

Navajo Livestock Reduction Program

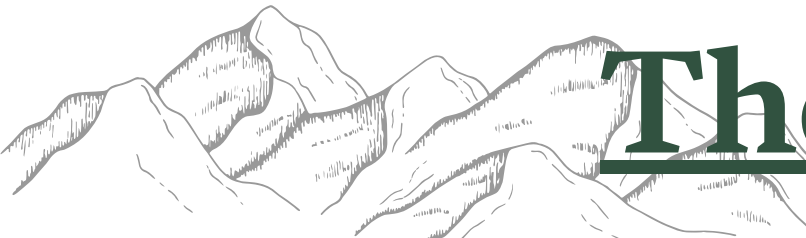
Compared to the treaties that exploit Indigenous land and the assimilation projects that exploit Indigenous cultures, the abuse of the Indigenous people's rights to property receive less attention. The **Navajo Livestock Reduction Program** is an example of such abuse.

The program, which started in 1933, aimed to reduce the amount of livestock the Navajos owned, for the federal government was concerned that overgrazing would further erode and deteriorate the environment. The officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and environmentalists believed that the program is beneficial to both the land and the Navajo people, who relied on the land for livings. Despite the good intentions, the program ended up bringing economic disasters and emotional devastation to the Navajo people, who did not receive the compensation promised by the government.



Top: A view of the Navajo County in the summer. Rolf Blauert Dk4hb, Near Keans Canyon on SR 264 — in Navajo County, AZ., June 2005. Accessed via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Az_navajo3_sr264.jpg. PD.

Left: A Navajo-Churro lam is resting. The wools of this type of sheep are often used to weave the famous Navajo rugs. Liz West, *Resting Navajo-Churro lamb*, May 12 2010. Accessed via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Resting_Navajo-Churro_lamb.jpg. CC BY 2.0.

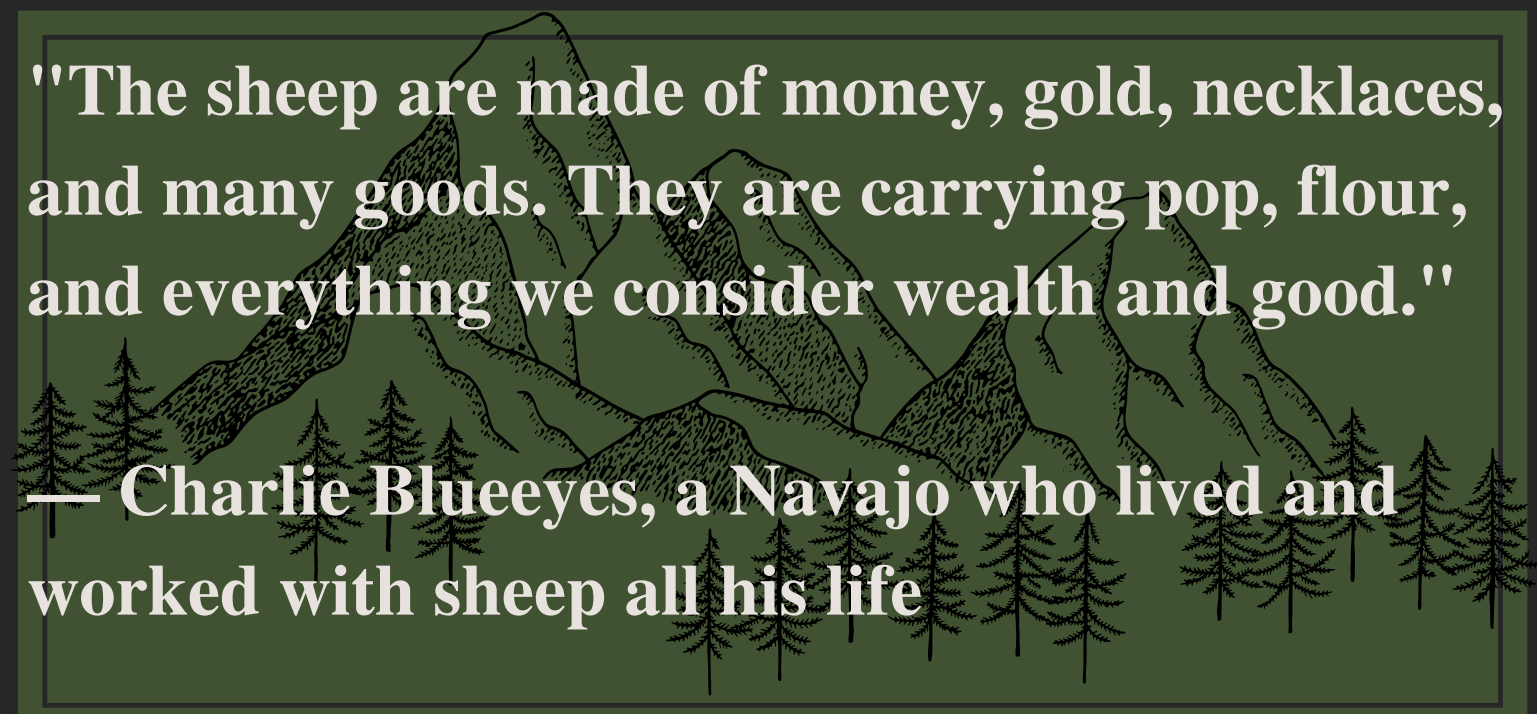


The Navajos' Relationship with Stocks

Live stocks are important to the Navajo people. Horses, goats, cows, and sheep provide meat, milk, butter, cream, fur, wool, and even transpoartations to Navajos. Among all the live stocks, sheep is viewed as the most valuable and meaningful to Navajo the people.

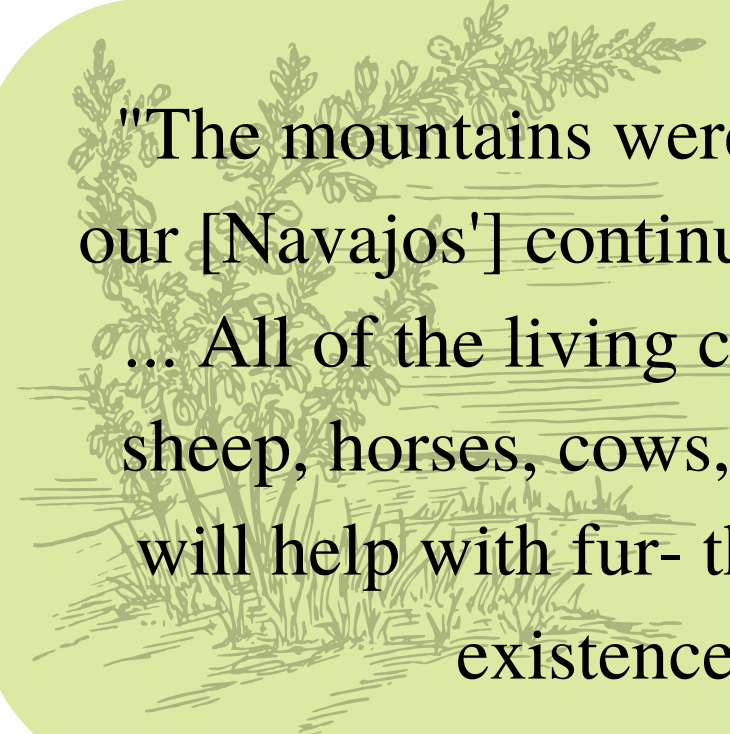
For Navajos, "Sheep is Life."

In the Navajo myths, when the holy beings created the world, they made sure the land are suitable for raising live stocks. One of the holy mountains, Dibe Ntsaa (Big Sheep Mountain), was "made of sheep – both rams and ewes." People would pray to the gods connected to this mountain to protect their live stocks, so they can live happy and prosperous lives.



"The sheep are made of money, gold, necklaces, and many goods. They are carrying pop, flour, and everything we consider wealth and good."

— Charlie Blueeyes, a Navajo who lived and worked with sheep all his life



"The mountains were put here for our [Navajos'] continuing existence. ... All of the living creatures, like sheep, horses, cows, etc., said we will help with fur-thering man's existence."

The Navajos before the program ...

After returning to their traditional homeland in 1868, the Navajos successfully rebuilt their community by raising herds. This was an amazing accomplishment, especially when you consider that many of other Indigenous groups were suffering due to the dramatic end of their traditional lifestyle. The number of Navajo sheep increased from 14,000 in 1868 to about 800,000 before the Great Depression, and the Navajo population increased as well.



Two Navajo women are spinning yarn while looking after kids. Young Navajo girls first learn the art of weaving by observing how their elder female family members work. *Spinning wool into yarn to be used in Navajo rug weaving. Southern Navajo Agency, 1933, between circa 1930 and circa 1938.* Accessed via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spinning_wool_into_yarn_to_be_used_in_Navajo_rug_weaving._Southern_Navajo_Agency,_1933_-_NARA_-_298599.jpg. PD.

Weaving was one of the most important income sources for Navajo families.

The famous Navajo blankets were hand woven by the Navajo women using the wool from the Navajo sheep.

Navajo families believed that weaving is a good way to make a living, because a girl "had all the goods, right in her hands."



A Navajo woman is weaving a rug with complicated geometric patterns. *Navajo Indian rug weaver with partially completed rug in loom. Southern Navajo Agency, 1933, between circa 1930 and circa 1938.*

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Navajo_Indian_rug_weaver_with_partially_completed_rug_in_loom._Southern_Navajo_Agency,_1933_-_NARA_-_298601.tif. PD.

The Rise of Concern

How did the government become concerned of the impacts of overgrazing on the environment? The early national conservation movement, reports from government officials, and Soil Conservation Advisory Committee all played a role in illustrating such concern.

The Negotiations

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John Collier, the Commissioner for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, advocated the stock reduction program to the Navajo Nation. He had conferences with Navajo Delegates, and eventually, the Navajo tribal council accepted the program.

The Promise

The council agreed to decrease the herds by 10%, and the government promised jobs and additional land for the reservation.

The Reality

However, the program ended up cutting the Navajo herds by half...

The promise of expanding the reservation never came true.

Although some jobs were provided to the Navajo people, there were not enough jobs for all who needed income. And the jobs provided were temporary instead of permanent. In fact, those jobs lasted less than 2 months.



“Navajo Sheep Corral and Feeding facilities. Note the Overgrazed Range and the Complete Lack of Vegetation Around the Corral,” *Geographical Review* 53, no. 2 (1963): 221, Figure 7.

The Process

When the program began in 1933, the reduction was voluntary and government purchased the animals at about one or two dollar per capita. The government also tried to convince the Navajos to abandon their traditional way of herding and adopt the scientific methods, which in theory would increase revenues and do less harm to the environment, by creating demonstration areas. However, the demonstration areas and the early reductions failed to achieve the goal. From 1937 to 1941, reduction became systematic and involuntary.,

"And around Tuba City and other places, they shot [the live stocks]. Sometimes they sent the meat somewhere to be made into food for dogs and cats, but sometimes it was left there in the sun, to rot. They did that with sheep and goats, too, and probably cows. That's what really hurt the People. "



The Outcomes

Despite his disbelief, Collier's program made the Navajo people vulnerable economic wise. First, the people who suffered the most from the reduction, were often not qualified for the limited jobs provided. Secondly, the economic loss due to the loss of stocks was miscalculated by the government. Thee meat from one sheep can feed five people for a week, but the one dollar payment for a sheep from the government can only buy "four cans of tomatoes." Moreover, if the stocks stayed alive, they could provide milk and other dairy products on daily basis, and provide furs and wool annually.

Many Navajo people held Collier accountable for their sufferings. Local leaders were also blamed. Because of the wide spread hatred toward Collier among the community, Navajo Nation rejected the Indian Reorganizatio Act, t"he centerpiece of Indian New Deal legislation" carried out by Collier

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