



The Western History Association

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Winter, 2007), pp. 437-455

Published by: [Western Historical Quarterly, Utah State University](#) on behalf of [The Western History Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25443605>

Accessed: 21/07/2012 19:56

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GENDERED INJUSTICE: NAVAJO LIVESTOCK REDUCTION IN THE NEW DEAL ERA

MARSHA WEISIGER

Navajo livestock reduction illuminates the gendered politics of conservation and the crucial contribution of women in resisting environmental injustice. In developing programs to halt soil erosion on the Navajo Reservation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Soil Conservation Service made matters worse, largely because they ignored the importance of women as livestock owners. Women's resistance helped bring an end to stock reduction and the conservation program.

IN 1936, LOCAL NEWSPAPERS in Winslow, Arizona, and Gallup, New Mexico, reported that the women were inciting a revolt on the Navajo Reservation. For three years, John Collier, the commissioner of Indian Affairs, had pressured Navajos to slash herds in an effort to conserve severely overgrazed rangelands. Now trouble was brewing, the *Gallup Independent* claimed, in the language of yellow journalism, “due to the dissatisfaction of the squaws over Collier’s policies.”¹ Evidence of this simmering rebellion is admittedly meager. Very few Navajo women spoke English, and the government officials who created much of the historical record tended to ignore them. But the few clues that do surface here and there are suggestive.² Consider the account of a community meeting near Kayenta, where perhaps 250 Diné (as they call themselves), nearly all of them men, had gathered. Before them stood Denehotso

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¹ “Fryer Denies Navajo Revolt Report,” *Gallup (New Mexico) Independent*, 7 May 1936.

² Periodically, tribal councilmen would indicate that anxious and angry women had spurred them to speak out against stock reduction or grazing regulations. See, for example, Deeshchii'ni's testimony in U.S. Congress, House Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, “Hearings on HR 3476 to Promote the Rehabilitation of the Navajo and Hopi Tribes of Indians,” p. 124, folders 1 and 2, box 13, Subject Files, Navajo Area Office, Record Group (hereafter RG) 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Region, Laguna Niguel, CA (hereafter NARA-PR).

Hattie. Although almost blind from trachoma, she was the meeting's "unquestioned, dominating leader," and an "aggressive and vigorous speaker." Pointing her finger at E. R. Fryer, the newly appointed superintendent of the Navajo Service, Hattie denounced the government's plan for range management. She spoke so heatedly and rapidly that Fryer's interpreter, Howard Gorman, could not keep up, or perhaps Gorman was reluctant to translate her invective. Nonetheless, it was clear that the woman did not blame government officials alone. She scolded Diné men, too, pointing at them as they hung their heads.³ Diné councilmen and community leaders had acquiesced to the wholesale slaughter of stock and the confinement of flocks into grazing districts, bringing poverty and despair to their people. Hattie held them all accountable.

This story illustrates the significant, but often overlooked, part that Diné women played in resisting and remembering the environmental injustice known as Navajo livestock reduction. The term "environmental justice" is usually reserved for the recent political movement to fight for poor and marginalized racial and ethnic communities that bear the burden of our society's toxic wastes and other environmental hazards. But noxious neighborhoods are not the only sites of environmental injustice. Between 1910 and 1933, the Blackfeet lost their right to hunt and fish in Glacier National Park, the Timbisha Shoshones became "squatters" on their own land when Death Valley became a national monument, and the Spanish land grant communities of northern New Mexico lost their communal lands to the Carson National Forest, all in the name of conservation. Today, the indigenous peoples of the American West and *Nuevo Mexicanos* define their ongoing struggles against the federal agencies that dispossessed them from their lands and livelihoods as battles for "environmental justice," a useful, if sometimes unsettling, way of viewing conservation conflicts. Significantly, women have been on the vanguard of the environmental justice movement in the American West and throughout the nation, as they were on the Navajo Reservation.⁴ The story of Navajo livestock reduction illuminates the gendered politics of conservation and

³ E. Reese Fryer, "Erosion, Poverty and Dependency: Memoir of My Time in Navajo Service, 1933–1942" (unpublished ms., 1986), p. 35, Center of Southwest Studies Library, Ft. Lewis College, Durango, CO (hereafter CSSL).

⁴ For an introduction to the environmental justice movement, consult Rachel Stein, ed., *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (New Brunswick, 2004); Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* (Tucson, 1996); Robert J. Brulle, *Agency, Democracy, and Nature: The U.S. Environmental Movement from a Critical Theory Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 207–21. For historical accounts of dispossession in the name of conservation, see Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York, 1999); Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven, 1997); Philip Burnham, *Indian Country, God's Country: Native Americans and the National Parks* (Washington, DC, 2000); William deBuys, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range* (Albuquerque, 1985). Noriko Ishiyama's "Environmental Justice and American Indian Tribal Sovereignty: Case Study of a Land-Use Conflict in Skull Valley, Utah," *Antipode* 35 (January 2003): 119–39, complicates the picture.

the crucial contribution of women's resistance to the failure of the New Deal program to save the soil.

John Collier's conservation program, to be sure, sought to address an environmental and impending human calamity. He and his men felt compelled to decrease herds drastically because Diné had allowed their animals to overgraze the land, which, especially when coupled with climate change beginning in the late-nineteenth century, acutely accelerated erosion. Climate change—a long period of intense drought followed by a new pattern of high-energy, convective summer storms—likely initiated the network of arroyos that even now scar the land.⁵ According to tree-ring data, the 1870s and 1880s had been extremely dry, although punctuated by years of considerable rain. Then came the severe drought of 1899–1904, with scant snow and rainfall. Some years saw almost none. Not since the 1660s—and before then, the 1250s—had the region suffered such painful drought. With so little moisture, plants weakened, setting the stage for rapid erosion when intense summer downpours brought flash flooding. Such storms came regularly during the prolonged wet period of 1905–1920—the likes of which had been unseen for nearly a century.⁶ Compounding the damage, some of the highly erodible sandstones in the area proved particularly sensitive to these climatic shifts.⁷

⁵ William L. Graf offers an excellent history of the study of arroyo development in "The Arroyo Problem—Palaeohydrology and Palaeohydraulics in the Short Term," in *Background to Palaeohydrology: A Perspective*, ed. K. J. Gregory (Chichester, ENG, 1983), 279–302. Also useful is William M. Denevan, "Livestock Numbers in Nineteenth-Century New Mexico, and the Problem of Gullying in the Southwest," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 57 (December 1967): 691–763; Richard Hereford and Robert H. Webb, "Historic Variation of Warm-Season Rainfall, Southern Colorado Plateau, Southwestern U.S.A.," *Climatic Change* 22 (November 1992): 239–56; Luna B. Leopold, "Rainfall Frequency: An Aspect of Climatic Variation," *Transactions (American Geophysical Union)* 32 (June 1951): 347, 350–1; William L. Graf, "Fluvial Erosion and Federal Public Policy in the Navajo Nation," *Physical Geography* 7 (April-June 1986): 97–115; Ronald U. Cooke and Richard W. Reeves, *Arroyos and Environmental Change in the American South-West* (Oxford, ENG, 1976), 1–15; Thomas R. Van Devender, "Desert Grassland History: Changing Climates, Evolution, Biogeography, and Community Dynamics," in *The Desert Grassland*, ed. Mitchel P. McClaran and Thomas R. Van Devender (Tucson, 1995), 92–3. For a countervailing argument, see Conrad Joseph Bahre, *A Legacy of Change: Historic Human Impact on Vegetation in the Arizona Borderlands* (Tucson, 1991), especially 109–23.

⁶ E.R. Cook et al., "Long-Term Aridity Changes in the Western United States," *Science* 306, no. 5698 (2004): 1015–8, published in www.ncdc.noaa.gov/paleo/pdsidata.html (accessed 28 October 2005) and Fenbiao Ni et al., "Cool-Season Precipitation in the Southwestern USA Since AD 1000: Comparison of Linear and Nonlinear Techniques for Reconstruction," *International Journal of Climatology* 22, no. 13 (2002): 1645–62, published in www.ncdc.noaa.gov/paleo/pubs/ni2002/ (accessed 28 October 2005).

⁷ Leslie D. McFadden and Joseph R. McAuliffe, "Lithologically Influenced Geomorphic Responses to Holocene Climatic Changes in the Southern Colorado Plateau, Arizona: A Soil-Geomorphic and Ecologic Perspective," *Geomorphology* 19 (July 1997): 303–32, and Joseph R. McAuliffe, Louis A. Scuderi, and Leslie D. McFadden, "Tree-Ring Record of Hillslope Erosion and Valley Floor Dynamics: Landscape Responses to Climate Variation during the Last 400 Yr. in the Colorado Plateau, Northeastern Arizona," *Global and Planetary Change* 50 (April 2006): 184–201.

The effect of livestock on this brittle environment was cumulative and dynamic. When livestock continuously defoliate favored forbs, grasses, and shrubs, they eventually kill the native vegetation they prefer and encourage the invasion and spread of less palatable plants, both native and exotic. As vegetation density decreases, larger areas of soil become exposed to the baking sun, making them more arid. And as the patches of bare ground become wider, the wind begins to carry away the topsoil.⁸ As early as the first decades of the 1900s, increasingly crowded flocks on the reservation—amplified by a handful of wealthy stockowners—and competition from Anglo-American and Hispanic ranchers on the reservation's fringes had depleted forage, restructured plant communities, and allowed greasewood, snakeweed, and other unpalatable and sometimes toxic weeds to flourish.⁹

Many Diné had discerned this degradation. Some called for the exclusion of competitors from the "Checkerboard" on the reservation's periphery, a patchwork of Navajo, federal, state, and privately-owned lands, and for expansion into new areas, much as ranchers have done throughout the history of the American West. Some called for the development of stock water so that poorly watered areas could be used for grazing. Others placed faith in their belief that the ceremonies that reenacted the creation of the earth could reestablish order in the natural world and restore *hózhó*, or beauty and balance. Still more had remained largely unaware of the altered landscape, in part because ecological change often occurs incrementally, escaping notice. Nonetheless, by the 1930s, nearly one million sheep and goats, or their equivalents in horses and cattle, ranged across the Navajo Reservation, and the damage triggered by overgrazing and climate change could no longer be ignored.¹⁰

Collier believed that if the range continued to deteriorate, sheep and goats would starve, and ultimately, so would Navajos. As he admonished the Navajo Tribal Council,

⁸ Harold F. Heady and R. Dennis Child, *Rangeland Ecology and Management* (Boulder, CO, 1994), 13–38 and R. M. Moore and E. F. Biddiscombe, "The Effects of Grazing on Grasslands," in *Grasses & Grasslands*, ed. C. Barnard (London, 1964), 221, 225–6. For a clearly written primer on vegetation change due to grazing, consult Thomas R. Vale, *Plants and People: Vegetation Change in North America* (Washington, DC, 1982), 24–8.

⁹ On competition from Anglo-American and Hispanic ranchers, see R.J. Bauman to Commissioner of Indian Affairs (hereafter COIA), 9 February 1918, folder 3, box 27, Franciscan Papers, Special Collections, University of Arizona, Tucson (hereafter SCUA); Hugh L. Scott, "Report on the Navajo Indians of Arizona and New Mexico," pp. 3–8, 11 October 1921, vol. 4, box 2, Entry 1388, Records of the Board of Indian Commissioners, Special Reports, RG 75, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter NA); [S.F. Stacher] to Homer Powers, 24 March 1920, H.J. Hagerman folder 2, box 13, Eastern Navajo Agency, RG 75, NARA-PR; Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Conditions of the Indians of the United States*, pt. 34, *Navajo Boundary and Pueblos in New Mexico*, 75th Cong., 1st sess., 1937, 18022–3.

¹⁰ There were an estimated 999,725 "sheep units" (the equivalent of one sheep or goat) on the reservation in 1933. Of these, sheep and goats numbered about 710,000. The Soil Conservation Service guessed that there were some 62,000 horses and cattle, but because of their greater forage needs, cattle counted as four "sheep units," and horses as five.

the grasses and soils were important “because if they go everything else goes—everything, including your own human life.”¹¹ He cared deeply about the fate of the Navajos. An anti-modernist like many social reformers of his generation, he believed that Native communities, particularly Navajos, somehow captured a purer, more authentic way of life. In the 1920s, he had described the Navajos as paragons of self-sufficiency and cultural integrity, a beacon for the larger society to follow. They had “preserved intact their religion, their ancient morality, their social forms and their appreciation of beauty.”¹² That way of life, however, depended mightily on the land. He had to act quickly to restore the range, he felt, for the future of an entire people hung in the balance.

Yet in their haste to respond to an environmental crisis, Collier and his conservationists unwittingly made matters worse, ecologically and culturally. Among their many mistakes, they ignored the importance of long-established cultural patterns, disparaged local knowledge and cultural understandings of nature, and refused to listen to Navajos’ advice in implementing the livestock reduction program.¹³ Significantly, they disregarded women. The fact that women really mattered in Diné society—that they had the power to sway communities—never fully penetrated the consciousness of New Deal policy-makers. True, Collier recognized their central place in Diné social organization and economy. And yet, when he and his staff sought Navajo approval of the conservation program, they excluded women from the decision-making. That was a mistake. Indeed, Howard Gorman, who was an assistant to Superintendent Fryer and later the chairman of the Navajo Tribal Council, observed that the conservation effort “failed largely because women of the tribe were not won over to Commissioner Collier’s program.”¹⁴

In ignoring women, Collier and Fryer followed a path laid out by earlier policy-makers. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had endeavored to transform Native societies by stripping women of their power as agricultural producers and hide processors and transforming them into good housewives. The Dawes Act, for example, sought—with limited success—to create patriarchal families by allotting lands only to male heads of households.¹⁵ And on the Navajo Reservation, the bureau

¹¹ Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Session of the Navajo Tribal Council, Fort Wingate, New Mexico, 7–8 July 1933, pp. 13–9 and Minutes of the Meeting of the Navajo Tribal Council, Keams Canyon, Arizona, 10–2 July 1934, p. 80, both in Navajo Nation Records Management Center, Window Rock, AZ (hereafter NNRMC); the quote is from the latter.

¹² John Collier, “The Fate of the Navajos: What Will Oil Money Do to the Greatest of Indian Tribes?” *Sunset Magazine*, January 1924, 11. For insight into the romantic reformers of the 1920s and 1930s, consult Sherry L. Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880–1940* (New York, 2000), 163–212.

¹³ My thinking on this subject has been clarified by James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

¹⁴ Quoted in Fryer, “Erosion, Poverty and Dependency,” p. 35, CSSL.

¹⁵ Emily Greenwald, “Indian Social Organization and the 1887 Dawes Act,” presented at the Western History Association meeting, 2001, courtesy of the author.

had instituted an all-male tribal council in the 1920s to approve oil leases and decide other important matters.¹⁶ Collier challenged the principle of cultural assimilation that governed Indian affairs, and yet he never questioned its patriarchal underpinnings.

Like the New Dealers, those historians who have examined this episode in the environmental history of the American West have largely ignored the importance of women. In *The Navajos and the New Deal*, Donald Parman leaves the impression that opposition to the conservation program emerged primarily because a handful of Navajo men fanned the flames while acting out their political and personal rivalries. Richard White, although more attentive to women in *The Roots of Dependency*, likewise overlooks their importance in resisting stock reduction.¹⁷ Indeed, some of the problems these historians have attributed to factionalism among powerful men were likely the result of the influence of women. Throughout the New Deal era, frustrated government officials complained that the Navajo Tribal Council vacillated from one meeting to the next, first agreeing to the government's plans, then demurring. That change of heart can be explained by Diné women's outcry against stock reduction. Between 1934, when range riders began seizing Navajo goats, and 1943, when the tribal council voted to suspend stock reduction, women goaded the council to resist the government through their participation in community meetings, petition drives, and acts of disobedience.

Diné lived in a matricentered society. I use the term "matricentered" to capture a way of organizing and thinking about the world that means far more than the commonly used phrases "matrilocal" and "matrilineal." Women stood at the center of almost all aspects of Diné life and thought: spiritual beliefs, kinship, residence patterns, land-use traditions, and economy. Their most important deity was—and is—Changing Woman, who created the Diné and their livestock and gave them their central ceremony, Blessingway.¹⁸ Diné traced descent exclusively through their mothers, and a newly married couple generally built their hogan near the wife's family, creating closely-knit networks of mothers, daughters, and sisters.¹⁹ But women's power did not rest merely on female solidarity. Women were important to economic production, and significantly they controlled the means of their own production: livestock and land.

¹⁶ Peter Iverson, *The Navajo Nation* (Albuquerque, 1981), 19–21.

¹⁷ Donald L. Parman, *The Navajos and the New Deal* (New Haven, 1976), 290–6 and Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln, 1983).

¹⁸ River Junction Curly, Version III, in Leland C. Wyman, *Blessingway* (Tucson, 1970), 622–34. In some versions of this story, various Holy People assist Changing Woman in creating the Diné and their livestock, and yet regardless of the version, Changing Woman is always the central creation figure.

¹⁹ My perspective is indebted to the work of David Aberle, Louise Lamphere, Gary Witherspoon, Mary Shepardson, and Gladys Reichard. Also important was Jerrold E. Levy, Eric B. Henderson, and Tracy J. Andrews, "The Effects of Regional Variation and Temporal Change on Matrilineal Elements of Navajo Social Organization," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 45 (Winter 1989): 351–77.

Diné acquired use-rights to grazing land through matrilineages headed by elderly women.²⁰ And women typically owned a large share of the sheep and almost all of the goats.²¹ These herds sustained lives: they provided food for families and produced the wool that women transformed into blankets, which by the early-twentieth century had become valued trade goods.²² Living in a society that measured wealth and prestige in livestock, those women who owned especially large flocks thereby amplified their autonomy and authority within their rural communities. They did not take demands to reduce those flocks without a fight.

Rebellion against stock reduction did not arise immediately, and even then, it did not appear everywhere. The program's initial phase in the winter of 1933–34 was largely voluntary. With funds from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Collier's agents and local traders purchased more than 86,500 sheep from Navajo stockowners. That was somewhat fewer than the goal of 100,000 head, but for the most part, Diné stockowners willingly sold their unproductive culls to the government, which even purchased old gummets that traders would never buy.²³ In essence, the federal purchases replaced the fall market for lambs, a market that had dwindled to nothing since the beginning of the Great Depression.

Not everyone who gave up their sheep did so all that willingly, however. Frank Lenzie, who supervised reduction, reported that "considerable opposition to the disposition of their stock was voiced by a large number of Indians in all parts of the Navajo country, their feeling being that the delegates did not have the right to obligate them to such a course."²⁴ One of the bureau's stockmen, Carl Beck, reported that women particularly resented the idea that a handful of men had promised they would sell their sheep. Women owned their own flocks, and no one had the right to tell them what to do with their property. But it was not only women who objected. In some quarters, people complained that they were being reduced to poverty, for tribal council members (many of whom were themselves large stockowners) encouraged everyone to

²⁰ Tracy Joan Andrews, "Descent, Land Use and Inheritance: Navajo Land Tenure Patterns in Canyon de Chelly and Canyon del Muerto" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 1985), 23–4 and Jennifer R. Nez Denetdale, "Remembering Juanita Through Navajo Oral Tradition: Out of the Shadow of Chief Manuelito" (PhD diss., Northern Arizona University, 1999), 216, 228, 257, 262.

²¹ Greasewood account books, 1932–34 and 1933, items 7A and 8, box 437 and Black Mountain sheep journal, 1937, box 320, both in Hubbell Papers, UA; books 7 and 9, Hubbell Collection, Arizona Historical Foundation, Arizona State University, Tempe.

²² On the rise of weaving for trade in the 1890s, see Kathy M'Closkey, *Swept Under the Rug: A Hidden History of Navajo Weaving* (Albuquerque, 2002).

²³ Minutes of the Special Session of the Navajo Tribal Council, Crownpoint, 9–11 April 1934, p. 61–2, NNRMC and Frank Lenzie to [Collier], 3 April 1934, Central Classified Files (hereafter CCF) 301.14, box 166, Forestry and Grazing Division (hereafter FGD), Phoenix Area Office, RG 75, NARA-PR.

²⁴ Lenzie to [Collier], 3 April 1934, NARA-PR.

reduce 10 percent of their herds across the board, rather than asking the wealthiest to shoulder the burden.²⁵

Still, for the most part, this initial reduction went smoothly, seducing Collier into thinking that Navajos understood the need for the program, or at least readily followed the tribal council's lead. And yet it would have been wise for him to listen more carefully to the Navajo Tribal Council. One delegate after another had tried to advise him that his broader plan to dramatically decrease herds would never find acceptance among the Diné. Henry Taliman, from Oak Springs, put it most emphatically. "Under no consideration," he warned, "will the Navajos favor reducing their livestock." He knew full well that the people back home opposed stock reduction. "They are just so afraid this thing is going to be carried out so they begged me especially not to accept this program."²⁶ Collier apparently pressured Taliman to change his mind during a closed executive session that evening. No minutes were kept of that discussion, so we have no way of knowing what transpired, but when the council reconvened the next day, Taliman himself presented the resolution calling for cooperation with Collier's program.²⁷ The commissioner declared victory and went home. Had he instead heeded Taliman's warning, he might have better prepared to avoid all out war.

The turning point in women's rejection of Collier's program came in 1934, when the government issued a mandate to nearly eliminate their goats. The Diné valued goats in ways that Collier and his men never fully grasped. Conservationists targeted these animals because they had little market value and damaged both rangelands and forests. And yet, for many Diné, goats measured the difference between feast and famine. Many subsistence herds consisted largely of goats, because they were hardier and survived winters better than sheep and so were more dependable as a source of food. Families could drink goat's milk and eat goat cheese and meat while reserving their sheep to breed or barter at the local trading post.²⁸ The loss of those goats would prove devastating.

Only a faint note of protest arose, however, at the March meeting of the Navajo Tribal Council, and even then, Collier seemed to quiet the councilmen's fears. Jacob Morgan—who would soon emerge as the leading voice of the beleaguered smallholder and Collier's nemesis—expressed concern for those with few sheep and many goats.

²⁵ Carl Beck, "History of Stock Reduction," in Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Conditions*, pt. 34, p. 17987 and Minutes of a Meeting of the Navajo Tribal Council, Fort Defiance, 27 January 1934, p. 23, CCF 21341-1933-344, vol. 1, Civilian Conservation Corps-Indian Division (hereafter CCC-ID), Southern Navajo, RG 75, NA.

²⁶ Minutes of a Meeting of the Tribal Council, Tuba City, October–November 1933, p. 46–7, CCF 00-1933-054, General Services, NA. Also see Nal Nishi's testimony, p. 44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62, 66, NA and Parman, *Navajo New Deal*, 45.

²⁸ Navajo Tribal Council Minutes, April 1934, p. 53 and Minutes of the Meeting of the Navajo Tribal Council, July 1934, p. 66, 75, both in NNRMC; Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Conditions*, pt. 18, *Navajos in Arizona and New Mexico* (71st Cong., 3d sess., 1932), pp. 9120–1, 9247–8, 9556–7, 9559. See also pt. 34, p. 17784.

"I have been wondering," he remarked, "if it would not be possible in some way to think of these people."²⁹ Henry Taliman suggested that they table the issue until they could discuss it with the people back home and then "act upon how the livestock can be reduced to the best satisfaction of the people."³⁰ Chee Dodge, the wealthiest stockowner among the Diné and widely respected as a leader, thought that the council could resolve the issue now by sparing those with flocks smaller than 100 head. Collier listened thoughtfully to these concerns (it would be one of the last times he would do so) and responded that it might even be possible to help poorer families by replacing goats with sheep acquired from large stockowners.³¹ That would eliminate goats and yet give families enough livestock to live on. Collier's assurances laid the council's fears to rest, and the men unanimously resolved to encourage their people to sell half their goats, with the proviso that the delegates would ask the people back home to "consider the matter and devise ways and means" for carrying out the program.³²

The council's resolve would not last long. Back home, the men quickly discovered that the people who owned goats had no intention of giving them up without a fight. Both Carl Beck, the BIA stockman, and C. N. Millington, national head of the Indian Emergency Conservation Work program, who attended several community meetings, noted that women were especially vocal in their criticism of the council's decision to sacrifice their goats. Women owned the vast majority of these animals, and they felt betrayed by the men who had promised to cut their herds. Some women resolved to reduce their flocks in their own way by eating lots of goat meat, and they set about butchering the animals for home consumption. But all this talk of selling off their goats left them feeling anxious and powerless.³³

When the council again convened at Crownpoint and later at Keams Canyon, the mood was tense. Throngs of as many as five or six hundred Diné women and men came to observe, their numbers spilling out under the trees. Large crowds often came to these meetings, but now the council members seemed more keenly aware of the people's interest in the proceedings. Indeed, the night before the Keams Canyon meeting, the

²⁹ Minutes of the Special Session of the Navajo Tribal Council, Fort Defiance, 12–3 March 1934, p. 47, NNRMC.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 48–9.

³² *Ibid.*, 51–2.

³³ Tribal Council Minutes, April 1934, pp. 64–5, NNRMC; Beck, "History of Stock Reduction," p. 17988; Millington to [Collier], 22 May 1934, CCF 21341-1933-344, vol. 2, CCC-ID, General Records, Southern Navajo, RG 75, NA; Meeting of Superintendents, July 1934, pp. 4, 301, Livestock Reduction Program file, box 120, and New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs, *Urgent Navajo Problems* (Santa Fe, 1940), 8, in Information Concerning Navajo file, box 22, Subject Files, both in Navajo Area Office, RG 75, NARA-PR. Aside from passing comments on women's reactions, there is a paucity of evidence regarding the substance of the response, probably because few Diné women spoke English and none of those recording observations spoke the Diné language.

council met with a gathering of angry people, who apparently accused the men of failing to represent them. Some of the women and the older men had pleaded with the councilmen, demanding to know how they were to support themselves without their goats.³⁴ So as this series of meetings opened, the councilmen did their best to explain to the bureau that few favored goat reduction, and they struggled with officials to find some kind of middle ground.

Albert Sandoval, a representative from the Southern Navajo jurisdiction, hoped to find another solution. He asked whether it would be possible to reduce the goats by eating them and by selling butchered meat to the reservation schools. He figured that if each family ate six head of goats and sheep per month, over the course of a year the Diné could reduce the entire stock population by almost half, not counting the annual reproduction of lambs and kids. Collier's representative at that meeting, James Stewart, replied that such an approach would take too long, and besides normal consumption had never brought a decrease in annual livestock numbers. But Sandoval stood his ground and requested more time to consider the proper course of action, pointedly calling Stewart's attention to the fact that the council's agreement to reduce goats had specified that the people themselves would devise the method for cutting their herds down. Sandoval challenged Stewart, and the crowd greeted his defiance with laughter and applause.³⁵

Goat reduction would come to symbolize stock reduction and would color the image of the entire conservation program. Poor planning of goat reduction hindered Collier's men from the outset. One major problem was the remote locations of many herds, which made it difficult to drive them to railheads. In one notorious incident, BIA stockman Carl Beck purchased 3,500 head of goats and sheep around Navajo Mountain, an utterly remote area on the extreme northwestern edge of the reservation. Before long, Beck realized that the animals would never survive the long trek to the nearest passable road, where they could be picked up by truck. So he herded them into a box canyon, ordered them shot en masse, and left them to the coyotes, buzzards, and crows.³⁶ Stories like this one—substantiated by piles of bones littering the ground—along with rumors of government agents burning goats alive reverberated across the reservation.³⁷

³⁴ Tribal Council Minutes, July 1934, pp. 66 and 79, NNRMC. For descriptions of the large crowds at Crownpoint and, earlier, Tuba City, see Ben Morris, interview by Tom Ration, April 1969, p. 6, 12, Tape 2, Interview 415, Reel 3, American Indian Oral History Transcripts: Navajo (hereafter NOHT), University of New Mexico (hereafter UNM).

³⁵ Tribal Council Minutes, April 1934, pp. 59, 63–4, NNRMC.

³⁶ Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Conditions*, pt. 34, p. 17806, 17988.

³⁷ See, for example, the interviews with Billy Bryant, Pat Sheen, Curly Mustache, and Scott Preston, in *Navajo Livestock Reduction: A National Disgrace*, Ruth Roessel and Broderick H. Johnson, comps. (Chinle, AZ, 1974), 141, 168, 172, 176 and Preston's testimony in Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Conditions*, pt. 34, p. 17916. Government officials never substantiated the story of goats being burned alive (unlike that of goats gunned down in a box canyon), but Curly Mustache, who offered the most specific description, came from Black Mountain, where the gruesome event allegedly took place. People from other areas recall hearing about resistance at Black Mountain, and such an incident would help to explain why an outcry arose from that group and not others.

Diné women owned almost all of these flocks of goats, so they experienced particular anguish as their goats were slaughtered. In oral histories, witnesses describe scene after scene of women weeping over their livestock. Howard Gorman later shared his recollection of events at the Hubbell Trading Post near Ganado: "It was a terrible sight where the slaughtering took place," he told a visitor. "Near what is now the Trading Post was a ditch where sheep intestines were dumped, and these were scattered all over. The women folks were crying, mourning over such a tragic scene."³⁸ These women did not soon forget the powerlessness they felt at the hands of government agents.

Collier first felt their wrath at the ballot box. The cornerstone of his Indian New Deal was the Indian Reorganization Act, a laudable—if sometimes culturally misguided—program to create tribal councils, promote economic development, and foster self-determination. When in 1935 it came time to vote on whether to take part in the IRA, the Navajos narrowly rejected the measure. Many Diné understood the election as a referendum on stock reduction and on Collier himself. Particularly in the eastern and northern jurisdictions of the reservation, where goat reduction had been especially devastating, people registered their anger by voting against the IRA. Upon defeat, Collier himself recognized that women may well have tipped the balance. Many, Collier discovered, had thought that a vote for the act was a vote for continued stock reduction, and he confided that it was this belief that "undoubtedly controlled the votes of a great many of the older Indians, particularly the women."³⁹

Women continued to voice their indignation as conservationists imposed maximum limits on the numbers of livestock each family could graze. By 1936, range managers estimated that the reservation could carry roughly 560,000 sheep and goats, or their equivalent in cattle and horses. (Each sheep or goat was one "sheep unit"; since cattle and horses required more forage, each counted as four or five sheep, respectively.) And yet after years of effort to cut the number of stock, more than 918,000 sheep units remained. The Navajos still needed to bring the stocking pressure down by nearly 40 percent. To do so, administrators established the "maximum permit number" for each family, using a calculation that took into account the number of stock a family could possess if the carrying capacity were divided equally, adjusted by the number of animals that those with even smaller flocks actually owned. Those who had fewer animals could keep all of them but acquire no more. Families with more than the maximum had to

³⁸ Howard Gorman, interview in Roessel and Johnson, comps., *Navajo Livestock Reduction*, 46.

³⁹ Collier to C.E. Faris, 17 June 1935, John Collier Papers, Yale University, New Haven, CT (microfilm), frame 315, reel 13. On the conflation of the IRA and stock reduction, see Roman Hubbell to Collier, 16 June 1936, John Collier Papers, Yale University (microfilm), frame 440, reel 14, and Kay Bennett, *Kaibah: Recollection of a Navajo Girlhood* (Los Angeles, 1964), 234–41.

remove the surplus stock from the reservation either by selling them or (for those few who could afford it, like Chee Dodge) by leasing pastures elsewhere.⁴⁰

Bringing the number of stock down to the land's carrying capacity required an accurate count of the animals, recorded at dipping vats and branding round-ups. This became the official register for a grazing permit system designed to convey or withhold land-use rights forevermore. Administrators wanted an authoritative register of ownership because they had long been frustrated with what they saw as Indian chicanery. In the late 1920s, the BIA had imposed a grazing fee on especially large flocks to no avail. Many bureau employees believed that Navajos had circumvented those regulations by claiming that large herds were in fact clusters of smaller, individually owned flocks of a few hundred head. Those tactics, officials thought, had stymied efforts to levy grazing fees and thereby discourage enormous herds.⁴¹

In truth, of course, each family member actually *did* own her or his own flock and pooled their animals to herd them or take them through the dipping vats. One woman, whom the ethnographer Gladys Reichard called "Dezba," tried to explain Diné conceptions of ownership to a government worker. When Dezba and her family took their sheep to the Ganado vat just before the first stock reduction, an agent told her that, by his count, she had 810 sheep and goats. But Dezba begged to differ. She clarified that they were not all hers: some belonged to her husband, others to her brother, and still more to her two daughters and her two sons. She herself owned only 125 head. But nothing she said convinced the man, and he walked off in disgust.⁴² Government officials, in fact, seemed almost mulishly unwilling to comprehend the complex fabric of the Navajo economy, which wove together communal conceptions of land use and obligations of reciprocity with highly autonomous notions of livestock ownership. That failure to grasp basic property concepts caused a good deal of animosity that might have been avoided.

⁴⁰ "Annual Report, Navajo District, for the Year Ending June 30, 1936," p. 12, folder 56, box 7, Soil Conservation Service (SCS) Records, Center for Southwest Research, Zimmerman Library, UNM; Office of Indian Affairs, "Grazing Regulations," 2 June 1937, UA; Tribal Council Minutes, January 1938, pp. 92–4, Arizona Department of Libraries, Archives, and Public Records (hereafter ADL); Collier to Chee Dodge, 8 September 1938, CCF 62000-1935-301, pt. 6, RG 75, NA. The SCS later revised the carrying capacity to 512,922 to eliminate the Hopi Reservation (District 6) from the calculation.

⁴¹ Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Conditions*, pt. 18, p. 9201, 9209 and E. R. Fryer, "Why the Government Is Trying Navajo Grazing Cases in the Federal Courts," 8 February 1941, p. 8, Navajo Stock Reduction file no. 1, box 13, Collier's Office File, RG 75, NA.

⁴² Gladys A. Reichard, *Dezba: Woman of the Desert* (New York, 1939), 11–3. Although Reichard represented her book as a fictionalized story with composite characters, she also insisted that she "used no incidents or details which are not true" (p. vi). Indeed, Dezba appears to be based largely on Maria Antonia, whose family she studied in *Spider Woman: A Story of Navajo Weavers and Chanters* (New York, 1934).

Instead of crediting actual owners, federal officials assigned possession of an entire family flock to the federally designated "head of household."⁴³ Generally, that person was a man. Only widowed, divorced, or unmarried women could be registered stockowners.⁴⁴ A few married women made it onto the list by taking their sheep and goats through the dipping vats themselves. But their designation did not last long. Take 'Asdzáá Yazzie, for example. She lost her chance at a permit when her husband amended the record to include his sheep, which had been counted erroneously with someone else's flock. On learning of the error, the district supervisor deleted her from the register and issued a permit in her husband's name.⁴⁵ Crediting men with the family flock reflected long-time BIA practices and the patriarchal values of the Mormon superintendent of the Navajo Service, E. R. Fryer, not those of the matricentered Diné. In Fryer's eyes, when a man and a woman ran their flocks together, they became a single economic unit, headed by a man. To his credit, Fryer followed this logic through the twists and turns of Navajo marital relationships. When a couple divorced, the woman reasserted and regained a recognized autonomy.⁴⁶ Even polygamous women who lived apart from their husbands in independent households could gain permits for their flocks.⁴⁷ And yet, when a woman shared her hearth with a man, or even with her natal family, she lost an important measure of her autonomy: her independent grazing rights.

As word spread that the registration of sheep heralded a new and dramatic program for reducing livestock, many Diné became defiant. Resistance flared especially in those districts where large numbers of herds exceeded stingy stock limits, some as low as 61 to 83 sheep units.⁴⁸ In the northern districts, the BIA arrested a handful of stockowners

⁴³ Office of Indian Affairs, "Grazing Regulations for the Navajo and Hopi Reservations," pp. 2–3, folder 12, box 6, Berard Haile Papers, UA.

⁴⁴ See, for example, "Livestock Census, Maximum Limit and Permit Compilation, District 17," recorded in 1937, CCF 62000-1935-301, pt. 4A, Navajo, RG 75, NA. Nothing in the grazing regulations actually defined heads of households as male, but it is clear that officials with the Navajo Service defined them so; see, for example, James Stewart to OIA, 20 December 1946, CCF 301.1 Grazing Permits, box 157, FGD, RG 75, NARA-PR.

⁴⁵ Similarly, officials canceled the permit of a woman (probably a widow) known as Yellow Hair's Wife when they discovered that she was living with David Begody, who received a permit presumably for their combined flock. See C.H. Powers to Willard Brimhall, 26 August 1940, DF 300.10 Permits, and the untitled notes on permits in District 3, DF 850.3 Hearings, both in box 1, 8NS-75-92-092, Range Unit Case Files, 1949–1961, Navajo Service, RG 75, NARA, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver. Also consult "Livestock Census, District 10," NA.

⁴⁶ Guy Sheets to C.H. Powers, 25 November 1940; E.G. Stocks to Fryer, 27 January 1941 (two letters); Sheets to Fryer, 28 January 1941, all in CCF 301 Grazing Permits Returned (1 of 2), box 119, Navajo Area Office, RG 75, NARA-PR.

⁴⁷ Fryer, Memorandum for files, 22 May 1941, CCF 301 (1 of 2), box 119, Navajo Area Office, RG 75, NARA-PR.

⁴⁸ Eric Henderson, "Navajo Livestock Wealth and the Effects of the Stock Reduction Program of the 1930s," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 45 (Winter 1989): 393. More than half of those who exceeded their permits lived in districts 4, 8, 9, 12, and 14, all of which became centers of resistance. Calculated from Livestock Census for districts 1–5, 7–15, 17–18, NA.

and sentenced them to six months in jail for interfering with the round-up of horses and cattle.⁴⁹ The most infamous case involved Hastiin Tso, Mister Big Man, the vice president of the Twin Lakes chapter (a local political and community center), who refused to take his sheep to the dipping vat for the official count. To make an example of Big Man, Fryer asked the tribal court to issue a warrant for his arrest. As Big Man stopped in Gallup on his way home from a protest meeting, three Navajo policemen attempted to take him into custody. When he resisted arrest, the officers beat him with blackjacks and a pistol. The tribal court dismissed the case, in part because the police had been outside their jurisdiction. The story of the attack, nonetheless, lingered in the minds of Diné as a vivid reminder of the power of the state.⁵⁰

Diné also blamed their leaders for failing them. Tall Woman remembered this era with reluctance and regret. Her husband, Frank Mitchell, a renowned healer, or hataalii, and a tribal councilman, had been one of the leaders, and “he and the other leaders really took the brunt of it,” she recalled. “People were very, very angry[,] and they started saying nasty words to all the leaders, blaming them. Even though Frank explained the order came from Washington, for some reason people blamed him. They even threatened to harm him and his children because of it. Those things worried me greatly.” Yet Mitchell himself agreed with the conservationists that overgrazing had nearly denuded much of the land. So “he kept telling us he had to do his job; the People were going to have to listen and obey those instructions. He said if they didn’t, the reservation would have no future; the land would never recover and everything would come to an end.” Even in decades later, she added, “People still talk about the stock reduction and the suffering it caused. In our family, we don’t talk about it very much because it brings back the hardships it caused for Frank . . . and others who had to enforce those orders. It wasn’t right that people blamed them for causing it; the overgrazing did it. But some of the People couldn’t understand that, so they blamed all the leaders, from Washington right on down . . . to the headmen in the local areas.”⁵¹ Mitchell ruefully remembered those times, too. He, himself, had received a permit for only ten sheep and two horses, and yet his neighbors accused him and the rest of the

⁴⁹ Lamar Bedoni, interview, 30 June 1972, p. 1–2, in *Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews*, ed. Dean Sundberg and Fern Charley, Oral History Program, California State University, Fullerton (microfilm) (hereafter OHPCSU) and Narrative Report, May 1941, CCF 13321-1936-032, Eastern District, RG 75, NA.

⁵⁰ David W. Carmody to Dennis Chavez, 6 August 1937, folder 31, box 80; D.W. Roberts to Chavez, 12 August 1937, folder 15, and Statement of Bob Lee, folder 21, both in box 81, all in Chavez Papers, UNM; William A. Brophy to Collier, 29 November 1937, CCF 62000-1935-301, pt. 1, Navajo, RG 75, NA. Also consult Fryer to Collier, 7 August 1937, Morgan-Palmer file, Collier’s Office Files, box 10, RG 75, NA, and Parman, *Navajo New Deal*, 179–80.

⁵¹ Rose Mitchell, *Tall Woman: The Life Story of Rose Mitchell, a Navajo Woman, c. 1874–1977*, ed. Charlotte J. Frisbie (Albuquerque, 2001), 211–2.

council of urging the government to reduce *their* livestock and not their own.⁵² Only a few strong Diné men could weather the impending storm.

Resistance grew as officials implemented the new grazing program. In early 1938, supervisors of the various grazing districts began issuing official certificates granting grazing rights, printed on special “safety paper” in government green and stamped with a red seal. Many Diné rejected these outright. Some refused to accept their permits; others burned them in campfires. At Sheep Springs, Diné men allegedly threatened the range riders who distributed them, and in the northern area around Aneth, men assaulted a range rider while on his route and destroyed the detested documents. Much later, in 1945, violence flared again around Teec Nos Pos, where angry stockowners, including at least one woman, bound and beat government officials.⁵³ Range riders and the Navajo police were part of the problem. Often their unnecessarily rough treatment of stockowners sparked violence, and Fryer did little to restrain them.

But surprisingly few sparks flared, considering how high emotions ran in these years. Indeed, the most common form of protest was the all-American petition drive. At trading posts, chapter houses, day schools, and ceremonial dances, Diné signed petitions denouncing stock reduction, John Collier, and the entire New Deal. As early as 1937, when the official livestock counts began, men and women—thousands of people altogether—gathered at chapter houses to register their dissent. Most could not write, so they marked these petitions with their thumbprints, which since the early 1900s had replaced the traditional “X” for signing important documents. We have little to tell us about these protest meetings, but the thumbprints themselves are suggestive. At each chapter house or trading post, more than 40 percent of those who came to convey their displeasure were women. We can imagine these women in their colorful Pendleton blankets as they waited patiently to make their mark. They likely gossiped with one another and discussed the troubles they had feeding themselves and their children ever since John Collier demanded that they give up their goats. At one chapter house, Bah stood with twelve other women, among them Rachel Tsosie, ‘Asdzáá Łtsoii, and Yił Deezbaa’. John W. Goat was next, but then came five more women eager to make their feelings known. This scenario repeated itself again and again as women

⁵² Frank Mitchell, *Navajo Blessingway Singer: The Autobiography of Frank Mitchell, 1881–1967*, ed. Charlotte J. Frisbie and David P. McAllester (Tucson, 1978), 259.

⁵³ Frank Goldtooth and Billy Bryant, interviews in Roessel and Johnson, *Navajo Livestock Reduction*, 103, 140; Fryer to Collier, 29 June 1938, CCF 62000-1935-301, pt. 1, Navajo, and William Zimmerman to Carl A. Hatch, 14 October 1941, Navajo Stock Reduction file #2, box 13, Collier’s Office Files, both in RG 75, NA. Also see Rudolph Zweifel, statement, n.d., CCF 301 Grazing Permits Returned (1 of 2), box 119, and Hearing concerning Toadcheni Tso [sic], Julius Bainbridge, Chee Wilson, and John Balony, 30 March 1938, and William W. McClellan, Jr., to H.E. Holman, 5 April 1938, both in CCF 301 Grazing Matters (1 of 2), box 120, Navajo Area Office, RG 75. And consult Deposition by Harry Lee Benally, 12 January 1945, Case 2669, Prescott Federal District Court Criminal Case Files, box 56, RG 21, Records of District Courts of the United States, all in NARA-PR.

and men waited their turn to stick their thumbs onto the black pad of ink and express their anger.⁵⁴

Jacob Morgan helped organize at least some of these campaigns, apparently in concert with New Mexico Senator Dennis Chavez. Both men harbored a deep antipathy toward Collier. Educated at Hampton Institute, Morgan resented Collier's tilt toward the leadership of traditional headmen, instead of the products of boarding schools, like himself, and he believed that the move away from assimilation would handicap the Diné in the modern world. Chavez, for his part, viewed Collier's efforts to expand the reservation eastward into the Checkerboard as a threat to his constituency, Hispanic and Anglo-American ranchers.⁵⁵ Because Chavez and Morgan supported the protests, Fryer and others with the Navajo Service dismissed the petition drive out of hand as a political vendetta and no more. Fryer believed that the Navajos had no idea of what they were signing and that the petitions represented the sentiments of "not more than twenty-four people."⁵⁶ It is true that Morgan clearly influenced and perhaps orchestrated these meetings. And yet, it was a mistake to disregard the Diné as merely dupes in a political struggle. Several of the preambles to these petitions specified that the people gathered specifically to voice their objections to stock reduction. And in a few locations, women and men offered personal notes attesting to their heartfelt refusal to allow the government to "execute" their horses or take more of their stock. Even though people may have signed after listening to a rousing diatribe against Collier and his New Deal program, their sentiments were no less sincere.

As range riders began to distribute permits, Diné were stunned at the extremely low numbers of livestock that the government allowed. In one heavily overgrazed district near the eastern Checkerboard, a family could own no more than 61 sheep units including their horses, each of which counted as five units. About one-third of the population, some with as few as 38 sheep and goats, would have to reduce their flocks if they kept 1 horse for each family member. Three other districts allowed fewer than 90 sheep units; even the most generous permits authorized only 280.⁵⁷ These limits, of course, reflected the amount of available forage and the population of stock-owning families. They were low largely because overgrazing had severely damaged easily erodible land or because the soils made grasses lean already. But the small permits came as a staggering shock, nonetheless.

⁵⁴ The Chavez Papers are filled with these petitions, spanning the period from 1937 through the early 1940s. See especially boxes 81 and 82, UNM. My specific discussion here draws on petitions from Rock Dale [sic], Rock Point, Twin Lakes, St. Michaels, Hunters Point, and Red Rock, as well as two collections of more personal expressions, one from Sweetwater and one that begins with a note from Tom Harvey and Pauline and Sarah Barton, location unknown. These names were written phonetically by the person who labeled the thumbprints; I have regularized the spelling here.

⁵⁵ Parman offers the most thorough account of this political battle in *Navajo New Deal*.

⁵⁶ E.R. Fryer, interview by Donald Parman, 21 July 1970, p. 35, Interview No. 890, Reel 4, NOHT.

⁵⁷ Livestock Census for LMUs 1-5, 7-15, and 17-18, NA.

Diné did not take this drastic reduction of their sheep quietly. A delegation from Oljato, Navajo Mountain, and Kayenta raised money to go to Washington, D. C., where they arranged an audience with Eleanor Roosevelt, whom they begged to intervene. One of the delegates, a woman named 'Asdzáá Nez, explained to Roosevelt through an interpreter: "Our sheep are our children, our life, and our food."⁵⁸ This theme of providing for families echoed in the words of women across the reservation. One woman wept as she vented her anger in 1940. Ever since Collier came to the reservation, she told sociologist Floyd Pollock, "we have seen nothing but trouble." The loss of her sheep meant that she could barely feed her family of six children. "This may sound awful for me to say," she added, "but I really hate John Collier. . . . When I think of what he has done to us, I realize that I could even kill him myself just like I could kill a mad dog. I don't like to feel about anyone the way I feel toward John Collier, but he has ruined our home, our lives, and our children, and I will hate him until the day I die."⁵⁹

The summer of 1943 opened a new chapter in range management on the Navajo Reservation. The Tribal Council, chaired by Chee Dodge, passed a series of resolutions that repudiated stock reduction and much of the conservation program.⁶⁰ One Diné woman was so moved by the council's courage that she asked to speak before the council. Congratulating the delegates, she exulted, "I have always wanted our Navajo people to come together and unite[,] and today I believe they have done so."⁶¹ When Collier took office, the Diné had lacked a strong political organization. Now they proved united against New Deal conservation.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Willow Roberts, *Stokes Carson: Twentieth-Century Trading on the Navajo Reservation* (Albuquerque, 1987), 108–9. Also see Pearl Phillips, interview in Sundberg and Charley, *Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews*, OHPCSU. Roosevelt accepted Collier's explanation that reduction was necessary and, at his urging, supported an irrigation project to expand agriculture on the reservation. See her "My Day" columns for 12 and 18 June 1941, Navajo Stock Reduction file 1, box 13, Collier's Office Files, RG 75, NA.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Floyd Allen Pollock, *A Navajo Confrontation and Crisis* (Tsaile, AZ, 1984), 96–7.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Navajo Tribal Council, Window Rock, 9–11 July 1943, pp. 38–9, 63, 72, 98, 103, ADL. Collier vetoed the council's resolution, and James Stewart, by then head of the Navajo Service, continued to enforce grazing regulations throughout much of the reservation. Nonetheless, the council's vote marked the beginning of the end of stock reduction. Felix Cohen, the Associate Solicitor for the Department of the Interior, wrote that the legality of the grazing regulations rested on the consent of the Navajo Tribal Council, which had, in essence, withdrawn that consent. Based on that opinion, Secretary of the Interior Julius Krug terminated the stock reduction program in 1947. See Minutes of the Navajo Tribal Council, Window Rock, 9–11 July 1943, pp. 38–9, 63, 72, 98, 103, ADL; Stewart to Collier, 19 July 1943; W. Barton Greenwood to Chee Dodge, 30 July 1943; Harold L. Ickes to Chee Dodge, 30 October 1943; Stewart to Walter V. Woehlke, 2 May 1944; Cohen, Memorandum for the Solicitor, 24 September 1943, and Cohen to Mr. Flanery, 22 February 1944, all in CCF 62000-1935-301, pt. 6, Navajo, RG 75, NA; Krug to Acting COIA, 26 January 1948, CCF 301 Lee Muck, box 120, Navajo Area Office, RG 75, NARA-PR.

⁶¹ Tribal Council Minutes, 9–11 July 1943, p. 36–7, ADL.

Diné defiance brought an end to stock reduction and the enforcement of grazing restrictions. The resistance included not only famous leaders like Jacob Morgan, but also the countless women and men who stood in line to express their thoughts with their thumbs. This rebellion against the conservation program would live on in collective memory. As grandmothers and grandfathers passed down stories to their grandchildren, few would recall Collier's effort to lay the groundwork for Native nationalism, preserve religious freedom, protect Navajo landowners on the Checkerboard, or even open up wells. Instead, they would reflect on the days when they had lots of sheep and curse Collier for destroying their pastoral way of life.

Ruth Roessel, a Diné educator and political leader, has done as much as anyone to keep those memories of environmental injustice alive. In 1974, she published a collection of oral histories with the provocative title, *Navajo Livestock Reduction: A National Disgrace*. In that book, she argued that the cruelty and callousness of stock reduction was an injustice that Americans had yet to acknowledge. "Americans deplore injustice and gross violations of human rights," she observed in her foreword. "We wring our hands and demand congressional action" for the protection, she went on, of those rights in foreign lands. "Yet, within the past 30 to 40 years, one of the most devastating attacks on individual and group rights took place on the Navajo Indian Reservation with hardly a murmur of protest. In this instance, as in most cases of the type, Americans' defense was, 'We didn't know what happened.'"⁶² Her pointed subtitle—*A National Disgrace*—and Broderick Johnson's illustrations depicting violence, powerlessness, and grim scenes of animals burned alive made a strong political statement. As their recollections make clear, the Diné experienced stock reduction in different ways, depending on where they lived, their degree of geographical isolation, their social position, their wealth, their gender, their education, and so forth, and their *personal* memories of that era reflect those differences. But the heavy-handedness with which the federal government carried out this program helped produce an overpowering *collective* memory of terror, betrayal, loss, and grief. That collective memory continues to complicate efforts to conserve Navajo rangelands.

Of course, Collier had the best of intentions when he launched his most ambitious New Deal program on the Navajo Reservation. Livestock, drought, and arroyo-cutting rains had gnawed the land, and as he grasped this serious threat, he felt an almost messianic impulse to act quickly before the area became another Dust Bowl. Adding to his sense of urgency had been the sudden availability of federal conservation funds, which he rightly feared might soon evaporate.⁶³ Collier intended to save Navajo life, both literally and culturally, by saving Navajo land. And yet, as the old adage goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Collier only belatedly, and imperfectly, comprehended the meanings livestock held for Diné, and he never fully fathomed long-established patterns of stock ownership. It

⁶² Roessel and Johnson, *Navajo Livestock Reduction*, ix.

⁶³ Tribal Council Minutes, July 1933, p. 19, and July 1934, p. 80, both in NNRMC and Collier, *From Every Zenith: A Memoir; and Some Essays on Life and Thought* (Denver, 1963), 219–20.

is not trivial that he and the conservationists always spoke of the Navajo pastoralist using the male pronoun; stockowners were sheep *men*, even though the commissioner was well aware that Navajo women owned their own sizeable herds. By controlling their own means of production and unmediated access to matrilineal grazing areas, women enjoyed economic autonomy and a good measure of power within their families and communities. Women, moreover, stood at the center of a distinctive social landscape in which their opinions actually mattered. When conservationists imposed measures to reduce stock without even consulting these women, they provoked a resistance that would, in the long run, foster chronic erosion. In the 1990s, a Diné man with the Navajo Department of Forestry told the ethno-geographer Patrick Pynes that most people now will not “touch grazing issues on the reservation with a ten foot pole.”⁶⁴

The New Deal conservation program could not possibly have worked as long as policymakers ignored the values and ideas of the Navajo people. When conservationists high-handedly imposed measures that were profoundly antithetical to Diné culture, they helped begin the process of their program’s unraveling. That is perhaps the central lesson of this episode in the environmental history of the American West. In our quest to restore ecological diversity and conserve land, we cannot ignore the people who make their living from it. That constitutes environmental injustice, which—as this story suggests—also has ecological consequences.

In their crusade to save the land, federal agencies rendered the Navajos nearly powerless over their lives. And that is an essential characteristic of environmental injustice. As with the struggle of the Western Shoshones against nuclear testing on their reservation or the efforts of the Hualapai to retain rights to the Colorado River, the underlying issues are power and control.⁶⁵ Notice how the Navajo story differs from that of Anglo ranchers, who reluctantly came under the Taylor Grazing Act during the same period. Those ranchers gained a powerful voice in the administration of public lands, which they themselves managed, and thus controlled, through local committees.⁶⁶ By contrast, federal conservationists managed every aspect of the Navajo range program. The resulting economic and cultural impacts of stock reduction and grazing management proved reprehensible, a shock from which the Diné are only now beginning to recover. In their myopic focus on restoring the land, New Deal conservationists lost sight of the fact that a truly sustainable relationship with the natural world requires an ethical relationship with the land, with those who people it, and with the cultures that give it meaning.

⁶⁴ Cited in Patrick Gordon Pynes, “Erosion, Extraction, and Reciprocity: An Ethno/Environmental History of the Navajo Nation’s Ponderosa Pine Forests” (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2000), 172.

⁶⁵ David Rich Lewis, “Native Americans and the Environment: A Survey of Twentieth-Century Issues,” *American Indian Quarterly* 19 (Summer 1995): 423–50.

⁶⁶ Joe A. Stout, Jr., “Cattlemen, Conservationists, and the Taylor Grazing Act,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 45 (October 1970): 311–32.