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Mary Elizabeth Hamlin
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

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Pueblo Indian Religion, Medicine, and the Good Life

MARY ELIZABETH HAMLIN M.P.H.¹

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Introduction: While a public health education trainee with the Division of Indian Health, United States Public Health Service, I became interested in the socio-religious structure of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. During the nine month field training period spent in the Albuquerque area I investigated the existing ethnological literature concerning the Pueblo Indians. Research investigation in the area of the relationship between religion and medicine was accomplished by study of literature and field observation and inquiry. My concern was not so much the epidemiological determinants of disease and its prevalence. Rather it was with the "behavior of the people in the face of sickness and in the presence of medical and other community resources for maintaining health and coping with disease." (Paul 1963:36).

This paper describes the all-embracing character of Pueblo Indian religion. A philosophy of individual and social health and well-being become apparent in the study. An awareness and an understanding of this philosophy of health and disease are basic to the proper functioning of the public health worker. The success or failure of the total health program is governed by soundly conceived concepts of Pueblo Indian religion, medicine, and the "Good Life."

Pueblo Indian Religion: The social structure of the Pueblos is intricately interwoven into the religious fabric of the culture. It is perpetuating the core of Pueblo culture—its religion. Pueblo Indian religion assumes the incommunicability of that which we call religion, but which is to the Pueblo Indian an all embracing individual and group way of life.

Religion, and the religious life, is the key to Pueblo Indian existence. The arts, industries, social structure, and government of the people flow in an orderly sequence from beliefs in nature, the peculiarities of the environment, and deifications of power. "Only in the Southwest do the gods travel with rainbows and lightning and wrap themselves in clouds tied with sunbeams." (Godard 1913:15).

The Pueblo Indians living and practising their religion

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today can only be understood by one who in imagination seizes upon the tyranny of the need of rain which has dominated and animated the minds of the generations that have formed its traditions. All aspects of nature including man belong to one great system of related life. Supernatural beings are reflections of nature and images projected by the human mind as it reacts toward the world and human society.

Mother Earth conceived the races of men and all nature in her womb, the underworld through which the people passed before reaching the surface of the world. The place of emergence, the place of fertility is generally known as *sipapu*.

Little is known of life in the underworld. There is no query how the earth was made. Emergence is a satisfying starting point for religious mythology. Most of the precious things kept by the Pueblo Indians, the "corn mothers", the "old ones", the societies and their ceremonies, the Kachinas, all are accounted for in the emergence, the coming up.

Corresponding to the idea of emergence of the people from *sipapu* is that of the dead returning to the underworld. Since the dead return to the place of germination it is not surprising that in Pueblo culture, where nearly every cultural phenomenon is focused on the idea of fertilization, the deceased, especially the ancients are associated with this idea.

The Pueblo Indians employ dramatic, graphic, and pictorial art for the purpose of influencing the invisible supernatural powers and through them natural forces. They induce the ancients to take part in man's affairs, to act in behalf of the worshippers. This is particularly illustrated in the Kachina cult, one element of the Pueblo Indian religion. The Kachinas, in general, include an indefinite number of beneficent supernaturals associated with rain, clouds, springs, lakes, and often mountains, who help the growth of crops and brings blessings of other kinds to man. The Kachinas are thought of being, or including, the spirits of the human dead. Participation in the Kachina cult is usually considered a minimum religious requirement. In the practices of the cult dramas the movements and activities of supernatural beings and animals are imitated. The actors wear masks, paint their bodies, and conduct themselves according to the appearance of the divinity they represent.

The religious dances of the Pueblo Indians are invocations to the gods and nature to bless the pueblo. They are a genuine religious expression, a dramatic representation. Reflected in nearly all religious dance is some aspect of the agricultural complex. The Corn Dances, best known

to the non-Indian, are dances to the gods for the success of all crops and the fertility of human beings and animals.

The dance, like ritual poetry, is a monotonous compulsion of natural forces by reiteration. There is a thoroughgoing identification with nature so that the forces of nature will swing to the purposes of the dancer.

The ritual of the Pueblo Indians is kaleidoscopic. Many patterns or rites are combined in many ways. Mobilized into an almost constant combination the rites may form a ceremony, sometimes with, sometimes without a dramatic idea. The logical order in the development of a ceremony, that is, the making of offerings and fetishes in an assemblage to form an altar before which a ritual takes place, is found in Pueblo Indian religion.

The ceremony, a congeries of rites, offers to the spirits what they like in payment for what is asked of them. The common ends or purposes of ceremonies are rainfall and wind, prediction of the coming season, abundance of crops, children, and game, and longevity. The seeking for social assurance, gratification of desire for stability and order is an instrumental version of desire for spiritual law in the natural world. This religious motivation is not unique to the Pueblo Indians but is the motivation of many other religious forms. The Pueblo Indians have a religious ceremonialism which is elaborate and important in tribal life; but it is dominated by a group ceremonial approach to the gods, not by that of individual experience. They do not seek or value excess, nor do they accept disruptive experiences deriving supernatural power from them.

The ceremonial calendar is based on solar and lunar observations, and the principle of one ceremony following another in a fixed order. This is a general adaptation to the economic round of the seasons, farming, hunting, and even building. It is the result, too, of ancient wisdom. "A deep engrained tenderness for children, the poetry of a race sensitive to all natural phenomena, the awe born of a consciousness of the mystery and the sorrows of every human life, and the need for something not of ourselves, something higher and more helpful than anything earth can give, is the essence of Indian religion, as it is of all our humanity." (Sedgewick 1926:243).

Most primitive religions are exceedingly conservative in pattern, strongly resisting change except when positively undermined by great pressure from the outside. Changes on the whole are involuntary and do not seriously disturb the pre-existing tribal patterns. Changes are principally in externals, not fundamental concepts, and take the form of the elaboration of old patterns.

The Spanish introduction of Roman Catholicism to the Pueblo Indians broadened the pueblo horizon without disrupting the culture to any great extent. "Did not the old . . . religion prescribe much fasting and include much penance? When witnessing Indian ceremonies in the Southwest, it is not difficult for one versed in Catholic ritual to find the graft of it on native rites, even in those zones from which the influence of the padre long since disappeared. Such things do not prevail unless more or less welcome; and today, in the Pueblo country, they

go to form the Pueblo-Catholic compromise." (Crane 1928:191).

The culture has been built upon acculturation between the native ideology of spirit rain-makers and the practices of warrior-like burlesquers of the Plains Indian type of military society; and between these pre-Spanish elements and Catholic saint ideology and rituals, including dancing, Spanish burlesque, and religious drama. (Parsons 1929:280)

There have been two basic ways in which the Pueblo Indian has made his adjustment to Catholicism. He has adopted portions of Catholic theology, ritual, and paraphernalia thus preventing disintegration by substitution. Secondly, he carefully concealed from the Spanish, and later from other non-Indians, his own religious practices. Pressure on native religious activities resulted in the Pueblo Indian's withdrawal into himself and the carrying on of practice in secret. Secrecy was the only protection left for Indian integrity.

The practice of exclusion of the non-Indians is historically associated with Spanish occupation. The Spanish Catholics attempted to interfere with Pueblo Indian ceremonial. At Hopi the Church domination was brief. Today non-Indians are not excluded from Indian ceremonials there. At Zuni Spanish occupation resulted in exclusion of Spanish-Americans and Mexicans, but not of other non-Indians. The Eastern Pueblos were continually under Church control. As a result no non-Indian is allowed to witness the many beautiful religious ceremonials of these people.

Pueblo Indian religion is a positive force in the individual's life. Clearly it is a means of aesthetic expression. The dances are festive, an opportunity for social interaction and play. Through a coherent seasonal cyclicality the individual and the society are integrated. The Kachina cult maintains a relationship between the ancestors and parents and children. Pragmatically, to the Pueblo Indian, religious ritual and ceremonies accomplish the making of rain, the source of life for the pueblo. Finally, the religion provides social control. These elements of Pueblo Indian religion suggest a total concept of social well being and health for the individual and the society.

Motivation to participate in religious ceremonialism is not one of mere necessity, but one of social conformance as well. Conformance is enforced by public opinion—gossip, ridicule, rumor, and/or formal action by the council. Often non-deliberate and unconscious methods of response make people conform.

Witchcraft acts as a control, "one method by which the action of an individual is culturally determined, thus rendering witchcraft immediately relevant to maintaining the status quo of the society and to resisting diffusion." (Adair 1948:49).

Witchcraft is inextricably bound up in Pueblo Indian religion. The "witch" is one who makes use of supernatural power improperly, that is for malevolent purposes. Individuals who display anti-social behavior, who are aggressive and desire power over fellow villagers may be considered "witches." They are evil doers or potential

evil doers and are the cause of epidemics, drought, injury to livestock, in short, anything detrimental to the community. Witchcraft succeeds then in displacing anxieties. It attributes personal difficulties to a scapegoat, not individual failure.

The stereotype of the "witch" endows him with power to fly as a bird or travel in a whirlwind. "Witches" are everywhere, come from every pueblo, every tribe, and speak a common language. They have animal familiars—owls, crows, buck deer. "Witches" are organized into fraternities and meet together at secret places. One duty of the War Chief is to guard against "witches." Ceremonies are performed by the numerous curing societies to exorcise disease and evil attributed to "witches" from individuals and from the pueblo.

Witchcraft is the basis for a mutually supportive system of ideas. Etiologically it explains disease and misfortune. By defining "witches" as dangerous persons, as causative agents, requires a degree of unity within the society for witchcraft opposition. It also provides an explanation for unknown phenomena. It functions, secondly, as a social control by defining standards of behavior, by limiting responses, by punishing transgressors. Personal desires are restrained in behalf of a greater social commitment. It is an outlet for aggression through gossip, accusation, and counter witch action.

The importance of witchcraft beliefs to the modern medical practitioner can not be overlooked. Concerning Pueblo Indian concepts of "the nature of disease and the philosophy of medicine . . . one of the most profound changes in pueblo culture is taking place; the weaning away of young men and women from the old-time medicine man . . . is having the effect of undermining the whole pueblo cultural structure." (White 1942:56). The U. S. Government medical program for Indians "is thrusting deeply, although somewhat obliquely, into the vitals of that complex whole that is sometimes spoken of as Pueblo Indian religion and sometimes as pueblo culture. It is at this point, more than any other, that modern science is coming to grips with the . . . supernaturalism of the Indian and is defeating it. And since . . . the philosophy of disease is so important, a blow struck at it will affect the whole culture as well." (White 1942:77).

What is the responsibility of the outsiders with technical know-how; the medical and public health personnel? "Public health workers, like other agents of social change, need to understand the nature of sociocultural patterns, what purpose they serve; why they persist and how they change." (Paul 346:34-43).

Conclusions: Until recently, social controls in the pueblos were centered in the power and influence of the religious hierarchy. "Formal education was limited in scope and patronage and was designed to return students to their culture with little real change involved; the (dominant, informal) education was a family and community process in which established cultural values and concepts were stressed and reinforced. Catholicism has been accepted by most as an external supplement to, not as a substitute for, basic native religious patterns. (Lange 1951:436).

Government schools, off-reservation employment, extra-village marriages and marriages to non-Indians, greater economic independence, appreciation for modern conveniences, all have served to detract from traditional ways. The economic trend toward cash and individual competitiveness, the new emphases from increased contact and pressure from the dominant Anglo culture have had some far reaching results.

Collectively, traditional social controls are losing the hold on the individual. There is an increasing indifference to native religion with formal education and an acquisition of Anglo culture.

With a steadily declining emphasis on agricultural activity there has been a decline in the importance of secret societies and numerous ceremonials where weather control and other allied objectives were paramount.

Education has decreased the prestige of the medicine man in his function of curing and countering witchcraft. Catholicism, also, has undermined the essential nature of the medicine man in life cycle crises.

Thus the combined influence of economic change, educational enlightenment, and Catholicism, with increasing momentum, have brought about basic changes in Pueblo Indian culture.

Change does not necessarily predispose disintegration however. Pueblo Indian culture is, and does remain for many individuals, an integrated culture despite accretion of alien ways.

A fundamental requirement of the public health program and the personnel involved is a sound conception of Pueblo Indian religion, medicine, and the "good life." There is a commonly held "view that the basic problem is how someone can do something to other people tacitly understood as inferior or subordinate. . . . [perhaps there might be more] emphasis . . . on determining what people want and aiding them to get it rather than how they can best be persuaded to do what people in another culture think is best for them. The latter too often is a rationalization really concealing what is thought best for the dominant culture." (Tax 1952:189).

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GEOGRAPHY

An Example of Crop Dynamics in Minnesota—The Soybean

Philip L. Tideman
St. Cloud State College, St. Cloud

Introduction: The soybean is a plant which has been domesticated for several thousand years. The exact time and place of this domestication is not known but the domesticated plant is referred to early in Chinese literature (Morse, 1947:138). The hearth of domestication appears to have been northern China but very early it spread as a crop over a considerable part of Eastern Asia and became a common crop in the areas known today as Japan, China and Manchuria, Formosa, and Korea. Until very recent times the soybean was only a botanical curiosity to the European or Western World but in much of Asia it was an important item of diet.

The soybean was introduced into the United States as early as 1804 but remained little more than an exotic plant to be found in botanical gardens for more than one hundred years. By 1924, the United States production of this crop was about 5 million bushels grown on about 1.5 million acres of farmland. By 1961, soybean production in the United States had reached 693 million bushels from about 27 million acres of cropland (Haywood, 1962:19). This extremely rapid expansion of soybean acreage and production is one very excellent example of the ability to change and to adapt on the part of the American farmer. It is thus a recent and impressive example of crop dynamics in the United States.

Map Explanations: With the introductory comments on soybeans as basic information, it is possible to look in some detail at this crop and its expansion on the northern fringe of the North American Corn Belt, and specifically, its expansion in Minnesota. This study includes counties that meet the following two criteria; (1) Soy-

¹ This paper represents a small and rather localized portion of a study presently under way at the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Clarence Olmstead, Carrol Rock, and the present writer are participating in that study. Partial financial support has been given by the National Science Foundation.

beans must occupy at least two percent of the Harvested Cropland of that county. (2) Soybeans must occupy at least one percent of the total land area of that county.

These two criteria are applied in order to set a base, arbitrary though it may be, to the study. This base is necessary for the purpose of delimiting the area of significant soybean production.

The map series 1-6 show the expansion of this crop in Minnesota for each of the agricultural census years from 1934 to 1959.

Map 1—1934 Seven counties in southeastern Minnesota have from 2 to 5 percent of their cropland in soybeans. This is the first census year that any Minnesota county meets the above listed criteria. During this period soybeans were sometimes used as a soil conservation crop rather than a cash oil seed crop.

Map 2—1939 By this year soybean production in the country as a whole had become sufficiently important so as to warrant the opening of a separate pit in the Chicago Board of Trade. This map shows minor areal expansion in the southeast part of Minnesota with four counties having from 5 to 10% of their cropland in soybeans.

Map 3—1944 This census year shows a very considerable expansion of soybeans in southern Minnesota. Several additional counties at this time fulfill the criteria and other ones have increased significantly their acreage in soys. Mower county has more than 10% of its cropland in soys and the spread of this crop is most apparent in two areas, one to the northwest in the Minnesota River valley counties and the other to the north of the Twin Cities, on the Anoka Sandplain.

During the first part of this decade, the war years, production of vegetable oils was promoted and government support prices on soybeans were established.

Map 4—1949 Continued expansion of this crop to the