter.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson, “Census, Map, Museum,” in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006): 163-187.

production of “historical maps” that reconstructed a “property-history” of new colonial possessions.<sup>17</sup> As people began settling in the colonies, states began to position themselves as “guardians of a generalized, but also local, ‘Tradition’” through their role in the production and protection of “Monumental archaeology.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, ancient sacred sites were gathered up on the map, reconstructed as unpeopled monuments for tourism, and “repositioned as regalia for a secular colonial state.”<sup>19</sup> This appropriation of antiquity freezes sacred sites into ancient ruins, which operate outside of history, in the realm of an eternal and static prehistory. In this sense, ruins are constructed as being under constant threat of collapse, perpetually vanishing treasures in need of ongoing state preservation.

While Benedict’s concept of state protectionism is useful in understanding certain elaborations of state control over ruins, his tendency to generalize his analysis into abstracted notions of a colonial-to-national progression may obscure more than it reveals about colonial practices. In the US territorial Southwest, the colonial, settler-colonial, and national projects are not so easily separable, and are perhaps best viewed as occurring simultaneously. The mythology and imagined geography of ruins in this region traces a deeper genealogy than the nation, connecting imperial desires to national histories, and making it a productive site to explore the construction of prehistory in a context of a broader definition of settler colonialism.

The military mapping of Chaco combined colonial cartography and the discourse of ruins in ways that created the conditions for, and reinforced the logic of, settler colonialism. Historian Patrick Wolf describes settler colonialism as a particular colonial

---

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 174-175; 181.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 182.

formation wherein control of territory and reproduction of settler society structures an enduring ideology of “destroying to replace.”<sup>20</sup> According to Wolfe, this logic of elimination of the Native extends to programs of assimilation, private property and individualism, and “statistical extermination” through the blood quantum regime. Thus, the logic of settler-colonialism extends to all aspects of the settler colonial project that seek to replace the colonized, not merely the areas that are subject to actual settlement. In the case of Chaco, the logic of elimination operates at the *territorial* level, through the spatial delineation of landscapes that require government protection, as well as the *epistemological* level, through scientific claims to the knowledge of the past. Both types of elimination require continual representational removal at various sites, such as cartographic practices and the preservation of ruins. The military mapping of the Southwest served to claim national spaces and separate nomadic peoples from the landscape through representational erasure. This privileging of settlements over nomadism anticipated government programs of removal such as the Navajo Long Walk of 1864.<sup>21</sup> It also shaped the ways the past was imagined, where monumental architecture was placed at the height of civilization, and nomadism as its regression. Through representational erasure, the map also worked to erase the violence of physical and discursive removal.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocidal Research* 8(4) (2006): 387-409.

<sup>21</sup> The Navajo Long Walk of 1864 refers to the capture and forced relocation of the majority of Navajo via an 18-day march to Fort Sumner on the Pecos River. They were interred there for four years prior to their eventual return to their homeland.

<sup>22</sup> Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); see also Scott Kirsch, “John Wesley Powell and the Mapping of the Colorado Plateau, 1869-1879: Survey Science, Geographical solutions, and the Economy of Environmental Values,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92 (2002): 548-572.

As a technology of settler colonialism, cartographic practice materialized ideas of Chaco in the national landscape, and constructed it as a space in which to pour multiple desires and impulses of the colonial cultural imagination. Dominant narratives of Chaco reveal the ways in which the practice and performance of heritage is part of an ongoing territorialisation of indigenous spaces and histories. Mapped as both center and periphery to the national story, Chaco could be rediscovered and revisited in the footsteps of the first explorers. Preservation practices are thus rationalized, while obscuring their political content as part of a logic of Indian removal that mapped Native knowledge outside the scientific discourses of antiquity. In her study of Israeli settler-colonialism, anthropologist Nadja El-Haj argues that ruins became historical “facts on the ground” that legitimized colonial attachments to territory, and shows how the interpretation of ruins through archaeology was foundational to the settler nation-state.<sup>23</sup>

My methodological approach draws from current scholarship in critical cartography that rethinks the way we view and understand maps and mapping practice.<sup>24</sup> In addition to being historical objects of inquiry, maps can be analyzed for the practices, epistemologies, and discourses in which they operate and help construct. Rather than increasingly accurate representations of an objective reality, maps are better viewed as constructions of reality that are constituted of, and in turn constitute, a historically specific and contingent constellation of ideas and power relations.<sup>25</sup> Put another way,

---

<sup>23</sup> Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> See for example: Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*; Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York City: The Guilford Press, 1992); John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geocoded World* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> See Christian Jacob, “Toward a Cultural History of Cartography,” *Imago Mundi* 48 (1996): 191-98, for Jacob’s discussion of the “translucent” map versus the “opaque map.”

maps are products of decisions about what to depict and what to leave out; thus, they serve particular social and political interests.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Chaco, just as the map worked to construct a particular version of the material and social landscape, the interpretation of ruins materialized certain ideas about civilization and drew boundaries between notions of history and prehistory, relegating the latter to observational field science as the best way to understand the distant past. In this context, the meaning of the ruins was constituted out of the logic of the map, which geographer Nicholas Blomley describes as a technology of dispossession that both depoliticizes the world into a series of a priori objects, and also “conceals the process through which it works as an ordering device.”<sup>27</sup> A critical cartography approach shows how meanings of Chaco were constituted out of the survey and mapping effort. Through the survey, representations of the ruins were affixed to the map through *process* of government-sponsored field-based practice, the *tool* of technological science, and the *text* of representational discourse. This multi-dimensionality of cartographic production allows access to different, albeit interrelated, registers of the settler colonial project, where ruins become a place to form attachments that reproduce the logic of elimination.

The *process* of mapping the Southwest was an important strategy to incorporate recently annexed lands and peoples into the Manifest Destiny of the nation. On an instrumental level, it collected and catalogued Native knowledge for strategic military purposes. The techniques of mapping were worked through local knowledge in local contexts, while at the same time served to discipline new national subjects and separate

---

<sup>26</sup> Wood, *The Power of Maps*.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Blomley, “Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid,” *Annals, Association of American Geographers* 93(1) (2003): 127.



people from their land through various forms of representational erasure. Viewing the map as a *tool* highlights the logic of the map that structured particular relationships with the land and its inhabitants, and created spatial representations that acquired the status of scientific truth. Investigating these cartographic representations, including the productive absences inherent in maps, as a result of historically contingent social processes serves to denaturalize the ontological status of the map (and ruins), and refocuses on the cognitive strategies through which colonial relationships of power are negotiated. And lastly, as *text*, early US maps of the Southwest and their accompanying journals were printed and reprinted in centers of governmental and commercial power outside the region, and circulated widely within diverse colonial discourses. The interpretation of Southwestern landscapes and peoples was worked through discourses of exploration, science, art, and civilization in ways that remade the region into a laboratory of anthropology, and ruins into monuments of a colonial prehistory.

Rather than untangling these functions of mapping into artificially bounded categories, I show how they are inextricably bound up together and co-construct each other just as they co-constitute meanings of nation, ruins, and Indians through the mapping of the Southwest. Through a visual and discursive analysis of the Navajo Expedition's map and accompanying journal, I suggest that national identity was articulated through contestations at the intersection of cartographic practices and interpretations of antiquity. As Doreen Massey has persuasively argued, "it is not that the interrelations between objects occur in space and time; it is these relationships themselves which create/define space and time."<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 36.

This co-construction of space/time is most readily apparent through the spatialization of antiquity, which fixes particular notions of time within the material space of observable facts. Ruins became a particularly productive arena in which to fix the territory of the nation to the origin story of national time.<sup>29</sup> As physical markers of a vanished past, ruins become frozen in both a particular prehistory, and at the moment of their “discovery,” thus continuing to assert themselves as monuments to a persistent colonialism. Highlighting the tensions between the map and the practice of mapping, and between cartographic logic and other knowledges, not only challenges the ontological status of the map (and ruins), but brings us closer to an understanding of the co-construction of space and time through colonial relations of power. And, perhaps most importantly, it re-politicizes the Southwestern landscape as a socially created space, and an ongoing site of struggle over meaning and material realities.

## **2.0 Mapping the Borderlands**

### ***2.1 Navajoland***

The Navajo Expedition penetrated and mapped the region referred to by historian James Brooks as the “Navajo Borderlands.”<sup>30</sup> While the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo transferred control of this region from the Mexican government to the US, this imperial borderland had never been conquered and incorporated into the fold of the Spanish Empire or Mexican State. Situated northwest of the Pueblo and Spanish-colonial

---

<sup>29</sup> See Antonis Liakos, “The Construction of National Time: The Making of the Modern Greek Historical Imagination,” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 16, No. 1 (June 2001): 27-42. “The national narrative restructures the experience of time, presenting the nation as an active historical agent that, through the narrative, acquires a new historical identity.”

<sup>30</sup> James Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2001)

settlements along the Rio Grande, the Navajo homeland was physically separated from this northern fringe of the Spanish colony by vast stretches of arid plateaus and tablelands, but intimately connected to it through the political economy of the region and episodic warfare. Longstanding relationships of trading and raiding between Navajos and their Spanish/Mexican and Pueblo neighbors structured a complex and shifting geography of settlements and interests in the borderlands.<sup>31</sup> These economic ties and conflicts intensified in the eighteenth century as the elaboration of sheep pastoralism by both Navajos and Spanish colonists made access to land and livestock in the region increasingly contentious. In addition to trading and raiding, an economy of captive exchange complicated the neat cultural distinctions implied by the colonial project of attaching names and places to various peoples in the region.<sup>32</sup>

While it is useful to view this area as a borderland of empire in order to highlight its position at the edge of colonial power, it is also potentially misleading. First of all, the area was differently mapped by various indigenous peoples, who invested the landscape with far-ranging and overlapping sacred, economic, and historical geographies. Second, being geographically “outside” of empire does not necessary equate to being outside the violence of colonialism, as historian Ned Blackhawk has shown in his analysis of the initially indirect, but nonetheless transformative, impact of colonial violence on Great Basin Ute and Shoshone peoples.<sup>33</sup> Lastly, the borderlands concept—whether conceived of as a physical locale or a more indirect sphere of influence—often assumes a contact zone, or middle ground, of a colonial core and indigenous periphery. In his recent history

---

<sup>31</sup> Including the Rio Grande Pueblos, but also Acoma, Zuni, and Laguna to the south, and Hopi to the west.

<sup>32</sup> Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*.

<sup>33</sup> Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land*.

of the Comanches, Pekka Hämäläinen inverts this relationship to position the Comanches as an empire that controlled and exploited the Spanish presence at the edges of its domain.<sup>34</sup> The Navajo borderlands could be similarly reoriented to emphasize the extent of Navajo autonomy and power over the colonists and regional economy in the late Spanish and Mexican periods. If careful not to diminish the violent and destabilizing role of Spanish and US colonialisms, such a move may provide a good vantage point from which to challenge the marginality inherent in constructions of Navajos as peripheral tribes merely reacting to imperial powers.

Thus, it may be more useful to refer to the borderlands as Navajoland or Navajo Country.<sup>35</sup> Through creation stories and traditional histories attached to the land, Navajos center their homeland squarely between four sacred mountains—Sis Naajini (Blanca Peak) in the east, Tsoodzil (Mt. Taylor) in the south, Dook’o’oosliid (San Francisco Peaks) in the west, and Dibe Nitsaa (Hesperus Peak) in the north. In addition, two important internal features—Dzil Na’oodilii (Huerfano Mountain) and Ch’ool’i’i (Gobernador Knob)—shape the Dinétah, or ancestral homeland (Figure 4). This region is ecologically diverse—spanning the high deserts of the Colorado plateau, the Continental Divide, the badlands of the San Juan basin, west-trending river valleys, and the pine forests of the Nacimiento Mountains. Navajo cartographies trace migration and trade routes through the time and space of the Southwest and beyond. Traditional histories, creation stories, and ceremonialism map connections to a sacred landscape that includes the Anasazi ruins in Chaco Canyon and multiple outlying sites. These connections are not

---

<sup>34</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 3. “Ultimately, the rise of the Comanche empire helps explain why Mexico’s Far North is today the American Southwest.”

<sup>35</sup> Jennifer Denetdale uses these terms in *Reclaiming Dine History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

timeless and static conceptions, relegated to an eternal prehistory, but changing relationships to the land and peoples of the regions. An analysis of the Navajo Expedition through its cultural production can only provide fleeting and refracted glimpses of Navajoland and Navajo culture in 1849. It is more useful for the ways interactions with, and representations of, Indians and ruins work to create notions of self and nation.

By carving out a particular view of the little known Navajoland, Simpson's Navajo Expedition map and journal also helped create and define notions of nation and the Southwest. It is useful to think of the "nation," the Southwest, and even the Navajo Borderlands, as "imagined communities," after Benedict Anderson.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, these entities become concepts that are created through contingent historical processes and inhere in social landscapes as opposed to merely physiographic ones. However, as discursive constructs attached to geographical regions, distinctions exist between these entities in the spatialized ways these communities are constituted. While Anderson posited the nation as a horizontal community of belonging forged through print capitalism and government institutions, the Southwest at this time was imagined as a peripheral appendage to the body of the nation, stitched to the national body through traverse surveys and wagon roads that linked the area to predominantly east-coast audiences. The small population of US newcomers in Santa Fe at the time of the 1849 Expedition was predominantly military and overwhelmingly male. This made the process of imagining the Southwest through print media a distinctly outsider affair, at least until more significant numbers of people started settling in the region after the coming of the railroad in 1880. The same area that lies "southwest" of US centers of power was

---

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

previously conceived of as “the Northern Frontier” by Spanish/Mexican geographies, and concurrently as the “center” to many indigenous groups, who possessed varying spatial and temporal boundaries of belonging within and beyond the traditional notions of the Southwest. Through the work and authority of the military surveys, Navajoland was refashioned from an imperial borderland to a part of the national landscape of the Southwest, and the Navajo people as a nation within a nation. These conflicting geographies underscore the blurred boundaries of discursive constructions of nation, empire, and region, as well as the concept of mapping itself.

## ***2.2 Borderland cartographies***

Although the borderlands concept may serve to obscure the particular dynamics of Navajoland, as argued previously, it remains a useful framework from which to challenge national narratives that reinforce colonial histories. Historians Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett conceive of borderlands history as a “study of entanglements” that works to “destabilize frontier trajectories.”<sup>37</sup> Focusing on the messy and contingent relations in the space of the borderlands, they argue, resists the teleology and closure of epic narratives. This shift is important for the ways it refocuses historical inquiry on the complicated and ambiguous terrain of contested spaces, where relations of power were in constant renegotiation, “and the futures of empires and nations were anything but certain.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, the peripheral spaces of the borderlands become the very places from which to investigate the center of colonial power.

---

<sup>37</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, “On Borderlands,” *The Journal of American History*, 98, No. 2 (September 2011): 358, 360.

<sup>38</sup> Hämäläinen and Truett, “On Borderlands,” 338.

Simpson's survey party entered such ambiguous terrain in 1849. Rather than a "blank spot" on the map, the world that they "discovered" had been variously mapped by Spanish conquistadors and missionaries, naturalists, and international cartographers. Simpson's interpretations of the Chaco ruins were filtered through his reading of both cartographic and historical knowledge of the region and the mythology of ruins and lost cities. Thus, Simpson's mapping effort can be seen within a larger cartographic history of mapping ruins. A review of Navajoland depicted on early maps reveals an unstable knowledge of the area and of the location of Chaco: place-names, topography, settlements and whole regions shifted and morphed, disappeared and reappeared between maps, not unlike the semi-nomadic people the map makers were trying to convey. These maps also reveal that myths, legends, and ruins were already important sites to place on a map, even if their whereabouts were completely unknown.

Early Spanish maps of the region are full of imaginary geographic features, some of which—such as the belief that California was an island—persisted for centuries. Others included an inland sea source of western rivers, a height of land sometimes called Sierra Nevada, and various mythical cities including Tiguex, Cibola, Quivera, and Atzlán. These images all furthered the idea of the "Northern Mystery," a place vigorously sought after by many survey parties from the 1540s to the 1840s. The search for lost tribes or Spanish exploring parties also propelled and legitimated the Spanish colonial interests in their northern periphery. Maps from this period record a great diversity of representation and the wide-ranging circuits (in both space and time) of very limited, anecdotal, and second-hand indigenous knowledge.

In this context of myth-making, it is fitting that the first known map born of Spanish reconnaissance of *la frontera* is also shrouded in mystery. Coronado's 1540 push north in pursuit of the fabled "seven cities of Cibola," references a drawing of the location of these fabled cities which has not survived to this day, in original or reproduction. The search for mythical cities was a search for gold, and early maps were like treasure maps pock-marked with strange place-names, both Spanish and indigenous, and illustrated with natural and mythical features. Groups of people or boundaries between them were rarely depicted.

According to map scholar Carl Wheat, it was French cartographer Nicolas Sanson's 1650 map of North America that "broke the monotony of these representations of imaginary geography."<sup>39</sup> Sanson's map is described an important map because it incorporated both mythical places and "real" place-names such as Santa Fe and "Apaches de Nabajo," which were all plotted on a curvilinear global grid of latitude and longitude (Figure 5). A French translation of Spanish and indigenous knowledge, the map appeared in a well-known world atlas that was reprinted numerous times around the world. The Navajo domain is positioned at the known edge of empire, beyond which stretches a vast expanse of blankness that is wrested free from earlier mythical iconography. The most striking aspect of Sanson's map, in light of its distinctive soberness, is the word "Cibola" that still floats in the white space outside the edge of empire (Figure 6). The retention of one mythical city beyond the limits of the known world entices the viewer to continue the metaphorical quest into the unknown.

---

<sup>39</sup> Wheat, *Mapping the Trans-Mississippi West*, 39.



Perhaps the most captivating and enduring of mythical cities is the fabled city of Atzlán, the lost city of the Aztecs. Located somewhere north of Mexico, Atzlán was said to be the original Nahuatl homeland before the Aztecs migrated south to the Valley of Mexico. After the Spanish conquest of Mexico, this mythical place gained much purchase in Spanish, and later US, cartographic imaginations. Wheat credits Barreiro's 1727 map as possibly the first depiction of Atzlán. Initial Spanish interest resided in the riches this fabled city was purported to contain, and propelled their northern explorations. Later, historians sought knowledge of the New World to place national histories in the continuum of the rise and fall of empires. Prescott's famous *History of the Conquest of Mexico* recounted the Spanish raid of the Halls of Montezuma, and speculated on the location of Atzlán, drawing heavily from the synthetic research of international naturalist and cartographer Alexander von Humboldt. In Humboldt's important 1811 map of the New World, he includes the approximate location of Atzlán, which he deduced from his extensive archival research on the topic. The general location is depicted by a long description in French that he places at approximately 36 degrees latitude and between 111 and 113 degrees longitude (See Figure 6). As this location was in the vicinity of Chaco Canyon, Humboldt's location of Atzlán proved to be very important for Simpson's later interpretation of the Chaco ruins.

Spanish cartographers increasingly mapped Indian populations and towns as they continued to push north and west in small exploratory parties. Navajoland, which had long been positioned at the edge of the map, was now variously depicted as the *Provincia de Nabajo*. Bernardo Miera y Pacheco, the famous cartographer of northern New Spain in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, often included a place called *Chacat* in Navajo

territory, marked with a symbol that denoted nomadic Indian villages. Josiah Gregg, credited with the first mention of Chaco in English in his 1844 *Commerce of the Prairies*, places the Navajo region outside the margins of his map, mirroring its location beyond the reach of US cartography, while carrying over the notion that there were Indian villages in this area (Figure 7).

In the era of US western expansion, commercial cartography focused on mass-producing an array of territorial atlases and national maps whose multiple printings reflected the rapidly changing national landscape. J.H. Colton, one of the leading commercial publishers at the time of the Navajo Expedition, produced a popular map in 1849 that incorporated the undefined location of Humboldt's mythical city, perhaps because there was nothing else to put in its place (See Figure 6). The salience of ruins as part of the geographical imaginary is also evident in the cartouche that decorates Colton's map. The cartouche is suffused with the timeless quality of nature and antiquity, where settlers and Indians gaze out over a placid lake from which emerges a huge rock in the shape of an Egyptian pyramid (Figure 8). This image, at once utopian and nostalgic, reinforces the logic of Manifest Destiny where the natural and cultural Other blend together. These representations of antiquity underscore the ways geographical knowledge floated between maps and across empires, and suggest that myths and ruins were always already a part of the spatial discourse of empire and nation.

Colton's map was widely distributed and printed twice in 1849—the second one after the Gold Rush to highlight the gold regions and routes to get there. It is the earlier version of this 1849 map that Simpson refers to in his journal and likely carried with him on the Navajo Expedition. Instead of marking Indian settlements or ruins, later versions

of this map variously incorporated the route of the Expedition, newly named geographical features such as Washington Pass, and an icon of Richard Kern's drawing of the Jemez Pueblo's green corn dance. The latter image was often used on maps to stand in for Pueblo Indians and mask the remaining blank spots on the map. Reproduced myriad times and in various formats, the green corn dance image served to reduce the Southwest to an easily identifiable icon. At the national scale, the newly fixed location of Chaco was still too obscure to find its way onto commercial maps, which became another way that its discursive construction enabled a continual rediscovery of the ruins.

### ***2.3 Silences, heteroglossia, and indigenous mapping***

Many scholars have considered the hidden indigenous knowledge inherent in colonial maps.<sup>40</sup> More often than not, indigenous mapping gets subsumed within the dominant framework of Western map production. In colonial contexts, indigenous knowledge gets incorporated and "smoothed out" in maps, while indigenous presence and the representational and real violence of removal gets erased from the record.<sup>41</sup> In her analysis of Humboldt's scientific mapping of the Americas, Mary-Louise Pratt shows how Humboldt's maps and abstracted geographies of the New World replaced Native people with a primordial nature. She shows how the discourse of nature remapped the Americas, producing a particular identity of the New World that was experienced both in the "contact zone" and in the heart of Europe. But, despite Native erasure, Pratt

---

<sup>40</sup> See for example, Mary-Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); and John Pickles, *A History of Spaces*.

<sup>41</sup> The concept of maps "smoothing out" the complexity of mapping practice and its representation comes from Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Edney argues that the impulse of increasing accuracy in the map came from a desire to close the inevitable gap between the object and its representation, which works to "smooth out" or obscure the inherent distance between these phenomena; for representational violence of colonial cartographies, see Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*.

emphasizes that mapping the “contact zone” produced “transcultured images” infused with Native presence. Drawing on Pratt’s work, cultural geographer John Pickles has elaborated on this concept to think about the “heteroglossic” nature of all mapping, where the spaces of transcultural mappings are “derived from and saturated with local knowledges and imagery, reflecting the heteroglossic not monolithic structure of colonial space.”<sup>42</sup> This emphasizes the ways maps work to produce realities in the uneven terrain of colonial relations through historically contingent dialogues of histories, cultures and places.

However, Native peoples of the Southwest engaged in various ways of mapping the landscape that reveal potential incommensurabilities with the conceptual form of the colonial map. While knowledge of the terrain, historical routes, and place-names may be translated through the heteroglossic spaces of the map, the overlapping dimensions of multiple sacred geographies exist beyond the logic and practices of the colonial map. For example, many Native groups trace various connections to landscapes and ruins in the Chaco region—including Utes and Navajos, and Pueblos such as Hopi, Acoma, Zuni, Laguna, Jemez, and others. Expressed through migration stories, ceremonialism, and pilgrimage, Native sacred geographies rarely emerge in the heteroglossic spaces of colonial cartographic practices.

In Simpson’s journal, there is a hint of the overlapping knowledges of Chaco in the multiple names he recounts for one of the ruins (considered in greater detail in the following section). Chaco Canyon itself is claimed as an ancestral site by two-dozen tribes and Pueblos. This multi-cultural affiliation to Chaco is mirrored by archaeologists’

---

<sup>42</sup> Pickles, *A History of Spaces*, 119.

interpretations of thousand-year-old bodies found in Chacoan great houses. The diversity of people comprising historical and contemporary connections to Chaco has not been paralleled at any other ancestral site in the Southwest. But the map requires a filtering of this complexity to produce one label that again “smooths out” multiple attachments to place.

Viewing indigenous mapping on its own terms, as cognitive spatial practices, challenges the very definition of what constitutes a map. As scholars have pointed out, indigenous mapping emphasizes the process, movement, and moment of mapping, while Western cartographies privilege the map product.<sup>43</sup>

### **3.0 Fixing Chaco through the Traverse Map**

Simpson’s survey picked up where other imperial projects had left off, engaging in the conversation of antiquity and native races through the new techniques and demands of US military mapping (see Figure 1). The particular technologies and field practices of the “cartographic gaze” (and the eastern-establishment origins of the US Topographical Corps of Engineers) structured the discovery and interpretation of Chaco, making national history manifest through the creation of “facts on the ground.” The survey party’s journey of discovery was captured and performed through the map product. In these ways, Simpson’s traverse map helped to fix certain meanings of Chaco and silenced alternate attachments to place.

The traverse survey linked astronomical observations to points along the route, and the movements of the troops were plotted in a red line on an otherwise colorless map,

---

<sup>43</sup> Pickles, *A History of Spaces*; Robert A. Rundstrom, “Mapping, Postmodernism, Indigenous People, and the Changing Direction of North American Cartography,” *Cartographica* 28(2) (1991): 1-12; Wood, *The Power of Maps*.

underscoring the objective of the expedition as a penetration into enemy lands. Although the US had mounted three expeditions against the Navajo since the start of the Mexican War in 1846, these were small campaigns designed to gain loyalty and submission of the Navajos through partial treaties prior to official claims of sovereignty over Navajo lands. In general, the US government misinterpreted the failure of the treaties—signed with a few Navajo headmen so that regional raiding and warfare would be curbed—as evidence of insincerity that required increased military force, rather than recognizing that Navajo social organization consisted of autonomous bands and not a centralized authority that could be coerced into controlling the whole population.

Thus, in the aftermath of victory in the Mexican War, the US mounted what equated to a shock-and-awe campaign to assert its newfound sovereignty over the region, amassing about 400 men, including Pueblo and Mexican militias. The map and associated journal produced during the Navajo Expedition are not silent about the reasons for entering Navajo country; the map charts a bold red line through new terrain, identifies potential resources, and claims the landscape. The expedition circled the Navajo stronghold of Cañon de Chelly—referred to as the *ultima thule*<sup>44</sup> of the expedition—with the goal of signing a comprehensive treaty with the tribe. One of the stipulations of the treaty claimed the right of the US to have their “boundaries fixed and marked, so as to prevent any misunderstanding on this point between them and their neighbors.”<sup>45</sup> Thus the map, like the treaty, can be seen as laying the groundwork for future boundary making. Unlike other traverse maps that marked east-west passages, the Navajo

---

<sup>44</sup> The term *ultima thule* denotes any distant place located beyond the “borders of the known world,” and was often employed in medieval geographies.

<sup>45</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 55.

Expedition illuminated the movement of troops to and from Santa Fe in a large circle. This representation on the map created a virtual boundary that defined the reach of US knowledge and also delineated the unruly extent of their new enemy.

### **3.1 “By means of which the world was to be enlightened”**

Unlike Humboldt’s comprehensive composite or Colton’s totalizing view of the nation, Simpson’s map is partial and incomplete, leaving large spaces on the map blank. This representation emerges from the techniques of traverse mapping and is similar to other soldier-engineer surveys of the Southwest under the direction of the US Corps of Topographical Engineers.<sup>46</sup> These linear, west-trending surveys sliced up the “empty spaces” of the Southwest, producing what some historians have referred to as the first “windows” into the Southwest. The partial view traced by the traverse survey implied the need of future surveys to add to the growing body of knowledge of the Southwest.

Simpson’s map, more so than those from the expeditions of Abert and Emory, resisted the inclusion of data from other sources. Thus, all that appeared on the map was the extent of the cartographer’s vision, as aided by an array of scientific instruments. While this partial view revealed the limits of geographical knowledge, it also underscored the increased truth and accuracy of the observational approach. Simpson is explicit about the importance of first-hand knowledge, and is careful to point out when he was not the primary observer or was presenting uncertain data. For example, he labels an uncertain wagon route as being “said to exist, having a general direction like this, but of its

---

<sup>46</sup> See Emory’s map (William Hemsley Emory / United States GPO: *Military Reconnaissance of the Arkansas Rio Del Norte and Rio Gila By W.H. Emory, Lieut. Top. Engrs. . . .* 1847) for a similar traverse map, and Abert’s map (James W. Abert and William G. Peck. *Map of the Territory of New Mexico . . . 1846–7*. Washington, D. C.: Senate Executive Document No. 23, 1848) for a contrasting example that fills in the spaces around the survey.

particular location and character [the] US knows nothing,” (Figure 9).<sup>47</sup> He places his astronomical observations systematically at the end of his journal entries and in an appendix. On the map, he distinguishes between camps determined by astronomical observation, and those for which he was unable to secure measurements. This distinguishing of second-hand knowledge works to increase the validity of truth claims of his observational knowledge and narrative.

This quest for knowledge, for “filling in the blank spaces of the map,” can be traced to the development of Enlightenment Reason so well captured by Sanson’s 1640 *Septentrionale* (See Figure 5). John Pickles calls this impulse the “cartographic gaze,” which he defines as “a particular constellation of ways of seeing with its particular practices and institutions of mapping that emerged in the modern era. It assumes what Adorno called ‘peephole’ metaphysics, an observer epistemology, and a Cartesian commitment to vision as the privileged source of ‘direct’ information about the world.”<sup>48</sup> Drawing on Foucault’s notions of governmentality,<sup>49</sup> he argues that it was the prioritization of these observer epistemologies that gave rise to the politics of surveillance. In his analysis of the cultures of exploration and empire, Felix Driver contends that geographical knowledge is constituted from a “range of embodied practices” that far exceeded cartography alone to include travelling, seeing, collecting,

---

<sup>47</sup> *Map of the Route pursued in 1849*, drawn by Edward Kern.

<sup>48</sup> Pickles, *A History of Spaces*, 80.

<sup>49</sup> Michel Foucault’s notion of governmentality is a “governmental rationality” that disciplines subjects through organized practices, mentalities, discourses, and techniques. He developed this concept most extensively in his lectures at the Collège de France between 1982 and 1984.



recording, mapping, and narrating.<sup>50</sup> The technologies of seeing that enabled the geocoding of the globe extended from Cartesian logic through the practices and instruments of data gathering in the field. While the scientific instruments helped translate the natural world into textual knowledge, they also served as material markers of difference in the field in ways that separated the colonizer from the colonized on the basis of a privileged access to knowledge about the world.<sup>51</sup>

On most military surveys into the Southwest a covered wagon contained all the instruments and scientific apparatus required for triangulated map-making, including sextants, binoculars or “horizon-glasses,” telescopes, thermometers, barometers, and chronometers. It also became the storehouse of field notes and collections. One cartographer emphasized the importance of the instrument wagon by describing it as “the Focus—the Magnet—the sun by day and the moon by night to our caravan, and ever foremost on the march, it was continually the object of our most jealous care, as the repository of the wonderful mechanism by means of which the world was to be enlightened for ages to come.”<sup>52</sup> In most cases, the wagon itself also served as an instrument, with the odometer strapped to one of its wheels to measure distance. On the Navajo Expedition, however, all of the wagons were abandoned at Jemez Pueblo due to rough terrain of the San Juan Basin ahead. But the Colonel retained some large cannons mounted on wheels, including three mountain howitzers and one six-pounder gun that continually slowed down the movement of the artillery unit. Simpson put the six-pounder

---

<sup>50</sup> Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 12.

<sup>51</sup> Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.

<sup>52</sup> Isaac Cooper during Fremont’s fourth expedition, quoted in Robert V. Hine, *Edward Kern and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 17.

to use by attaching the odometer to one of its wheels, and he was sure to mention when it had to be removed in technical sections such as the pass through the Tune-cha (Nacimiento) Mountains.<sup>53</sup> Other instruments and implements necessary to the mapping effort, such as drawing boards, paper, rulers, painting materials, were packed onto the survey party's horses. Simpson lamented not having a barometer to extrapolate altitude, but recognized that this was usually the first instrument to break on the road. A consideration of the day-to-day work of data collection reveals that the ideals of accuracy were very much dependent on, and often undermined by, the physical conditions of the field: terrain that was too rough to measure, changing weather patterns that obscured readings and fogged up lenses, or clouds that masked the stars at night. This extended to accidents of the road, such as a broken instrument, stolen pack animal, or the chaos of military action. Rather than creating a mirror of the route, the struggle for accuracy in the map worked to underscore the logic of the cartographic gaze, while at the same time revealed it to be an unattainable ideal.

### ***3.2 Finding "facts on the ground"***

The mapping effort began a story of Chaco based on the quest for observable truths—a lost city whose treasure was knowledge and not gold. Although the map did not claim a comprehensive view of landscape, the accompanying journal integrates many forms of knowledge that suggested an exhaustive reconnaissance of the route. In the time prior to specialist surveys, Simpson also functioned as the expedition's geologist, hydrologist, botanist, and ethnographer, while the Kern brothers created illustrations of landscapes and Indians, and made collections for east-coast patrons. In her analysis of

---

<sup>53</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 62

Napoleon's *Description de l'Egypte*, produced after the French survey of their territorial conquests in Egypt, Anna Godlewska emphasizes that maps, images, and texts worked together ideologically to reconstruct an "eternal and immutable" ancient Egypt that replaced Egypt itself.<sup>54</sup> In Simpson's mapping, similar representational practices carved out a window on the Southwest that was framed by a type of settler-colonial rationality. Along the way, Simpson marked resources important to this logic: settlements, minerals, water holes, and *ruins*. In this context, ruins became a particularly potent resource, an arena in which to create and recreate attachments to nation and region.

Marking ruins alongside other material resources, the mapping effort brought scientific logic to the romance of ruins. The measurements, descriptions and drawings of the survey materialized the myth of a lost city in the abandoned stacked stone buildings and their representation. In her study of archaeological practice and settler-colonial state formation in Israel, Anthropologist Nadia Abu El Haj conceives of archaeology as a "historical field science" which attaches history to "facts on the ground" in ways that are then used to legitimate national claims to territory.<sup>55</sup> In a similar way, the US mapping of Chaco created new facts on the ground that linked prehistory to the national story. Discovering, naming, and documenting ruins defined them as resources and areas of scientific and historical interest. The incompleteness of the documentation marked them as a valuable place to which to return and apply the rigors of historical field science. This construction fashioned territorial claims to particular sites on the ground and contributed to the idea of the Southwest as a laboratory of prehistory.

---

<sup>54</sup> Godlewska, "Map, Text, and Image."

<sup>55</sup> Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground*.

### *3.3 The traverse map as journey*

The traverse map embodies not only the accumulation of observational knowledge, but also the journey of the exploration, and movement over new terrain. Notes on available fodder, campsites, alternate routes, and productive lands are linked to spots on the map through the journal, and assume a repeatability of the route by both future military engagements and potential settlers. The table included on the map emphasizes this movement by listing the progression of camps with distances from each other and from Santa Fe, including remarks about the availability of water. It is in this context of journey and repeatability that Simpson relates the discovery of Chaco. The small exploratory party's movement through the canyon is clearly captured on the map (Figure 10). Their detachment from the main column of troops is depicted as a faint dashed line that makes its way through the canyon, ruin by ruin. The major ruins are individually marked and numbered on the map in the order they were discovered: (1) Pueblo Pintado, (2) Pueblo Wejiji, (3) Una Vida, (4) Hungo Pavi, (5) Chetro Kettle, (6) Pueblo Bonito, (7) Pueblo del Arroyo, (8) unnamed, (9) unnamed, and (10) Peñasco Blanco. This representational device guides the map-reader to visually follow the campaign westward. This detail, and the fact that the camps are similarly numbered in progression, suggests a deliberate presentation of movement through the ruins, attaching the ruins to their process of discovery and fixing them in the moment of encounter. In addition, this approach marks Chaco as a region, as opposed to a mere point on a map, defined by named topographic features including Cañon de Chaco, Rio de Chaco, and Mesa Fechada (Fajada Butte).

### 3.4 Naming ruins

While the numbered progression of ruins emphasized the journey and abundance of discovery, the individual marking and naming of each distinguished them as unique and significant structures within a larger ruinscape. The first major ruin the survey party encountered was approximately 15 miles east of the main entrance to the canyon (Figure 11). Simpson describes seeing the “conspicuous ruin” from afar, shortly after crossing the continental divide and upon reaching the Rio Chaco. He reveals in his journal the process of naming the ruin by choosing from amongst the names offered by various Indians and Mexicans in their charge: “[The ruin was] called, according to some of the Pueblo Indians with us, *Pueblo de Montezuma*; according to the Mexicans, *Pueblo Colorado*. Hosta calls it *Pueblo de Ratonas*; Sandoval, the friendly Navajo chief with us, *Pueblo Grande*; and Carravahal, our Mexican guide, who probably knows more about it than anyone else, *Pueblo Pintado*.”<sup>56</sup> Exactly why Carravahal is given more legitimacy than the others is not clear; however, he accompanies Simpson on the extended excursion through the canyon the following day, and provides names for most of the major ruins—all of which are still used today. Interestingly, 27 years later an aging and nearly blind Carravahal guided the next major mapping of the canyon—William Jackson’s topographical survey for the USGS—taking his nephew along to serve as his eyes.<sup>57</sup> In contrast to Carravahal, who did not necessarily need his eyes to see, Simpson’s naming of

---

<sup>56</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> William H. Jackson, “Report on the ancient ruins examined in 1875 and 1877,” in *Tenth Annual Report of the United States Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, embracing Colorado and parts of adjacent Territories, being a Report of Progress of the Exploration for the Year 1876*, by F.V. Hayden, 409-450. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878).

Pueblo Pintado is linked to the moment of initial observation, even though he was still many miles from the ruin.

In typical military fashion, Simpson named the highest peak in the region—a mountain integral to the sacred geographies of multiple Native groups including the Navajo—after President Zachary Taylor. The most technically difficult portion of the route through the Tune-cha (Nacimiento) Mountains Simpson named “Pass Washington” after the Bvt. Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the expedition. “Colonel Washington informs me,” recounts Simpson, “that it is the most formidable defile he has ever seen.”<sup>58</sup> However, in 1992, the Navajo Nation successfully renamed Pass Washington as Narbona Pass on topographic maps, in honor of the Navajo chief that Washington’s troops killed near this location.<sup>59</sup> This renaming reveals the tenuousness of the perceived stability of place-names. It also suggests that maps work in a continual process of territorialization that often silences alternate attachments to places.

### ***3.5 Making the nation through the Topographical Corps, 1838-1863***

The ability to affix most of these names so securely to the map—in contrast to previous mapping of the area—resides only partly in a better technology of mapping. This stability is also a result of the government’s increasing control over mapping and the centralization of knowledge production from Washington DC through the Topographical Corps. In his study of John Wesley Powell’s mapping of the Colorado Plateau between 1869 and 1879, geographer Scott Kirsch asserts that a “traffic of knowledge” between cartographic surveys and the government created and controlled both the idea and the

---

<sup>58</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 61.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Hixson Julyan, *Place Names of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 1998), 239.

space of the West.<sup>60</sup> Kirsch argues that the frontier had “an explicitly geographic character” and that the American map became “affixed to the territory itself” through the work and authority of the surveys.<sup>61</sup> Kirsch’s observation that the Colorado Plateau was still considered a blank spot on the map at the time of Powell’s survey reveals the longevity of the cartographic project in the Southwest, where the limited reach of observational knowledge struggled to define and contain a vast territory and its Native inhabitants.

The US Army Corps of Engineers institutionalized cartographic practice and production in the US, and was reshaped through various wartime reorganizations. The War Department incorporated civilian and commercial mapping and publishing until the War of 1812 prompted an increased reliance on a small group of military topographic engineers as opposed to civilian mappers for strategic and tactical purposes. By 1818, a separate Topographical Bureau was created, which included a Map Depot to publish and disseminate maps. Their first project, under the direction of French Huguenot Isaac Roberdeau, was a large-format map of the US, identifying extensive gaps in the knowledge of the West (particularly the Southwest) and topographic surveys of the northern frontier. In 1838, in response to the Seminole War in Florida and a renewed interest in western expansion, the Bureau was elevated to Corps status and increased its officers from 10 to 36. Contrary to its early use of commercial cartographers, the Corps now promoted and instructed commercial map-making by disseminating geographic knowledge through free access to cartographical data and materials. Thus commercial

---

<sup>60</sup> Kirsch, “John Wesley Powell.”

<sup>61</sup> Kirsch, “John Wesley Powell,” 552-53.

maps, like Colton's map of North America, represented the most current government data, and were used widely by topographic engineers in the field.<sup>62</sup>

Almost all the topographic officers were trained at the West Point Military Academy in New York. The instructors in the school were well-known European cartographers and artists, and the curriculum attempted to assimilate English, Austrian, German, and French traditions, which grew out of European colonial and nation-building projects. Early in the nineteenth century, students were mainly trained in the French military tradition. After the defeat of Napoleon, General Bernard and some of his military engineers were hired by the Corps to prepare US fort plans and teach in the academy. Also, the British tradition of landscape painting was added to the curriculum and taught by professional artists. As production centralized and increased, there was an increasing need to consolidate the varieties of global cartographic styles into a national vocabulary. Techniques of interpreting astronomical observations, and standardized iconography and representational styles were catalogued in a seminal publication, the first work of its kind, the 1837 *Treatise on Topographical Drawing*. This text codified certain styles and procedures in an attempt to standardize knowledge production.<sup>63</sup>

Initially focusing on siting of fortifications and lighthouses and the mapping of navigable waterways, the role of the Corps shifted to internal civil improvements in the 1840s. In the Southwest at this time, projects consisted of exploration and military surveys, westward roads, boundary surveys, and railroad surveys. As late as 1856, Lt.

---

<sup>62</sup> Ralph E. Ehrenberg, "U.S. Army Military Mapping of the American Southwest during the Nineteenth Century," in *Mapping and Empire: Soldier-Engineers on the Southwestern Frontier*, edited by Dennis Reinhartz and Gerald D. Saxon, Austin: University of Texas Press, 80-129.

<sup>63</sup> Ehrenberg, "U.S. Army Military Mapping"; Frank N. Shubert, *The Nation Builders: A Sesquicentennial History of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, 1838-1863* (Fort Belvoir, Virginia: Office of History, United States Army Corps of Engineers, 1988).



James Abert, the head of the Topographical Corps for most of its existence, referred to portions of the Southwest as “absolutely as unexplored as is the interior of Africa.” Anticipating the USGS “Great Surveys” of the 1870s, Abert advocated covering the interior west with “a network of explorations and surveys, accompanied by a series of carefully conducted observations of every kind that will fix its geographical, mineral, vegetable, and climatic peculiarities. Thus would every stream and mountain become known, and every nook, valley and plain be open for settlement and enterprise of our population.”<sup>64</sup>

The course of Southwestern cartography linked the new scientific methods of mapping with the impetus of Manifest Destiny. While the Corps was working to consolidate its geographic knowledge, the vast terrain of the West was nonetheless open to independent and international cartographers, whose work was often subsumed into the larger national project. An important contribution came from Joseph N. Nicollet, a French government astronomer who immigrated to the US in 1832 to contribute to the “progressive increase of knowledge in the physical geography of North America” and set about conducting a major hydrological mapping of the Mississippi Basin.<sup>65</sup> His “scientific method” consisted of using barometric positions for elevations that corresponded to a system of hachures that was thought to more accurately depict surface relief. He was also committed to relying solely on self-obtained astronomical position points and differentiating indigenous knowledge in hatched lines (as opposed to discriminately borrowing data from previous maps, which had been the standard

---

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Shubert, *The Nation Builders*, 74.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Ehrenberg, “U.S. Army Military Mapping,” 91.

practice). Additionally, Nicollet employed a new type of systematic analysis of place-names using local Indian and French place-names that populated his maps with a level of detail unique among maps of his day. Recognizing the value of Nicollet's approach, Abert, head of the Topographical Corps, and Poinsett, the Secretary of War, promptly purchased this map and other "geographical and topographical matter" for \$2,000. These funds were diverted from military defense funding that had been set aside for the creation of a system of frontier forts stretching from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico. The map was published in three versions between 1842 and 1845 through the Government Printing Office. The new mapping technologies, like the military forts, served a similar purpose of enabling the "orderly exploration and settlement of the West."<sup>66</sup>

Abert and Poinsett then asked Nicollet to lead an expedition to the Dakota Territory. He proved to be a major influence on the course of Southwest cartography, as his two assistants, Fremont and Emory, took his techniques directly to the mapping of the Southwest. Fremont took the scientific method approach to fill in the blank spot on the map between Mississippi valley surveys and Charles Wilkes survey of the Columbia River. "This map may have a meager [sic] and skeleton appearance to the general eye," Fremont noted, "but [it] is expected to be more valuable to science on that account, being wholly founded upon positive data and actual operations in the field."<sup>67</sup> Fremont would also make expeditions into the northern Southwest, including circling the vast desert of the Great Basin, and the Kern brothers joined him on a number of his surveys.

---

<sup>66</sup> Ehrenberg, "U.S. Army Military Mapping," 90; Martha Coleman Bray, *Joseph Nicollet and his Map* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1980).

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Ehrenberg, "U.S. Army Military Mapping," 91-92.

Graduating from West Point as somewhat of a prodigy, Simpson began his career by determining locations for lighthouses at the nation's eastern edge, and fortifications in its contested interior. His deployment to the Southwest was initially to map settler roads westward from fort to fort; an imperative that increased after gold was discovered in California in 1849. Upon arriving in Santa Fe, he was deployed to accompany the Navajo Expedition while remaining on the lookout for suitable fort locations and a western passage through the New Mexico territory. Well regarded for the brevity and authority of his prose, Simpson wrote of the "barren wastes" of the Southwest as God's punishment for the immorality of its inhabitants. Unlike other cartographers who were swept up in the romance of the frontier, Simpson looked forward to his eventual return to more familiar landscapes of the Northeast. His career eventually culminated in being chief engineer of the Interior Department, where he oversaw the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. Simpson's map of the Navajo Expedition may appear to be a unique representation of the region; however, it highlights his attachment to scientific accuracy more so than any substantive departure from the mapping techniques of his day.

Simpson guided the survey party, but it was the Kern brothers who carried out many of the daily cartographic tasks. Under Simpson's direction, Edward Kern was responsible for collecting field observations and drew the final map once they returned to Santa Fe, while Richard produced most of the journal's illustrations. Edward and Richard Kern received their professional training in the Drawing School of the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia.<sup>68</sup> This was the premier technological organization in the US, devoted to the extension and dissemination of applied scientific knowledge. Richard Kern also

---

<sup>68</sup> Weber, *Richard H. Kern*.

taught drawing before heading west to become an artist-explorer with Fremont and Simpson. Fascinated with the burgeoning field of human science, Richard produced drawings of crania and artifacts for the popular Egyptologist George Gliddon, and developed a lasting friendship and patronage relationship with Dr. Samuel George Morton, the renowned craniologist.<sup>69</sup> Morton's influential *Crania Americana* catalogued North American races into distinct species on the basis of skull size, which earned him the reputation as the forerunner of scientific racism.<sup>70</sup> His research was intimately linked to western explorers like Richard Kern, who procured for him hundreds of indigenous skulls during their travels. Based on their dedication to the advancement of science, first Richard, and then two of his brothers, physician Ben and illustrator/cartographer Edward (already with Fremont's third expedition in the West) were invited to be members of the prestigious Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences.<sup>71</sup> These institutional and professional relationships among the nation's elites expanded the reach of cartographic practice to fuel a wide-ranging pursuit of scientific humanism (and racism) that developed hand-in-hand with the settler-colonial project in the Southwest.

### ***3.6 Unsettling the traverse map***

Cartographic technologies aimed to decrease the gap between material reality and its representation.<sup>72</sup> But while the technologies of mapping claimed to enlighten the blank spaces of the globe, their grasp on reality was constantly threatened by the contingencies of mapping practice. As mentioned previously, factors such as the weather, instrument

---

<sup>69</sup> Weber, *Richard H. Kern*.

<sup>70</sup> Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Weber, *Richard H. Kern*, 21-24.

<sup>72</sup> Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.

failure, and alternative meanings of places (as represented through contested place-names) always threatened the perceived stability of the map. At the most basic visual level, the dominating and teleological progress of the line representing troop movement attempts to order the underlying instability of the expedition. In particular, the map obscures how the movements and survival of the US military were utterly dependent on Native and Mexican guides, translators, scouts, and militia. Often, the troops did not follow a single line; Pueblo and Mexican militias were incorporated en route; many people, especially members of the Mexican mounted militia, deserted; scouts were continuously moving forward and back and scouting alternate routes; and one regiment was deployed to Abiquiu, where “Utahs,” or Ute Indians, were said to be concentrating in large numbers.<sup>73</sup> Also, the constant threat of Navajo ambush caused guards to mistakenly fire on their own troops multiple times. In this way, the map works to “smooth out” the day-to-day struggles of the expedition, including movement over the landscape and the multiple encounters and knowledges that both enabled and constrained its course.<sup>74</sup>

The excursion to Chaco was similarly fraught with uncertainties and mistranslations. Rather than an organized scientific detour, it was perhaps the most dangerous part of the expedition for Simpson, Richard Kern, and the few others who joined them to explore and catalogue the wonders of the ruined city. It was initially planned that Simpson’s party explore Chaco Canyon and regain the troops further downstream later that night, where they were supposed to return to the river on the other side of the canyon. The troops never arrived, having pursued a more southerly route, and

---

<sup>73</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 10.

<sup>74</sup> Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.

members of the Chaco excursion got separated and lost as they searched in vain for the regiment. Late that night, Simpson encountered the assistant physician alone in the dark, and they waited for daylight fearful of Navajo attack, thankful that the Mexican scouts thought to bring some food. In the end Simpson blamed Sandoval, the Navajo guide charged with guiding the regiment, for either not explaining himself properly, or else “he had had in view something sinister.”<sup>75</sup> In addition, the lack of precise survey and measuring instruments, as well as a disjointed and incomplete cataloguing of buildings and architectural features, resulted in a piecemeal documentation effort that had to be reconstructed after the end of the expedition. On the map, however, the progressive logic of the exploration overshadows its fragmented and anxious nature.

#### **4.0 Natural and Nomadic Landscapes**

While the technologies of the traverse map fixed points along the route from which to recreate the journey of the expedition, the map and journal also commented on the larger natural and social landscapes that surrounded them. In his analysis of spatiality and the state in India, geographer Sankaran Krishna describes cartography as “more than the technical and scientific mapping of the country,” to include “representational practices that...endow an entity with a content, a history, a meaning, a trajectory. Under such a definition, cartography becomes nothing less than the social and political production of rationality itself.”<sup>76</sup> It is this logic of the map, and the representational and spatial practices it engenders, that make it an important technology of control and

---

<sup>75</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 49.

<sup>76</sup> Sankaran Krishna, “Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India,” in *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities*, Borderlines Series, vol.2, edited by Michael J. Shapiro and Hayward R. Aker, University of Minnesota: Minneapolis, 1996, 82.

constructive of the social body, not just the geo-body, of the nation.<sup>77</sup> In Simpson's journal, a spatial rationality can be seen structuring experiences of encounter in various ways that inscribe the concept of the Southwest with a particular social and political meaning.

The reconnaissance of the Navajo borderlands combined the impulses of imperialism and nation building. In his discussion of imperial mapping, Matthew Edney argues that although the techniques of mapping empire and nation may be the same, the disciplinary strategies of making subjects versus citizens depends on the deployment of spatial knowledge. For example, the social life of the imperial map circulates in centers of power, structuring the knowledge about imperial peripheries. This is compared to national maps that are geared towards developing a national consciousness and identity. Edney argues that imperial maps also engage in the national project by constructing an imperial *Other* that helps define the national Self.<sup>78</sup>

In the Southwest, compounded colonialisms created a complexity and ambiguity around notions of difference that the new regime aimed to sort out. Affixing places to the map was one thing, but making legible the diverse social landscape was often another. The practice of canvassing the landscape coupled with the prioritization of vision eventually led to the elaboration of surveillance technologies that extended from physical to social environments. In his consideration of the US policies toward the Oglala Sioux in the 1880s, historian Matthew Hannah shows how the governmentality of the state attempted to discipline nomadic populations through the overlap of spatial practices and

---

<sup>77</sup> John Pickles develops the concept of the geo-body of the nation as transcultural mapping in *A History of Spaces*, 115-117.

<sup>78</sup> Matthew Edney, "The Irony of Imperial Mapping," in *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, edited by James R. Akerman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, 11-46.

social control, specifically through practices of food rations and enumeration.<sup>79</sup> In Simpson's glimpse of the Navajo borderlands, Romantic representations of a burgeoning national iconography tried to discursively discipline the perceived wildness of unknown peoples and landscapes, and the threat these moving targets posed to the settler nation. It was amidst this untamable ambiguity of the Navajo borderlands that the material presence of ruins asserted themselves in the cartographic imagination as important and timeless islands of interest.

#### ***4.1 Making national landscapes***

The journal and map exhibit an almost feverish nationalism in the effort to tame "wild tribes" and landscapes. All along the way, natural features were likened to national icons and mythology that appear in both text and image. Upon seeing the immense basalt formation of Cerro de la Cabeza (Cabezón), Simpson describes the volcanic plug as strikingly similar to the Washington D.C. capital building, noting that the traveler could not fail to notice the similarity.<sup>80</sup> Simpson found a string of Washington capitals as he mapped his way westward along new wagon roads, the last one near Tukumcari. From a later camp a couple miles west of the peak, he commented on its "towering sublimity" and declared he had never seen anything "more beautiful or grand."<sup>81</sup> These descriptions were contrasted with "dirty-colored" soils and "barren wasteland" deemed worthless for cultivation, and descriptions of "dirty" water, homes and churches of both Pueblos and Mexican towns. In Richard Kern's illustrations, sandstone outcrops take on fanciful

---

<sup>79</sup> Matthew G. Hannah, "Space and Social Control in the Administration of the Oglala Lakota ('Sioux'), 1871-1879," in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1993, 19(4), 412-432.

<sup>80</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 29.



shapes of buildings and domestic objects and were anthropomorphized into female silhouettes and nationally symbolic figures such as the face of William Penn. Cliffs and buttes were drawn as Egyptian pyramids or ancient buildings of Greece with hints of columns and pedimented lintels visible in the rock, which made manifest the impulse for a national history through neoclassical architecture (Figure 12). This type of nationalistic imagery proliferated in the first half of the nineteenth century in painting and literature, as America's natural wonders were molded into icons of antiquity and cultural heritage that was deemed lacking in the young nation.<sup>82</sup>

An interesting example of remaking nature through nationalist architecture is Simpson's description of the never-before-seen Navajo stronghold of Cañon de Chelly, fabled to contain an impenetrable fort. The Navajo Expedition claimed to be the first outside group to penetrate the canyon and report that the fortification was a natural maze of towering sandstone walls. Simpson described the red sandstone cliffs as "magnificent in their proportions...[with the] precision of horizontal joints as can be seen in the custom-house of New York."<sup>83</sup> The building to which Simpson refers was a grand neoclassical structure completed in 1842 by Town and Davis, an architectural firm known for their development of the Greek Revival as the national style (Figure 13).<sup>84</sup> This comparison served to nationalize the natural landscape. It also had the effect of imagining the feared Navajo stronghold as a port-of-entry to a neighboring nation, bringing the imposing canyon down to human size, and obscuring the context of the expedition as an

---

<sup>82</sup> Nick Yablon, *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>83</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 76.

<sup>84</sup> *Great Buildings* website, "U.S. Custom House," accessed September 25, 2011, [http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/U.S.\\_Custom\\_House.html](http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/U.S._Custom_House.html).

act of domination. Indeed the word “nation” is used liberally throughout the journal in reference to the Navajos. The extent of the US nation, on the other hand, was conjured through national imagery of patriotic places and persons, and specific references to the United States as a political entity.

#### ***4.2 Mapping subjects***

Rather than being erased from the journal, Indians became one of its main subjects. Indeed, the seemingly contradictory representations of Indians in the map and journal are a main tension between the two documents. The frontispiece of the reprinted journal is an illustration of a Navajo warrior whose label “Navajo Costume” sets the stage for depictions of Indians in the grand pageant of the frontier (Figure 14). Portraits of Navajos are only of “important men,” such as Chief Narbona, Martinez, and Chief of the San Juan Navajos, mirroring the US policy of only consulting with headmen (See Figure 14). The depictions and drawings of Navajos naturalize them as almost white. Often Simpson describes Navajos as having Anglo features, or looking white except for a slightly darker complexion. At Cañon de Chelly, one Navajo is likened in appearance to George Washington, while Navajo Chief Martinez is described as a having the look and air of a Jacobin. Used to describe any political radical of the day, the term “Jacobin” was mainly inspired by the fact that Chief Martinez was wearing a “sky-blue-blanket greatcoat, apparently of American manufacture, and not unlike [Simpson’s] own.”<sup>85</sup> It was also delivered in the context of the signing the treaty with headmen in Cañon de Chelly, thus positioning Martinez as both a subject of the nation, and its potential subversion.

---

<sup>85</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 71.

While Navajos were described as almost white, the Kerns brothers' association with West often manifested itself in what Philip Deloria calls "playing Indian."<sup>86</sup> Deloria identifies the ways in which non-Indians acted out national, modern, and personal identities through various fantasies about Native people. In the case of the Kerns, these fantasies were in the form of rugged artist-scientists of the frontier in pursuit of knowledge of Native peoples and places, which often manifested through their clothing and habits. For example, Edward was known to dress in fringed moccasins and buckskin pants with fringe and look "quite aboriginal."<sup>87</sup> And, Richard noted that "life in the field was much more congenial to my semi-savage habits than living in a civilized community."<sup>88</sup> Exalting in the semi-wildness of the Southwest, the artist-explorers thus perpetuated Romanic notions of the frontier.

Women hardly figure into the journal, but passing remarks position Native and New Mexican women between notions of civilized and uncivilized, and outside conventional notions of white womanhood. In one of his letters back to Philadelphia, Edward Kern describes Indian women in general as being "up and down like a planed board, no grace no poetry."<sup>89</sup> The only illustration of a woman included in the journal is of Jemez Pueblo Chief Hosta's wife, who is not named, but is drawn in traditional attire in front her house and labeled as "An Industrious Pueblo Woman." The image of the semi-civilized industrious woman in the domestic sphere is later contrasted by Simpson's description of Navajo women riding up to the troop regiment on horses "*comme les*

---

<sup>86</sup> Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Weber, *Richard H. Kern*, 18.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Weber, *Richard H. Kern*, 26.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Weber, *Richard H. Kern*, 18-19.

*hommes.*” These types of passing judgments about levels of civilization and morality are sprinkled throughout the text, sketching the delineation of social hierarchies that viewed Navajos as morally inferior to Pueblo Indians.

This social and racial ambiguity around representations of Navajos belies the inability of the tools and text of the mapping effort to adequately fix them in the colonial gaze. This was particularly true in ongoing attempts to distinguish between friendly and hostile Navajos during the Expedition. While dependent on Navajo guides for knowledge of the landscape and translation, the regiment was also always on alert for potential Navajo ambush. There was a constant sense of unseen Navajos circling the conspicuous movement of the Expedition. Once the troops began destroying cornfields, this threat became more palpable and resulted in instances where soldiers fired on their own regiments. Yet Navajos were also depicted as picturesque figures in the landscape in multiple drawings, and individuals were described as intelligent and friendly. This tension is best expressed within the same figure of their sometimes trusted, sometimes sinister, Navajo guide, Antonio Cebolla Sandoval. At once, “a very intelligent Navjo chief”<sup>90</sup> and trusted guide, and he was also described as potentially plotting ambush. Simpson’s inability to observe Navajos en route, to fix them in his gaze, both physical and socially, leads to his statement that “these people evidently gave signs of being tricky and unreliable, and probably never will be chastened into perfect subjection *until troops are stationed immediately among them*” (emphasis original).<sup>91</sup> This conclusion anticipates future projects of “pacification.”

---

<sup>90</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 44.

<sup>91</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 56.

But the journal also provides glimpses of how Navajos were able to navigate the rapidly changing political and social environments after the US-Mexican War. On one level, this can be seen through individual and eclectic patterns of dress that incorporated Spanish conquistador feathered helmets and lances, as well as traditional dress and elements of US military uniforms. On a more overtly political level, what Simpson interpreted as sneaky unreliable actions on the part of some Navajos also could be read as intentional maneuvering. For example, Sandoval was the main translator for the Expedition and in part responsible for determining the course of the reconnaissance. A rich headman and accomplished interlocutor between the Navajo and Spanish, he was adept at moving through different cultural worlds. While he worked for Navajo-Spanish peace prior to US involvement, he also conducted many raids against his own people, and was an often-distrusted figure to his fellow Navajos.<sup>92</sup> In another example, knowing that the US had put itself in the role of protector and peacekeeper in the volatile Southwest, Navajos spread rumors of Ute attacks at Zuni Pueblo in order to get the troops to leave Cañon de Chelly.

Perhaps the most lasting memory of the Expedition for Navajos was the killing of Chief Narbona in what was recounted as an accidental skirmish over a horse. Unlike the more complicated figure of Sandoval, Narbona is remembered for his life-long work toward a lasting peace. Richard Kern described him as “the head chief of the Nation, and a wise man and great warrior. His frame was immense—I should think his height near 6 feet 6 inches. He was near 90 years old when killed.”<sup>93</sup> In the journal, Simpson calls him

---

<sup>92</sup> Virginia Hoffman, *Navajo Biographies, Volume I* (Phoenix: Navajo Curriculum Center Press, 1974).

<sup>93</sup> Richard Kern, *Richard Kern, Santa Fe, N.M., to Samuel George Morton, Philadelphia, Pa., 1850, July 3-4*, Letter, from The Newberry Library, *The Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection*, 1-8.

alternately “one of their greatest warriors” and the “scourge of the Mexicans.”<sup>94</sup> Although the journal recounts the killing of Chief Narbona, it leaves out the detail that he was also scalped, and that Richard Kern lamented not collecting his head to send to his friend and patron, the aforementioned craniologist, Dr. Samuel George Morton. “I very much regret,” Kern wrote to Morton the following year, “that I had not procured Narbona’s cranium, as I think he had the finest head I ever saw on an Indian.”<sup>95</sup>

Later on the trip Kern was able to make up for this omission and procure a head for Morton from a dead Navajo man on the road to Zuni Pueblo. The journal does not reveal Kern’s collection of the head, but notes that the Zunis had killed the “Navajo prisoner...by direction of a California émigré.”<sup>96</sup> In his letter to Morton, Kern states that the Zunis explained that he was killed as punishment for stealing. As Goetzmann remarked in *Exploration and Empire*, “it was a rare week which passed without Dr. Morton’s receiving at least one skull from a party of Western explorers.”<sup>97</sup> This reveals how Navajo bodies became another specimen for collection and analysis in east-coast institutions, and underscores the violence of drawing the contours of difference.

#### ***4.3 Nomadic landscapes***

The unstable representation of Navajo social status is echoed in the map, where Simpson constructs his version of a nomadic landscape. He does not define the Navajo region with boundaries, but includes a sweeping label for nomadic areas of the Navajos, Utes, and Apaches that surround the settled regions of the Rio Grande. Mexican towns

---

<sup>94</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 60, 56.

<sup>95</sup> Kern, *Richard Kern to Samuel George Morton*.

<sup>96</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 94.

<sup>97</sup> Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 325.

and Pueblos are depicted with the same symbol. In contrast, no Navajo settlements are called out on the map, despite Simpson's mention of passing Navajo camps and hogans along the route. Cornfields, on the other hand, are frequently depicted—most likely because they provided fodder and food at multiple camps (Figure 15). From these agricultural plots, one can infer Navajo homesites in these areas, even as discussions of Navajo village life were omitted from the map and journal. Instead of settlements, Simpson highlights a number of Navajo trails on the map, some of which make up portions of the official route, and others that trail off into the blank spots of the map.

This inability to observe Navajos en route, to fix them socially and physically, serves to separate them from the landscape and anticipates the decades of wars and scorched-earth policy that culminated in the Long Walk of 1864. This positioning also enables the separation of the Navajos from antiquity, creating a space for ideas of Chaco as separate from the people who live in the area.

## **5.0 Documenting Chaco as Science and Art**

Although Simpson frames this fascination with Southwestern antiquity as a side excursion to the main task of documenting the movements of the military expedition, it fits squarely with his larger task of making the natural and human landscapes legible to a new audience. In a material sense, the ruins are composed of both natural and cultural worlds, while standing apart from either. Thus, while the journal is constantly aiming to humanize natural landscapes and naturalize social ones, ruins appear to stand in for both without needing much translation. They are at once part of the natural world and the human touch of civilization.

### ***5.1 Measuring the beauty of ruin***

Aesthetically, for Simpson, the Chaco ruins in particular are a perfect marriage of science and art, technologically mirroring the order and regularity he found so beautiful in nature. He applies his scientific techniques to this concept of the ruins through his documentation. The mystique of the ruins is in turn mirrored by his careful measurements and descriptions, romantic drawings, and reconstructions of buildings.

Simpson remarked on nearly two-dozen ruins along the expedition, ten of which made up the complex he associated with Chaco Canyon. After setting up camp at a water hole roughly one mile from Pueblo Pintado, Simpson and the Kern brothers were anxious to explore and document this first outlying ruin. They proceeded to record the ruin in great detail—measuring and characterizing the 55 rooms, noting the thickness of walls, the number of stories, the size and position of openings, the construction of the wooden roofs, the courtyard and round kivas, or what they called *estufas* after the Pueblo Indians who recognized them as similar to their own structures used to hold “political and religious meetings.”<sup>98</sup> The Kerns sketched pottery sherds, Indian “hieroglyphics,” and landscape scenes. They returned the next morning stating that “we would gladly, had time permitted, have remained longer to dig among the rubbish of the past; but the troops having already got some miles in advance of us, we were reluctantly obliged to quit.”<sup>99</sup> Upon learning that Chaco Canyon contained numerous large ruins like Pueblo Pintado, Simpson obtained permission to detach from the troops the following day to explore and document the stone city, while Edward Kern remained to record the official route.

---

<sup>98</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 35.

<sup>99</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 36.



Just as Chaco is now claimed as a cradle of Southwestern archaeology, Simpson is claimed as its first archaeologist. Nineteen color plates of the Chaco ruins were included in the journal, including five ground plans, four landscape scenes, two room interiors, sketches of pottery sherds and petroglyphs, and one artistic reconstruction of Hungo Pavi (Figure 16). Three of the ground plans included scales in feet, while the plan of Pueblo Bonito depicts a perimeter measurement, “Circuit about 1300 feet” (Plate 37), which was likely measured by pacing. This lack of a scale may be a result of the irregular shape of the structure, or the fact that the southeastern portion of the ruin is unclear and marked on the map as “so ruinous as to be indistinguishable.” The plans are similar in that they “smooth out” the irregularities of the ruins, depicting very regular and symmetrical rooms with sharp corners. Also, four of the five ruins are oriented exactly south, so their long axis runs along the top of the page, with the north arrow pointing up. The exception, the plan of Una Vida, has the north arrow pointing to the right in order to retain the heavy long axis of the ruin at the top of the page. The emphasis on regularity and uniformity reflects the aesthetic of science and art where beauty was often found in order, symmetry, and repetition.

### ***5.2 Aesthetics and civilization***

Simpson’s first impression of Pueblo Pintado clearly marks the site as an important resource in the burgeoning science of man:

“We found them to more than answer our expectations (see Sketch in Plate 20.)

Forming one structure, and built of tabular pieces of hard, fine-grained, compact gray sandstone (a material entirely unknown in the present architecture of New Mexico), to which the atmosphere has imparted a reddish tinge, the layers or beds being not thicker than three inches, and sometimes as thin as one-fourth of

an inch, it discovers in the masonry a combination of science and art which can only be referred to a higher stage of civilization and refinement than is discoverable in the works of Mexicans or Pueblos of the present day. Indeed, so beautifully diminutive and true are the details of the structure as to cause it, at a little distance, to have all the appearance of a magnificent piece of mosaic work.”

100

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Simpson’s first impression is his aesthetic response to the masonry, which then gets translated into a marker of civilization (See Figure 16). Responding to the marriage of science and art in the stonework links Simpson’s cultural aesthetics with this past civilization, and contrasts it with that of the Pueblos and Mexicans, who mainly used adobe building technology. His observation that sandstone is a material entirely unknown in the architecture of New Mexico reveals the limits of his knowledge; but, more importantly, shows how the definition of the region is constructed as the extent of this limited knowledge. Simpson’s claim that the material culture of the ruin “can only be referred to a higher stage of civilization and refinement” derive from the inherent truth claims associated with his powers of observation.

Notably missing from Simpson’s first impression of Pintado is mention of the Navajos in the conversation of civilization. Later in the journal, after Simpson sees what he calls the “huts” of the Navajos along the expedition, he compares the stability and workmanship of the Chaco ruins with Navajo hogans.<sup>101</sup> He discusses the possibility—first raised by Gregg in the *Commerce of the Prairies*—that the Navajos were part of the civilization of Chaco. This suggestion aimed to resolve the Navajo’s semi-sedentary

---

<sup>100</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 34.

<sup>101</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 78-79.

settlement patterns and “primitive” architecture with their exquisite blanket-making technology, which seemed to Simpson to derive from a higher stage of civilization. Simpson develops a few scenarios of how the Navajos could have “regressed” to their current stage, including coming from earlier “stock” or readapting to an increasingly dry climate. Writing before Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* and the subsequent turn in ethnology to describe civilization as a trajectory from barbarism to savagery to civilization, Simpson exhibits the seemingly contradictory tendencies of assuming this type of teleological rhetoric of civilization and aiming to explain it away.

### ***5.3 Discourses of antiquity***

Simpson’s passion for accuracy extended to his quest for illuminating the locations of previously mythical places, and tying them securely to his map of the Southwest. The question of origins was foremost on Simpson’s mind while he was documenting the ruins, and he strived to fix the historical time of the ruin to its physical manifestation. In the journal, he engages in a lengthy rumination on the possible origins and associations of Chaco, citing an array of well-known and obscure cartographers, historians, and explorers (including Humboldt, Prescott, Roberts, Gregg, Doniphan, Clavericus, and Wizenius). Relying heavily on Humboldt’s approximate location, as well as comparisons to other descriptions of ruins such as Casas Grandes, Simpson deduces that Chaco is most likely Montezuma’s lost city of the Aztecs prior to their journey south. He gains his authority on the subject from his first-hand observation of Southwestern landscapes, and gives more weight to the writings of cartographers than historians.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 44-47.

In the Southwest at this time, the Montezuma myth was at the fore of discourse about ancient civilizations. Every passing ruin was invested with stories of Montezuma, and some sites, such as Pecos ruins, were rumored to contain remnants of Montezuma's sacred fire.<sup>103</sup> Pueblo people were cited as referring to Montezuma as both a person and religion, and many tales were spun about his eventual return to the Southwest. According to Simpson, his Indian guides corroborated the Aztec story. He quotes his Jemez guide, Hosta, as stating that Pueblo Pintado was "built by Montezuma and his people, when they were on their way from the north towards the south; that, after living here and in the vicinity for a while, they dispersed, some of them going east and settling on the Rio Grande, and others south to Old Mexico." While Simpson's embrace of the Montezuma myth was common in the Romantic milieu of his time, his ability to materialize the fabled lost city in a physical place is what begins the newly imagined space of Chaco.

In addition to fixing the myth within the space of the ruin, the mapping effort fixed the ruin within a new geography of antiquity. Placing his discussion of Chaco in the context of North American historians and cartographers, Simpson delineated the discourse of antiquities of his time. This linked the spatial knowledge of territory with the temporal dimension of history. In this sense, it is not Simpson's assertion that the site was most likely of Aztec origin that is most important, but the fact that he draws boundaries around the ways the knowledge of history is produced and legitimized. In this way, competing narratives around Chaco's origins are acceptable, but only within the domain of the prescribed discourse, which exclude other ways of knowing the past. So, when fellow cartographer, Abert, suggested that ancestors of Pueblo people built the ruins, it

---

<sup>103</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 35.

still enacts a separation from indigenous claims to place because the discussion takes place in the realm of historical discourse and scientific observation—or prescribed notions of time and space. This discourse maps Chaco as outside of indigenous historical and physical realms.

In the journal, Simpson provides a glimpse into another way of knowing Chaco, linked to migration stories and movement around a center:

“Sandoval, a very intelligent Navajo chief, also says they were built by Montezuma; but further states that the Navajos and all the other Indians were once but one people, and lived in the vicinity of the Silver mountain; that this mountain is about one hundred miles north of the Chaco ruins; that the Pueblo Indians separated from them, (the Navajos,) and built towns on the Rio Grande and its tributaries; but that ‘their house continues to be the hut made of bushes.’ Nothing more satisfactory that this have I been able to get from either Indians or Mexicans.”<sup>104</sup>

Simpson’s focus on the origin of a lost race, however, makes him unable to see how his story performs an erasure of Sandoval’s. Migration stories like this one cease to appear in later records of Chaco.

#### ***5.4 Preserving and reconstructing ruins***

Referring to Pueblo Bonito, Simpson stated “this pueblo, though not so beautiful in the arrangement of the details of its masonry as Pueblo Pintado, is yet superior to it in point of preservation.”<sup>105</sup> Impressed with the state of preservation of several rooms in the northwest corner of the ruin—where the ceiling was “more tasty than any we have seen

---

<sup>104</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 44.

<sup>105</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 41.

[and] more perfect in its details [with the beams] beautifully regular”—Simpson asked the Assistant-Surgeon J.F. Hammond to provide a detailed description of the room that then appeared as an appendix to the report.<sup>106</sup> A detail not mentioned in the journal, but observed by William Jackson’s 1877 survey, is that Simpson etched his name in the plaster of this beautifully preserved room, effectively marking himself as the first of many scientists to pass through and attach meaning to the ruins.<sup>107</sup>

Richard Kern’s reconstruction of Hungo Pavi takes one of the most symmetrical ruins and graphically restores it to life (Figure 17). Kern incorporates his observation that the upper stories were likely stepped back terraces, taking his cue from Indian pueblos that he had visited along the way. Highlighting the difference between the romantic view and the scientific one, Simpson notes in the journal that while Kern’s illustration was close to a true reconstruction, he inadvertently omitted one level of the structure. The impulse to revive ruins through reconstruction is usually relegated to the realm of imagination, while the ruin itself is preserved at the moment of discovery to halt the inevitable flow of time. In his essay, *The Necessity of Ruins*, J.B. Jackson explores the desire to restore ruins as a vernacular history-making project that serves to erase its history.<sup>108</sup> He argues that ruins mark a discontinuity, a period of neglect, that “ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins.”<sup>109</sup> Although he is

---

<sup>106</sup> Simpson, *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance*, 42-43.

<sup>107</sup> William H. Jackson, “Report on the ancient ruins examined in 1875 and 1877,” in *Tenth Annual Report of the United States Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, embracing Colorado and parts of adjacent Territories, being a Report of Progress of the Exploration for the Year 1876*, by F.V. Hayden, (Washington: Government Printing Office: 1878): 409-450.

<sup>108</sup> J.B. Jackson, “The Necessity for Ruins,” in *The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

<sup>109</sup> Jackson, “The Necessity for Ruins,” 102.

concerned with recent American ruins, or ruins “just outside of memory,” Jackson’s insight is that understandings of past are made out of interactions with the material present that work to “correct history.” Jackson identifies a shift in history-making in the mid-nineteenth century from political monuments that commemorate a social or religious contract to views of an evolutionary, progressive past that is remade through the born-again landscape of revived ruins and reconstructed environments, “places where we can briefly relive the golden age and be purged of historical guilt.”<sup>110</sup> Kern’s restoration of Hongo Pavi marks the beginning of this transformation of Chaco. The ancient ruins can be seen as “just outside of memory” of the newly constituted nation. Just as the territorial boundaries of the United States were expanded to make manifest the historical destiny of the nation, the temporal boundaries of its origin were stretched to encompass the ruins.

### ***5.5 Conquering ruins***

Simpson’s quest for the origins and locations of ancient cities attached great import to the act of exploration itself, including the journals and narratives of previous explorers. It was also larger than just Chaco, and did not end when he left the Southwest. Twenty years later, Simpson wrote a Smithsonian Report about the disputed location of Coronado’s Seven Cities of Cibola, which was subsequently published as an essay in 1884.<sup>111</sup> It includes a map tracing Coronado’s route and the Seven Cities of Cibola, bringing to life the mythical first map of the region that was, and still is, so famously lost to history (Figure 18). Rather than a rendering of a sixteenth century map, however, Simpson updates “the toilsome march of Vasquez de Coronado and his adventurous

---

<sup>110</sup> Jackson, “The Necessity for Ruins,” 102.

<sup>111</sup> James H. Simpson, *Coronado’s March in Search of the Seven Cities of Cibola and the Discussion of their Probable Location* (Smithsonian Report 1869, published in Washington, 1884).

followers”<sup>112</sup> by positioning the route within the framework of the best available cartographic knowledge of the Southwest at that time. Unlike his own map from the Navajo Expedition, his Coronado map highlights the Cartesian grid that now firmly defines the space of the Southwest. He includes the location of the “Gran Chaco ruins” and the Chaco River north of Coronado’s route.

Simpson explains that he can better understand and interpret Coronado’s journal because they were both cartographers intimate with moving over the terrain and offers his “well-considered views, derived, early in life, from observation of the field itself, and confirmed by careful study of all the authorities in [his] reach.”<sup>113</sup> This approach aims to resolve what Felix Driver identified as the great preoccupation of nineteenth century geographical imagination: the tension between the “field” and the “cabinet.”<sup>114</sup> Through an extensive interpretation of Spanish narratives and secondary histories, combined with his superior geographical knowledge, Simpson’s consideration of “the grand enterprise of the Mexican government in 1540”<sup>115</sup> retraces first the march, then the location of the ancient city. As an officer “engaged officially in the United States service,”<sup>116</sup> Simpson claims the US as rightful heir to this grand enterprise of conquest. His reading of Chaco as the great city of an older colonial enterprise, the Aztec Empire, reinforces this privileged place within a longer lineage of civilizations that rose and fell in the Southwest.

---

<sup>112</sup> Simpson, *Coronado’s March*, 309.

<sup>113</sup> Simpson, *Coronado’s March*, 309.

<sup>114</sup> Driver, *Geography Militant*, 11-20.

<sup>115</sup> Simpson, *Coronado’s March*, 309.

<sup>116</sup> Simpson, *Coronado’s March*, 309.



Through the cultural work of the surveys, the US claimed its place in the lineage of conquest, following Aztec empire and Spanish colonialism. At the same time, however, it separated itself from its most recent foe by constructing Mexicans as recent intruders in a landscape of ancient civilization. By placing civilization in a fallen past, the geography of ruins worked to depoliticize a turbulent present, where relationships of power were being carved out through the violence of borderlands encounter. This colonization of antiquity recalls the ways Napoleon's mapping of Egypt erased contemporary Egyptian Arabs from the past, repositioning them as a barbarous veneer over what was claimed as the intellectual origins of the West.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Simpson's narrative of the Chaco ruins focused on an imagined height of civilization in the New World, after which various shades of barbarism and semi-civilization competed over the scraps of a fallen landscape of desert wastes pockmarked by the ruins of a former grandeur. But, unlike Napoleon's imperial conquest of Egyptian antiquity, the US mapping of the Southwest could not as easily disengage from the social landscapes that animated the region. While the ruins became a way to legitimize the territory as having a history in the abstract, the ever-present local histories and geographies of the Pueblos, Navajo, and other Native peoples were continually reworked through colonial power relations in ways that redefined, and continue to remake, current-day contours of national identity.

---

<sup>117</sup> Godlewska, "Map, Text, and Image."

## 6.0 Conclusion

At Chaco Canyon, Simpson began an origin story of the nation, residing in the antiquity of a civilized past and its discovery. Since the initial mapping, Chaco has been a productive and ever-expanding site for varied ideas of antiquity, civilization, and science, and deemed worthy of increasing forms of national protection and control. Conflicts over the ownership of Chaco Canyon played a key role in the passage of the 1906 American Antiquities Act, and it became one of the country's first National Monuments in 1907 (five years before New Mexico became a state). Currently located at the powerful nexus of science, state institutions, and government preservation, Chaco can be read as an evolving site of intellectual and physical conquest, and a monument to colonialism. Alternate attachments to place were eclipsed by the new geography of antiquity that circumscribed boundaries around the knowledge of the past and its protection.

Mapping and spatial discourse continue to be important ways various attachments to Chaco are rearticulated and reimagined. Chaco Canyon is perhaps the most extensively mapped archaeological site in the US, and also a site valued as a metaphorical "blank spot" on the map. It has been variously mapped and imagined as property, a commodity, a collapsed empire, a cradle of Southwestern archaeology, a national park and world heritage site, and an archaeo-astronomical complex. It is also an ancestral centerplace for two-dozen Native American pueblos and tribes, and the historical homeland of a displaced Navajo community. As such, it remains an important site in which to investigate the ways mapping contributes to the production of contested meanings of the past.

The military mapping of Chaco not only fixed the site in prehistory, but also in the moment of its discovery. The map, text, and images of the Journal constructed a

particular vision of Chaco that remains an important guidepost for the way the national park manages the meaning and material space of the ruins. The maintenance of the ruins to reflect “the condition which existed when first seen by the early explorers”<sup>118</sup> has become a preservation imperative that requires a full-time Stabilization Crew to continuously rebuild and reconstruct the deteriorating ruins. This labor attempts to freeze time within the landscape of the ruins, conjuring an unpeopled and eternal past to be discovered anew by the visitor, and operates in constant tension with the inherent destructive nature of archaeological practice and the inevitable passage of time. Beyond the ongoing fixing of a colonial moment of discovery, the work of the Stabilization Crew can also be viewed as part of present colonial relations of power between park management and local Navajos, who have worked on the Crew to rebuild the ruins for generations. Some of the workers are part of families who were removed from the park boundaries in the 1930s and 40s. The ways in which local Navajos have been employed to contribute to their own dispossession from the landscapes and narratives of the park are subjects for future research. However, this example illustrates how these relationships operate within a logic of antiquity which continues to serve the imperative of Native removal.

The current controversy over paving the main access road to the park also shows how the logic of antiquity is worked through the mapping and spatialization of Chacoan landscapes. San Juan County’s proposal to improve the road has precipitated a new transformation in the real and imagined landscapes of Chaco, the contours and consequences of which are still unclear. Chaco imaginaries are being reworked on

---

<sup>118</sup> *Chaco Culture National Historical Park Management Plan*, National Park Service, 1968.

various stages, including the procedural and public involvement channels of NEPA, political alliances, backdoor mediation among jurisdictional agencies, environmental discourse and letter writing campaigns, and out in the landscape in the performance of place.

A dominant narrative emerging from the road conflict is the “Chaco experience,” which is “visitor experience” dressed up in the exceptionalist discourse of Chaco. The Chaco experience is the long journey over dirt roads and the sense of remoteness and solitude once you arrive. It is shedding the trappings of modern life as you rattle down the road and wondering if you—or your car—will make it. It is the dark night sky and the lack of development, save for “a few scattered hogans along the way,”<sup>119</sup> which convey the greater Chacoan World. It is wandering through the ruins unescorted, feeling like you’re the only one there. It is the palpable presence of Anasazi absence.

This imaginary also serves to recreate Chaco as a metaphorical blank spot on the map. It consumes and performs the mythical moment of discovery, the point at which time was stopped and the ruins made to stand still (Figure 19). It constructs Chaco as peripheral to modernity and as a source of renewal for the modern visitor. Protecting the Chaco experience becomes the same as protecting an “authentic” prehistoric landscape of Anasazi collapse. This narrative effectively remaps Chaco as extending beyond the boundaries of the Park, and legitimates the Park’s participation in political battles outside its area of jurisdiction. While some opponents of the road project acknowledge the needs of local residents, viewing them as “a few scattered hogans” makes it easier to extend their Chaco imaginaries into Navajo spaces. In the Chaco experience, Navajos figure as

---

<sup>119</sup> Stephen Capra, “Preservation of the Magic,” *New Mexico Wild*, 12 (1) (2010): 14

the picturesque background of “a few Navajo families who live in this remote part of the country.”<sup>120</sup>

The sense of remoteness is essentially a reworking of the logic of removal. It constructs Chaco as the presence of absence, and the Navajo communities living outside its boundaries as an absence of presence. The “magic”<sup>121</sup> of Chaco is not the feeling of remoteness, but its construction. And this remoteness is constructed through the removal of human presence, embodied both in the historic landscapes features that told the story of Chaco as a contested borderlands, and the lives and livelihoods of Navajo families who had their own understandings of place. In both their ancestral and material claims, Navajo views falls through the cracks of the dominant discourses, leading to the construction of recurring absences from this contested terrain. Yet, this in-betweenness that often makes Navajos invisible in discussions of Chaco, also affords a productive vantage point from which to rethink Chaco as a contested space.

The road conflict has enabled the local community, who call themselves the Diné of Chaco Canyon, to speak out collectively about their removal. For the centennial anniversary of the National Park in the summer of 2007, they staged a commemoration in order to remember a different history.<sup>122</sup> The event’s location north of the Park boundary on Navajo land was significant, asserting ownership and presence in space. The road map pictured on the flyer for the event ended just before the Park boundary, deliberately excluding the iconographic image of Park’s 34,000 acres from the map (Figure 20). This

---

<sup>120</sup> Capra, “Preservation of the Magic,”14.

<sup>121</sup> Capra, “Preservation of the Magic,”14.

<sup>122</sup> Natasha Kaye Johnson “Tears Shed for Chaco: Former canyon residents recall legacy of forced removal” in *The Gallup Independent*, Friday August 31, 2007.

act performs a provocative remapping of the region, replacing the dominant icon of the Park with its absence. “Celebrate & Honor the Navajo People,” the flyer reads, “History brings strength,” (See Figure 20). This struggle underscores the ways in which seemingly mundane mappings and disinterested attachments to antiquity constitute the ongoing logic of settler colonialism, and thus become important sites of struggle.

As the history of Simpson’s mapping effort suggests, the erasure of historical and sacred attachments to Chaco is not an unfortunate byproduct of scientific interpretations of antiquity, but an essential component of the process of defining what Chaco is, by what it is not. In other words, the erasure of various histories from the landscapes of Chaco is instrumental to the creation and maintenance of dominant ideas of place. These silences emerge most obviously through an analysis of the ways cartographic practices construct the meanings of space and time through a particular colonial rationality. In this context, the current struggle over the road can be read as a struggle over the meaning of antiquity itself, and engages in the most recent reworking of colonial relationships of power that began with the “discovery” of the ruins.

## Bibliography

- Abu El-Haj, Nadia. *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2001).
- Anderson, Benedict. "Census, Map, Museum." In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 163-187. London: Verso, 2006.
- Blackhawk, Ned. *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Blomley, Nicholas. "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid." *Annals, Association of American Geographers* 93(1) (2003): 121-141.
- Bray, Martha Coleman. *Joseph Nicollet and his Map*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1980.
- Brooks, James. *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press: 2001.
- Capra, Stephen. "Preservation of the Magic." *New Mexico Wild* 12 (1) (2010): 14-16.
- Deloria, Philip J. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Denetdale, Jennifer. *Reclaiming Dine History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2007.
- Driver, Felix. *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000.
- Edney, Matthew. *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Edney, Matthew. "The Irony of Imperial Mapping." In *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, edited by James R. Akerman, 11-46. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Ehrenberg, Ralph E. "U.S. Army Military Mapping of the American Southwest during the Nineteenth Century." In *Mapping and Empire: Soldier-Engineers on the Southwestern Frontier*, edited by Dennis Reinhartz and Gerald D. Saxon, 80-129. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.
- Fabian, Ann. *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Frazier, Kendrick. *People of Chaco: A Canyon and its Culture*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.

Godlewska, Anne. "Map, Text, and Image: the Mentality of Enlightened Conquerors: A New Look at the Description de l'Egypte." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995): 5–28.

Geotzmann, William. *Exploration and Empire: the Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1966.

Hannah, Matthew G. "Space and Social Control in the Administration of the Oglala Lakota ('Sioux'), 1871-1879." *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1993, 19(4), 412-432.

Hämäläinen, Pekka. *The Comanche Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Hämäläinen, Pekka and Samuel Truett. "On Borderlands." *The Journal of American History* 98, No. 2 (September 2011): 362-383.

Harley, Brian. "Maps, Knowledge, and Power." In *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, edited by Paul Laxton, 51-83. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Hine, Robert V. *Edward Kern and American Expansion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.

Hoffman, Virginia. *Navajo Biographies, Volume I*. Phoenix: Navajo Curriculum Center Press, 1974.

Jackson, J.B. "The Necessity for Ruins." In *The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.

Jackson, William H. "Report on the ancient ruins examined in 1875 and 1877." In *Tenth Annual Report of the United States Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, embracing Colorado and parts of adjacent Territories, being a Report of Progress of the Exploration for the Year 1876*, by F.V. Hayden, 409-450. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878.

Jacob, Christian. "Toward a Cultural History of Cartography." *Imago Mundi*, 48 (1996): 191-98.

Johnson, Natasha Kaye. "Tears Shed for Chaco: Former Canyon Residents Recall Legacy of Forced Removal." *The Gallup Independent*. Friday August 31, 2007.

Julyan, Robert Hixson. *Place Names of New Mexico*. Albuquerque: UNM Press, 1998.  
Kern, Edward. *Map of the Route pursued in 1849 by the US Troops, under the command of Bvt. Lieut. Col. Jno. M. Washington, Governor of New Mexico, in an expedition against the Navajos Indians*. Philadelphia: Duval, 1849.



- Kern, Edward. *Map of the Route pursued in 1849 by the US Troops, under the command of Bvt. Lieut. Col. Jno. M. Washington, Governor of New Mexico, in an expedition against the Navajos Indians*. Philadelphia: Duval, 1849.
- Kern, Richard. *Richard Kern, Santa Fe, N.M., to Samuel George Morton, Philadelphia, Pa., 1850, July 3-4*. Letter. From The Newberry Library, *The Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection*, 1-8.
- Kirsch, Scott. "John Wesley Powell and the Mapping of the Colorado Plateau, 1869-1879: Survey Science, Geographical solutions, and the Economy of Environmental Values." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92 (2002): 548-572.
- Krishna, Sankaran. "Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India." In *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities*, Borderlines Series, vol.2, edited by Michael J. Shapiro and Hayward R. Aker. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996.
- Liakos, Antonis. "The Construction of National Time: The Making of the Modern Greek Historical Imagination." *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 16 (1) (June 2001): 27-42.
- Lipsitz, George. "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies." *American Quarterly*, 42 (4) (December 1990): 615-636.
- Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- McNitt, Frank, ed. *The Navaho Expedition: Journal of a Military Reconnaissance from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the Navajo Country, made in 1849 by Lieutenant James H. Simpson*, annotated and edited by Frank McNitt. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964, reprinted by Red River Books, 2003.
- National Park Service. *Chaco Culture National Historical Park Management Plan*. 1968.
- Noble, David Grant. *New Light on Chaco Canyon*. Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1984.
- Pickles, John. *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geo-coded World*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Pratt, Mary-Louise. *Imperial Eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Reinhartz, Dennis and Gerald D. Saxon, eds. *Mapping and Empire: Soldier-Engineers on the Southwestern Frontier*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.

Rundstrom, Robert A. "Mapping, Postmodernism, Indigenous People, and the Changing Direction of North American Cartography." *Cartographica* 28(2) (1991): 1-12.

Shubert, Frank N. *The Nation Builders: A Sesquicentennial History of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, 1838-1863*. Fort Belvoir, Virginia: Office of History, United States Army Corps of Engineers, 1988.

Simpson, James H. *Reports of the Secretary of War*. Washington, DC, Senate Ex. Doc. 64, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1850.

Simpson, James H. *Journal of a Military Reconnaissance from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the Navajo Country, Made with the Troops under Command of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel John M. Washington, Chief of Ninth Military Department, and Governor of New Mexico, in 1849*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1852.

Simpson, James H. *Coronado's March in Search of the Seven Cities of Cibola and the Discussion of their Probable Location*. Smithsonian Report, 1869, published in Washington DC, 1884.

Weber, David J. *Richard H. Kern: Expeditionary Artist in the Far Southwest, 1848-1853*. Albuquerque: UNM Press, 1985.

Wheat, Carl I. *Mapping the Trans-Mississippi West, 1540-1861*. Mansfield Centre: Martino Publishing, 2004.

Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocidal Research* 8(4) (2006): 387-409.

Wood, Denis. *The Power of Maps*. New York City: The Guilford Press, 1992.

Yablon, Nick. *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819-1919*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.