

New Mexico Historical Review

Volume 8 | Number 3

Article 3

7-1-1933

Kin and Clan

A. F. Bandelier

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

Bandelier, A. F.. "Kin and Clan." *New Mexico Historical Review* 8, 3 (1933).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol8/iss3/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

KIN AND CLAN

An Interesting Lecture Delivered Friday Night, April 28th, 1882, by Prof. A. F. Bandelier, under the Auspices of the Historical Society of New Mexico, Concerning the Peculiarities and Characteristics of the Indian Race

From the *Santa Fe New Mexican* of April 29, 1882¹

THE following lecture was delivered last night before the Historical Society, to an audience which completely filled the Council Chamber. Hon. W. G. Ritch was in the chair and introduced the speaker, A. F. Bandelier, whose researches and investigations among the Indian tribes is promising some exceedingly interesting and important results. Mr. Bandelier has been several weeks living with and among the Pueblo Indians, and comes here from Cochiti, to which point he returns today:

It is a difficult task for one who has as yet devoted but a short time to special investigations in this territory, to address an audience composed of persons, all of whom have the advantages of longer experience in New Mexico; consequently of greater practical knowledge. My appearance before you, therefore, cannot be with the intention of imparting information in the shape of new facts relative to New Mexico. Its purpose is simply to offer a plea of making an appeal in behalf of an institution, which, in your midst, has recently arisen, out of the ashes of its past. This institution is the "Historical Society of New Mexico."

No plea deserves attention and hearing unless it is substantiated by facts. These facts are gathered both from general principles and from details.

The practical value of historical studies has not, as yet, been generally recognized in the United States. They are regarded rather as a matter of taste, of laudable and harmless curiosity, than a matter of necessity.

1. In this reprint of an early paper of the Historical Society some changes of spelling and format have been made.—EDITOR.

THE MONUMENTS OF THE PAST

are, very often, viewed only as mold, but fit to be "ploughed under" for the benefit of advancing culture. This results in part from the peculiar historical formation of the people of the United States, but largely also from a misconception of the nature and scope of historical studies.

History embodies our knowledge of the development of mankind from its first appearance. There are, consequently, no "prehistoric" times, properly speaking. Archaic periods existed and still exist in certain regions; there are numberless remains of human life and occupation scattered over the earth's surface with which no chronology, no knowledge of the fact of their makers, is as yet connected, still they are historical in the widest and only proper sense of the term. Historical studies are based upon various auxiliary disciplines. Archaeology is one of them, since it aims at resurrection to life of a forgotten past; it emerges into ethnology, which makes the customs and habits, the industry, mode of life, crude beliefs, and social organization of the human race, its special object of study. Ethnography forms the connecting link between history and geographical sciences. These are not all the branches which the historian must cultivate, only a few of the leading ones. The result of his endeavors will be a historical fact, that is, an undeniable truth—therefore a lesson. Is it utterly superfluous to ask: Whether and how far the lessons of the past are indispensable to the present and to the future?

There is no part of the United States offering such excellent illustrations of the value of historical studies, as the territory of New Mexico. Ever since the first arrival of the Caucasian branch, it has stood in the presence here of another ramification of the human race, different in physical features, but much more distinct in ethnological development. Those two groups were, and are, called upon to live with each other, yet they have, until now, failed to understand each other to a great extent. Where there is no understanding, misunderstanding rules supreme, conflicts come, therefore mutual detriment. On the part of the more advanced cluster, extermination has been applied sometimes as a remedy, but whereas it is necessary or rather unavoidable under certain circumstances, as a policy it is always a crime.

There is a wide gap between the Indian and the white man, and, singular to state, the former seldom makes any

effort to bridge or to fill it. It incumbs upon the white man, as the older and wiser brother, to stoop, and therefore, to understand the younger child. The difference between the two groups is not due to physical causes alone, the body of the Indian is not so very distinct from ours. It does not consist in a lack of capacity for handicraft; the Indian is dexterous. He is shrewd and quick to perceive in negotiations to a certain extent. The spell which hangs over him is of a different nature, and while it more or less regulates all his thoughts and actions, it fetters him, until gradually broken, to the inferior position which he now occupies. This chain is his

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

When Europeans first began to occupy the American continent, they found the marriage relations of the aborigines in a state of confusion, unexplainable to them. Polygamy was absolutely unknown; in some very rude tribes a peculiarly regulated form of promiscuous intercourse seemed to prevail—in others monogamy with authorized concubinage and apparent incest. Nowhere did the family as we understand it present itself; there always was a barrier between man and wife which extended itself to the customs of house life.

In New Mexico, up to the Indian revolt of 1680, and after the re-conquest war, the men in the pueblos slept in the estufas, the women and children alone occupying the cells of the houses. A similar custom prevailed in Mexico where it has given rise to the myth about "harems" kept by the chiefs. The Incas, of Peru, also observed division by sexes. Among the Iroquois and other tribes of the east it did not probably exist, but it was found almost generally with all sedentary Indians of a higher grade.

This distinction was still more apparent in other divisions. Individual tenure of lands was unknown to the Indians, the lands were communal, as they still are among the Pueblos, and were in Mexico prior to 1857. The little worked plots, however, descended, in both countries, exclusively to the males; the females received nothing. Now it is changed, the lands being divided among all the children alike. In most Indian tribes of a roaming character, whereas the little wardrobe and the household goods of the mother descend after her death to her children, or to her relations on her mother's side in case she leaves no offspring, the hus-

band's gun, his blankets, and similar articles of his own use, generally went to the children, or to his brothers and sisters, or to the sisters of his mother and their offspring in the first generation. At Cochiti, the crops once housed, belong to the wife; the husband cannot sell an ear of corn without her consent, except in the field, but horses and cattle he can dispose of at his pleasure.

A further sign of this division is the strict repartition of chattels. What the wife uses she owns, and so does the husband on his side. As late as 60 years after the conquest in Mexico, the wife was purchased, and with her the cooking utensils, but the latter remained her property, of which she could dispose freely. Any woman of a pueblo might sell the entire kitchen furniture of her house, and none of the male inmates could complain, provided she replaced it. For these rights of property, separate and distinct, are accompanied by an equally precise division of work.

THIS BARRIER BETWEEN THE SEXES

extends, as I have already stated, to the children, in the sense that it separates them for either of the couple—from the man if descent is in the female line, from the woman if the inverse rule prevails. But besides it initiates and explains many irregular features of marriage. At the time of the conquest a girl could marry her brother's son, and this (as the Queres, for instance call the children of their brother, "sa-uishe," my children) explains the accusation of incestuous intercourse. Similar relations existed in Mexico and Peru. But the same girl who might marry her nephew on her brother's side, could not take for her spouse any of her sister's offspring, even in the remotest generation. Thus crops out here a division of Indian society into "clusters," based upon common descent.

We have been accustomed to look at the Indian "tribe" as their unit of organization. Such is not the case. The tribe is a mere shell, a co-partnership, formed for defense and subsistence, by consanguine clusters, or kins speaking the same dialect. These Kins, called in Peru, "ayllu," in Mexico, "calpulli," among the Queres of New Mexico, "hantch," they are the units of society. They are equivalent to the Roman "gens," of the German "sippe," of the Scottish "clan," of the Irish "sept." They are the descendants of a common custom, whose name is generally lost. Their basis

is communism in living, democracy in government. All the offices are elective. In New Mexico they held for life or during good behavior; also in Mexico and in Peru. The Spaniards wisely kept this system, but they changed the term of office, limiting it to one year. It is untrue that there were any Indian monarchies or empires in America. Everywhere the same system prevailed, and nowhere was there any consideration in the shape of a state or a nation. It was impossible on account of the kinships, and these ruled the tribe. The supreme authority was, and still is in the Pueblos,

THE TRIBAL COUNCIL

Previous to the conquest, and sometime after it in New Mexico, this council was composed of one or more representatives of each Kin, elected for life. Now it has changed in so far as the council is composed of the so-called principals, that is, of such men as have once received the dignities of governor, or their lieutenants. (Among the ancient Mexicans the council consisted of twenty members, one of each Kin; among the Incas, of sixteen.) The influence which

THE KIN

thus exercises, is a most powerful one, and one which besides is of ages in duration. It ties and fetters the Indian in all his thoughts, desires and actions. If, on one hand, kinship springs from consanguinity, it rules marriage relations on the other. Intermarriage in the same kin is forbidden, because its members are all regarded as blood relatives; thus husband and wife are always of different clusters. The kin actually dismembers the family proper. It also crushes out, or at least weighs down heavily upon individual aspiration. Any member of one of these consanguine groups is bound to follow in the track of that group, else he becomes an outcast and loses all claims to further support. This is a serious consequence, in the case of an Indian.

It would become far too prolix were I to enumerate here all the rights bestowed and the duties imposed by the organization of the kin upon its members. They frame, altogether, the strongest, most efficacious, and most durable system of communism the earth has yet seen, and as such the most powerful tyranny. With a system of government which nowhere in aboriginal America has deviated from

that of a military democracy, the Indian has always borne the chain of the most terrible moral and mental despotism.

The kin even controls the system of Indian architecture. I shall not trespass here, on ground, which at an early day, a gentleman from your city intends occupying before you, but may state as an introduction to his own subsequent discourse that Indian architecture, from the Sioux lodge to the houses of Uxmal, Mitla and Tiahuanuco, is only understood through Indian social organization.

It is but natural, that the all absorbing influence of kinship should change vastly

THE MORAL CONCEPTIONS

of the Indian, and import to him principles of what is right or wrong which are somewhat at variance with those with which we have become imbued. Theoretically, and practically in many cases, every one who does not speak his own language, is an enemy to the Indian, and it becomes his duty to slay him, or at least to damage him in such a manner that it will result to the profit of his own kinship. The behavior of an Indian towards a stranger is therefore evenly a matter of greater or less ferocity—or of policy. We need not wonder at the numerous instances of theft committed by the aborigines, at the acts of treachery imputed to them in their early intercourse with the white men. Whenever the Indian believed the new-comers to be gods, he received them kindly and often trembling. Such was the case on the American coast. When he was satisfied that they were mortals, he either fled on their approach, or attacked them, or endeavored to catch them in a trap. There is no doubt but that, in Peru, the Incas had laid a snare for the Spaniards at Casamarca. Once established on the American continent, however, the whites impressed the aborigines so much with their superior ability and resources that the latter changed their tactics somewhat and sought to derive profit from that intercourse in a peaceful way. But the innate feeling always remained and remains: That the white man is a theoretical foe, and will not change until the Indian becomes convinced that he himself is a free man and not the slave of a cluster of blood relations.

The cases where great hospitality has been shown by the Indian are very numerous, and these appear to militate against the foregoing. But this hospitality becomes a law

only when it is to be exercised with the approval of the kinship. No stranger could, until contact with the whites had modified the customs, enter any Indian village, whether it was one of the Mohegans, Mandans, the pueblo of Pecos, or the great pueblos of Mexico or Peru, without previous consent of the chiefs, which, as I have said, were the delegates of the kins. In all the Indian towns where I have lived I always asked permission of the authorities first, and when, in Santo Domingo, I remained beyond the time virtually agreed upon and refused to leave after their summons—they starved me out. When the consanguine cluster, alone or through the tribe, had secretly resolved upon the death of a guest, individuals have saved that guest's life only in few cases. The friend of a kin is every member's friend, but friendship is a matter of sympathy and sympathies are variable; whereas kinship is a historical fact based upon physical precedents, therefore unchangeable.

It is one of the curses of the social organization of the aborigines, that it imposes upon the members the obligation of revenge. This obligation, admirably formulated by the late Lewis H. Morgan, as one "of the kin," converts an injury committed upon an Indian into a matter of the whole cluster, and, through the latter's association with other kins, of the whole tribe. This accounts for the incessant Indian feuds and numerous "Indian wars." Murder existed previous to the colonization of America only in the case where one kinsman slew another. The ancient Mexicans afford good illustration of the rules observed. If the deed was committed upon a member of the same kin, the slayer was invariably put to death; if upon a member of another kin, the two clusters negotiated about the price or indemnity. The same took place between tribes, if the victim belonged to an allied tribe. If, however, the murdered man was an outsider, the performer of the act, if the murder had been ever so foul, was often rewarded for it at home.

Indian creed and belief is only understood in its details through Indian sociology. So is the mode of worship. It is more than doubtful whether at any time before Columbus the notion of a divine creation prevailed in America. Generally a duality of original creative power, of different sexes, was believed in. Tribal gods, often historical personages deified, were the figure-heads of worship. They again find their inception with the kin whence, through as-

sociation with others, they have gradually passed into greater prominence. Historical researches in the broadest sense of the word, thus present to us the ruling power of Indian society. While individualism appears as the characteristic feature of modern civilization, communism, more or less prominently developed, stands as the type of American aboriginal culture. The white man acts and lives for himself and those whom he has chosen for his companions—the Indian lives and acts through, for and with his consanguine relationship.

To break the bonds of kinship suddenly is not

THE PROPER REMEDY

for these bonds cannot thus be severed. A slave can be set free through a legislative act, but no legal stipulations can change at once the system of consanguinity. Such a change has been wrought, but in a long period of time. Our ancestors, more than fifteen centuries ago, had an organization similar to that of the highest developed Indian community. The operation has also been successfully performed on this continent. On the other hand, we have seen Indian tribes advancing gradually into civilization, and keeping all the while their kins. Before attending to these historical phenomena, I must allude to another one yet—the fact of

A TRIBE LOSING ITS KINSHIPS

and descending the scale of humanity from a higher stage of culture to a lower one.

The Sioux, or main band of the great Dakota stock, are now a roving tribe, with hardly any tillage of the soil. They have no kins, their family is often coupled with concubinage, the wife is at the lowest round of the ladder. In the past century they were semi-horticultural Indians, almost sedentary, and were organized into kinships. A marked decline has taken place within the last 150 years. When the Sioux were first met with, they occupied the upper part of the Mississippi valley, and thence made their raids south and east. They were, like the Iroquois, and still are, an active, ambitious and remorselessly fierce stock. After the purchase of a portion of the land, through the agency of Jonathan Carver, they removed to the west towards the prairies, and then began to use the horse. They improved the great facilities afforded by this swift animal, so as to extend their roamings over vast distances then uninhabited and not fit for the abode of man. Thus the tribe became

scattered and the kinships broken up in course of time. The result has been decline and degradation, for the organization into consanguine clusters is not by far the lowest level to which humanity may sink. Several groups of Indians have been slowly and steadily progressing into a more

ADVANCED STAGE OF CIVILIZATION

while at the same time they cling to their original system of society. Besides the Pueblo Indians of this territory, who are the least advanced, owing to the isolated position of New Mexico, until a few years ago, the Iroquois of New York and the tribes of the Indian Territory are the most conspicuous.

The Iroquois owe their preservation mainly to two causes. The first is the great military power which they had acquired over nearly the whole of the region now called the United States, east of the Mississippi river. This was due to the expansion of the series framed by the kinships into a league or confederacy, comprising five autonomous tribes. The other cause is their situation in the confines of natives who have successively contended for the mastery of North America. England and France, then England and the United States mutually courted the five nations. Nevertheless the latter steadily decreased until about 30 years ago, when they came to stand still and since have begun to increase again. At the same time they began to show decided marks of improvement in acts of life. With these improvements the kin gradually lost its hold upon the individual. Individualism began to rise above communism, and while the consanguine cluster still remains, it is not any longer a many-headed despot; it has become softened into a brotherhood, preparatory to initiation into that widest and most natural association, the great brotherhood of mankind.

If the tribes of the Indian territory are left undisturbed, a similar result may be expected there. Thrown together but lately, although some of them were already neighbors long ago in other districts, the example of their surroundings is gradually improving the advances made previously. Their original numbers together with their geographical location, as between the English and French at first, then within the United States bordering upon French possessions in the Union afterwards, has saved them from utter ruin, and has made it the interest of civilized nations to cultivate peaceful intercourse as much as possible. The

time will come when the Kin will lose its hold upon the tribes and they shall enter the path of civilization on a level with now advanced groups of humanity.

But the most interesting, and, as far as the lessons of history are concerned, the most valuable spectacle, is presented by the Indians in the present republic of Mexico. At the time of the conquest, and, as far as we know, even before, the aborigines of that country composed a number of autonomous tribes, linguistically varied. No consolidation, no nationality had ever been formed or merely attempted. In some parts, as in the Valley of Mexico proper, confederacies had sprung up for the purpose of subsistence. Self-defense as well as aggression was their object. Tribes unfavored by others were not incorporated, but simply kept in awe, and tribute extorted. The normal state of the country was, therefore, one of perpetual warfare. The sedentary Indian of Mexico was, in many respects more advanced than were the Pueblo Indians, but not one of these improvements had carried him beyond the pale of original communism. The "mysterious advances" so lavishly credited to the aborigines of Mexico and Central America resolve themselves, upon close study of the past and present, into features of natural growth. The conquest came and placed in power of each other those groups of mankind, separated in degree of culture by the work of at least a thousand years. The dilemma was a grave one for Spain. How to preserve the country and its inhabitants without forcing the latter across the chasm of divide, a leap, when they must invariably have been engulfed, since they lacked moral and mental strength to accomplish it. Twenty years were spent in various essays, and during these twenty years the Indian suffered, for he was the material for the victim of every luckless experiment.

At last, however, the

COUNSELS OF THE CHURCH PREVAILED

and every Indian community was permitted to take its own course, provided it kept at peace with the others, and recognized the Spanish government—supporting it through a limited taxation, and adopting the Christian faith. The remainder were left to the teachings of example, and to very slow and cautious education through instrumentality of the church. The results of it are apparent. For 250 years, at least, the Indians of Mexico, formerly in

uninterrupted warfare, enjoyed the most profound, nay enervating peace, some savage tribes excepted. Within 60 years after the conquest, Indian historians and Indian poets of merit appeared. Some of them wrote in their native idioms with our letters. At the present time, every trace of the Kin has disappeared, communal tenure of land is abolished, and the tribes are distinguished only through language and tradition. As these traditions became public property of all, they lose their practical hold. The Indian of Mexico, besides being a Nahuatl or an Otomi, or a Tzapotec, now feels that above all he is a Mexican; the civil as well as the military government of his country was largely in his own hands; he counts in his ranks persons of literary and scientific distinction.

These beneficial effects of the Spanish policy have even thrown a faint gleam of light over into this territory. They are faint because New Mexico was always a forlorn hope to Spain. But in this respect also they place the territory for historical studies in a similar position as a metallurgic region, when eruptive and sedimentary rocks meet. In the same manner that geological contrast lines develop the most perfect crystals and sometimes the most valuable ores, so historical contrast lines produce the richest material for future investigation.

To unearth this material and to reduce it to clear bulion in the shape of practical lessons is the task of the society to whose call I have now so feebly responded. Let me, therefore, once more appeal to you in its behalf. Should my plea result in anything like active support, I will have discharged but one of the many obligations under which I am placed by the kindness and friendship of the people of New Mexico, irrespective of origin and nationality.