

THE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY CONTROL

The Attempt of a Native American Community  
to Participate in the Education  
of their Children. \*

by

Jean Stockard

University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon  
Fall, 1972

\* I would like to thank David Wellman for his many helpful suggestions  
in the development of this paper.

## Abstract

The struggle of a Native American community for the control of the education of their children is reviewed and analyzed from the theoretical perspective of internal colonialism. The theory of internal colonialism is briefly reviewed. Emphasis is given to the place of racial control. It is shown how the educational system of the Bureau of Indian Affairs is a means of racial control. This control is both structural and subjective. That is, it operates both through the institutional structures of the social system and through the more subjective aspects of everyday lives and the interactions of individuals. The reactions of the colonial oppressors to the attempts of the Native Americans to gain a voice in the control of their school illustrates the full extent of this control.

## Theoretical Basis

The position of third world groups in the United States has been analyzed in terms of colonialism, or more precisely, "internal colonialism." (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, 3-32; Blauner, 1969; Moore, 1970) Basically, such an analysis sees the subjugated groups as being in a structural position analagous to that of colonized peoples in historic over-seas colonial situations. In his formulation of the theory Blauner wrote,

There appear to be four basic components of the colonization complex. The first refers to how the racial group enters into the dominant society (whether colonial power or not). Colonization begins with a forced, involuntary entry. Second there is an impact on the culture and social organization of the colonized people which is more than just a result of such "natural" processes as contact and acculturation. The colonizing power carries out a policy which constrains, transforms, or destroys indigenous values, orientations, and ways of life. Third, colonization involves a relationship by which members of the colonized group tend to be administered by representatives of the dominant power. There is an experience of being managed and manipulated by outsiders in terms of ethnic status.

A final fundament of colonization is racism. Racism is a principal of social domination by which a group seen as inferior or different in terms of alleged biological characteristics is exploited, controlled, and oppressed socially and psychically by a superordinate group. . . . Thus racism has generally accompanied colonialism. (1969, 396)

Social control is necessary and implicit in the racial domination of a colonial system. Social control is an aspect of all stratified systems. The difference, however, in systems of internal colonialism, is that the control is no longer instrumental, limited for a specific purpose, but becomes essential for the maintenance of the total system. Thus social control becomes a form of racial control. This racial control becomes institutionalized, an inherent dimension of the system of internal colonialism.



Institutionalized racial control mechanisms tend to reinforce the development of more ideological racism of individuals in the system. The propensity of colonizers to support the continuance of racism and racial control not only on the structural and institutional level but also within their own beliefs and actions can be understood as coming from the realization, not necessarily conscious, that any other action would be contrary to and thus destructive of their social system.

Any challenge by the oppressed, the colonized, to this control is interpreted as a threat to the total system of racial domination. (Memmi, 1965) The challenge must be met; the complaints of the oppressed must be squelched if the system is to survive. The colonized must learn to accept the legitimacy of their oppression, for again a rejection of any part of it would threaten the very basis of the colonial system. Methods used to squelch attempts of self-assertion may vary in intensity and design from total destruction and dehumanization of those initiating the attempt, to containment or co-optation.

Similarly, any attempt by a colonizer, a member of the superior group, to protest the colonial system is viewed as a dire threat to that system. Simply through the structural definitions of a colonial system a member of the superior group is a colonizer, is privileged. Thus any colonizer who challenges the system of which he is a part and of whose privileges he partakes "is nothing but a traitor" in the eyes of the other colonizers. (Memmi, 21) The objections of the colonizer to the system can be met just as harshly as those of the colonized.





The situation described above is common in third-world communities. In the following pages we will describe an experience in a Native American community, illustrating the nature and extent of racial control there and the reactions of the system and the people in it when attempts were initiated to alter that system of control. Although the situation described occurred in only one community, the context of the situation is not at all unusual. What perhaps was unusual was the extent to which the oppressed managed to make known their dissatisfaction.

#### Native Americans as a Colonized People

The colonized position of Native Americans is perhaps more like that of people in over-seas colonies than other third world groups in the United States. For while blacks, some Chicanos, and Asian-Americans were brought to this country as a source of cheap labor, the Native Americans were the victims of an invasion. Gradually and painfully their land was appropriated, their numbers were diminished, and they were herded onto small tracts of land not desired by the invaders. Here they were and are now carefully watched. Their affairs and land are held in trust and administered by the United States government through a branch of the Department of the Interior called the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Navajo reservation is located in the arid Southwest in the "Four Corners" area, comprising portions of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Only two paved roads cross the large land area, which is about the size of the state of West Virginia. Few homes have running water or electricity; families must go several miles to haul water. The land is arid and sparsely

covered with grass. Jobs are scarce; the unemployment rate is high, and state welfare payments are low. Health conditions are deplorable. Tuberculosis is quite common as is trachoma, a disease of the eyes now prevalent among only American Indians. **Malnutrition is often seen**, and infectious diseases are a major problem.

Despite economic and health problems, the cultural life of the Navajos, their sense of history and group feeling is strong. Most Navajos still speak their own language. In fact, a large portion of the people know no English. Traditional religious ceremonies, medicine men, and traditional beliefs are not a hold over from the past, but are an important part of life for many people.

As the representative of the colonial power, the Bureau of Indian Affairs virtually controls the lives of Navajos. Only in recent years has the tribe as a whole been allowed authority in even a few areas, now primarily involving law enforcement and some aspects of economic development. The Bureau, as it is called, retains authority over physical development, irrigation, wells, ~~and~~ roads; some aspects of welfare; and, most important for this paper, education. Medical care is now under the authority of the Public Health Service, another government body. Historically these functions were designed as services to be provided to the Navajos in exchange for their peaceful return to their homeland. In reality, the services have never been totally provided and, most importantly, have become a means of controlling the Navajos, of maintaining the status quo, the subjection of the people.



Such an assertion becomes more tenable when we examine the structure of the BIA and its personnel. The Bureau is an agency within the Department of Interior. All employees are hired through and supposedly protected by civil service regulations. Unique among government agencies, the BIA must grant preference in employment to people of Indian heritage. This reform was initiated originally as a means of transferring greater control over Bureau activities to those immediately affected. However, while 47% of the Bureau employees are Indian, only 25% of them are employed at the GS-6 civil service level or above. Eighty-two per cent of the non-Indian employees work at or above that level. Even when the level of education attained and length of service are used as control variables, discrimination against Indian employees remains. (Olson, 1970, 41441-41449) Thus input by Native American employees to the system is primarily restricted to the lowest levels. Input by community residents, officials, and parents is even more limited. In a few communities advisory school boards have been chosen, but they are rarely if ever allowed a voice in administrative decisions. In no area of Navajo life that is controlled by the Bureau is the voice of tribal members more than token or advisory.

The reasons for this situation do not seem to arise simply from bureaucratic chaos. True enough, officials in the BIA are secure in their jobs and do not want to leave them. But policies that continue over periods of years blocking Native Americans from top posts indicate a deeper reason for the discrepancy. Basically we shall contend that the situation illustrates racial control, the control of an oppressed people that is necessary if the colonial system is to survive. If the oppressed are allowed any real control

over their lives the very system of subjugation would be challenged. Thus the maintenance of the system requires that either none of the oppressed be allowed a voice in the operations of the system or that the voice they are given be of only a token nature, of no consequence or in line with the views of the oppressors, a path Selznick has termed "formal co-optation." (1966, 260-1) In the following pages we shall give an example of the extent of this control.

### The BIA as an Agency of Control

To understand the Bureau's activities it is useful to have at least a cursory knowledge of its hierarchical structure. The Bureau's education system is administered through a large bureaucracy stretching from Washington, D.C. and Albuquerque, New Mexico, to an "Area Office" in Gallup, to Window Rock, an intermediate stop, and then to the local "Agency Office," which has contacts with the administration at the local schools.

Even at the local level several layers of administrative responsibility compound the decision-making process. The school principal of Civil Service grade eleven or thirteen is usually the main administrative officer in charge of education. If it is a boarding school there will be both a teaching supervisor, in charge of classrooms, and a guidance supervisor in charge of dormitories. These people are ordinarily at Civil Service grade nine or eleven. Specialists in fields like music and English and assistant supervisors fall next in line with teachers and guidance counselors at levels five, seven, and nine, coming next. Only rarely is an Indian found at these levels. Most Native Americans are employed as aides in the classrooms or dormitory at levels three, four or five. Only the teachers, guidance counselors, and aides, and some specialists, work directly with the children.

Thus the people who make important decisions are several, if not many, steps removed from those who will be affected by the decision. More importantly, those who make the decisions, even those who carry them out, are not accountable to those whom the decision will affect, the Navajos and their children. The policy making of the BIA occurs in a sterile bureaucratic atmosphere, far removed, both administratively and morally from the recipients of the decisions. To see the impact of such a situation we need only reflect on a typical city or suburban school where at most only two layers of bureaucracy separate a principal from his or her charges and from his or her superiors. More importantly, in the usual setting through the hiring and firing functions of locally elected school boards parents may have direct input into the administration of most of these schools.<sup>1</sup>

In general, we shall assert that the Bureau educational policies unite to form a system of control that enters every institutional sector of Navajo life: economic, political, family, education, and religious, besides affecting basic societal norms and values. The low quality of education received in Bureau schools virtually eliminates the possibility of all but a small fraction of students ever having economic independence either within the dominant society or in the traditional economy. The low academic achievement of Indian children attending Bureau schools has been well documented. (Subcommittee Report, 1969, 62-3) At Round Rock, the Bureau school with which we are most familiar, teachers thought their students were doing well

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<sup>1</sup> I realize the picture is not nearly this rosy for large city systems. However, many of these systems may also be interpreted in the light of racial control and the system of internal colonialism.



when they scored only two grades below their assigned level on standard achievement tests. Many students are functional illiterates when they leave school. Thus their participation in economic life can only be minimal, even if the discrimination against them in the job market were lessened. More importantly, after long years in a white man's school the students are unable to actively participate in their Navajo economic tradition. The girls do not know how to weave rugs or dry corn. The boys do not know how to plant. Few young men become medicine men. By locking the youth into this white man's inferior school system they are locking them out of both the Navajo economic sphere and that of the white men and dooming the young to a life of subjection and dependence, a life where they will not threaten the present system.

Second, political socialization is strongly controlled. While children in most middle class white schools are encouraged to practice "self-government" (though admittedly only on minor and token topics), children in Bureau schools are forbidden to comment on their life circumstances. Even people in their late teen years must conform to stringent rules designed for elementary school children. (Subcommittee Report, 1969, 64-5) No forms of self government, even token, are allowed. Thus for nine months of each year the children have no chance to run their own lives or think for themselves. Moreover, the boarding school setting only gives them rare opportunities to observe the political lives of their parents, their participation in local politics. Finally, and perhaps potentially most important, the situation at the school with Anglo administrators and Navajo subordinates and only token Navajo input into the administration is a graphic illustration to the students of the way their society is run. As most of the Navajos with whom the children come into contact at the school have also been raised within

that system, the children may develop little vision of alternative styles of life, or political control.

Control over family life is another consequence of the Bureau educational system. A Navajo man with whom we worked once suggested that the boarding school system was effectively destroying Navajo family life. Dr. Robert Bergman, a psychiatrist on the reservation, testifying before the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education, corroborated with this view. (71) Certainly taking a child from his or her family at six years of age, not allowing his parents to visit for, at some schools, several weeks at a time, verbally downgrading the child's family life in the classroom, besides treating the parents inhumanly, can do nothing to aid family stability and unity. When a child is separated from family life and interaction for the major portion of his life from six years of age on, the generational continuity of the family institutional structure is certainly in danger.

Social control as exercised through educational institutions proceeds along two dimensions: the actual education received in the bureau schools and the lack of education received in the home and traditional cultural life. Children are given only low-level educational materials in the schools, designed to "civilize" or "make good citizens" while actual substantive and intellectual material is pretty much ignored. (Subcommittee Report, 60-3) Thus few students are capable of continuing their education in other schools. Correspondingly, matters related to Navajo culture are not allowed. Representatives from the community are not allowed at the schools, and as children must stay there they never learn traditional tales and skills, some of which are practiced only during the winter months.

Control of the religious lives of the children is an element that is perhaps unique to Native American communities. Children at Bureau boarding schools are required to attend one hour of "religious instruction" as given by the local missionaries after school each week. In addition, services are held each Sunday morning; attendance is required for children remaining over the week end. Usually only three choices of service are available: Catholic, Latter Day Saints, and the local Protestant denomination. The traditional religions of the children are not discussed, and in fact may be ridiculed, if not by the missionaries by teachers. These traditional beliefs are often held in high regard by the children and their parents. The attitudes transmitted by school authorities are not well received.

One of the most significant aspects of religious control occurs at off-reservation boarding schools, usually several hundred miles from the children's homes. Unlike their younger brothers and sisters, children at these schools may not go home on the weekends or for vacations. Ceremonies of the Native American Church (Peyote) are banned by school administrators, though not by federal law. Several people have told us of the anguish of the young high school students who belong to this church yet are many miles from home and desirous of participating in their religious ceremonies. Some try to conduct their religious rituals on a hillside away from the school. The school officials, however, seeing such actions as a threat to their power and authority, send employees across the hills to find the "drug pushers." Obviously, the only religions tolerated and allowed by the Bureau are those of the white man.



Implicit in the Bureau policies discussed above is the idea that what is Navajo is bad; only what is Anglo, what comes from the white community is good. We are suggesting that these overriding moral condemnations and attitudes are implicit in racial control. Control exercised over the lives of Navajos through the Bureau educational process is then both objective and subjective. Through regulations, economic prowess, and in some cases brute force, objective or structural control is emphasized and maintained. The other element of control arises out of these structural aspects and is just as harmful in the long run. This aspect involves the dominant society's negative judgment of Navajo life, the attitudes that are continually transmitted to the children, their parents and the employees. Both of these aspects of racial control become more apparent when we examine the conditions at one school and the attempts made to change these conditions.

### The School at Round Rock <sup>2</sup>

After finishing our undergraduate work my husband Walt and I were employed by the Bureau as secondary teachers and/or guidance counselors. As our first assignment we were sent as counselors to Round Rock Boarding School, a seven grade institution (including "Beginners," the pre-first grade class for six-year olds), capable of caring for five hundred to seven hundred students. The school is located on a dirt road about eight miles from a state highway. The closest town of any size is the agency town Rock River, about thirty to forty miles or an hour's drive away. A few Navajos from the surrounding area are employed in Rock River, but most manage to subsist on income from their sheep, the small crops some can grow, handcrafts,

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<sup>2</sup> While all the events described in this paper actually occurred, names of all people and places are fictitious.

primarily rugs, and meager welfare payments. Some seasonal employment outside the community is available. Individuals or families may travel to nearby states to help with harvest or leave for several months to work with the railroad.

The first school in the community was built prior to the second World War and accepted only students who could come from home each day. Several years later a larger plant was developed on another site which could also care for boarding students. A bus run was established up the canyon for the day students. Finally, in the fall of 1968 the present school was opened with enough facilities to house all children in the surrounding area, eliminating the bus run, and the chance for many students to live at home.

The school was administered entirely by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. On the local level the main administrators were a principal, a teacher supervisor, and a guidance supervisor and his assistant who were in charge of the dormitories. In our school there were no Indian administrative personnel. On the agency level, a bureaucratic notch above the local school, only one Navajo woman was employed as an administrator, in an advisory post labeled "educational specialist."

The principal, Mr. Thorpe, and his wife, a first grade teacher, had been employed by the BIA for many years, long ago in the Dakotas, more recently on the Hopi reservation, and at Round Rock for the last fifteen years. Mrs. Thorpe had once been a major force in the school, the dominant authority not only over the classrooms but over the dormitories as well. She was well known for her cruelty to children, her belief that Indian youngsters could not learn, and her practice for many years of having almost all first

graders automatically repeat that year of schooling. Mr. Thorpe, past the customary age for retirement when we came to the school, had apparently been overwhelmed by the expansion of the school to its larger quarters. According to reliable sources Thorpe had an earlier record that was hardly free of mishaps and administrative faux-pas. He was trying to avoid any problems that would force his dismissal. When we arrived he seemed to be an exhausted old man, simply waiting for his wife to decide to retire.

The most central force in the disturbances we will describe, Ray Mullen, was a man in his mid-forties who entered the education profession fairly late in life. His first job was with the bureau at a school south of Round Rock. Local rumors reported that he had problems at the other school which were similar to, if not more serious than, those at Round Rock and left there under duress. Several years before we came it was reported that Mullen, then at a considerably lower civil service rating, had decided to transfer to another school. Thorpe was aware of Mullen's failings but gave him a good recommendation hoping to facilitate the transfer. However, the bureau froze all transfers at about this time, noted his good recommendation and promoted Mullen to a Guidance Supervisor position only a level below Thorpe and left him at Round Rock.

Two other administrators were involved. Ron Carlson, the teacher supervisor, had worked his way through the system from a teaching position to a place of authority over the teachers and just under the principal. In theory his authority was equal to that of Mullen's. In reality, however, his impact was secondary, though in some instances just as damaging. Carlson was wary of endangering his position of authority, and although he could



have helped complainants in later months he aligned himself most solidly with the administration in hopes of bolstering or at least maintaining his own power.

Edward Kerr was the assistant guidance supervisor, a step below Mullen, his "flunky" and main connection to the dormitories. Kerr, a retired elementary school principal, had spent a year in residence at an Ivy League School of Education many years before. He had also taught courses in child psychology and fancied himself an expert in the field. He saw his main purpose on the reservation as educating the Indians to the "realities" and "truths" of Driekurian child guidance. Basically Kerr's attitude seemed humane. However, his position in the bureaucracy and his delusion that he was predetermined to expose the Navajos to the truths of psychology eventually undermined the benevolent intent of his actions.

The Anglo teachers at the school were a varied lot. Some had been with the Bureau for many years. They were discouraged and convinced the children would never learn, but felt they had made a sacrifice and done their part "to help the Indian people." Then there were those who had been with the Bureau for only a few years. Some were aware of immense problems with the structure and operation of the school and a few had even attempted changes or made complaints. As each person was defeated their enthusiasm began to wane and they became gradually more discouraged and resigned. Each year a few new teachers would be added to the system. Still relatively naive, they would be initiated to the rigors and injustices of a system that seemingly no one could control and would join the old ranks, or perhaps fight for a while, and then either become resigned to the situation or quit in disgust.

The Navajos at the school had for the most part been employed by the BIA for many years and in almost all cases had gone through the bureau school system, now a prerequisite for hiring. Some of them were fairly well-educated, yet had never risen beyond the GS-5 level, allegedly because of lack of qualifications. These people had watched the workings at the school for many years, and they too were defeated, but in a different way. We were to find that underneath their defeat, their beliefs that nothing would change, there existed both a large reservoir of fear and an intense distrust and hate of the system that many saw as killing their people.

One other Anglo, Stanley Peterson, was employed as a guidance counselor. However, because of his inherent intellectual limitations (He reportedly received monthly checks from the government for a mental disability suffered in the military.) and his ill-concealed racism, he was usually the object of open disdain from the Navajo employees and children under his jurisdiction, and was either ignored or used as a ploy by the administrators. One further element in Peterson's history with the Bureau prompted the disdain of the Navajos. Before coming to Round Rock Peterson had been an instructional aide at an off-reservation boarding school. There Peterson's supervisor had been a Navajo woman without an academic degree. In the fall of 1968 Peterson was for some unknown reason promoted several steps and moved to Round Rock as a guidance counselor. Navajos at Round Rock who had many years more experience with the children were not informed of the opening or urged to apply, a clear violation of federal Equal Employment Opportunity regulations.

Walt and I were also termed "guidance counselors." In this position we were each placed in a large dormitory in a supervisory position over the employees in the dorm, all Indians. About one hundred and fifty youngsters, both boys and girls, lived in each dorm in dark cubicles equipped with two bunk beds and surrounded by sterile concrete walls. Our tasks mainly involved administrative busywork: counting laundry, ordering supplies, and pushing paper clips. It was virtually impossible for an Anglo to do any real counseling. The cultural and language differences between an Anglo, middle-class counselor and a young Navajo-speaking child from the reservation were too large to overcome. The only real effective counseling we observed took place between people sharing the same cultural background and understandings and usually the same language. The only innovative aspect of our position, an aspect in which our activities met with continuous opposition, was the development of recreational activity programs for the youngsters, an area sorely lacking at the school.

Gradually, both because of problems we encountered and experiences related to us by other employees and the children we became aware of the racism and degradation pervading the Bureau educational system. As suggested earlier, many of these problems can be seen as aspects of "racial control," attempts to maintain the institutional suppression of the Navajo people. Other circumstances may not be so interpreted for they are not unique to the Navajos or to other groups of Native Americans, but are common even in white working class communities. Nevertheless, these circumstances were often interpreted by the Navajo employees and parents as being racist; that is, as



occurring because the children or adults involved were Navajos and not Anglos. On the following pages we shall describe events and conditions at the school, illustrating how many of these conditions may be seen as mechanisms aimed at maintaining the colonial system of racial domination.

### Control at Round Rock

Administrators at the school were always intent upon maintaining rigid control of policies, programs, and the lives of the employees. Salary levels for most Indian employees of the bureau are extremely low and in many families both the husband and wife must work. Correspondingly a major instrument for social control used by administrators is the arbitrary enforcement of leave and work schedules, assigning opposite schedules and days off to those couples deemed most deserving of reprimand within a certain work period. The assignment of work schedules was completely arbitrary, and the punitive nature of these assignments was reinforced by threats and announcements of the administrators. The racial aspect of this control can be seen by how it was directed toward the Indians. While Walt and I were always given at least one day off together and assured at the beginning of the year that this would be the common practice, when I later prepared a duty schedule that provided the same privilege for the Navajos in my building Mullen took one look at it and harshly replied, "You can't do this for the people in your building. (all Navajos) I'll have to rewrite the schedule myself."

The guidance counselors (all Anglos) had been given a choice of not working on Sundays so they could attend church services if they wanted. Throughout the year Mr. Peterson had been allowed to alter his work schedule so he could both attend Sunday services and get Sunday pay. Evelyn Smith,

an employee in Walt and Mr. Begay's building, was involved with missionary work on Sundays. Lockhart however had scheduled her to work then. Mr. Begay and Walt, seeing this as a problem, asked Mullen about changing the schedule. He replied, "Her job comes first, I can't make an exception for her," and refused to reconsider even after he was reminded of the choice the counselors had been given.

A second way the administrators tried to maintain control over the lives of their employees was by granting or refusing to grant leave privileges. On numerous occasions, even though such practice was strictly against Civil Service regulations, which allow up to three days sick leave without a doctor's statement, Mullen and Kerr would require written notes from a doctor before an individual would be granted sick leave, even if such leave was to visit a doctor. One woman was refused leave to enter the hospital even though she held a hospital admittance clip. Another woman who was pregnant feared she had suffered a miscarriage while on duty. She continued to work both that night and the next, however, for fear of being accused by Mullen of lying when she tried to explain what happened. On the other hand when we or any other Anglo were ill we only had to call the administrators on the phone to inform them. No notes from a doctor were ever requested.

Although many physical conditions and the attitudes of teachers at Round Rock were similar to those we have witnessed in other oppressed areas, these conditions and attitudes were usually seen by the parents and Navajo employees as occurring primarily because the children involved were Navajo. Few supplies were available. Children in the classrooms were given paper in half-sheets only. In many classrooms there were no pencils, so the children used broken color crayons. In other rooms no reading textbooks were available

for the children so the teacher laboriously copied stories from her one teacher's edition onto large sheets of paper for the class to read in unison. Unfortunately, her supply of paper rapidly diminished. This lack of supplies became even more maddening when we realized that offices further up the bureaucratic chain and even in the local administration threw away supplies for which we or the teachers were pleading.

The shortage of materials would not have been as depressing if it were not for the concomitant lack of enthusiasm and concern shown by the administrators and some teachers for the well-being and education of the children. The children, especially the younger ones who had not yet been thoroughly discouraged and beaten down, were anxious to try new activities and learn new things. As guidance counselors we were responsible for various programs in the dormitories. The dormitories were certainly not effective as a home for children. Recreational facilities were especially poor. There was a large gymnasium on the school grounds but access to the gym was severely limited, primarily to the school sports teams, an activity especially favored by the administrators. Balls, jumprobes, and other equipment were in short supply. A few arts and crafts materials, mainly in the form of construction paper and large first grade size crayons, were available.

Many times only one person was on duty to work with forty to eighty children, hardly a ratio amenable to individual attention. Obviously the situation called for immediate changes and the dormitory staff tried several modes of attack. We realized that many of the teachers and two educational specialists, one in English and one in Music, were anxious to work with children in the dormitory setting. Thus several programs were attempted including a 4-H program, an English learning and play program in the dorms, and a



music program for the children in the evenings. Apparently each of these proved threatening to the guidance administrators and they moved in various ways to halt them, either through extreme verbal harassment of the specialists, teachers and outside personnel working with the projects; refusal to provide necessary supplies even though money was available; and/or simply decreeing the programs could not continue as was done with the music program.

The music specialist worked throughout the school year to establish a recreational, extra-curricular music program for the children. The youngsters enjoyed working with her and she was enthusiastically pursuing several projects until the middle of February when she told me that she had been forced to give up all her plans for extra work. The guidance supervisors had said that she was getting the children too excited and that her program would not be good for the school or for the youngsters. This statement was prompted by the fact that some unknown people (and from all evidence not the children in the program) had shot beebee holes in some of the windows of the building she used.

The connection of some of these circumstances to racial control and discrimination may be indirect, especially when viewed from a nationwide perspective, for unfortunately such circumstances are common. However, we must admit that the circumstances severely handicapped the educational experiences of the children, dooming them to nine months of each year in an uneventful, closely controlled, non-stimulating environment which could certainly lead to retarded development over a period of years.

Perhaps the interactions of bureau officials with the community members, parents, and children will illustrate the extent of racism within the Bureau educational system more completely. During the fall months people in the community like to sell their produce of melons, fruit, and steamed corn to add to their meager funds. Students also like to buy the produce. In the fall the administrators made it clear that the community people were not to be allowed on campus to sell their wares. However, throughout the year the Anglo milk distributor was freely permitted to sell popsicles and ice cream bars.

Mullen and Kerr stated publicly that the community people deserved to be treated like children. Their actions bear out their statements. Community people were allowed to attend the weekly school movie in the gymnasium if they paid a small fee. However, the parents were treated like children, not allowed to stand in the halls and talk with friends or even to use the restrooms during the film. The gymnasium, supposedly built for community use, remained locked during school breaks and summer vacations. Even the children of campus employees were not allowed to use the facilities and were threatened with beatings if they came onto the school grounds.

One of the most disturbing actions toward parents occurred at the beginning of the school year. On September 17 the parents of two children and their aunt who acted as interpreter came to withdraw the children from school. The boy had suffered physical abuse at the hands of his classmates and both children were generally unhappy in the school system. Kerr and Mullen were present. Kerr had been informed two days earlier of the situation. As the parents explained the problems, Walt and I tried to assure them that we were aware of the difficulties and that employees were trying to correct them.

However, we were immediately interrupted by Mr. Mullen, "Tell them those kids are lying," he directed the aunt. "They just don't want to come to school. Nobody is hurting the children. I'd be the first to know if they were." The parents were quickly ushered out of the office and we were prevented from saying anything further.

Subsequently we were called into Mullen's office where he said that he would appreciate it if we kept our "mouths shut" in the future. Later Kerr told Walt, "Never admit anything to the parents or give them any grounds on which to complain. We just can't have parents coming in here complaining all the time."

Attitudes directed toward the school board members and chapter officials were similar to those directed toward the parents. When school board meetings were held Thorpe would require that everyone speak English and that no Navajo be used, even though few board members were comfortable in the former language. School board members were kept carefully guarded when they came to the school. They were not allowed to visit classrooms, tour dormitories, or inspect facilities. The administrators would often publicly state their feeling that the school board did not care about the school, that they were ignorant, and that having them around was a waste of time.

These attitudes of disdain and disrespect and racism were continued in the treatment of children. At times virtually identical remarks were directed toward the Navajo adults and the children. Sometime between November and the end of January Mr. Kerr explained to me that Mullen handled meetings in his abrupt and rude manner because he felt the Indian employees feared or respected the white man more and obeyed orders unquestioningly when given in such a way. Similarly, one Wednesday morning in late January or early February I received a phone call from Mr. Kerr relaying the message that Mullen did not want me to stay in the dorm with sick children on movie nights.



that Mullen did not want me to stay in the dorm with sick children on movie nights. I was to go to the gym because the children behaved better for Anglos than they did for the Navajos, an assertion that from our own observations and experiences seemed blatantly false. Such an attitude seems only to represent the desire by the administrators to maintain control over the people and to keep this control in hands of the privileged.

Brutality was manifested in many concrete instances including the treatment of runaways, refusing to look for children even when the weather was extremely cold and the children had no coats, severely punishing children with medical disabilities, and refusing to send children to the Public Health Service Clinic when they were obviously ill. Only two illustrations of the brutality toward children need to be offered. They are only examples as such cruelty was common. On one occasion two boys were caught drinking. The boys were taken into an office for interrogation where one of them was struck with great force by Mullen with his open hand on both sides of the boy's face and head. Walt was present at the time and felt the youth presented no threat. In fact, Mullen had to cross the room to deliver the blow.

On another occasion Guidance Counselor Peterson was supervising a group of boys cleaning the gym. Some of the boys apparently teased Peterson and in the process spilled a little popcorn onto the floor from a box Peterson was holding. Peterson became furious and began kicking the boys around him, striking at least five of them, one of whom was later treated by the school nurse for a bruise about four inches in diameter. The incident was reported to the administrators, but no reprimand was ever issued. The administrators simply accepted Peterson's statement that the injured boy had fallen and

hurt himself, was comforted and sent to the dormitory. They refused to talk to any of the boys witnessing the attack or to examine the injury.

### Reform Through "Channels"

By late November and December we had become quite distressed over events to that point and began to talk about taking action against the administrators. We sought the advice of people in our buildings and were told of past attempts at complaints, some of which involved much more substantial violations than any we had witnessed. For example, during the previous school year a former employee at the school, an Anglo, wrote the Interior Department in Washington, D.C. describing an incident involving Mrs. Thorpe and one of her students. Mrs. Thorpe apparently became upset with a child one day and threw a rock striking him in the back or rear of the head. Word came from Washington through the agency office that Mr. Carlson was to investigate the situation. Carlson investigated by showing the notice from the agency to Mr. Thorpe. Mrs. Thorpe and two other teachers who had witnessed the incident were called into the office. The teachers were were asked if the reported details were correct. When they answered "yes," Mrs. Thorpe became extremely upset and Mr. Thorpe interrogated the teachers more thoroughly (essentially a method of harassment and intimidation). Finally Mr. Carlson asked the teachers if they wished to pursue a formal complaint. Realizing from the preceding moments the type of attention such a complaint would get, the teachers declined. The agency office and the Department of Interior were told that nothing serious had happened.

One inexcusable event was reported to the appropriate officials several years earlier, and again the official reaction was to minimize the situation and threaten all involved with retribution if any action was taken. In the fall a few years ago a woman at the school was working as a night attendant in a dormitory which also contained Mullen's apartment. One night about 2:00 a.m. the woman was approached on her job by Mullen who invited her to come to his apartment for coffee that his wife had prepared. (The wife of the prior Guidance Supervisor had established a practice of making coffee for the night aides.) The woman accepted and went to the apartment followed by Mullen. She noticed that Mrs. Mullen was not around and asked for her whereabouts. Mullen did not answer. At this point the girl became nervous and got up to leave. Mullen jumped after her and grabbed her before she had gotten to the door, holding her to him as she struggled. She smelled liquor on his breath. Finally escaping she ran to her friend in the next dormitory where she spent the remainder of the shift.

The next day the woman went with her mother to Principal Thorpe's office where she told her story. Thorpe called Mullen into the office. Mullen denied the event and threatened the woman with court action if he were fired. The girl persisted over a period of several months by taking her complaint to the agency office seeking redress. She received the same treatment, a complete denial to help her. The situation ended with a meeting of school employees, administrators, and the girl's relatives with Mullen vociferously denying the incident and threatening the entire staff with retribution if he were ever punished. The matter died there, the victim of administrative cover-ups and harassment.



The actions which occurred that fall were not uncommon. We began to realize that the night aides were still receiving periodic visits accompanied by lecherous advances. Two women who had worked at the school the year before had also been approached by Mullen on several occasions. They managed to fend off his advances and were subsequently not rehired the following year, even though their work record had no flaws.

We realized that efforts at removal would be difficult, but continued to talk about initiating a complaint. All efforts at this time were very quiet so as not to arouse suspicion. Throughout this period we could sense that the other employees had little hope of anything being changed, of any efforts ever working. In discussing the situation Mrs. Salt once commented, "You know, it seems like every Bureau school has some problem like the ones here." Reflecting the despair felt by many long-time employees, Mrs. Begay confided much later that she had no real hope until reading the final document submitted to Washington. Immediately before the Christmas break these ladies attempted to talk to the night attendants to see if they would be willing to testify about Mullen's advances. However, the night aides refused to say anything at all. In fact, they became afraid that their own jobs were in danger.

After Christmas we concentrated on trying to interest employees in contacting community officials about the problems at the school. Neither Walt nor I speak Navajo which added to the natural distrust Navajos feel toward Anglos, especially those connected with the school. Thus our overtures were not very useful. The employees we were working with failed to contact community leaders. They were afraid of losing their jobs or having other reprisals

taken against them even though they disliked the administration. The fears they had were well grounded. They had been warned before that complaining would not work, and no one knew of a successful case. They only knew of people who were not rehired. Certainly their knowledge of the Bureau's control mechanisms was more valid than ours.

Meanwhile tension between the administration and us continued to mount. Funds for supplies for the children would be promised then abruptly cut off; extreme rudeness would be shown employees publicly; and numerous other events such as those mentioned earlier continued to occur. (Interestingly enough, we were told by several people that conditions had been much worse in years past with not only Mullen being worse but Mrs. Thorpe also contributing her share.)

In mid February Walt and I were called to Mullen's office for a meeting with him and Kerr. Mullen had sensed that we were upset with the situation at the school and asked for an explanation. He appeared to listen to our suggestions and promised to change a few policies. However the following week for no apparent reason the changes were rescinded.

At the end of February we decided that we would try to go to the agency office, see if they could handle the matter, and, if not, that we would have to leave. We had given up on the possibility of any community involvement because of the little success thus far obtained through our surreptitious efforts. However the day before our appointment with Les Johnson, the personnel manager at the agency I had a clash with Mullen which led to a meeting with Roland Jones at Rock River.

We had reached the depths of despair and frustration with the situation at the school. Aware of civil service regulations legitimizing official leave for personnel problems Walt informed the administrators that we were going to the agency office in Rock River that afternoon. Mullen granted permission adding his usual threat that if we went to complain we'd "better make the complaint good." As the other top officials were out of the office that day we met with Roland Jones, acting agency superintendent and a former Equal Employment Opportunity Counselor, and the secretary in the personnel office.

We told Mr. Jones about conditions at the school. He agreed that the situation did indeed seem serious and said we were justified in coming to the agency. He also told us that a joint complaint against the administrators could be filed by all employees; no jobs or promotions of the complainants would be threatened; and names of the complainants would never be revealed to the respondents. A joint complaint with guarantees of job protection and anonymity was very important to the employees at this point. One of the primary threats given by the administrators to potential complainants involved individual court actions and loss of job security, both of which would be disastrous to most Navajo employees.

Mr. Mullen demanded on February 26, the day of our meeting with Mr. Jones, that I be in his office at 9:00 a.m. the next day. Mr. Kerr and Mr. Thorpe also attended the session which was held in Mr. Thorpe's office. For the major part of the hour and a half session Mullen listed things he did not like about me personally, occasionally adding threats about changing duty assignments or removing work materials. Throughout the episode Mr.



Thorpe merely listened to Mullen rarely if ever asking me questions or questioning Mullen or Kerr further. Thorpe repeatedly stated that he hoped the matter would go no further, that it could be settled locally.

Mullen finally said that he would itemize some complaints against me and presumably against Walt also and give us a copy by Tuesday or Wednesday, March 3 or 4. This was never done. He also intimated that he would take the complaint against us to the agency as soon as possible. The entire episode seemed mainly designed to scare or threaten me. Neither Thorpe nor Kerr gave any support throughout the episode. They did not explain my rights to me, a clear violation of Civil Service regulations, nor seem to feel that Mullen was anything but justified in his actions. The only conclusion that could have been reached from the meeting was that I was to be punished, per- by being moved to another dorm or by having a complaint of unknown charges (since the ones mentioned including not actively supporting school team sports were not substantial enough) filed against me.

On the same day Walt was called into a meeting with Thorpe and Kerr. He too was threatened with a complaint and, in addition, was forbidden to enter any dormitory other than the one where he worked, an obvious attempt to cut down on employee communication and a restriction never applied to Mr. Peterson, the other guidance counselor.

On the afternoon of the 27th Walt and I met with Mr. Johnson, the personnel manager for the agency. His general attitude was discouraging. He was vague and would not give clear answers even to strict policy or procedure questions. We informed him of Mr. Thorpe's long history of suppressing complaints. Despite this Johnson said that people should go through channels

and that he hoped we would take care of the situation by meeting with Mr. Thorpe. Johnson said that formal written complaints took a long time, and that very few cases ever got to that stage. To emphasize this point he showed us the folder of a written complaint started in the previous November. He did admit that the fact the investigation had taken so long was partly his own fault, a statement that gave us no assurance of his fairness or competence.

We asked about regulations regarding specific incidents like corporal punishment. Johnson replied that if everyone who had ever struck a child in the BIA were removed we would only have a few employees left. His statements implied that only a pre-meditated beating would receive any action from the Bureau. We asked about supervisors using foul language. He said that he was sworn at almost every day, a statement which he then retracted adding that there were no regulations that forbid using swear words. Again the implication was that nothing would or could be done through his office.

Johnson repeated that one must go through channels in complaining and that Harold Bishop, the acting agency school superintendent, would be the person to see after Thorpe. He again urged that the complaint be settled at the local level. (It took thirty minutes to discover that channels went from Thorpe to Bishop.) We asked if others might add their complaints to our own as supporting evidence. In contrast to Mr. Jones' statement of the previous day Mr. Johnson replied that if it were done this way he would throw it out. Each individual had to file a separate complaint in writing and in appropriate form. If the incident went to a hearing the complainants would have to "fight it out for themselves" with the accused supervisor at that

time. This "regulation" seemed especially discriminatory toward Navajos, most of whom had gone through the Bureau school system and thus found it extremely difficult to express their thoughts in writing. Similarly, a verbal confrontation alone against a verbose and brutal supervisor who virtually controlled one's future economic security is not a situation where an individual, especially one with little economic independence, would feel able to speak freely.

Johnson's conversation indicated that he really did not want any complaints in his office. He declined to give clear answers and implied with gross verbosity how lengthy and futile were the routines of making a complaint. Immediately after our appointment with Johnson we went to Mr. Bishop's office to set up an appointment to air our grievances with him. Mr. Bishop's secretary understood the basic nature of the problem. She said she would inform him and that someone from the office would call us on Monday, March 2, to set up an appointment. Mr. Bishop's office never called us back. However, throughout this time period the agency office and the local administrators remained in close contact. During my meeting of February 27 in Thorpe's office Mr. Bishop telephoned and the obvious topic of conversation was the current activity at Round Rock.

Thus our attempts to initiate changes through the prescribed channels met only with rebuke and failure. Walt and I essentially pursued this route alone, although the administrators knew we had the moral support of the Navajos at the school. The reactions of the Bureau to our attempt illustrate not only some of the objective and structural aspects of control within the



system (e.g. the levels through which one must complain, the changes of regulations at appropriate moments, the refusal to acknowledge the complaint) but also the more subjective and emotional reactions of administrators deeply involved in that structure.

Wonder has been expressed at the vehemence of colonizers against any among them who put colonization in jeopardy. It is clear that such a colonizer is nothing but a traitor. He challenges their very existence and endangers the very homeland which they represent in the colony. (Memmi, 21)

Thus Memmi described the source of the repulsion those in positions of authority felt against us, those "of their own kind," who rejected the system of which they were a part. We shall see elements of both the structural and the more subjective elements of control in later events.

In many ways it was much easier for us to complain than for the Navajos. We had only minimal economic and geographic ties to that area of the country. We were well educated. Although by choosing to resist we were obviously destroying our chances of further government work we knew there were many other areas where we could go. In other words, our existence would not be threatened by voicing our opposition to the system.

On the other hand, for most Navajos voicing a complaint is an extremely difficult and dangerous step to take. Their homes and families are in that area. They have deep emotional and spiritual ties to the land. There are vital economic connections to their position. Jobs are scarce on the reservation; many people compete for each opening. It is well known that a record as a "trouble-maker" can bring employment problems not only for oneself but for one's family as well. Nevertheless, some people took this step of resistance.

### Community Action Begins

On either the evening of the 26th or the next day Esther Benally, an employee in my dorm, told us that her husband, a kindergarten teacher at the school, was active on the Community Action Committee at the chapter house and could get community support for our case. Mike Yazzie, also in my dorm, told us of legal help he had received at DNA, an Office of Economic Opportunity sponsored legal aids service. The lawyers had expressed interest in helping people fight the bureau. These suggestions proved to be most important in the series of events.

Meetings were held with John Benally, Esther's husband, and Frank Nakai, the local representative to the Navajo Tribal Council. They both agreed that pursuing the complaint through agency channels would likely be futile. They thought that both community and legal support was necessary and attainable. Within a few days an open Community Action Committee meeting was held with members of the community, legal representatives from DNA, and some school employees present. The community people voiced their support, the lawyers suggested ways the complaint could be handled, and the CAC voted to support the move. Within a few days the Navajo school board followed suit and the turning point in the case was reached.

The developments here should perhaps be made more explicit: At this point the complaint jumped outside the boundaries, the rigid structures and outlines for complaints developed by the Agency. According to the agency personnel manager and the school administrators the only way we as employees

of the school could complain about the mistreatment we and others had suffered was to individually present a statement in writing of our allegations against the administrators. Then these disagreements would be handled by the school principal. If this proved unsatisfactory, the complainant and the respondent would meet in an open verbal hearing at the agency office where the accusations would be handled and, most likely if past experiences were any indicator, be suppressed.

The alternative method suggested by our lawyers and used in at least two other off-reservation cases was a class-action suit filed jointly by school employees, parents, community members, and the Navajo School Board against the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the school itself. Such a suit filed under the Equal Employment Opportunity Laws would bypass the local administration going directly to the Department of Interior in Washington, D.C. Other obvious advantages to this method were that all wronged parties in the community could unite their efforts against the school, and writing and handling of the complaint would be guided by competent legal personnel.

Although we informed Mr. Thorpe that we had decided to drop our actions with the agency officials he was not informed of the second tactic. The administrators were, however, aware that all was not well. Numerous attempts were made in the next weeks to arouse fear in employees, to create dissension, and to stifle any attempts at self-determination or the actual filing of any complaint or "petition," as the administrators called it. These acts of harassment can be interpreted as attempts by the administrators to reassert and emphasize their power and authority, to remind the potential complainants of their subservient position in the social structure and the ability of the



system to control and potentially ruin their lives. There are numerous examples of this.

On March 2 a general staff meeting was scheduled for the guidance department. A local school board member and a parent came to attend the meeting to learn more about what was happening at the school. Mullen, ignoring the tribal resolution creating the school board which gave board members power to participate in the total management of the school, ordered the people out of the room. During the remainder of the meeting Mullen and Kerr repeatedly told the employees that if they had a complaint they "had better do it right," which according to them meant going through channels to the agency office. The meeting ended with a threat by Mullen that he still controlled schedules of tours of duty and that some people would likely be moved in the near future.

On March 5 Mrs. Clawmez, an employee in my building, related to me that Mullen had called her into his office around 9:10 a.m. and asked her if she were happy in the dorm. He then said that he was going to move people around and that even Walt might be moved out of his building, another obvious attempt to instill fear and dissension.

Harassment included not only threats but changes in policies and procedures as well. On Thursday March 5 I was called at home by Mr. Kerr who asked that both Walt and I come to his office as soon as possible for a meeting on new staffing patterns. He seemed to feel that the matter was quite urgent and set the meeting time for one-half hour later. At the meeting in Thorpe's office Mullen presented a new staffing pattern for the guidance department which would transfer many of the duties of the guidance

counselors to the Supervisory Aides, all Navajos, change the schedules of the counselors to a straight shift Monday through Friday (We had been working split shifts and weekends), and move the counselors out of the line of authority.

Walt and I discussed the proposal with the supervisory aides and we all came to the conclusion that the proposal was mainly a move to bring the dormitories more directly under the control of the office and produce more pressure for the dormitory personnel, a far from desirable situation. We all agreed that the program would be excellent, but not with the present administration. Mr. Peterson was also against the proposal, primarily because he felt the aides would no longer respect him if he had no given authority. However, after visiting with Mr. Kerr the evening of March 5, Peterson decided to support the suggestion.

At a meeting the next morning Mullen seemed quite upset that we were not wholly in favor of the idea and announced that we would meet again on Thursday, March 12. At Mr. Kerr's urging the supervisory aides would be allowed to attend that meeting. Mullen announced that he would be ready to compromise, but that we better be ready to do so also. (At a later staff meeting Mullen announced that he had had to "go back" on this plan to change the job description, apparently because he feared the views of higher authorities on the illegal changes.)

On March 19 a general staff meeting, perhaps the most dramatic in the series was held for all guidance personnel. Mr. Mullen opened with a few administrative details, stuttered a bit, and said that he was getting down to the "nitty-gritty" of the meeting. He stated that he was aware of a

"petition" with about thirty-five names being prepared against him. He said he was also aware of DNA or someone assisting the community or the people involved with this complaint. Continuing this theme he said, "This doesn't both me a bit. I think I know the people involved and I couldn't care less. If you think you're shaking me up, you're wrong." He said that people were wrong if they thought he wouldn't see their names and that in an ad hoc committee they would have to stand up and face him. He said that he was taking leave on the next day to hire a lawyer and added, "You people load your pistol with your best shot, because I'm going to do the same. And I'm sure that I can get a lawyer just as good as one from DNA." He continued in this vein for several minutes in a forceful threatening tone. He seemed to be daring anyone to go ahead with a complaint saying he would take them to a court of law. This kind of statement was repeated about three different times during the meeting. Mullen also stated that he had notified Thorpe of the petition and that Thorpe was going into the agency office that day to notify them and tell the officials to "go down to DNA and tell them that they want everything out in the open."

At the end of the meeting Mullen turned the floor over to Mr. Kerr who stated in his usual eloquence that if one signed a "petition" he was legally responsible and might well have to go to court. He told people not to sign anything unless they knew positively what they were getting into, a statement obviously designed to back up Mullen's threats. As a postscript Kerr announced that March 26 was Tribal Leader's Day adding that we didn't really have to pay too much attention to it but that he supposed it was good for "public relations."



Such open meetings were not enough. The next morning more individual pressure was put on Walt. He was approached in the dormitory by Kerr and asked if he had "something against wearing neckties," which he had not done regularly since January. He replied that he didn't think they were appropriate in dealing with community people; it would appear that those people who wore neckties were merely "putting on the dog." Mr. Kerr left agreeably and Walt was soon called by Kerr saying that Mullen wished to see him.

A little after 10:00 a.m. they met in Mr. Mullen's office. Mullen's opening statements implied that not wearing neckties was another indication that Walt was trying to cut his throat at every possible instance. Then getting to the obvious point of the session Mullen said, "I want to get this whole issue out in the open. Has the complaint you talked about with Mr. Thorpe earlier been dropped?" Walt simply replied that it had. Mullen then attempted to call Mr. Bishop in Rock River. "I'm going to get you to bring this 'petition' out in the open," he said. "You'll have to talk with the people at agency," apparently referring to someone in the personnel office. Walt replied that since there was no written complaint going through channels there was nothing to talk about.

During the conversation Mullen also stated that what the community did wasn't bothering him as they didn't know much, if anything, about his job. Kerr agreed that the community was ignorant and wasn't actually involved with the school. Finally Mullen said that he could certainly make it rough for Walt using his legal authority, again inferring a change of building assignment. He ended on a threatening tone by saying that he would find out if there was any way to make him talk and that a memo would be out on Monday.

In response to the threat of March 20 a memorandum was issued on Monday, March 23, which involved detailed instructions on the duties and activities of the guidance counselors with stipulations forbidding trips outside of the dormitories, visits to classrooms or with teachers except in the dormitories when the children were present (usually an impossible situation), talking with aides other than the one directly below us in the pecking order, a refusal to allow any Navajos to participate in counseling, forbidding visits with parents except in the school offices, and adding mounds of useless paper work. As promised the week before the memo was an obvious attempt to put the counselors aside, give them papers to fill out, keep them away from the teachers, prevent them from working with the students, and thereby make them feel useless so maybe they would quit and go away.

The threats given in the open meetings and the harassment of **individuals** were far from the only problems encountered. A usual tactic was for an administrator to call a Navajo into his office for a private chat and there warn him firmly of the dangers of participating in a complaint. Others who were known to be sympathetic to the complaint were repeatedly called on the carpet for situations quite apart from their work situation and threatened with firing if these situations did not change. Such a threat was usually hard to separate from the on-going political situation.

Stephen Warner, David Wellman, and Lenore Weitzman have made the interesting observation that oppressed people do not "take their oppression lying down." (mimeo) That is, there are certain ways oppressed people react in response to oppression, ways often unknown to their oppressors, by which

they reaffirm their own sense of self-worth and dignity. Such was the case at Round Rock. Several devices, all aimed at easing the high tensions and reaffirming the employee's sense of individual value apart from the structural definitions of the bureau were used as reactions to the oppression. An often used tactic was that of "dormitory employee jokes." Administrators became known by certain nicknames. Phrases and jokes using these names were often used, even when the administrators were nearby. The regulations set up by the office also became fare for the employees with elaborate ruses and schemes devised to circumvent these usually ridiculous and useless rules. Even the teachers would sometimes participate in these put-downs, perhaps because here they felt their resistance would not be detected.

Navajo speaking employees had an advantage here. No Anglo employee knew Navajo, and it was extremely easy to carry on conversations or transfer encouraging remarks in that language without the knowledge of one's superiors. The assumptions of administrators about Navajos could often be turned against these highly ranked Anglos. The administrators usually assumed that all traditionally dressed Navajos knew no English. When the school board member earlier mentioned tried to attend a dormitory staff meeting, Mullen assumed she and her husband could not speak English. He asked one of the employees to translate for him. Mrs. Tahe understood English, but waited for someone to translate his remarks so she could hear even more in the meeting.

Throughout March and the first part of April facts and statements were gathered and compiled by the legal representatives. By mid-April the complaint was written and ready for signatures. Meetings were held with community



officials to explain the complaint and many community people readily signed. The school employees had been severely threatened during the preceding weeks that all sorts of reprisals would befall them if they became involved. Thus several who had provided statements for the complaint itself were reluctant to sign it in its finished form. One lady who did sign confessed to me after the investigation that she wished she had not signed it but merely given her testimony to the investigator. She was afraid she would be unable to ever get a promotion or transfer with the complaint on her record, an experience confirmed by many others before her.

Tensions remained high at the school throughout this period. Not only were there administration-employee tensions but many employee-employee tensions erupted and remained high as the feasibility of complaining, even the right of complaining was debated. Certainly our presence did not reduce the tensions. While we could provide encouragement to individuals and explain government regulations regarding complaints and harassment, it was obvious that we would never face the repercussions that could befall the Native Americans involved.

It should be noted that all Native Americans working at the school did not support the complaint. While some were fairly passive, afraid to give active support but hoping the complaint would succeed; others firmly stated their opposition to the attempt. They felt it was "foolish" to complain about the situation at the school and believed no action should be taken. It is hard to understand why people in an obviously oppressed situation would feel this way. Perhaps they were simply well socialized. Or maybe they were

afraid to even hope for change, feeling that none would ever come, and thus it would be futile to try. Nevertheless, their dissent (or lack of it) did not calm the nerves of the complainants. Care had to be exercised in discussing the complaint to keep information from other employees known to be sympathetic to the administrators. The dissent of other employees only added to the uncertainty and fears of those complaining. Only the enthusiasm and continual encouragement of a few community members and employees, especially the Yazziés and Benally's, provided the encouraging momentum needed.

#### The Complaint is Filed

Only about a week and a half after the complaint was filed and news of the seriousness and extent of the brief had sifted back to the local level did feelings among complainants and respondents begin to change. At this point the administrators were on the defensive, at least for a short period of time. The first emotion on the part of accused administrators seemed to be anger. On hearing of an article in the Gallup newspaper describing the complaint (one of the few instances of media coverage received) Thorpe reportedly said that he couldn't see how they discriminated, they hired all kinds of Navajos. Kerr reportedly commented, "Oh, the Gallup paper always gets things mixed up." In perhaps a natural reaction, those involved with the complaint were personally vilified in numerous ways with accusations ranging from political views and attitudes toward the children to type of mail received. (Mrs. Thorpe was the local expert on personal mail.) It was fairly easy for the administrators to blame the development of the complaint on Walt and me, seeing us as "outside agitators" sent to "revolutionize"

the reservation. Such a view did not help the complaint for the true level of despair of the Navajos was easily minimized or ignored.

Recovering from their first **shock** the administrators immediately reinforced their efforts to suppress the complaint, even though they were obviously aware by this time of the illegality of such actions. The previous week Mr. Begay had requested a meeting with the school board to discuss discipline procedures in the dormitories. The meeting was first forbidden by administrators, but after a small hassle and a discussion of regulations it was rescheduled and expanded to include an explanation of the complaint. By this time complainants were confident enough to begin numerous counter maneuvers. Announcements of the meeting inviting community people were made over the Navajo radio station.

Before the meeting Mrs. Barber, one of the office secretaries, asked if she could go to the meeting. Mullen asked her if she were "neutral" regarding the complaint. She didn't know what he meant by neutral so she didn't answer. Mullen then stated, apparently quite seriously, that if Mrs. Barber were not involved she could go and take notes for him. If she were backing the complainants she would have to take notes for Thorpe. Mr. Kerr also asked Mrs. Barber both before and after the meeting if she had signed the complaint.

At the meeting Don McGee, the main attorney, explained the complaint and Norman Chee, a Navajo advocate at DNA, served as translator. Questions were answered and in the Navajo tradition comments and personal feelings were explained. Two of these stand out in my mind. Mr. Bluehorse, a school board member and an older gentleman with kind, watery eyes, stood and related his



views. He explained how a long time ago white men had come to the area the Navajos call home. These white men said they were going to help the Navajos. But they often only helped themselves. They cheated, lied to, and hurt the Navajos. He had signed the complaint because he felt this should change. John Benally, the kindergarten teacher, a Navajo active in the complaint, stated why he had signed. He said that Round Rock was his home. He was born there, and he would probably die there. He cared what happened to Round Rock and to the school; he wanted it to be good.

The meeting was significant by being conducted mainly in Navajo, the first language of most of the people present. Previously the principal had demanded that all school board meetings be conducted in English, despite the fact that most members were far from comfortable in the tongue. The meeting was presided over by the school board with the administrators sitting quietly on the front row, seemingly overwhelmed and mainly quiet. Only Peterson asked a question. Thorpe, trying to appear conciliatory, promised help to the investigator. In what could be seen as an only barely disguised divisive and paternalistic gesture he suggested that some people had signed the complaint and others had not, but that they should try to get along.

For perhaps the first time since our arrival the Anglo administrators had been publicly subjugated to a Navajo run meeting. The effect however was not permanent. The next day at a guidance staff meeting Kerr opened with comments about the meeting with the school board. In response to a specific request within the complaint that jobs in the school be redesigned and training be given to Navajos so they could advance in the structure

Kerr stated, "These jobs cannot be redesigned down to your level." He expounded on the large amounts of schooling necessary and the impossibility of any Navajos ever attaining the posts without years of further schooling.

These comments struck an emotional cord of disgust and deep dismay in many Navajos present. Kerr had completely ignored the long years of experience and obvious expertise many employees had developed working with the children. One capable lady complained, "Here I've worked for the Bureau for thirty years, and he tells me I should go back to school." With even more insensitivity Kerr ignored the intense cultural conflicts experienced by Navajos when they attempt to pursue higher education. "He just doesn't know how hard it is," cried one young man to me after the meeting. "You are one person at home and another person at school. No one can take that kind of life very long." Obviously the insensitive, harsh comments and attitudes of the administrators deeply hurt and angered the employees.

With respect to the complaint itself Kerr first warned the employees to "be careful," and then in what seemed an attempt to relieve himself of all responsibility said, "I don't hold anything against any of you people that signed this complaint. Now, I'm only speaking for myself; I'll not speak for the other administrators in the office. . . . I'm not a tricky supervisor. . . ." He later tried to relieve himself of all responsibility regarding leave policies and pass all guilt to the supervisory aides, all Navajo and two steps below him in the hierarchy.

### The Investigation

In mid-May an investigator, Charles Anderson, arrived in the area marking the entrance of Washington-level officials into the situation. Throughout the development of the complaint our hopes of justice rested with this level of the bureaucracy. We envisioned that they would certainly make the harassment cease and allow the people their rightful voice in their own lives and those of their children. Instead the actions of these officials, although several seemed genuinely concerned with the situation, illustrate the pervasiveness of racism within the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the extent to which racial control is necessary to preserve that system.

After spending a day in Gallup reviewing local, agency, and area records Anderson asked for a meeting with complainants. One was held in the chapter house. A large number of people attended. Harassment and threats (including one against our lives) had continued up to the time of that meeting. Thus we had requested that the respondents be temporarily reassigned elsewhere during the investigation. It was felt that only if this were done would people be able to give the full story of their experiences. The community members were especially insistent that this move be taken. We had been assured by Mr. Cross, director of the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, that if any threats were made after the filing of the complaint this reassignment would be carried out.

Anderson approached the first meeting in a jovial, joking mood. He seemed blissfully unaware of the fact that he was facing a group of people who had perhaps never met an official of the United States government whom



they could trust. He failed to take into account the seriousness and intensity with which the complaint and its possible consequences on individual lives were viewed. He also ignored the traditional Navajo way of approaching a serious matter with a serious demeanor. The threats that had occurred in the recent days and promises earlier made by Cross were explained to Anderson. Anderson claimed that Cross could make no such promises, but stated he would talk to Lawrence Carpenter, Area Director, and ask for removal of the administrators. From such actions and the general context of his statements Anderson was obviously trying to shift the balance of power and the responsibility for the investigation and outcome of the complaint back to the local level, precisely where past experiences had shown no justice would occur.

Either that afternoon or the next day Anderson returned with the news that Carpenter had said the removal would be impossible and that testimony would have to be taken. (We had been told by the lawyer that Anderson himself did have the power to remove the respondents or recommend strongly that such action be taken. Unfortunately at this time there was a shift in legal counsel as one of the attorneys went on an unavoidable trip. Thus these legal points were not emphasized as they could have been.) There then followed a period of distress with several people expressing to Anderson their disappointment with the procedures thus far and trying to communicate the fear felt by the employees toward their supervisors.

The community had felt especially strongly that the respondents must leave before testimony was taken, while employees at the school felt that somehow testimony had to be given to those in positions of authority. A dilemma developed between wanting to support the community in their demands

and feelings and wanting to give testimony. According to Anderson, such testimony would provide additional grounds for reassignment. In what was certainly a show of power, Anderson threatened to leave with no testimony if none was given by the next day. Finally, testimony from numerous people encountering harassment was given Anderson and he promised to take this to Carpenter and again ask for reassignment. Although this was supposedly done, Carpenter refused again to reassign the men. (It should be noted that a precedent for such reassignment had occurred about a month previously in a Denver area case where the Commissioner himself stepped in and removed the harrassing administrators. Reportedly the White House disapproved of the Commissioner's sympathetic actions and in this case the word was to "go slow.")

After about two weeks Anderson left leaving Norman Chee to finish collecting the testimony. Chee was extremely busy as were all the people in the DNA office and was unable to collect all the information that was likely available. Similarly, the task of translating and transcribing the reams of testimony proved extremely difficult. Many potential respondents were left to write their own testimony, something which they had never done before and which, as products of the Bureau educational system, was extremely difficult. Several people capable of giving important testimony but away from Round Rock were never contacted by Anderson or his office. Thus the amount of testimony collected, though substantial, was far from the amount available.

Some mention should be made of the place of the other Anglo employees, mainly teachers, throughout the investigation. A few teachers openly

supported the movement contributing testimony of their own. Others at least supported the movement in spirit, talking to the investigator and verbally giving him their opinions. However, they lacked the courage or commitment to place their views and experiences, often very damaging to the system, onto paper. Other teachers (including the music specialist), though they had obviously had extremely unhappy experiences with the administrators and the Bureau as a whole and had even perhaps tried complaining themselves, refused entirely to participate claiming that their participation would harm future chances of promotion or transfer. Finally, there were those teachers who tried to "sink into the woodwork" throughout the proceedings. These were usually teachers who feared they were next on the list of those who were harming children and should be removed.

At the end of the testimony gathering uncertainty still gripped the atmosphere. Mullen left the school about one week after the investigation started. It was rumored he was looking for work in a small school in Oklahoma. Kerr reported that Mullen would be back by the first of August. Peterson left about the same time taking all his cars and his family. The principal was scheduled to retire around the first of July, and Kerr seemed to be staying except for a brief vacation around the same time. It was rumored that Carlson had been advised by the agency personnel to request a transfer as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup>

With Mullen temporarily absent the harassment subdued and the fears of the complainants centered mainly about agency and area offices. The complainants feared that no transfers or promotions would ever be given once one's

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<sup>3</sup> At this point (the end of the school year) having been assured by Anderson that sufficient evidence was gathered to force a complete change in the situation at the school, Walt and I left the area for the summer.



name had been put on the "black list," This was a reasonable fear in view of past experiences and the lack of any assurances to the contrary from agency officials or those higher up.

Anderson reviewed the evidence and submitted his findings to the Department of the Interior in late June. His findings were favorable to the complainants including the uncovering of many violations not mentioned above such as falsification of government documents, misuse of funds and property, violation of federal EEOP statutes and numerous other offenses. In a few instances such as some of the occasions involving child abuse, relevant testimony was overlooked or never gathered and the conclusions reached were not as profound as the testimony warranted. Nevertheless, more than sufficient evidence was presented by the investigator to make immediate action the only humane and logical step.

#### The Aftermath

However, the findings were ignored. Thorpe and his wife were allowed to retire quietly. Mullen, who only a few days before had been declared guilty of numerous infractions all capable of dismissing him from governmental service, was promoted to the position of acting principal. Kerr, Carlson, and Peterson remained at the school. By August it appeared to the embattled complainants that their demise, as anticipated, was shortly to come. The Bureau had again managed to reassert its control over the Navajos, not only maintaining them in a structurally subordinate position throughout the investigation and during the subsequent months, but by attempting to undermine their will to assert themselves, attempting to destroy their group cohesiveness and group-consciousness.

Toward the end of September the Bureau officials, seemingly wanting to settle the matter yet unwilling to change conditions basic to the problem, called the law firm and said that the area officials including Lawrence Carpenter, known by the employees to be long-time "Indian haters" wanted to meet with the complainants and try to settle the issue. According to the attorney

That seemed to Norman and me to be a fairly blatant effort to intimidate the complainants and keep the commissioner's office (Washington level officials) out of the affair, but Norman told him he'd ask the complainants. We met with a group of them Sunday night, and they refused to meet with the area big shots. . . .

Finally, on October 8 a meeting was held with the few remaining brave complainants (Many had been effectively scared off by the months of continuing harassment and pressure.) and representatives of the BIA. On October 11 Guidance Supervisor Mullen was finally reassigned, according to Cross "with his concurrence." It is interesting to note that no concurrence was solicited from the Navajo complainant who was denied his job only a month earlier.

Gradually the respondents in the case were transferred from the school and other officials were moved in. A Navajo principal came to Round Rock; the acting school superintendent was replaced with a permanent Navajo; and the local school board was given more power. It is important to note that none of the respondents were removed from the Bureau or contact with children. Mullen was only transferred to another area. Kerr was moved to a school within the same agency. Peterson was even promoted before he was transferred to another branch of government service. The personnel manager remains in his post, and the acting school superintendent was moved only to a permanent assistant position.

One year later employees at the school as well as the community people seemed pleased with the way activities were going. They approved of the participation of the new principal in the community and felt her work was aiding the school. Likewise, a new teacher supervisor, an Anglo, was appointed who rejected the old ideas of Navajo children being naturally "slow," and the children were allowed to move through the grades as quickly as they could, thus getting closer to grade level. For a few months the government seemed to put extra money into the school providing badly needed supplies and establishing new training and employment programs.

But the improvements were only temporary, an attempt to stifle any further complaints. Two years after the filing of the complaint the people at the school realized that their situation had changed only in external characteristics. The Navajo principal was leaving, other administrators had slipped into patterns of authoritarian or lax administrative procedures. The badly needed extra funds had been removed. Fewer people were staffing the dormitories than two years earlier leaving the ratio of one aide to eighty children as the most common case. Supplies were as scarce as before. More importantly, the people realized that as Navajos they still had no real control over the education of their children. The source of power over their lives still rested in the hands of the colonial oppressors, the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

### The Final Analysis

The local situation was improved to some extent. Yet the question remains: what effect did the change have on the system of education to which



Native Americans are subjected? While conditions are perhaps temporarily eased at one location (only by moving the source of these problems to another location) , the problem infecting the total system remains. Anglos still totally outnumber Indians in the administrative levels of the Bureau. Community officials are given a voice in school affairs at only a few rare locations. Racist and insensitive teachers and administrators remain im-meshed within the system. And most important, the institutional structures that tie Indians to the bottom of the social strata have not been altered. The BIA moved to quiet the cries of oppressed individuals in one instance. It did so, however, without relinquishing it's perogatives and control over the lives of Native Americans.

Only after a long period of time that multiplied the agony of the colonized and made the power of the oppressors, the colonizers, even more apparent were small changes implemented at the local level. These changes only alleviated the most pressing problems at one school. They did nothing to alter the institutional relationship of the BIA to Native Americans, to alter the colonial relationships and extent and nature of the racial control in these relationships. Instead, the actions of the government in resolving the complaint may be seen as a fulfillment of the requirements of an institutionalized system of control, ending in a state similar to Selznick's formal co-optation. (1966, 260-1) This involved first attempts to defuse and quiet if not destroy the complaint and those involved in it at each step in the process, and finally, when these tactics failed, a provision of only token representation with little substantive input into the actual administrative process, and no genuine alteration of the total institutional structure.

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