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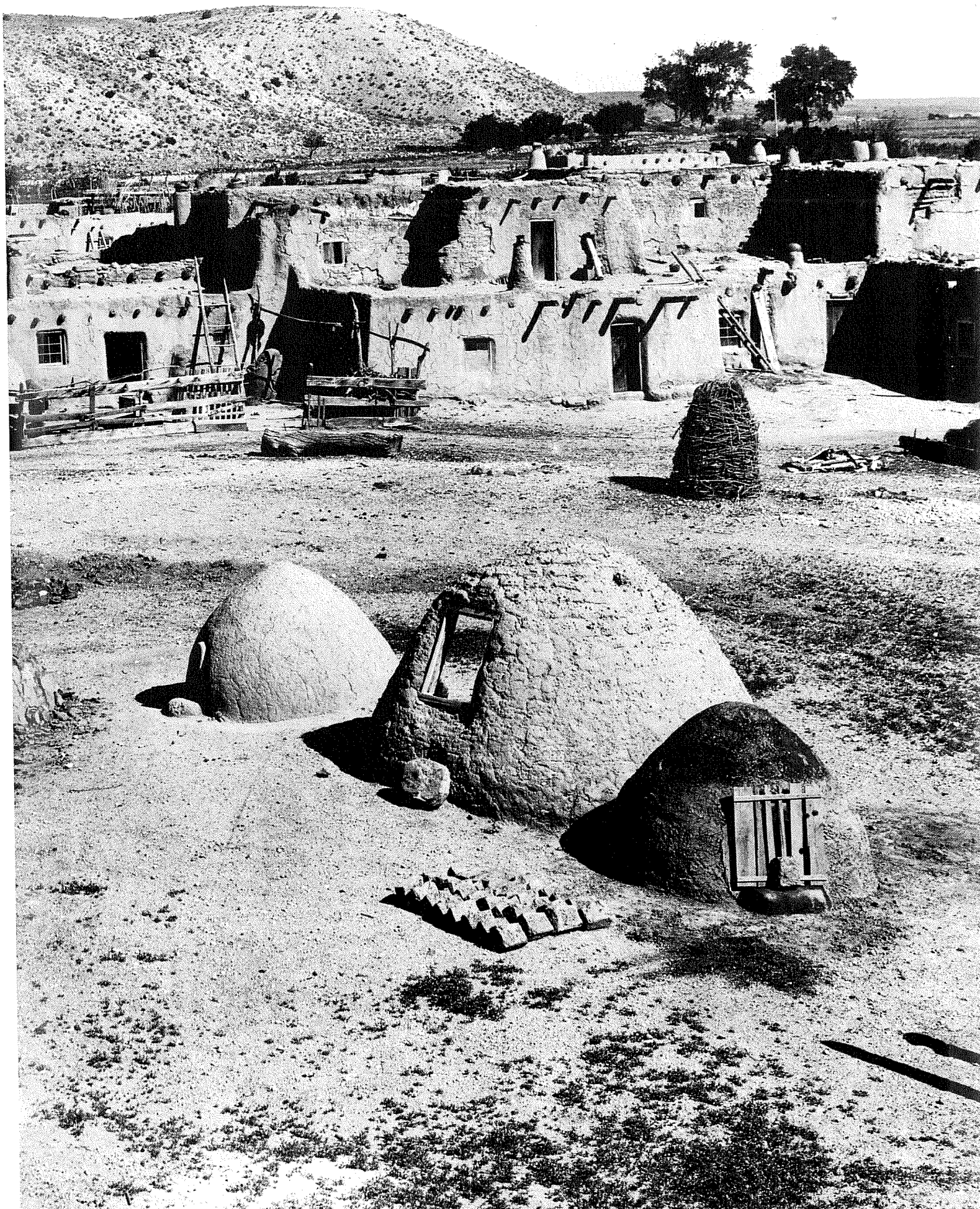
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# Conflicting Landscape Values: The Santa Clara Pueblo and Day School

The following is about my understanding — and feelings — about two very different relationships to the land represented by the Santa Clara Pueblo, in New Mexico, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) day school established next to it. These different relationships reflect the divergent world views of two cultures, as well as their differing methods and content of education.

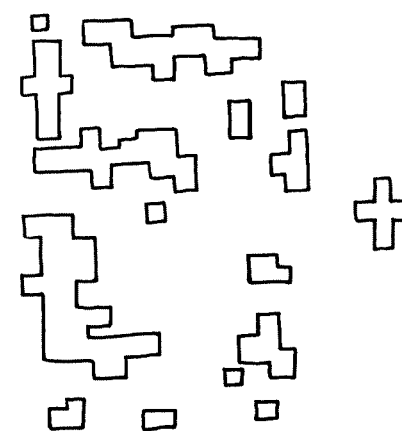
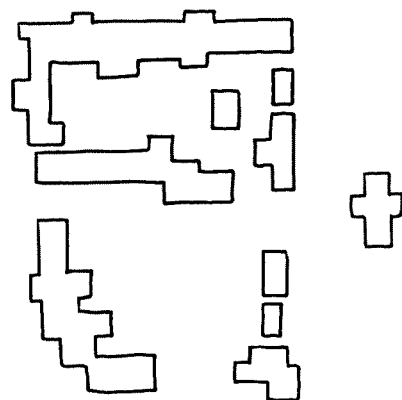
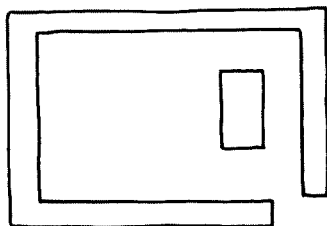
Pueblo people believe that the primary and most important relationship for humans is with the land, the natural environment and the cosmos, which in the Pueblo world are synonymous. Humans exist within the cosmos and are an integral part of the functioning of the earth community.

The mystical nature of the land, the earth, is recognized and honored. Direct contact and interaction with the land, the natural environment, is sought. In the pueblo, there are no manipulated outdoor areas that serve to distinguish humans from nature. There are no outdoor areas that attest to human control over “wild” nature. There are no areas where nature is domesticated.

Santa Clara, where I was born, is a typical Tewa Pueblo with myths that connect it to the nearby prehistoric sites and also inextricably weave the human place into a union with the land from whence the people emerged. The people dwell at the center, around the *nansipu*, the “emergence place” or “breathing place.” The breath flows through the center as it does through other breathing places in the low hills and far mountains. These symbolic places remind the people of the vital, breathing earth and their specific locations are where the people can feel the strongest connection to the flow of energy, or the creation of the universe. The plants, rocks, land and people are part of an entity that is sacred because it breathes the creative energy of the universe.

**View from roof of pueblo church, 1899.**

**Photo by Vroman (no first name given). Courtesy Smithsonian Institute, National Anthropological Archives.**



**Evolution of the Santa Clara pueblo from traditional form (top) to recent years (bottom). Drawings courtesy Rina Swentzell.**

The physical location of Santa Clara Pueblo is of great importance—the Rio Grande snakes along the east of the Pueblo; the mysterious Black Mesa, where the mask whippers emerge, is to the south; the surrounding low hills contain shrines and special ceremonial areas; and the far mountains define the valley where humans live.

This world, for me as a child, was very comfortable and secure because it gave a sense of containment. We roamed in the fields and nearby hills. At an early age we learned an intimacy with the natural environment and other living creatures. We learned of their connectedness to rocks, plants and other animals through physical interaction and verbal communication. We gained tremendous confidence and an unquestioning sense of belonging within the natural ordering of the cosmos. Learning happened easily. It was about living. In fact, the word for *learning* in Tewa is *baa-pu-web*, which translates as “to have breath.” To breathe or to be alive is to learn.

Within the Pueblo, outdoor and indoor spaces flowed freely and were hardly distinguishable. One moved in bare feet from interior dirt floors enclosed by mud walls to the well-packed dirt smoothness of the Pueblo plaza. In this movement, all senses were utilized. Each of the various dirt surfaces (interior walls, outdoor walls, plaza floor) were touched, smelled and tasted. Special rocks were carried in the mouth so that their energy would flow into us. Everything was touchable, knowable and accessible.

There was consistency in that world because the colors, textures and movements of the natural landscape were reflected everywhere in the human-made landscape. Reflection on the cosmos was encouraged. Separation of natural and human-made

spaces was minimal, so conscious beautification of either outdoor or indoor spaces was not necessary. Landscaping—replanting, bringing in trees, shrubs and grass for aesthetic reasons—was thought to be totally unnecessary. The mobility of humans and animals was accepted but the mobility of plants rooted in their earth places was inconceivable.

The Pueblo plaza was almost always full. People cooked outdoors, husked corn, dried food and sat in the sun. The scale of the Pueblo plaza was such that I never felt lost in it even when I was the only person there.

The form and organization of the Pueblo house reinforced the sense of security and importance of place. One sat on and played on the center of the world (the *nansipu*) and thereby derived a sense of significance. Houses were climbed on, jumped on, slept on and cooked on. They were not material symbols of wealth but were rather, in Thoreau’s terminology, a most direct and elegantly simple expression of meeting the human need for shelter.

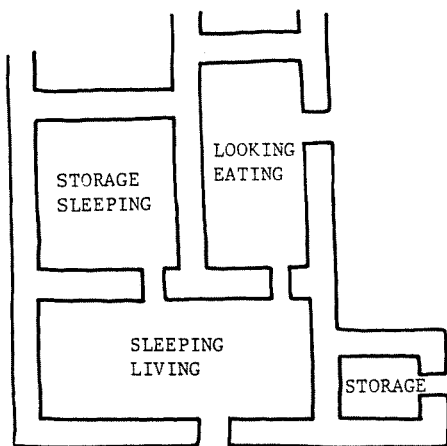
Construction methods and materials were uncomplicated. The most direct methods were combined with the most accessible materials. Everyone participated, without exception—children, men, women, elders. Anybody could build a house or any necessary structure. Designers and architects were unnecessary since there was no conscious aesthetic striving or stylistic interest.

Crucial elements of the house interiors were the low ceilings; rounded and hand-plastered walls; small, dark areas; tiny, sparse windows and doors; and multiple-use rooms. All interior spaces were shared by everybody, as were the exterior spaces. The need for individual privacy was not important enough to affect the plan of Pueblo houses. Privacy was viewed in a differ-

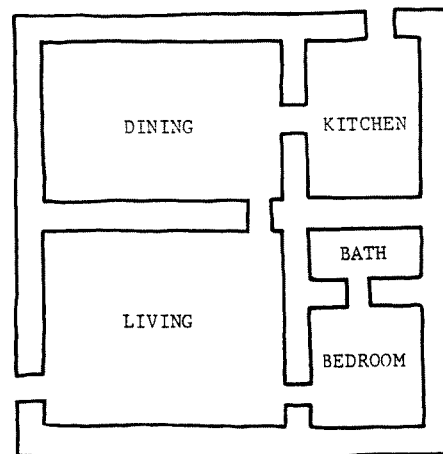
**View of the Santa Clara Pueblo,**

**1879.**

**Photo by J. K. Hillers. Courtesy  
Smithsonian Institute, National  
Anthropological Archives.**



**Typical pueblo interior layout,  
1940s.**



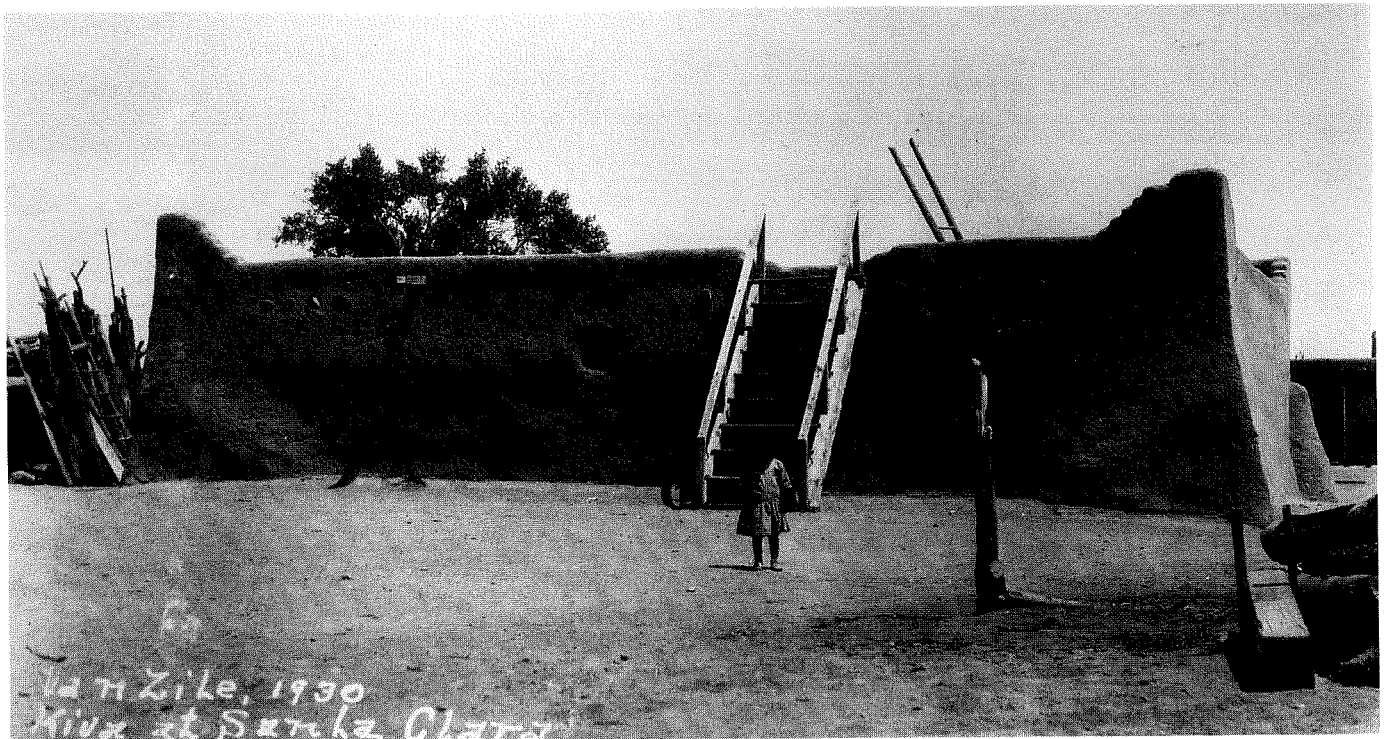
**Typical pueblo interior layout,  
recent years.**

ent way; it was carried around within the individual and walls and physical space were not needed to defend it. Sharing was crucial.

Within the house, as without, spirits moved freely. Members of families were sometimes buried in the dirt floor and their spirits became a part of the house environment. Besides those spirits there were others who had special connections with the house structure because they assisted in its construction or because they were born or died in it. Since houses survived many generations, the spirits were many. Houses were blessed with a special ceremony similar to the ritual performed for a baby at birth. There

was also an easy acceptance of the deterioration of a house. Houses, just as people's bodies, came from and went back into the earth.

Ideas that characterize the Pueblo human-made and natural environments, then, are that humans and nature are inseparable, human environments emulate and reflect the cosmos, creative energy flows through the natural environment (of which every aspect, including rocks, trees, clouds and people) is alive, and aesthetics and the cosmos are synonymous.



**Kiva at Santa Clara Pueblo,  
the enclosure for the *nansipu*  
or "breathing hole."**

**Photo by Fayette W. Van Zile.  
Courtesy Smithsonian Institute,  
National Anthropological  
Archives.**

**How Western Education Shaped the Day School Landscape**

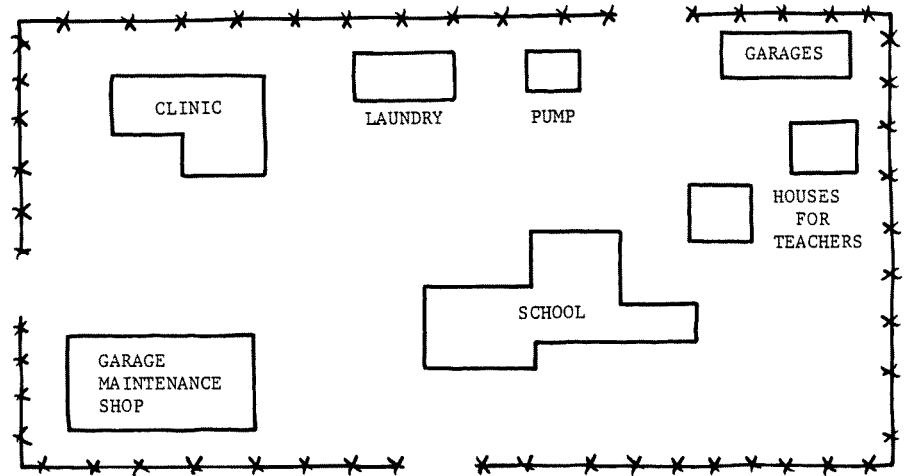
*“The goal, from the beginning of attempts at formal education of the American Indian, has been not so much to educate him as to change him.”*<sup>1</sup>

Santa Clara Day School was introduced to such a world in the early 1890s during the BIA’s golden age of constructing schools for Native Americans. In the very early years of European settlement in America, various religious groups attempted to “civilize” and Christianize Native Americans. In 1832, that responsibility was assumed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the focus narrowed to “civilizing” Native Americans.

From 1890 to 1928, the goal was to assimilate Native Americans; the tactics were dissolving their social structure through Western education and destroying their land base. After 1928, when an influential government study asked for “a change in point of view” in how Native Americans should be educated, programs in bilingual education, adult basic education, training of Native American teachers, Native American culture and in-service teacher training were initiated across the country. But these programs were halted almost as quickly, and certainly before these ideas reached Santa Clara Day School.

The years after 1944 saw a new determination to terminate Native American reservations and abolish the special relationships between Native Americans and the federal government, relationships that had been guaranteed by centuries of law and treaties.<sup>2</sup> It was during this time, from 1945 to 1951, that I attended Santa Clara Pueblo Day School.

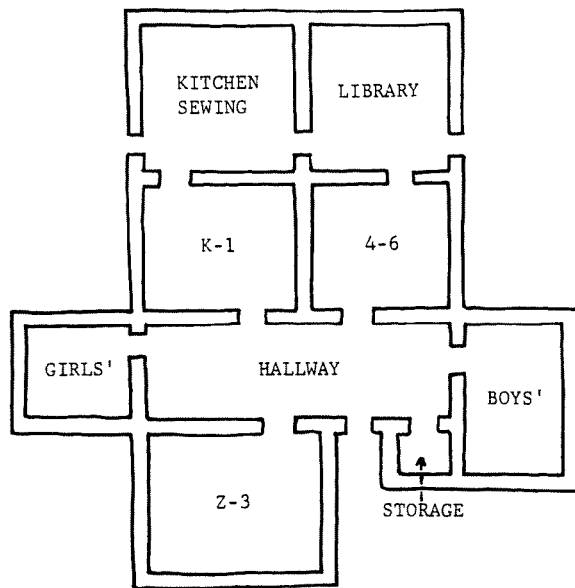
The government school grounds and buildings, built during the 1920s, not only reflected that attitude of changing and civilizing Native Americans but also characterized the



**Plan of BIA school at Santa Clara.**



**BIA school playground.**  
Photo courtesy Rina Swentzell.



Plan of BIA school building.

general Western-European attitude of human control that seems to stem from the Renaissance glorification of human capabilities. Everything had to be changed so it would be in accordance with the Western way of thinking and being. The BIA school compounds reflected a foreign world view that opposed the Pueblo world and its physical organization.

At Santa Clara, the BIA school complex was located a quarter of a mile from the center of the Pueblo and had a barbed-wire fence around its periphery. That fence defined the complex and effectively kept the two worlds separate. The cattle guards and the double-styled ladders built over the fence provided the only openings into the compound. They kept out both animals and old people. All large rocks and natural trees had been removed a long time before I was a student and there were but a few foreign elm trees within the barren, isolated landscape.

The loss of trust that occurred when people moved from the Pueblo to the school setting was most striking. Within the Pueblo, pre-school-aged children were allowed enormous free-

dom of activity and choice; to a great extent they were trusted as capable of being in charge of themselves. This liberal assumption created its own self-fulfilling prophecy. Since Pueblo children were expected to care for themselves in an adequate, responsible way, they generally did.

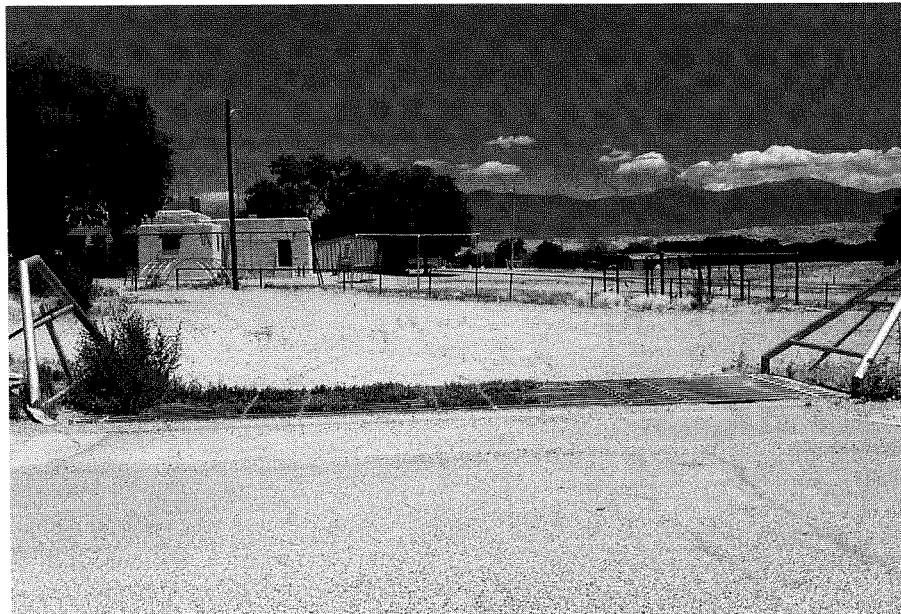
But within the BIA school, there was a different attitude: The overall atmosphere was one of skepticism. The fence was an expression of the lack of respect and trust in others. Although the formal reason given for the fence was that it kept out animals, everyone in the Pueblo knew its purpose was also to keep people out. It was an unsettling feeling to know other people had to physically protect themselves from community.

As the school grounds were separate from the life and environment around it, so were the various structures located within the compound separate from each other. There were separate laundry and shower buildings—as part of the civilizing effort, everybody, including adults, was supposed to take showers. Also included in the compound were a health clinic, a maintenance shop, the main school building and small separate houses for the teachers. All of them were scattered seemingly randomly in the approximately five-acre compound.

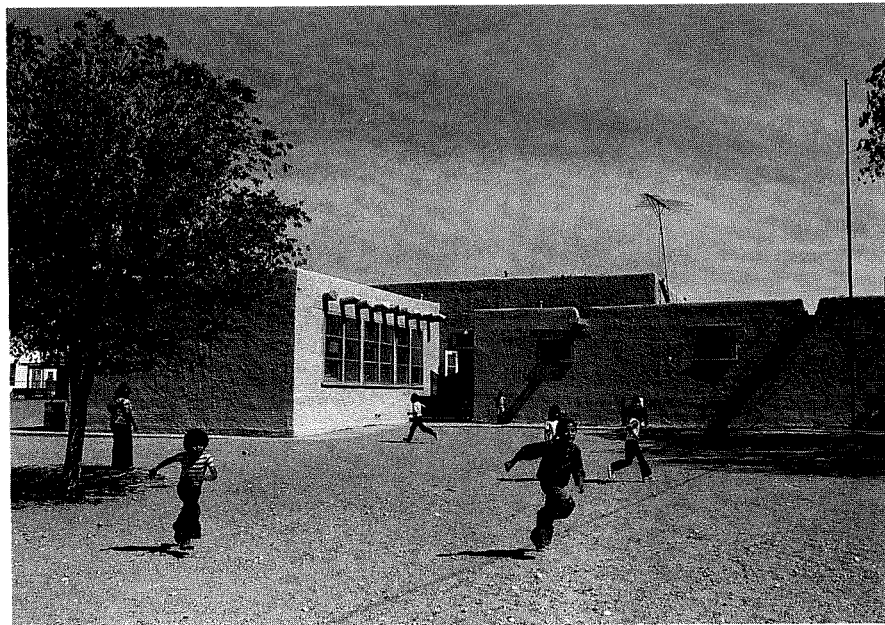
Within the school building, children were grouped into rooms according to grade level. Inside the various classrooms, the divisions continued. Those who could read well were separated from those who could not. Individual desks and mats were assigned. Individual achievement was praised. Concentration on the individual, or the parts, which has become the hallmark of modern American society, was strongly emphasized. This was in contrast to the holistic concepts of the Pueblo, which emphasized togeth-



**View from roof of Pueblo  
church, 1899.  
Photo by Vroman (no first  
name given). Courtesy  
Smithsonian Institute, National  
Anthropological Archives.**



**Cattle guard-entrance to the  
BIA school grounds.  
Photo courtesy Rina Swentzell.**



**Above: Buildings at the BIA school were constructed with pitched roofs, which were foreign to the Pueblo residents.**

**Below: The roofs of some of the buildings were subsequently removed.**

**Photos courtesy Rina Swentzell.**

erness and cooperation and which were expressed in connected and multiple-function structures.

The floor plan of the school was efficient and designed to create an aspiration of moving up—the good old American attitude of upward mobility—from one room and grade level to the next. The move, however, was always disappointing because there were expectations that something special would happen in the next room but it never did. The whole system had a way of making people unhappy with the present situation. Again, this was totally foreign to Pueblo thinking, which worked towards a settling into the earth and, consequently, into being more satisfied with the moment and the present.

Inside the school house the ceilings were very high. The proportions of the rooms were discomfoting—the walls were very tall relative to the small floor space. The Catholic church in the Pueblo also had high ceilings, for Spanish priests sought to maximize both interior and exterior height in the missions they built. But in the church there was no sense of overhead, top-heavy space. It had heavy, soft walls at eye level to balance its height, as well as dark interiors that made the height less obvious.

Although there were plenty of buildings on the school grounds, it seemed that there were never enough people to make the spaces within the grounds feel comfortable. Everything seemed at a distance. The message was don't touch, don't interact. The exterior formality of the structures, as well as the materials used, discouraged climbing on them, scratching them, tasting them, or otherwise affecting them. There was no way to be a part of the place, the buildings, or the lives of teachers who lived there.

The creation of artificial play areas on the school grounds within the Pueblo context and community was ironic. The total environment (natural as well as human-created) was included in the Pueblo world of play. Play and work were barely distinguishable. Every activity was something to be done and done as well as possible; the relaxation or joy that play gives was to be found in submerging oneself in the activity at hand.

Play and work were distinguished from one another in the BIA school and specific time was assigned for both. There were recesses from work, yet play was constantly supervised so that the children could not discover the world for themselves. Every possible danger was guarded against. Lack of trust was evident in the playground as opposed to the Pueblo setting where we roamed the fields and hills.

It was apparent that the Anglo teachers preferred indoors and human-made spaces over the outdoors, and they tried to instill this preference in us. In the Pueblo, the outdoors was unquestionably preferred.

The saddest aspect of the entire school complex was the ground. There was no centering, no thought, no respect given to the ground. The native plants and rocks had been disturbed a long time ago and the land had lost all the variety one finds in small places created by bushes, rocks or rises and falls of the ground. The ground had been scraped and leveled, and metal play equipment was set upon it. It was also a gray color, which was puzzling because the ground in the Pueblo plaza, only a quarter of a mile away, was a warm, brown color.

The sensation of being in the Pueblo was very different from that of being on the school grounds. The Pueblo plaza had soulfulness. It was

endowed with spirit. The emergence place of the people from the underground was located within the plaza and the breath of the cosmos flowed in and out of it. The land, the ground, breathed there; it was alive. The school grounds were imbued with sadness because the spirit of the place, the land, was not recognized. Nothing flowed naturally. The vitality of the school came from faraway worlds, from lands described in books. Appreciation of the immediate landscape was impossible.

### **The Legacy of Conflicting Landscape Values**

The Pueblo and the school grounds were imbued with different cultural values, attitudes and perceptions, and the students who moved from one setting to the other were deeply affected by those differences.

The school was part of a world that was whole unto itself and its orientation towards the future, time assignments, specialized buildings, artificial playgrounds and overall concern with segmentation were elements of a conscious world view that was not concerned with harmony and acceptance of spirituality in the landscape.

The government did not come to Santa Clara Pueblo out of inner kindness or benevolence. Rather, the government was dealing with Native Americans in what it considered to be the most efficient manner. This efficiency, which was so apparent in the structures, took away human interaction and dignity. We had to give ourselves totally to this order.

BIA authoritarianism assured the absence of any human-to-human or human-to-nature interaction. The monumental structures and sterile outdoor spaces in no manner stimulated the community to enter and

exchange communications at any time or at any level of equality. In that people-proof environment, the natural curiosity that children have about their world was dulled and respect for teachers far exceeded respect for the larger forces in the world.

Santa Clara Day School was a typical American school of its era— isolated and authoritatively emphatic. Its visual landscape read accordingly with the surrounding fence, the barren land and the tall, pitched-roof structures scattered within the compound.

But the longest-lasting impact may not be visual. The two physical settings taught different types of behavior to Pueblo children. Consequently, lack of confidence and feelings of inadequacy have become characteristic traits of children who lived in the Pueblo and went to the BIA school.

### **Notes**

1. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969) p. 10.

2. *Ibid.*, p.13.