“The Disorganized Tribe”
Navajo Resistance to the Progressive Ideal 1933-1935

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Today
we leave my mother’s hogan,
my mother’s winter hogan.
We leave the shelter of its
rounded walls.
We leave its friendly center fire.
We drive our sheep to the mountains.
For the sheep
there is grass and shade
and water,
flowing water
and water standing still,
in the mountains.
There is no wind.
There is no sand
up there.

- “Today”: An Excerpt from a Bilingual Navajo-English Reader, 1942
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Of course, any errors are my own.
Introduction

In June of 1935, John Collier was irate. The eager Commissioner of Indian Affairs had done everything right to benefit the Native Americans: he had crusaded for a progressive, culturally pluralist approach to Indian policy, convinced Congress to restore tribal sovereignty through the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), and even allowed Native American tribes to vote on whether the legislation would apply to them. Now he witnessed the astounding repudiation of his administration, as the Navajo, or Diné, had rejected the IRA referendum. He must have wondered how they could justify voting against a new constitution, new Tribal Council authority, and a large federal credit program. Why, despite his hard work, had the largest tribe voted to remain disorganized? The Commissioner found it incomprehensible, but to the average Diné the rejection was not such a surprise. After all, this was the man who had killed their sheep.

Between 1933 and 1935, the federal government wrested some three hundred thousand horses, goats, and sheep from the Diné people. Some were demanded and given up voluntarily, some were sold for a pittance, some were extracted coercively through threats of incarceration, and others still were shot outright. As Ernest Nelson, a medicine man and former Chapter president, told interviewers in the 1970s, “before stock reduction sheep were bleating everywhere,” but afterwards they were only bleeding. “The government men didn’t know what to do with all those goats; so they drove them down into a canyon near Navajo Mountain and shot them in masses. There were 1,800 goats in that canyon, and, today, you can still see all those bones scattered about ‘Adah’ooldoni (Canyon Trail).” Today, stock reductions remain seared into Diné collective memory as a gross injustice committed against them by the federal

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1 Figure based on dipping records from Committee on Indian Affairs, Survey of Conditions, pt. 34, p. 17806.
government. Diné Bikeyah, the Diné name for the reservation, was marked by violence, and the blood was on John Collier’s hands. As J. Barton recalled, “Mr. Collier has set out to reduce their stock throughout the whole Navajo reservation and that is the reason why that all the Navajo people don’t like him. . . Mr. Collier took everything away from the Navajo people.”

Historical explanations for why the Diné rejected the Indian Reorganization Act vary widely, depending on the historian’s sympathy for New Dealer and Diné perspectives. For his part, John Collier was quick to connect the referendum results with stock reductions. Days after the votes were tallied, he sent an open letter to the Diné people which barely concealed his rage, bemoaning the fact that “a large number of those who voted against the Reorganization Act did so because they thought there were voting against stock-reduction, and because they had been told, and believed, that if the Navajos adopted the Reorganization Act, then their sheep and goats would be confiscated.” Some historians essentially agree with Collier, attributing the vote result to a misinformation campaign by Diné Tribal Councilman J.C. Morgan. Others pay Morgan less heed, arguing instead that the failure was a legitimate repudiation of the livestock reduction policy.

I argue that the IRA result in Diné Bikeyah is best explained by consistent federal government misunderstanding of how political power was distributed on the reservation. The government’s ignorance became a tragic flaw, rather than a predictable misidentification, in the context of the stock reductions of 1933-1935, which fomented Diné antagonism. As anger ran high, Diné political factions united to repudiate government intervention in Diné Bikeyah. Most notably, the interests of traditional female leaders whose power and status was derived from their

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4 John Collier, “A Message to the Navajo People Through the Superintendent From Commissioner Collier”, June 21, 1935. Thomas Dodge Papers, Box 1 Folder 13, Arizona State University (ASU).
livestock converged with the interests of assimilationist Diné men who resented the government’s cultural preservationist stance. This convergence happened right under the nose of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) officials, whose own cultural biases left them unprepared. They expected to find a homogenous, paternalist tribe with democratic principles enshrined in the Tribal Council and local Chapter House system; instead, they encountered a political tradition of consultation, discussion, and consensus, within a culture of gender equality.

The confrontation was thus avoidable, and quite unexpected at the dawn of the New Deal in 1933. Before John Collier’s ascension, federal policy toward Native Americans had been defined by assimilationism – an American supremacist belief that Native American cultures were primitive, and should be erased by reeducation in American ways. For many tribes, this approach culminated in the Dawes Act of 1887, which divided communal lands into individual allotments with the intention of converting Native Americans into smallholding farmers. Although Diné Bikeyah was never allotted under the Dawes Act, Diné confrontation with federal assimilationism came earlier. Between 1862-1868, they were forcibly interned at Hwéeldi, or Bosque Redondo at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, where the government hoped they would adopt farming.

But 1933 heralded a new era, one where those in power spoke of preserving and protecting Native American cultures. Amongst eager New Dealers and Diné people alike, the hope of this coming change was placed in John Collier, an activist-turned-bureaucrat whom Franklin Roosevelt named Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Collier’s progressive agenda was an ambitious crusade against assimilationism, founded on his commitment to cultural pluralism and tribal political sovereignty. With these goals in mind he crafted the Wheeler-Howard Act, or Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) to create a new charter system between tribes and the
government which would increase tribal power and reverse the Dawes allotment system. If it represented such a positive change from both New Dealer and Diné perspectives, why then did the Diné nation reject Collier’s plan?

Historians have been divided on this question. Donald Parman gave it the first serious consideration in *The Navajos and The New Deal*. He argued that the referendum failed because J.C. Morgan, a pro-assimilation Diné missionary, had encouraged a false connection between the IRA and more livestock reductions. According to Parman, average illiterate Diné people thought they were voting about keeping their animals because Morgan was a compelling public speaker who intentionally misled them. Parman is sympathetic to the New Dealers, decrying any Diné resistance as a missed opportunity for their improvement. Like the BIA officials at the time, Parman wished the Diné had understood the threat overstocking posed to their range, and that they recognized the government’s plan as a genuine effort to raise them out of poverty. Despite his apologetic orientation, Parman’s detailed narrative of the build up to the referendum vote is unparalleled.5

Richard White’s seminal *Roots of Dependency* provides the sharpest rebuttal to Parman. He argues that the government only paid attention to conditions on the Diné range for fear that eroded Diné soil would silt the Colorado River and threaten the Hoover Dam, then under construction. White notes that J.C. Morgan’s assimilationism made him a natural enemy to Collier, but that Morgan’s campaign only gained traction by appealing to nascent anti-government sentiment which resulted from stock reductions. In further contrast to Parman, White portrays the Diné as victims of government imperialism, he does not venture to explain how Diné people organized resistance to the IRA.6

Quite recently, Marsha Weisiger has attempted to reconcile these two viewpoints in *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*. Weisiger offers an incredibly nuanced argument to which this paper is greatly indebted. She casts the tragedy as one of cultural misunderstanding, although her sympathies clearly lie with the Diné. In her work, Diné actors did not yield passively to Collier’s plans, but actively obstructed their advancement because of fundamental ideological differences and a century long suspicion of federal agents. She pays special attention to the role women played in subverting New Dealer demands, and makes the best use of Diné oral history collections to date. I also use Diné voices as much as possible in reconstructing their perspective. For Weisiger, the oral histories explain how Diné memory and history intertwine; she is most effective in discerning how Diné and government understandings of climate history and range conditions could differ so widely.

Unfortunately, her delicate treatment of Diné intellectual life is not matched by an equal analysis of the New Dealers, leaving the impression that government policy came out of an intellectual void. Her sympathy for the Diné also unfairly casts New Dealers as malevolent. Weisiger pulls too far away from Parman, and her portrayal of government officials lacks subtlety as a result. Government officials had their own logics, and their own truths, which are also deserving of historical contextualization. While the Diné were the ultimate victims, there is no classic villain.

I agree with Weisiger that government officials misunderstood Diné culture, but it was a more concrete political misunderstanding which led to their defeat. By continually consulting only the Tribal Council, white traders, and their own anthropologists, BIA officials completely missed the modernizers and women whose influence was slightly outside their gaze. When these interests converged in opposition to the IRA, New Dealers had little chance at victory; they did

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not understand how Diné decisions were made, and so failed to make their case by default. I use oral histories to explain how Diné organized behind the scenes, digging into the subtle ways a variety of interviewees explained their opposition to the government and their votes on the IRA referendum. This approach plays to the strengths of oral accounts – chronological accuracy is not as important as a sense of how people remember feeling about certain events, and how they recall their fading trust in the federal government.

Between 1933 and 1935, immense opportunity for meaningful and mutually beneficial change was terribly squandered. John Collier was bested by a conflict of ends and means: the intellectual aspiration to encourage and support the diversity of communities within America, pitted against the practical New Deal emphasis on efficiency and scientific management, whose implementation begs for authoritarian leadership. The case of the Diné nation during the New Deal is an extreme example of what can happen when culturally distinct communities within America encounter this impossible contradiction. By definition small communities have less power than the federal government, and so must suffer the consequences of bad policy no matter how progressive the original aim. This paper is at once a case study of federal failure with implications beyond the circumstances discussed, and a particular history of the Diné people’s organized resistance.

Part I focuses on John Collier and the New Dealer reorientation of Indian Affairs. I look at the intellectual roots of Collier’s approach, and lay the groundwork to explain why he continued to pursue livestock reductions in the wake of so much Diné anguish. Parts II and III give historical background in the religious, political, and economic lives of the Diné between 1868-1933, with special attention to women. I look at the range of Diné identities, from practitioners of traditional cosmology to evangelical Protestants, boarding school educated men
to elderly female shepherds. I look closely at the formation of identity in each case, mapping out the historical roots of the particular constellation of power which proved so difficult for Collier to navigate. These sections explain what exactly the Diné were defending when they rejected the Indian Reorganization Act. I end Part III by introducing J.C. Morgan, and the constituency he represented in Diné Bikeyah.

Part IV explains the New Deal’s failure, starting with a chronological exploration of the livestock reductions from 1933-1935. Here, I focus on the political tactics employed by BIA officials, and how they missed real centers of Diné power. Part IV ends with a section about the IRA vote itself, which leads to my concluding analysis of the efficacy of the Diné resistance, and some final questions about the relationship between American progressivism and the Diné nation.

Finally, a note about terminology: The Diné have been one of the most studied communities by every branch of social and natural sciences over the course of American history, but few researchers have themselves been members of the tribe. This imbalance has generated an entirely biligáana (non-Diné) vocabulary to discuss aspects of their cultural, religious, and political life. I have tried wherever possible to use Diné words to describe Diné concepts. For a full list of the Diné words with English translations, see the glossary which follows the conclusion.
John Collier and the New Deal

“Indian societies must and can be discovered in their continuing existence, or regenerated, or set into being de novo – and made use of.” – John Collier

John Collier was considered a radical choice by Washington elites when Franklin Roosevelt appointed him Commissioner of Indian Affairs. His time spent in the West made him an outsider, and his experience with social science, rather than policy making, meant that his administrative capacity remained untested. However, Harold Ickes, Roosevelt’s pick for Secretary of the Interior, supported the choice. He wrote in defense of Collier, “I want someone in that office who is the advocate of the Indians.” This sentiment indicated a major shift in federal policy toward the Native Americans. Previous administrations had focused on Indian land rights, not individual welfare, and the BIA had “become so involved in the property rights of the Indians that the average Red Man had become subordinated to his property.”

The tide began to shift just before Franklin Roosevelt’s election, when then-Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work commissioned the Brookings Institute to compile a comprehensive report on conditions in Native American communities, partially in response to pressure from Collier and the American Indian Defense Association (AIDA). The result was published in 1928 under the title, “The Problem of Indian Administration,” but was more widely known as the Meriam Report, for the investigative director Lewis Meriam. The report was bluntly disparaging of BIA, arguing Native Americans would never be Jeffersonian farmers, and the Dawes Act had clearly failed. In the direct language of the report, “It almost seems as if the government assumed that some magic in individual ownership of property would in itself prove an educational civilizing factor, but unfortunately this policy has for the most part operated in the opposite

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direction.”9 Meriam recommended instead that BIA become directly involved in community development, economic stimulation, and day school construction. In order to improve conditions, the Bureau also needed a much larger budget, more qualified employees, and a “maximum decentralization of operation.”10 These recommendations provided empirical support for criticisms Collier had been making for years, and would in time form the core of his agenda as Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

John Collier was personally endowed with tremendous control, as his office held the federal government’s plenary power over the Native Americans. Each aspect of the Wheeler-Howard or Indian Reorganization Act, can be traced back to him, either as a long term goal from his activist days in the 1920s, or as a government priority he championed with equal vigor as Commissioner. His involvement with the Diné was particularly intimate, since he personally visited the reservation seventeen times between 1933-1938.11 More than any other federal employee, his name stuck in Diné collective memory long after the New Deal ended, and he became the primary, even sole symbol of frustration and anguish toward the federal government during the period. When asked by interviewers to recount their experiences in the 1930s, Diné people always mention him by name, even in cases where time has blurred chronology and obscured other faces. Collier’s ideas were not unique in his time, but he wielded unparalleled power to apply them in Diné Bikeyah.

Collier had been an effective and persistent advocate for Native Americans throughout the 1920s. In the beginning of the decade, he worked with the Taos and Zuni Puebloans against two federal assaults on their sovereignty, the Bursam Bill and a BIA crackdown on spiritual

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10 Meriam, The problem of Indian Administration, 29.
dancing. Debated in Congress in 1922, the Bursam Bill was a retrograde plan to increase state court jurisdiction on the Pueblos and settle longstanding land disputes. Puebloans correctly interpreted it as an attempt to take their land and reduce their autonomy. Through education campaigns in the Pueblos and by attracting national media attention, Collier helped defeat the Bursam Bill and “remained the BIA’s constant gadfly for the next decade.”

In 1923 he founded the American Indian Defense Association, which successfully lobbied Congress to hold investigative hearings into conditions on reservations, and provided emergency hay to Diné shepherds in the harsh winter of 1931-1932. As a critic of the sitting Commissioner, he fiercely defended Native American rights.

Raised in Atlanta, Collier attended Columbia College in New York in 1902, and immediately became involved with progressive intellectual life and questions of organic community in the city before World War I. He attended Mabel Dodge’s weekly salons, exchanging ideas with such luminaries as Margaret Sanger, Emma Goldman, Walter Lippman and Bill Haywood. During his time in New York, Collier was involved in several projects to empower the urban poor though community building, including a failed attempt to resettle unemployed immigrants in his native Georgia. He became heavily involved with the People’s Institute at Cooper Union, which “was formed expressly to counteract this isolating of the self within the crowd. The People’s Institute was seeking to bring to the common folk of New York, as we now in retrospect realize, what is known as the gemeinschaft mode of life (the sufficing brotherhood, within innumerable local communities which are moved by shared purpose.)” For

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13 Weisiger, Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country, 163.
15 Philp, John Collier's Crusade for Indian reform, 7-9.
Collier, organic community would be the individual’s salvation from social chaos of the industrialized world. Collier reflected in 1963 that his time at the People’s Institute shaped his general outlook, forming the question which defined his career: “Can such mechanisms for community existence be re-created within the socio-economic order which engulfs us now, deeper and always deeper; engulfs us in its denial of all order except that imposed by industrialism and militarism, intermixed with government authority?”\(^\text{16}\)

This question, as Stephen Kunitz points out, was rooted in the major challenge to classical liberalism which intellectuals in the 1920s sought to address. Deeply worried about the increased atomization of society caused by industrialization and urbanization, many thinkers took a conservative tact, celebrating “the idea of communities in which everyone knew his position and understood his reciprocal obligations to everyone else.”\(^\text{17}\) Indeed, Kenneth Philp calls Collier “essentially a conservative” who “looked to preindustrial cultures, not rigid social doctrines to discover the secret of a democratic communal form of existence.”\(^\text{18}\) This approach actually put Collier at the forefront of progressive anthropological thought.

In this context, it is hardly a surprise that Collier and his major biographers refer to Collier’s “discovery” of Native American peoples, specifically Southwestern Puebloan people in Taos, as their lifestyles appealed to his idealization of cooperative communal living. During the Great War, he spent two years living alternately in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Taos, New Mexico, where Mabel Dodge had relocated in 1919. Dodge had married Tony Luhan, a Taos Puebloan with whom Collier would become close friends. Like so many of his progressive contemporaries in New York, Collier became disillusioned by the catastrophe of World War I, and sought both physical and intellectual refuge.

\(^\text{16}\) Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 93-94. Collier is referencing Tönnies.
\(^\text{18}\) Philp, *John Collier's crusade for Indian reform*, xiii.
In the Taos Pueblo, Collier found “a new, even wildly new hope for the Race of Man,” because their institutions had “survived repeated and immense historical shocks, and which were going right on in the production of states of mind, attitudes of mind, earth-loyalties and human loyalties, amid a context of beauty which suffused all the life of the group.” Collier encountered a living example of his ideal society in Taos, and up to the five years before his death he maintained, “it might be that only the Indians, among the peoples of this hemisphere at least, were still the possessors and users of the fundamental secret of human life- the secret of building great personality through the instrumentality of social institutions.” In the October 1922 issue of The Survey magazine, he called the Taos Pueblo his “Red Atlantis.”

Robert Dorman, historian of the regionalist movement during the Progressive and New Deal periods, draws attention to the intellectual roots of Collier’s utopian idealization of Southwestern Native Americans. Dorman writes,

The recourse to American Indian civilization was in itself a hallmark of the severity of the interwar cultural crisis. Implicitly and explicitly, the Native American literature, narrative histories, and anthropological studies produced during the 1920s and early 1930s reflected the tragedy of modernization, not its progress. In terms of the frontier myth, modernization had heretofore always meant the triumph of a superior white civilization over barbaric, paganistic redskins. This latter view was turned on its head by the failure of progressive liberalism to confront World War I. The potential for destruction and chaos in the modern, industrialized world shocked progressives, who began to see Native Americans as victims rather than inferiors. Collier underwent the same transformation as he experienced the shaky transition from turn-of-the-century Progressivism to New Deal liberalism.

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19 Collier, *From Every Zenith*, 126.
Anthropology helped define the contours of his approach. Prominent anthropologists later reflected that the Bureau of Indian Affairs was at the forefront of applying anthropology to social policy. Relying on the work of Franz Boaz and his students, Collier became a proponent of cultural pluralism, or celebration of the diversity of cultures, rather than a more traditionally hierarchical schema which asserted the supremacy of white, industrialized cultures. During Collier’s tenure, legions of social scientists swarmed the reservation, including anthropologists, to aid range control and soil conservation efforts. In an interview for the American Indian Oral History collection, E.R. Smith recalled Hugh Calkins, regional conservator in the Soil Erosion Service, bringing six to eight anthropologists to educate the staff about Diné life.22

Collier also embodied a self-assurance amongst the bureaucrats that their interventions were justified because they were guided by such good intentions. When defending Collier’s appointment to that position in 1932, Ickes wrote, “The whites can take care of themselves, but the Indians need some one to protect them from exploitation. I want a man who will respect their customs and have a sympathetic point of view with reference to their culture.”23 Here, Ickes exemplified the paternalism under girding the new BIA policy. For all the rhetoric of cultural pluralism, the New Dealers never considered the implications of the great power differential between themselves and the Diné, probably because on some level they still thought they were members of a more advanced civilization. They did not recognize how having more power meant that they could impose culture as well as policy, because they did not consider their plans to be culturally contingent.

To his way of thinking, Native American cultures were models of alternative social

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22 E.R. Smith, Interview by Donald Parman, June 1979, p. 7-8, Interview 642, reel 4 AIOHC.
arrangements whose practices could set an example for American society.\textsuperscript{24} The clear implication, for which later historians and activists would criticize New Deal Indian policy, was that the reformers were acting out of self interest, not concern or compassion. The title of one of Collier’s publications from 1934—"United States Indian Administration as a Laboratory of Ethnic Relations"—does add credence to this argument. Collier’s time in Taos cannot be totally discounted, but it is indicative of the way his high ideals would later clash with his method of implementing change. When dealing with the Diné in the 1930s, his would struggle to match his rhetoric with equally progressive action.

Still, Collier’s ascension was the first time real change seemed possible since before 1862. Collier’s reputation as a fierce advocate energized Diné Bikeyah. In the words of a Gallup Independent headline from January 23, 1933, “Navajos Back John Collier,” and in early 1933 they had plenty to celebrate.\textsuperscript{25} According to Western historian Richard Lowitt, tribal funding had been reduced from $500 million in 1887 to $12 million in 1933, but Collier made increased expenditure one of his first priorities. On July 7, 1933, the Gallup Independent explained, “Announcement of the two billion dollars and more program for public works on the Navajo reservation centering about Gallup left Indian agents astounded, but what really set jaws to wagging was the assertion by Commissioner Collier that allotment of road funds would be equally as liberal.”\textsuperscript{26}

So it was with enthusiasm that Tom Dodge, then chairman of the Diné Tribal Council, welcomed John Collier to the first Tribal Council meeting since his appointment as Commissioner in July 1933. Dodge praised Collier as “a man who has constantly raised his voice

\textsuperscript{25} Gallup Independent, “Navajos Back John Collier,” Monday Jan. 23, 1933 from Donald Parman Papers, Folder 31 Box 2, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico. (CSR-UNM).
\textsuperscript{26} Richard Lowitt, \textit{The New Deal and the West. The West in the twentieth century}. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 123; Gallup Independent, July 7, 1933 page 4 Parman Papers Box 3, Folder 31, CSR-UNM.
on behalf of the Indian nations,” and told the gathered Diné onlookers, “we all hope and trust that at last the Indian will get not only a new deal but a new square deal; and now friends, I will present to you the ‘Plumed Knight’ of the Indian cause, Mr. Commissioner.” The crowd must have been pleased with Collier’s response as well, as he promised to “do nothing of importance out here except in consultation with you and in line with your own expressed views and wishes.” It was an easy promise to make, and even easier to break considering the power of his office.

Years earlier, when Collier was living at Mabel Dodge’s artist colony in Taos, D. H. Lawrence foresaw the likely results of such a contradiction between goals and relative power. Having observed Collier’s interactions with Puebloans as he campaigned on their behalf, the eminent British novelist astutely presaged “that [Collier] would destroy the Indians by ‘setting the claws of his own benevolent volition into them.’” In retrospect, some Diné expressed regret at not recognizing the clash that lay ahead. Ben Morris put it simply, “the Navajo people were pretty rich on sheep and so time came on, we just hear of him coming. All the time we thought that he was a nice kind man to help us, we didn’t even hear nothing of what he was going to help us with.”

Collier’s approach to Indian Affairs was also heavily guided by a new wave in environmental policy, which emphasized scientific land management, rather than mixed use. During Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency, environmental conservation had become an institutionalized part of the executive bureaucracy, with Gifford Pinchot’s conversion of the Division of Forestry into the US Forest Service under the Department of the Interior. A new

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27 Minutes of the Navajo Tribal Council, Fort Wingate, 7 July 1933, p. 2, Thomas Dodge Papers, Box 3 Folder 2, Labriola Center, Hayden Library, Arizona State University. Tempe.
28 Philp, John Collier's crusade for Indian Reform, 24.
29 Ben Morris, Interview by Ration, April 1969, p. 2, Interview 415, reel 3, AIOHC.
conservationism emerged, focusing on “rational planning to promote efficient development and use of all natural resources.” This “gospel of efficiency,” a hallmark of Progressive era federal policy in general, led to increased federal regulation of public lands, including the first efforts to require permits for grazing. With the beginning of the New Deal, the gospel of efficiency could finally be brought to bear on Native American lands.

Practically speaking, experts were needed to bring nature under human control. Environmental historian Samuel Hayes articulated the connection between conservationism and professionalization of the executive bureaucracy in his *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*. Hayes wrote that at the heart of conservationism was “the view that experts alone should make resource decisions.” Historian Sarah Phillips explained further that “housed within a more protected executive setting, a new professional class of foresters, hydrologists, and geologists attempted to protect the supply of the nation’s resources while harvesting those resources for sustained economic growth.” In other words, New Deal conservationism was empowered by faith that more scientifically organized land management would revive the national economy, and a legion of new specialists were called upon to conduct the work.

The same was true on the Dine reservation, although neither Hayes nor Phillips discusses Indian Affairs. Like his peers, Collier was seduced by the apparent objectivity of the scientific approach to land management, and it likewise made broad claims toward “nonmaterialistic values” which appealed to him from his work in New York and Taos. Collier was taken by the “belief that social order was a result of intelligent social organization and rational procedures for

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guiding social and economic life.”35 New Dealers considered it the duty of the state to “preside benignly” over this reorganization.36

When these ideas became policy, however, the ends necessary to achieve them counteracted their good intentions. In order to achieve intelligent organization, power had to be centralized, and Collier’s orders had to be carried out exactly. This directly contradicted the spirit in which his policies were conceived, especially his stated emphasis on devolving power from BIA back to tribal councils, and reinstating some measure of tribal autonomy. Comparing livestock policy on and off the reservation bears out this claim. According to Donald Worster, cattle growers opted not to be included in the new Agricultural Adjustment Administration’s commodity program, which paid producers in exchange for reduced output. In other words, the cattlemen in 1933 decided not to have their herds reduced, and the government obliged. The Diné did not have that luxury.

The sheer number of specialists who descended on Diné Bikeyah was extraordinary, but it is clear that they did not always know what they were doing. Joe Kerley, a trader from Kayenta, wrote a scathing open letter to John Collier in 1938, in which he remembered,

The reservation swarmed with ‘experts’ from all over the nation; agronomists from Vermont, great engineers from Georgia, soil erosion experts from Harvard, sociologists from Columbia, and other social workers to teach the Navajos the ‘play spirit.’ A simple, primitive people were dazed, bewildered as they watched these experts, these incomplete organisms flying backwards through space none of whom could tell gamma grass from colo weed nor a sheep from a goat.37

Kerley’s reference to sheep and goats in particular alludes to how the range of specialists, anthropologists and conservationists included, did not grasp the centrality of livestock in Diné

37 Open letter to John Collier by Joe Kerley, Coconino Sun, June 10 1938. Parman Papers, Box 1 Folder 23, page 1. CSR-UNM.
life. The power over Diné Bikeyah rested in outsiders who worshipped surveys and reports, not local knowledge.

The gospel of efficiency required an endless consultation with experts. Just to acquire so much outside opinion meant that the executive branch commissioned countless advisory reports to inform decisions. Just as the Meriam Report catalyzed support for direct federal intervention on reservations for cultural preservation, two reports in particular justified the massive range control and soil conservation campaign on the Diné reservation. In 1930, Indian Service forester William Zeh conducted a survey of the environmental conditions in Diné Bikeyah, and his report was grim. He found that the range was severely overgrazed, with close to one seventh of the entire territory completely incapable of supporting agriculture or livestock.\(^{38}\) As the animals reduced vegetative cover and compacted soil with their hooves, the land became more arid and susceptible to wind and water erosion, causing deep arroyos to form and wash Diné Bikeyah into the Colorado River watershed. At the end of the line lay Boulder Dam, then under construction, which promised to provide water and power to the growing American southwest.\(^{39}\) Considering this degradation, he calculated that a ratio of roughly twenty-five acres of grazing land per head of livestock was necessary for full range recovery. In fact, he found closer to ten acres per head, meaning that the Diné’s 1,300,000 sheep and goats would need to be reduced by at least half.\(^{40}\)

Even more troubling, the count did not even include cattle or horses.

Immediately after his appointment, Collier commissioned H.H. Bennett to conduct a follow up report, later published July 2, 1933 as “Report of the Conservation Advisory Committee for the Navajo Reservation.” The Bennett report distilled Zeh’s findings and bolstered the argument for reductions. Although Bennett would go on to run the Soil


\(^{39}\) Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, 24. Boulder Dam was later renamed Hoover Dam.

\(^{40}\) Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, 34.
Conservation Service and earn a reputation as the “Father of Soil Conservation,” his research on the reservation lasted only a week, and Weisiger suspects his figures came primarily from Zeh’s report. Both men found that “areas adjacent to water, hogan, and garden-sized field, are usually denuded of original cover; they now support only a thin stand of weeds, as thistle.” As a first step, Bennett recommended establishing an erosion control station, “manned by experts and designed to carry out practical demonstrational and educational work along lines of erosion control, revegetation, range management and general conservation.”

Since livestock would be excluded from the area, Bennett recommended that an Emergency Conservation Work camp be set up on the site, and that Diné who lost grazing land be compensated in some combination of wage work and direct payment. When Collier pitched the station to the Tribal Council meeting in Fort Defiance, he said explicitly that employment opportunities would compensate for any lost grazing area. In his mind, and in the minds of the gaggle of federal government employees with him at the meeting, the replacement of subsistence livestock with wage labor not only made perfect sense, but it was a desirable improvement.

To Diné livestock owners, most of whom were women, the trade off was antithetical to their personal connection to the animals. Edward T. Hall, a Columbia educated anthropologist, defended the Diné perspective in his seminal West of the Thirties. “Sheep and money were not interchangeable,” he wrote, the Diné think of their sheep as part of the family. Over and over, the limitations in Collier’s progressivism were put on display. His romanticization, which had initiated his interest in Indian Affairs, was overwhelmed by the gospel of efficiency. Ultimately,
he proved that idealization is shallow, and coercive power is forgiving of ignorance.

The same problem arose from the Zeh and Bennett reports. As Weisiger points out, both reports were foregone conclusions, based on the assumption by government scientists that the Diné range had once been a lush pastureland. In fact, there was only a hazy record of previous environmental conditions, which they hardly scrutinized.46 Alistair Preston studied the effect of accounting in reports like Zeh’s and Bennett’s on supporting the government’s case for broad intervention from so far away. He came to a similar conclusion as Weisiger, writing, that the documents “were not only to convince others of the dire problems on the reservation but were expressed in such a way that they catered to the explicit interests of those people who would be instrumental in enabling action at a distance and in enacting it locally.”47 For example, he demonstrates that Collier used the 1930 Zeh report to convince Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to support stock reductions.48 Science was not a neutral analytic tool, but a means to find what they were already looking for. But in this case, as we will see in Part II, there was a competing set of assumptions and beliefs about the land which the government did not anticipate.

Instead, government documents suggested that through a prolonged educational campaign the Diné would volunteer to alter their stock raising and understand the scientific explanation. The Bennett Report recommended that Diné ECW camp workers be “subjected to an intensive educational campaign” so that “they would return to their homes as Range Conservation Missionaries, and persuade their community or chapter to take over erosion and

42 Preston, “Enabling, enacting and maintaining action at a distance,” 562.
range control as a purely Indian function.” In a memo from Collier to Ickes later that July, Collier used the same argument, justifying his request for $2,500,000 for the erosion control program because it would achieve “a maximum of educational effect upon the Indians.”

Collier, Bennett and his team were convinced that educational programs alone could persuade the Diné to willingly reorient their economy from pastoralism to wage work. They were the messengers of science, armed with paperwork and scholarship to support their position. There was no legitimate alternative explanation. Although Bennett’s report suggested getting Tribal Council and even local Chapter approval for the demonstration station, it laid out the details of the station down to a proposed location, writing that “The Mexican Springs watershed near Tohachi has been selected” as a desirable site. The language, the use of the word “selected” in particular, suggests that the plan was complete, and just needed Tribal Council’s approval to keep up appearances. Meanwhile on the reservation, summer was heating up. On May 6, Roman Hubbell sent Collier an exasperated telegram asking for help: “Unprecedented drouth (sic) condition for this time of year on Navajo reservation. . . livestock suffering from inadequate watering facilities prompt action will save some livestock on reforestation program windmills and dams are most essential to Navajos.”

Having grown up at his father’s trading post near Ganado, Hubbell knew the Diné well enough to understand that livestock health was critical to their survival.

49 Bennett Report, p 5, Parman Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
50 Collier to Ickes, July 24 1933 Parman Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
51 Bennett Report, p 7, Parman Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
52 Telegram from Roman Hubbell to John Collier, May 6, 1933, Parman Papers Box 1, Folder 5.
Diné Spiritual Experience and The Role of Women 1868-1933

“We always resided here with a big herd of sheep.”

Diné Bikeyah, as the Navajo call their homeland, is comprised of two parts: a reservation covering northeastern Arizona and spilling into Utah and New Mexico, and an additional territory to the southeast colloquially called the “Checkerboard” for its mingling of private, state, federal, and Navajo lands. Marked in each direction by the four sacred mountains – Mount Blanca, Mount Taylor, Mount Hesperus and the San Francisco Peaks – the reservation is home to some 180,000 Diné (The People). It was established after a century of Spanish and then American encroachment on Dinétah, until the Civil War provided a catalyst for drastic state action. In 1862, Colonel Kit Carson rounded up the Diné people and the Mescaleros and forcibly relocated them to Hwéeldi, where the army intended to assimilate the Diné into American farming culture. The experiment failed miserably, and in 1868 the Diné signed a peace accord with the American government in exchange for the first patch of the modern reservation bridging eastern Arizona to western New Mexico; this was to be an autonomously Diné territory.

In establishing the first reservation, the government guaranteed some measure of territorial autonomy, and a limited defense for Diné people against white rancher encroachment on the range. The government distributed some 15,000-20,000 sheep and goats to the returning Diné, and as Richard White explains, “The Bureau of Indian Affairs, eager to have the Indians self-sufficient, encouraged the growth of Navajo herds and forbade the selling of breeding stock so that the flocks might attain maximum productivity.” Estimates put the Diné population following the Hwéeldi internment around 10,000, but by the 1890s the estimates double, and reach nearly 40,000 for 1930. According to White, “between 1870 and 1957 the Navajos

53 Mary Cook in Roessel Navajo Livestock Reduction,143.
54 See maps in appendix.
55 White, Roots of Dependency, 216. Weisiger agrees.
sustained a remarkable average annual rate of increase of 2.34."  

At the same time, livestock increased rapidly, exceeding 1 million head of sheep and goats between 1930-1932, despite killer winters in the 1890s which reduced herds by 20%.  

The four million acre 1868 treaty reservation could not possibly feed so many animals, so Diné took their herds off reservation from the very start. In 1937, J.W. Hoover noted that “the tragic bungling of the United States government” lay in the expectation that families would “take up homesteads of 160 acres just as if the land were like the prairies of the Midwest.” As the population and their herds grew, seven Presidents issued executive orders to expand the reservation. By 1911 the territory reached twelve million acres, and approached the current fourteen and a half million acres by 1930. In his seminal Roots of Dependency, Richard White is quick to point out that the appearance of more people and animals occupying more land is in fact deceptive, and a false premise on which the livestock reduction programs were later justified.

The expansion of the reservation actually coincided with a de facto shrinking of available grazing land, as railroads and white ranchers made land claims close to the reservation boundaries and throughout the Checkerboard area, ejecting Diné herds. And while the number of sheep did increase, the strain on the range remained roughly constant because sheep increases were a direct result of horse reductions. Using the BIA’s own quantitative system for categorizing livestock, which valued a horse at five “sheep units,” White demonstrated that total Diné holdings in 1886 were 1,725,000 units, while a respected 1930 count came in at 1,111,589

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56 White, Roots of Dependency 219.
57 White, Roots of Dependency 220; Weisiger, Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country, 137-138.
59 See maps in appendix.
60 Kelly, The Assault on Assimilation, 7.
units. In his words, “Superficially, reservation boundaries appear to have expanded as Navajo population and herds expanded; in reality, an increasing number of Navajos had to subsist on a dwindling amount of land.”\(^{61}\) It is also important to recognize the hazy, unscientific, and generally suspect nature of most demographic statistics before 1930, when census surveys began systematically visiting each homesite.\(^{62}\) These figures are only hazy approximations, but the general trends remain valid.\(^{63}\)

Understanding the New Dealer perspective is only half the story. Whatever Collier imagined about the Diné when he conceived of the stock reductions and Indian Reorganization Act, it was unrealistic. In fact, Diné history is one of constant flux, where traditions are acquired in exchange and evolve over time. At the outset we must acknowledge historical and archeological evidence which places Diné arrival in the Diné Bikeyah area rather late, and suggests that sheep were introduced with Spanish conquest. No one agrees when the Diné separated from other Southern Athabascan communities, but carbon dated tree ring evidence suggest that “ancestral Navajos were present along the New-Mexico Colorado border and for an unknown distance source by A.D. 1500 and possibly a century and a half earlier.”\(^{64}\) Scholars have also struggled to pin down when sheep were introduced to the range. The earliest written account of Diné life is Mre. de campo Roque Madrid’s campaign journal from a brutal raid of Diné territory in 1705. Although Madrid mostly observed farms, indeed his men slashed and burned as many as they could, he did find and kill thirty two sheep during the raid.\(^{65}\)

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\(^{62}\) The secondary literature is in virtual agreement here, see especially White, Kelly, Weisiger, Iverson.
\(^{63}\) See appendix.
sources suggest that Diné sheep herds were plentiful by the end of the eighteenth century.\footnote{66}{White, \textit{Roots of Dependency}, 213.}

Regardless of exact timing, it is clear that by 1933 sheep occupied a central place in traditional religious practice. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Diné origin story of Hahjeénah or the Emergence, the core narrative in the positive complex of rites and songs in traditional cosmology called Hózhóoji, or Blessingway.\footnote{67}{Leland Clifton Wyman, and Berard Haile. \textit{Blessingway}. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970) 4; Hasteen Klah and Mary C. Wheelwright. \textit{Navajo creation myth; the story of the emergence.} (Navajo religion series, v. 1. Santa Fe, N.M.: Museum of Navajo ceremonial art, 1942), 15; Weisiger, \textit{Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country}, 70-78.}

Describing the Diné creation story from one or even a few sources is like signifying a beach with a handful of sand. It is a story with endless variations, endowed with power by the hataalii (spiritual leaders) who sang it and performed the accompanying rituals.\footnote{68}{Marsha Weisiger has outlined the dangers for biligaana researchers delving into Diné religious practice in \textit{Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country}.} Sheep formation is a fixture of all major published accounts of Hahjeénah. It is most clearly articulated in River Junction Curly’s telling to Father Bernard Haile, a monk at St. Michael’s Mission whose famously close rapport with the Diné there make his scholarship unusually accurate. His transcript of three versions of Hózhóoji is particularly useful here because each version was recorded between 1929-1932, giving an approximate sense of Hózhóoji in the New Deal era.

The beginning of Hahjeénah traces the Diyin Diné’e, or holy people, in their emergence from the first world through to the fifth world where powerful Diyin Diné’e Changing Woman gives birth to Holy Twins, Monster Slayer and Born for Water. Monster Slayer, the elder Holy Twin, sets out to rid the world of evil spirits, but first he must find sustenance. As River Junction Curly told Father Haile, Monster Slayer stood atop Wide Belt Mesa and looked out across the scrubby desert to see what he might eat. First Monster Slayer sees a flock of white sheep in the distance, but “they turned out to be chamiso [four-wind salt-bush]. He returns to the mesa again,
and sees “blue sheep with darker lower bodies, they were moving down in an enormous flock.”

He returns a third time and fourth time, seeing brown sheep which turn out to be Mormon tea, and black sheep but it was only “a streak of jet.”

With each return to the mesa, this narrative links sheep with the ecology and geography of Dinétah. Each of the sacred mountains which demarcate the ancient homeland from the San Francisco Peaks to the southwest, Mount Hesperus to the northwest, Mount Taylor to the southeast, to Blanca Peak to the northeast, is commonly represented by brown, blue, brown, or black respectively. In the story, the colors and sacred mountains are further bound up with plants common to the range, which help constitute the Diné sheep diet. Taken together, the symbols of this episode draw inexorable connections between the ecology of Dinétah, sheep economy, and the Diné themselves.

Before they could create the Diné people who will live in the fifth world, Changing Woman and Mirage Man made sheep. “The singing for the sheep started first,” Curly told Haile, and the gathered Diyin Diné’e made the sheep so that “their hearts will be red stone, their diaphragms will be abalone, their livers will be turquoise. . . their special intestines will be long strings of valuable stones.” Through these words, the Hózhǫ́oji chanter imbued each banal sheep organ with material and spiritual value. The Sun told the new animals, “I made you so people can live by means of you in the future. . . I made you so you will be in harmony with all kinds of horses. I made you so that you will be in harmony with all kinds of sheep. I made you so that you will be in harmony with all kinds of corn.” The repetition of “harmony,” illuminates how Diné understood their relationship with the range. For believers in Diné chants like

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69 Wyman, Blessingway, 623.
70 Wyman, Blessingway, 623.
71 As Weisiger points out, sometimes the colors are white, blue, yellow, and black.
72 Wyman, Blessingway, 626.
73 Wyman, Blessingway, 628.
Hózhǫoji, sheep were more than subsistence. Sheep had been endowed with spiritual meaning which centered them in the relationship between the positive and negative forces, and their forced removal would topple the fragile balance which supported Diné life.

The Sun’s words also recalled the guiding balance in the Dine cosmological universe between hózhǫ, roughly translated as positive things, and hóchxǫ, or negative things. As John Farella writes, these concepts were derived from the creation story itself “in terms of the creation of wholes that are parings of opposites or complements. These pairings should not be regarded as tangible and temporally fixed, however; it is better to look at hózhǫ/hóchxǫ as temporary, although cyclically reappearing, points in an ongoing process.”74 Within this belief system, change was a normal and desirable recalibration, and religious practice was an effort to maintain balance between the forces. Even for Diné who did not fully accept these traditional spiritual beliefs, the Diné balance concept helped define a uniquely Diné worldview. In the context of hózhǫ/hóchxǫ, Diné gender relations and understanding of range conditions can be seen as part of a comprehensive philosophical outlook.

While many Diné subscribed to traditional beliefs in whole or in part by the 1930s, a resurgence in Christian missionary work at the turn of the century had created a strong alternative community for Diné spiritual life. The Christian Reformed Church arrived in Diné Bikeyah in 1896, and “within just a few years of each other, competing missions sprang up among the Navajo: Episcopalians at Fort Defiance, Franciscans at St. Michaels Mission, Methodists at Shiprock, Baptists at Two Grey Hills, and Presbyterians at Ganado.”75 These missionaries won few converts, but Diné people took advantage of their superior services,

75 B. Gjeltema “Jacob Casimera Morgan and the Development of Navajo Nationalism” (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2004), 120.
especially medical care and schools.

Many of the Protestant denominations had begun their missionary work on the reservation under the federal government’s Peace Policy of the 1870s, and their work in the first decades of the twentieth century was similarly allied with the government’s assimilationist policy. When the New Deal began, missionaries “had lauded the virtues of white, middle-class dress, food, and cultural patterns for decades, and remained committed to a dual program of Christianization and civilization as they attempted to assimilate American Indians.” According to Parman, a disproportionate number of former mission school students went on to work for tribal government, creating a new guard of young Diné leaders for whom Christianity was but a part of their desire to move the reservation into the “main stream of American life.” Some of these young people, mostly men, attributed their success to assimilationist federal policy, and would later defend it against Collier’s assault. The New Dealers underestimated how powerfully assimilationism had taken hold amongst some Christian Diné, since they themselves were so enamored of the apparent organic community of more traditional Diné life.

Diné women were even less visible to the New Dealers than Diné Christians or assimilationists. This omission had huge impacts on both reception of stock reductions and the IRA referendum vote, as women were the most angered by stock reductions. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women tended to own more sheep than men, and men owned more horses, but little reliable quantitative evidence exists to support or refute this claim. Oral histories confirm that women engaged extensively in livestock raising, and that they probably owned more sheep than men. Nancy Woodman, a Diné woman from Chinle, told researchers, “I kept growing with my

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77 Parman, _The Navajos and the New Deal_. 19.
78 Weisiger discusses this in greater depth on pages 94-95 of _Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country_.

sheep until finally I became a woman. Then I got children. I started thinking of the sheep as my children. I thought a little more or higher of the sheep. I started increasing the sheep a little more. I never slept at night because of the sheep.” Like Woodman, Sarah Begay had a close connection with her livestock, and was appalled by having to part with any of them. She said in an interview, “They took so many. “That is enough; it is enough.” I tried to say. “Let’s have some more. There’s too many goats,” they said. . .The flock was all mixed together. Some belonged to my mother, some belonged to my older sister, and some of them were ours. “

Begay’s account conveys the sorrow she felt at losing her property, and it further suggests that livestock ownership fell mostly to women.

The accounts of Ason Attakai and Martin Johnson, given to field researchers from Navajo Community College, also provided examples of the rich details which can be culled from oral histories. Attakai described her experience of horse and sheep reductions over the course of the 1930s, from the first horse reductions through subsequent rounds of sheep and goat reductions. Bedridden at age 96, Attakai explained that

The first horse killed was one of mine, farther on was another one of mine that was a pack horse. Another one belonged to one of my father’s relatives, which she cried over … My late father’s wife had some sheep. She died of old age a while back. She was one of those that had their sheep reduced … Later, I heard the same thing happened in Pinon, Arizona, which I did not see. I just head that the women cried over the sheep. I just remember hearing, “Who would not cry if their livestock was being killed.”

Like Sarah Begay Attakai remembers sheep as women’s property, and reduction as women’s loss.

Martin Johnson’s memory of reductions is equally vivid, and also full of clues as to

80 Sarah Begay, interviewed by Fern Charley and Dean Sundberg, 20 June 1974, p 9, in Sunderberg and Charley, Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).
81 Ason Attakai in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction,128. Emphasis mine.
livestock ownership patterns. He told his interviewers, “There was blood running everywhere in the corral as we just stood there and watched. My wife was the one who had raised the sheep and goats in her younger years. She cried about her goats as they were killed.”

We will delve into the details of the events they describe in due time, but for now it is important to notice the clear gendering of livestock which these accounts confirm. In all these examples, the livestock are portrayed as women’s property without caveats. The same is true for Martin Johnson, who notes again that his wife was more connected to their livestock, and that she too cried for her loss.

More support comes from Tall Woman’s autobiography, as told to and recorded by anthropologist Charlotte Frisbie. Born around 1874, Tall Woman vividly recalled the post-Hwéeldi and New Deal periods. In a section about her marriage to Frank Mitchell, Tall Woman explains that her only property at the time of the marriage was sheep, which she “was taking care of and herding all the time.” Furthermore, Tall Woman’s father counseled Mitchell that in order to marry his daughter, he should “plan on helping with the sheep and other livestock.”

For Tall Woman, too, sheep were women’s possessions and herding was women’s work.

Tall Woman’s experience was also indicative of social balance between men and women. She recalled, “We respected each other, went along together, supported each other; we didn’t try and step ahead of each other, or speak for each other.” The balance concept of hózhó/hóchxó extended to family relationships, and encouraged women to maintain economic independence from their husbands so that both adults took responsibility for the family. Tall Woman elegantly summarized her relationship this way:

Of course, we talked about the future too, trying to look ahead together, to figure

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82 Martin Johnson in Roessel, *Navajo Livestock Reduction*, 94.
84 Rose Mitchell, *Tall Woman*, 83.
85 Rose Mitchell, *Tall Woman*, 297.
out how much corn to grow for our own use and for our livestock, and what other work to do in order to have a little income…. In all those things, we supported and encouraged each other, but we didn’t decide them for the other one… Because there were two of us trying to raise our children, we tried to add in both parts, the woman’s and the man’s, according to the ways we were taught.  

Scholarship on Diné gender relations in late nineteenth and early twentieth century bears out this example. Louise Lamphere, the most authoritative voice, argues that social and political decisions were not considered separate, and that women and men shared equally in domestic authority.  

Marsha Weisiger points to a key Marxian rubric- that Diné women controlled the means of production by owning the most sheep and controlling customary land use rights.  

Even if their husbands, brothers, or sons had wanted to disrupt the balance, they would have found it difficult to threaten their womenfolk. In a characteristic generalization, Donald Parman writes that “a wife could terminate the marriage by merely sending her husband back to his own people.”  

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that through marriage, customary land use, and sheep, Diné women were important decision makers in domestic life.

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87 Louise Lamphere. "Historical and regional variability in the Navajo women's roles". *Special Issue on Navajo Ethnology*, 431.
Dine Political Organization and Economy 1868-1933

“At first the Navajo could not get used to the idea of sending delegation to decide without calling the whole Tribe together.”

Although evidence points to strong cultural and military cohesion before the Long Walk, it is not matched by political unity. Eighteenth century Spanish conquistadors certainly played fast and loose with tribal categories, confusing Diné raiders with other tribes or simply resorting to the umbrella term “Apache.” Historians tend avoid the problem by assuming self-conscious Diné nationalism. According to Peter Iverson, it was “the common crucible of the Long Walk experience” and shared memory of internment at Hwéeldi from 1863-1868 which gave birth to the first reservation, and “Navajo” as a political identity.

Lack of cohesive nationalism did not mean, as the New Dealers thought, that no political organization existed on the reservation. There were regionally important headmen or naat’áanii who “planned and organized the workday life of his community,” but lacked “ coercive powers.” W.W. Hill describes a democratic appointment system, where factors governing the choice included exemplary character, oratorical ability, personal magnetism, and proven ability to serve in both the practical and religious aspects of the culture. The people of a district were canvassed to determine the eligible candidate. In this the women had as much voice as the men. Usually the choice was nearly unanimous. Young also suggests that women were sometimes naat’áanii, but for the most part they were men. These leaders served to facilitate cooperation and social cohesion on a local scale, as they could “arbitrate disputes, resolve family difficulties, try to reform wrongdoers,” but there was no

90 Oakee James, Interview by Ration, April 1969, p. 1, Interview 393, reel 3 AIOHC.
92 Iverson, The Navajo Nation, 10.
95 Weisiger corroborates.
central authority across Diné Bikeyah. It’s helpful to think of headmen and matriarchs as mediators, rather than elected representatives. For issues which affected larger social networks and families or regional groups, consensus was paramount.

Women’s position as equal members of the political community became threatened as the reservation became a target for American business. After 1881 when the reservation became accessible by railroad, mining interests surveyed the reservation, and requested mining rights leases. By law, leases could only be issued by consent of a tribe’s governing council. The problem, of course, was that no such council existed. Private mining companies were persistent, however, and in 1923 the serving Commissioner of Indian Affairs signed the Navajo Tribal Council into being.96

By all accounts, the Council was little more than a BIA controlled rubber stamp, formed to meet the requirements of the 1891 legislation. Meetings could only be called by the “Commissioner of the Navajo Tribe,” who also had to be present at all Council meetings. Provisions for democratic election of council members were weak, and the regional superintendents were empowered to appoint delegates. As a result, the Council was entirely male from the start. As Iverson writes, “the creation of the Council is a significant landmark – not so much for what the Council did as for what it would become.”97

By the same token, the BIA established regional governance bodies called Chapters to “spur economic self-sufficiency,” which had likewise “unplanned consequences in the 1930s.”98 Robert Young, writing for the Diné Community College Press, emphasizes the external influence which characterized these developments:

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96 For information about the Council’s formation, see Young A political history of the Navajo tribe, 53-64, Peter Iverson, and Monty Roessel. Diné: a history of the Navajos. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002.), 133-136.
97 Iverson, Diné 134.
98 Kelly, The Navajo Indians and Federal Indian Policy, 75.
In the first years of the 20th century there was no compelling need for creation of a tribal government for purposes of internal control. The internal sovereignty of the Tribe was exercised quite adequately through the traditional system of Headmen with local community control by persuasion – not coercion; so a formal legislative body to enact laws for the entire Tribe, [plus an executive and judiciary branch] were neither needed nor would they have fit into the social-political system of the period.99

Pete Sheen, a chapter leader in the 1930s, told interviewers about the distasteful relationship between the Tribal Council, chapters, and federal government during that time. “The chapter officers and the Councilmen had no power to help their people in those days. Whatever regulations came up, they had to obey the government and tell the people,” he said.100 The majority rule structure, furthermore, was “only to please the superintendents.”101 The Tribal Council did not replace the female and headman facilitated consensus system for Diné decision making, but it was the only Diné political authority recognized by the federal government. By the time John Collier and the New Dealers came to power, there were in effect two distinct but overlapping political systems in place.

Family and clan connections, the centerpieces of Navajo individual identity, also formed a strong basis for Navajo political organization. Despite rapid demographic growth between 1869 and 1933, Diné Bikeyah would have seemed sparsely populated by an outside observer, as travel between clusters of hogans required long rides across the range. In general, Diné families were organized around a matriarch. She and her husband shared a hogan, and her daughters (and sometimes sons) who lived with their own spouses and children built hogans nearby to form a family cluster.

In this isolated landscape, Diné clan identities helped delineate social and political

100 Pete Sheen in Roessel, *Navajo Livestock Reduction*, 166.
groupings through the mother’s line.\textsuperscript{102} Clans were not set in stone; indeed, anthropologists and government agents working at the same time found different numbers of Diné clans, but they were nevertheless a tool for Diné national cohesion, and a demonstration of the centrality of women in Diné society.\textsuperscript{103} In fact, clan identities stood at the intersection of Diné matricentrism, connection to customary grazing lands, and social organization.

This is certainly the portrayal favored by Michael Francisconi’s interviewee 21, identified only as a female member of the Ashiihi (Salt) clan. Before livestock reductions, she said in 1995, “we were poor and richer relatives provided us with “livestocks”, and we kept half the increase … Relatives helped each other and everyone benefited.”\textsuperscript{104} This culture of support for relatives meant that no one could slip through the cracks, despite the fact that some Diné grew quite wealthy off their herds. Members of the same clan even referred to each other as brother or sister, and were forbidden from marriage.\textsuperscript{105} Many clan names corresponded to places within Diné Bikeyah, like the Ma’ii’ Deeschgiizhnii (Coyote Pass- Jemez) or Kinyaa’aanii (Towering House People) clans.\textsuperscript{106} Even though families within these clans may have left those areas many generations ago, the connection to Diné Bikeyah itself persisted. Clan identities help explain how social and political life intertwined, often with women at the intersections.

Perhaps more indicative of the way clan identities connected people to the land was the prevalence of water sources in clan names. For example, the Biihbitoonii clan (Deer Springs) or

\textsuperscript{102} Scholars tend to question the accuracy of clan genealogies, but for our purposes it is most important that they are traced back to a common female ancestor.

\textsuperscript{103} Marsha Weisiger uses the term “matricentric” rather than “matrilineal” or “matrilocal” to suggest the degree of importance women had for practical and theoretical Diné social identity. She traces the term to Louise Lamphere in To Run After Them: Cultural and Social Bases of Cooperation in a Navajo Community (1977).


\textsuperscript{105} Parman, The Navajos and the New Deal, 5. In her autobiography, Tall Woman also refers to her clanspeople as brother or sister.

\textsuperscript{106} These examples are taken from Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction: A National Disgrace. It is noteworthy that the editors included the clan identities of their interviewees.
the Tachiinii clan (Red Streak Extending to the Water). Water was a precious resource in the extreme aridity of Diné Bikeyah, and took on all the more value considering Diné dependence on farming in conjunction with livestock for subsistence in the post-Hwéeldi period. The typical family unit migrated between seasonal homes over a wide expanse of grazing area to which they held customary use rights. Although the emphasis on sheep herding often gave anthropologists the false impression of Diné nomadism, most families, even those without sheep, migrated to water sources in spring. 

Former Councilman Clifford Beck Sr. recounted, “In the spring people planted their crops, the land was moist during the planting, and it rained in midsummer. . . . Corn, squash, and melon seeds were planted in the moist earth. Everything was plentiful, including the foods that were planted and the rain. . . . So it was that in the 1930s there was a lot of livestock.”

New Dealers completely missed the prevalence of summer farms, another indication of how they were blinded by their own expectations of Diné culture. According to their view, the land was so overgrazed that only hugely oversized herds could be at fault, and it followed that the herds alone were feeding families. In December 1933, the Gallup Independent reported that the New Deal’s conservation effort was “outstanding because it deals with problems of staying nature’s hand in semi-arid regions where tillage and crops cannot easily be brought to aid of man.”

Never mind that Diné people had long supplemented herding with subsistence farming, a fenced in demonstration area would apparently teach them something worth losing grazing land.

The post-Hwéeldi period was also a time of significant economic change for the Diné.

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107 White, Roots of Dependency, 222, citing W.W. Hill; Weisiger, Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country, 123-124. Also see Tall Woman’s experience, Rose Mitchell, Tall Woman, 126.
108 Clifford Beck Sr. in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction, 197-8.
109 Gallup Independent, Dec 26 1933, Parman Papers Box 3, Folder 31, CSR-UNM.
The government’s attempt to turn them into subsistence farmers during their internment had failed spectacularly, leading to dependence on government rations and near starvation. The memory of such hardship was not soon forgotten after their return to Diné Bikeyah, and they guarded their herds vigilantly.\textsuperscript{110} If anything, post-Hwéeldi Diné life shifted to center even more on sheep herding, an effort supported by BIA agents.

Since military peace was finally established with the Americans, Diné families began establishing homesites on lower ground, and “between 1868 and 1900 the purely woodland sites of the Navajo fell from 49 percent to 22 percent of the whole.”\textsuperscript{111} Families established multiple homesites for seasonal use, increasing transhumance and allowing domesticated herds to prosper. At the same time, increased pressure on lowlands significantly decreased wild game populations, which had traditionally been used as a supplemental food source and safety net during droughts.\textsuperscript{112} Raiding of American herds, another pre-Hwéeldi defense against crop failures, also ceased with the end of hostilities.\textsuperscript{113}

But the Hwéeldi experience was not the only motivation for increased dependence on sheep herding. Once the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad passed through Diné country, and met the Southern Pacific Railroad at the Arizona-California border, off-reservation demand for Diné crafts exploded.\textsuperscript{114} As was common throughout the American West, merchants followed the railroad. Lorenzo Hubbell and his son Roman emerged as powerful entrepreneurs on the Diné reservation, owning between ten and twelve trading posts by the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{115} Trading was

\textsuperscript{110} Lawrence David Weiss, \textit{The development of capitalism in the Navajo nation: a political-economic history.} (Minneapolis: MEP Publications. 1984), 65.
\textsuperscript{111} White, \textit{Roots of Dependency}, 245; also see Francisconi, \textit{Kinship, Capitalism, Change}, 44.
\textsuperscript{112} White, \textit{Roots of Dependency}, 246.
\textsuperscript{113} Raiding had been a significant feature of Diné relations with Spanish conquistadors and American ranchers for several centuries. Significant enough, in fact, that it was a major justification used by Kit Carson to round up the Diné during the Civil War.
\textsuperscript{114} Weiss, \textit{The development of capitalism in the Navajo nation}, 65.
\textsuperscript{115} Weiss, \textit{The development of capitalism in the Navajo nation}, 72.
conducted entirely on credit, a fact which has led many historians to mark this period as the 
beginning of the end for Diné economic independence.\textsuperscript{116} Francisconi writes that the relationship 
was unequal because of “the artificially low prices the Diné received for their products and the 
inflated prices the traders and industrialists received for theirs. This is the definition of 
imperialism: the domination of one nation by another for the economic benefit of the more 
powerful nation.”\textsuperscript{117} If reorientation toward the market economy was slow in the first decades of 
the twentieth century, it accelerated dramatically during World War I as demand for wool 
increased.\textsuperscript{118} Diné handicrafts also became more valuable with new access to Eastern markets, 
and many families produced baskets, jewelry, and rugs, or hunted pinion nuts to take advantage 
of demand.\textsuperscript{119} 

Another byproduct of the trader economy was greater Diné class stratification. As 
Weisiger points out, uneven sheep distribution had long been the status quo, but connection to 
external markets exacerbated the problem. BIA policy also directly encouraged herd growth by 
forbidding the sale of female breeding stock, allowing large scale owners to became commercial 
herders, and squeezing poorer Diné.\textsuperscript{120} In nearly every account, Chee Dodge is heralded as the 
exemplar of the new Diné commercial herding class. In 1915 he and his wife Nanibaa owned 
some 5,000 sheep; he was the richest man in McKinley County New Mexico.\textsuperscript{121} Because land 
rights were governed by customary use and need rather than strictly drawn boundaries, herd 
increases amongst the richest Diné crowded out smaller holders, who protested to their regional

\textsuperscript{116} White leaves little to the imagination with his title \textit{Roots of Dependency}, and his view is shared by Weiss, 
Francisconi, and Kelley.

\textsuperscript{117} Francisconi, \textit{Kinship, capitalism, change}, 42.

\textsuperscript{118} Weisiger, \textit{Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country}, 147.

\textsuperscript{119} Weiss, \textit{The development of capitalism in the Navajo nation}, 67.

\textsuperscript{120} Much of the literature uses “ricos” and “pobres” to denote the difference between the haves and have-nots on the 
reservation. I find this distasteful and have chosen alternative language which may have the unfortunate side effect of being less direct.

\textsuperscript{121} Francisconi, \textit{Kinship, capitalism, change}, 46.
superintendents. One of Francisconi’s interviewees told a particularly violent tale of herding competition:

There was a local headman who would arrive without notice on horse back, and help himself to any “sheeps” that he wanted. One night when the moon did not shine my uncle laid in wait for this man; when the headman passed my uncle knocked him off his horse with a large stick. Then with a large rock he crushed his skull. The body was hidden where nobody but the coyotes would ever find it . . . After that our herd grew big . . . The man at the trading post who was married to a Hopi would carry us all year on credit, and we would pay off our credit with wool, mutton, and live lambs.

This example is undoubtedly extreme, but it helps demonstrate how central sheep raising had become in the Diné economy.

Although economic reorientation made the Diné more vulnerable to global market fluctuations, it also increased the power and independence of women within their communities, as they produced new commodities. Sheep derived products like rugs and wool were the most highly sought, and “by 1935, traders estimated that weavers’ percentage of trading post income was 30 to 50 percent.” Raw wool sales brought in even more money. In Diné eyes, market pressure toward sheep raising was paying off. They could earn money from their sheep without killing the animals, maintain social status and insurance against lean years, and purchase supplementary foods like flour, coffee, tea, canned goods, and vegetables which would not grow in the harsh desert soil.

The post-Hwéeldi period saw the rise of another political faction, the young men who had been educated at BIA boarding schools and came to promote assimilationist policies themselves. In the 1930s, no one better exemplified that group than Jacob Casimera Morgan, who would become John Collier’s single most vocal political opponent. Unlike women, Morgan’s group was

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123 Interview 3: 47 75, Francisconi *Kinship, capitalism, change*, 166.
recognized by New Deal officials, but they underestimated his ability to mobilize resistance.

Born around 1879 in the southern Checkerboard region of Diné Bikeyah to a family of sheep herders, J.C. Morgan was sent to boarding school at age ten. He excelled in school, and was accepted to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia. Most often associated with African American education, and famously the inspiration for former student Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute, Hampton had a small number of Native American students from around the country. During Morgan’s time, there were 531 African-American students and 124 Native American students enrolled. Records show that usually only two or three of the Native American students graduated the three year program, making Morgan’s accelerated two year completion especially exceptional.126

The years at Hampton were formative for Morgan’s world view and his sense of himself, as he had proud accomplishments in the world outside the reservation, desired to see his people gain enough economic standing to merge with the broadening American middle class. As Parman wrote disparagingly, “fourteen years of intensive indoctrination in assimilation produced a genuine apostle.”127 He hoped to “educate the Indian people in the way of Christian life and good citizenship of this country.”128 In practical terms, Morgan also wanted the trappings of modern American life to reach his people, calling for “water development, additional sawmills, new trachoma and tuberculosis hospitals, more physicians, better roads, well equipped schools” in the Farmington Times-Hustler newspaper.129

Once he returned to the reservation, Morgan joined the Christian Reformed Church, helping Farmington missionary LP Brink translate the Bible into Diné. The CRC was a logical

126 Donald Parman, “J.C. Morgan: Navajo apostle of assimilation.” Prologue, the Journal of the National Archives. 4 (2): 84.
128 JC Morgan to Grorud, Jan 21 1937, Parman Papers Box 1, Folder 17, CSR-UNM.
choice for Morgan, as it remained a staunch supporter of assimilationism while other Protestant denominations on the reservation gradually accepted that cultural pluralism won more converts.\textsuperscript{130} Morgan was a great asset to the CRC’s mission because of his ability to bring their gospel to the isolated home sites of herding Diné. At the expense of the church, he drove around the reservation calling on individual families, and showing them the materials he had translated. These visits gave Morgan familiarity and access throughout the reservation, an asset he would call upon as a leader of Diné resistance to the New Deal in 1934.

In 1932, Morgan and Howard Gorman, another young man who had received boarding school education, formed the Returned Students Association in order to promote assimilationism amongst their peers and within the Tribal Council.\textsuperscript{131} Chapters sprang up all over the reservation, promoting economic development and, at Morgan’s suggestion, celebrating the signing of the Dawes Act with “Citizenship Day” festivities.\textsuperscript{132} In the selection for the 1933 Tribal Council delegation, all but one of the Returned Students endorsed candidates was elected.\textsuperscript{133}

John Collier initially underestimated, or at least misunderstood, Morgan’s position. In a speech to the Returned Students Association in his first visit to the reservation since becoming Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Collier explained that it was

the policy and duty of the Government to cherish or reawaken, in the mind and soul of the Indian, not only pride in being Indian, because all Indians have that, but hope for the future as an Indian, and love and ardor toward the rich, many sided values of Indian live as expressed in the arts, the songs, the dances, the rituals, the cooperative institutions and forms which are yours as your heritage and have come down to you out of your past.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{130} LaGrand, “The Changing ‘Jesus Road,’” 438.
\textsuperscript{131} Parman, “Apostle,” 87,
\textsuperscript{132} Parman “Apostle,” 88.
\textsuperscript{133} Parman, Navajos and the New Deal, 39, “Apostle,” 88.
\textsuperscript{134} John Collier, “Talk by The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, to the Returned Students of the Navajos at Program of The Returned Students, Fort Wingate, New Mexico, July, 7, 1933, p. 3. Thomas Dodge Papers, Box 1 Folder 7, ASU.
At the very least, this speech must have bewildered Morgan, Gorman, and the assembled returned students. More likely they were offended by his romanticization of cultural features which they thought were holding the Diné nation back. The encounter helps demonstrate how J.C. Morgan challenged Collier’s concept of cultural authenticity. Here was a Diné man who had become a Christian missionary and “apostle of assimilation,” being told by a Columbia educated white man from Georgia that his peoples’ traditions should be preserved. Morgan completely subverted Collier’s expectation that he would be received as a savior by the Diné people. Instead, in the heat of battle, Morgan would go so far as to accuse Collier of being a communist, charging in 1936 that Collier’s romantic position amounted to “despotic control over Indian lives and property which the bureau intends to convert to collectivism.”

Not all Diné Christians were so hostile to the Indian New Deal. Chee Dodge, a nominal Catholic with close ties to the St. Michael’s Mission, was initially allied with Collier. One of the most frequent mistakes made by Bureau of Indian Affairs officials and documents was referring to Chee Dodge as a “chief.” Having served as the first chairman of the Tribal Council, Dodge represented Collier’s ideal of the Native American elder statesman, whose combination of personal power and traditional lifestyle made him a model for Americans at sea after the Great War.

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135 Washington Herald October 3, 1933, Parman Papers, Box 1 Folder 19, CSR-UNM.
137 Ickes to Trotter, Feb 21 1936, Parman Papers Box 1 Folder 13, CSR-UNM.
Collier made his first visit to the Diné reservation as Commissioner shortly after the Bennett Report was completed. Apparently oblivious to the symbolism, he called a Tribal Council meeting at Fort Wingate, the old army fort where the Diné had surrendered to Kit Carson in 1863. It was a curious choice of location, especially considering Collier’s own opening remark that “your memory goes back to the days at Bosque Redondo.” But, Collier had picked the spot, so thirty-odd federal government officials met the twelve delegates and their alternates, including Collier, H.H. Bennett, and the superintendent of each of the six reservation districts or Agencies for July 7-8, 1933. After laudatory introductions on both sides, Collier launched into a description of his plans for the reservation, including water development, erosion control, and land acquisition. H.H. Bennett, on hand for the purpose, presented his proposal for the demonstration station at Mexican Springs. In both their comments, Collier and Bennett pushed for the Council to make a decision immediately because the stakes were so high. “Every one of you know what is in store for your children if something is not done before it is too late,” Bennett told the Council.

The Diné councilmen hesitated. They came from the Diné political tradition of consensus, and did not want to act without gauging wider opinion. Albert Sandoval, the delegate from the Southern Navajo jurisdiction, suggested a recess so councilmen could converse with the audience. Otherwise “there is going to be a lot of confusion among the spectators if we act on it

138 Chee Carrol in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction,152.
140 Minutes of the Navajo Tribal Council, Fort Wingate, 7 July 1933, p. 2, Thomas Dodge Papers, ASU.
at once.” He was keenly aware that the crowd of ordinary Diné who had gathered to witness the meeting would be angry if the council approved the Mexican Springs project without soliciting more Diné input.

As Oakee James explained, “the delegates were not used to the white man’s habit of accepting the decision of the majority and acting on it. Even when the Indian people disagree the old method had been to argue and delay until the decision was unanimous.” Although the Mexican Springs station deliberations were only extended overnight, the Gallup Independent helped fuel federal government pressure by running the headline, “Navajo skepticism of friendly aid holds up approval of erosion plan” in the interim. The next day, the council unanimously passed a resolution permitting the station as long as local herders consented.

The rest of the meeting followed a similar pattern. Collier made a long statement of objectives, another federal government agent with more expertise clarified a specific plan, and the councilmen asked a few questions. At the same time, Collier repeated his commitment to increasing self rule and Diné autonomy. He told the council, “It is perfectly feasible to maintain the guardianship of the United States and to increase the services which it renders to you, while at the same time throwing to you greater and greater responsibility for doing your own work until the Government should become merely a bystander.” For a group of bystanders, the government was getting quite involved.

When it was finally built, the demonstration station was more of a showcase for visitors to the region than a successful outdoor classroom. Parman mentions that “Henry Wallace,

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141 Minutes of the Navajo Tribal Council, Fort Wingate, 7 July 1933, p. 2, Thomas Dodge Papers, p 22, ASU.
142 Oakee James, Interview by Ration, April 1969, p. 1, Interview 393, reel 3 AIOHC.
143 Gallup Independent July 7 1933, Parman Papers Box 3 Folder 31, CSR-UNM.
144 Resolutions of the Navajo Tribal Council, July 8 1933 p 151, Navajo Nation Records Management Center (NNRMC).
145 Minutes July 7 Dodge 3.2 p. 4
M.L. Wilson, and Rexford Tugwell, included Mexican Springs on their itineraries during visits to the Southwest, “which means it was least a good publicity tool for the SCS. But, as Oakee James told his AIOHC interviewer, “Few Navajo went to the laboratory near Fort Wingate . . . . Few understand about the great tract of wasteland which had been fenced near Mexican Springs and which has now turned into green pasture, since it had a vacation from the sheep.”

Perhaps this was due in part to the fact that those Diné most encouraged to visit the site were the least affected by stock reductions. As Bennett had suggested, the SCS made provision to employ people from the area whose grazing land had gone to the station. However, they hired men, not women or elderly people who were more likely to feel the loss of grazing territory. The agreement between the SCS and the five Mexican Springs area Chapters makes the SCS preference clear in article four: “Every able-bodied, capable man from 18 years of age from any place of the Five Chapters . . . will receive first consideration for employment on the Navajo Experimental Area. Boys between the ages of 16-18 will be employed for vocational training during the summer vacation from school if employment is possible.”

Looking back, Howard Gorman suggested that asking women to replace grazing area with conservation cash was “like telling us to fill up the erosions with our goats.”

Collier explicitly mentioned livestock reductions for the first time at a special session of the Tribal Council in Tuba City, Arizona held from October 30 through November 1 1933. For this meeting, forty federal government officials joined the twenty-five person council. Structurally, the meeting ran much like Fort Wingate. Collier and his subordinates dominated the

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147 Oakee James, Interview by Ration, April 1969, p. 8, Interview 393, reel 3 AIOHC.
148 “Agreement Between the Soil Conservation Service- Experimental Station and the People of the Five Chapters for the Mexican Springs Area, dated (erroneously it seems) March 20, 1935. Parman Papers Box 1, Folder 8 page 2. CSR-UNM
149 Howard Gorman in Roessel, *Navajo Livestock Reduction*, 42.
meeting with their plans for consolidation of the six jurisdictions, day school construction, and erosion control. Collier told the council that their cooperation on range management would result in unprecedented expenditures and create 15,000 acres of new farmland through irrigation projects. He used vague language to describe the actual mechanisms of Congressional appropriations, referring to the concern of “Washington forces” and “high up officials of the Government,” that erosion endangered “the biggest, most expensive dam in the world, the Boulder Dam, now being built.”

The Commissioner built his case carefully, outlining the huge appropriations he had secured, like $800,000 for wage work at Mexican Springs and two million dollars for seventy new day schools. The condition for these goodies was cooperation on soil conservation, and he told the council that “if there were not an erosion control program these other things would not be appropriated for and they would not be done.” Finally, Collier made clear exactly what cooperation meant. “We know that the Navajo Indians are thinking people,” he condescended, and “if you are going to stop erosion and if you are going to recapture your damaged land, you will have to cut down the number of your sheep and you will have to cut down the number of your goats.” In closing, Collier reiterated that his concept of self-government included the tribe’s “freedom to make mistakes if it wants to,” but forcefully added, “I think it is a matter of life or death to you.”

A.C. Cooley, director of extension, was next to speak. He showed the Council a chart of Diné income from sheep and goats compared to income from Emergency Conservation Work, Public Roads, and the other proposed projects. According to his projections, government

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150 Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, Tuba City October 30, 1933 p. 34 NNRMC.
151 Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, Tuba City October 30, 1933 p. 35, NNRMC. Note that the stenographer capitalized “government,” perhaps in response to the way Collier used it as a proper noun; Ibid, 18.
152 Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, Tuba City October 30, 1933 p 35- 37.
expenditure on the reservation would increase by $600,000, while income from losing 200,000 sheep and goats would only cost the tribe $100,000.\textsuperscript{153} His attempts at linearly reasoned arguments prove how dramatically the officials underestimated Diné memory of past wrongs. Middle aged Diné like most councilmen were direct recipients of stories from Hwéeldi through their parents and grandparents. As Edward T Hall put it, “The Navajos had learned from past experience that whenever the white man talked crazy like that, something valuable was about to be taken away from them.”\textsuperscript{154} Councilmen had good reason to be suspicious that field officers would renege on their promises.

Throughout the presentation, Collier appeared to understand the Council’s indecisiveness. He insisted that none of his proposals would be enacted without Council approval, and even promised, “As long as I am Commissioner we are not going to use compulsion on the Navajo tribe.”\textsuperscript{155} There is no reason to suspect that Collier was anything but earnest, but it is also clear that he considered his earnestness and rational arguments sufficient to convince the Tribal Council to do exactly what he wanted in the way he proposed.

The debate over consolidation of the six jurisdictions at the Tuba City Council meeting illustrates the conflict, as J. C. Morgan, the representing Northern Navajo on the Council, sparred with Collier over a paragraph in the council’s resolution which supported consolidation. “We have no right as a council to force this thing on our people without their knowing of it,” he told the Commissioner. “I suggest that we do not take this paragraph into consideration until we have gone back to our own jurisdictions and hold a meeting with our people and see what they think of it.”\textsuperscript{156} Like Sandoval at the Fort Wingate meeting, Morgan was concerned that the

\textsuperscript{153} Testimony of AC Cooley at Tribal Council Meeting, Tuba City, p. 39 NNRMC.
\textsuperscript{154} Hall, \textit{West of the thirties} 135.
\textsuperscript{155} Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, October 31 1933, p 37 NNRMC.
\textsuperscript{156} Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, November 1 1933 p 65 NNRMC.
Council was being misconstrued as a democratic representational body. More to the point, Morgan distrusted the New Dealers because he fundamentally opposed their reorientation of Indian policy. Although he did not take well to the condescension of government officials, he generally preferred the old system.

When the specter of livestock reductions was raised, other Councilmen joined Morgan’s voice in protest. Jim Shirley, alternate from Southern Navajo, wondered aloud, “whether is it justified for the officials to take all the time. . . . This is the second day at the meeting which is supposed to be our meeting. It seems that the officials are taking most of the time in discussion the way this work should be done.” Shirley was no doubt offended by Collier and Cooley’s paternalistic language, and submitted, “we were born here and raised here and we know about the processes of nature on our range.” Henri Taliman, delegate from Southern Navajo, extended Shirley’s comment by setting forth his own plan. He argued that water development was key, and that Diné would never reduce their livestock. Accepting the basic scientific argument, he reasoned, “we realize that our range has become depleted but we have also had unusual dry conditions the last few years. . .but we do need more dams and more windmills and more development of springs.”157

Other delegates registered their shock by turning to the audience of Diné in attendance for opinions. While thanking the Commissioner for his work on their behalf, Nal Nishi, an alternate from Leupp Agency, argued that sheep reductions would not benefit the Diné people. He added, “I am pretty sure the audience feels that way,”158 soliciting support. Billy Pete, Diné representative for the Hopi, spoke directly to the audience, asking if they wouldn’t rather change

157 Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, Oct 31 1933 p 42- 46 NNRMC.
158 Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, Oct 31 1933 p 44, NNRMC.
Cooley’s chart so both expenditure and livestock would increase.\textsuperscript{159}

These statements were not idle obstruction; they reflected the overlapping of the Tribal Council with the more complicated network of power on the reservation, of which the Council was only one part. The Council was justified in discomfort at facing “the hardest question that has ever been brought before the Navajo Council” without consulting other authorities, like women who were likely tending the flocks at home.\textsuperscript{160} Curly Mustache was a Chapter officer at the time, and he recalled succinctly, “I would approve only if my people agreed to it.”\textsuperscript{161} George Bancroft, delegate from Western Navajo, echoed the sentiment yet again when he told the Council, “I want to ask the people how they feel about it. This is so sudden.”\textsuperscript{162} The Council was not only caught off guard, but wanted to consult important people, especially women, who were not in attendance.

Over the course of 1933 and 1934, as they grew ever more distressed, these other stakeholders made their presence increasingly known at Tribal Council meetings. The most obvious way for individual Diné to assert themselves this way was by simply showing up. Diné people, even those who did not live near Agency headquarters and had less contact with white people, often made long journeys to sit in the audience of Council meetings. Ben Morris rode all the way from Crownpoint to Tuba City to attend the Council meeting in 1933, and he describes gathering with other people from Crownpoint beforehand to discuss questions they had for John Collier:

We had two meetings before we went and we were talking about trying to increase more land and talk about more livestock and we were wrong about that …We thought all the time that we could raise any amount of sheep that we can…

\textsuperscript{159} Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, Oct 31 1933 p. 19 NNRMC.
\textsuperscript{160} Henry Taliman in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, Oct 31 1933 p. 47 NNRMC.
\textsuperscript{161} Curly Mustache in Roessel, \textit{Navajo Livestock Reduction}, 175.
\textsuperscript{162} Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, November 1 1933, p. 72. NNRMC. Bancroft was referring to the consolidation paragraph which Morgan objected to.
When we got there, there was a whole lot of Navajo people gathering up and I should say around 500 people whom we could hear up to the back from Crownpoint . . he was going into the small building where the headquarters of Tuba City was and everybody was crowding outside and just the head leaders were inside the little house.163

As Ben Morris indicates, ordinary Diné people were organizing around these political issues in ways that Indian Service and SCS officials, and perhaps portions of the Tribal Council, did not even know about. Audience members transformed Council meetings this way, overlaying the apparent democratic system with their own consensus based decision making tradition.

Collier got his resolution at that meeting, but only by intimidating Henry Taliman. It was the first indication of things to come, as Collier’s rhetoric grew distant from his authoritarian leadership style. He wanted the Diné to become autonomous, but only if they did it his way. In a closed night session on October 31, he apparently convinced Taliman to completely reverse his position, for Taliman himself presented the pro-government resolution the next morning, thanking the government for all its help and expressing support for the day school construction, jurisdiction consolidation, conservation work, road construction, and stock reduction.164 There is no explicit reference in the transcript to indicate exactly how Collier managed to flip Taliman, but Parman ventures that Collier reiterated his earlier argument about Washington withholding funding.165 After Taliman agreed to remove the district consolidation portion which so bothered J.C. Morgan, the resolution passed.

The first stock reduction which followed was a false start, however, because of the manner in which sheep were chosen for reduction. True to his word, Collier tried to make reductions fully voluntary, allowing owners to choose which animals to sell for a cheap price. During the Tuba City meeting, Chee Dodge wisely forecast the problem with this scenario: “If

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163 Ben Morris Interview by Ration, April 1969, p. 3, 6, Interview 415, reel 3 AIOHC.
164 Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, November 1 1933 p 61-62 NNRMC.
165 Parman, The Navajos and the New Deal, 45.
you were giving a fat price to the Indians you would get a nice sale from the Indians but if your price is below the market price then naturally we would give you the culls of the herd.”

Chee Dodge was exactly right. Although the government bought 86,517 sheep, not too far from the goal of 100,000, dipping records indicate that there were actually more lambs in 1934 than in 1933, most likely because the non-productive sheep were sold to the government.

By government standards, the first stock reduction was a complete failure. After running all over the reservation collecting sheep, they missed their quota and were repaid with a robust lambing season. Large herders refused to take their proportional share of the burden, insisting on a ten percent cut across the board. As a result, owners of small herds were unduly hit, as they had fewer of “the gummers and the shells” for disposal. Smallholders resented their peers placing market incentives above community support, increasing animosity between classes of Diné herders. Partially due to this first inequity in reductions, the smaller herders were most devastated by the coming phases of reduction.

Tensions were brewing while BIA and SCS officials went back to the drawing board. As Carl Beck reported to Congress in 1937, the first reduction “made the entire tribe suspicious of the Government’s program.” Beck attributed the suspicion to confusion over replacement of livestock income with wage work and infrastructural improvements, but his analysis glossed over any differences within the tribe. Contrary to official government portrayal, many Diné people completely understood the scientific argument, and they even suggested alternative solutions in public forums like council meetings and congressional hearings. For one subset of stockholders, mostly expressed by educated men with some experience dealing with Americans,

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166 Chee Dodge in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, November 1 1933, p.94 NNRMC.
167 Committee on Indian Affairs, Survey of Conditions, pt. 34, p 17806, 17995.
168 Hall, West of the Thirties, 131.
169 Committee on Indian Affairs, Survey of Conditions, pt. 34, p 17989.
the obvious solution was not to kill livestock but to develop water resources. The BIA’s failure to take their suggestions seriously helped them set aside differences with more traditional herding interests when the IRA came up for vote just two years later.

Like many of his peers, J.C. Morgan had been a vocal proponent of water resource development since at least 1927 when he outlined his goals in the Farmington Times Hustler. True to his broader goal of bringing industrial production and modern infrastructure to the reservation, Morgan repeatedly told government officials how much his people wanted water development. He did so in the spring of 1931, for example, when he testified in Shiprock before a special subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, which toured the reservation that spring as part of a national inquiry into conditions for Native Americans throughout the country. Morgan told the subcommittee that water was his first priority, specifically reservoirs and wells for stock and farming.¹⁷⁰ He expressed his support yet again in a retrospective article for the Southern Workman where he wrote, “I believe in the development of water on all parts of the reservation.”¹⁷¹

Water development created a bridge between Morgan’s stridently pro-assimilation posture and other less extremist Diné political factions. When the Senate subcommittee visited Fort Defiance, Arizona, Albert Sandoval gave similar testimony regarding water. He told the senators, “We need water for the stock and we need water for irrigation and we need water for domestic purposes.”¹⁷² Based on his familiarity with the existing water resources in the Northern Navajo district, he suggested that wells and spring development were adequate, but what they really needed was a reservoir.

Like Sandoval, Henry Taliman also touted water development. Before he yielded to

¹⁷⁰ Committee on Indian Affairs, Survey of Conditions, pt.18 p.9792.
¹⁷² Committee on Indian Affairs, Survey of Conditions, pt.18 p.9244.
Collier’s pressure, Taliman made the same argument at the Tuba City council meeting, arguing that more dams, windmills, and spring development throughout the reservation “would be adequate to stop erosion.” Taliman further enriched the argument by reminding those gathered that “we have had unusually dry conditions these last few years.” The Soil Conservation Service had already concluded that reductions were absolutely necessary. Morgan, Sandoval, and Taliman were left no recourse. They would not forget the slight during the fight over the IRA.

Beside other solutions within their scientific framework, the government completely ignored Diné logic, which provided alternative explanations for the soil conditions. Indeed, there is a chorus throughout Diné oral histories that the real source of erosion was prolonged drought. Weisiger writes that the 1930s were not, in fact, marked by extreme drought relative to the climate record, but a return to normalcy relative to unusually wet conditions in the previous decades. The Diné were thus justified in believing they were being dried out; in fact 1934 and 1936 were “droughty years” according to Weisiger.

In the experience of regular Diné shepherds like Hoske Yeba Doyah of Ganado, the hard snows during the winter of 1931-32 and the subsequent drought years seemed abnormal. “The cold winter snow takes some our stock away when there is no food for them. During the summer the animals suffer from lack of water,” he described to Diné researchers. Maurice Knee, whose brother in law, Harry Goulding, ran a trading post in Monument Valley agreed, “All it needed was a good rain!” For Nal Nashi, Tribal Council alternate from Leupp, these climate cycles constituted an organic reduction process. “Nature does it,” he said at the Tuba City meeting.

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173 Henry Taliman in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, November 1 1933 p 46 NNRMC.
174 Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, 47.
“Severe winter weather reduces our sheep.”

All these men, most of whom had some sustained contact with federal government agencies, had reason to believe that their suggestions would be considered as serious alternatives to stock reduction. Collier had openly “asked for the tribesmen’s own ideas as to what they want,” and they believed him. At various moments, the government did promise to improve water development, but it was never taken seriously as a replacement for stock reductions, more as another, smaller facet of the larger program. That said, a large number of water improvements were completed between 1931 and 1937, including 244 drilled wells, 600 dug wells, 168 windmills, 853 spring development, and 1,400 stock reservoirs. Looking back from the 1960s and 70s, these investments would be a small consolation in Diné memory.

Like many other Diné who were interviewed for oral history projects in their old age, Ason Attakai fully reversed New Dealer logic, suggesting that the lack of precipitation and poor soil conditions were a result of stock reductions, not overstocking. She joked, “All this is due to the lack of precipitation from above. Maybe they reduced that, too.” But Attakai’s perception was more complicated than her humor. Her view represented an understanding of the integrated relationship, the hózhó, between water, land, and sheep. Women like her had spent their lives among the sheep, but were hardly ever present when federal agents were collecting opinions. Diné collective memory considered the droughts of the 1930s as extreme perhaps, but also natural. In time, the rain would fall and the range would recover. According to this logic, stock reductions interfered in the natural cycle and actually contributed to environmental degradation. Chee Carrol subscribed to this view, explaining how “sheep and cattle then became more scarce

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176 Nal Nishi in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, November 1, 1933 p 44 NNRMC.
177 Gallup Independent July 31 1933, p 2 Parman Papers Box 3, Folder 31, CSR-UNM.
179 Committee on Indian Affairs, Survey of Conditions, pt. 34, p 17580.
180 Ason Attakai in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction, 129.
as streams and ponds dried up and the grasses, too. Livestock had been depended upon. The animals kept everything going.” Keedo Descheenie remembered arguing, “Watch, if we don’t bother the animals within two or three years there will be rain and plants (grass) for our stock to eat. If you kill the animals, there will be no rain or grass. You’ll be saying what you’re saying now, “There is no grass.” By 1935, both returned students and more traditional herders had watched their logic undermined, their suggestions ignored. The basis for political alliance was growing.

Given the climate and anthropogenic influences on the range at the time, it is very difficult to say whether climate change or Diné herds had a larger impact on range degradation. Regardless of the outcome, the failed process reveals how little federal officials heeded their own warnings, let alone the alternative vision of ecological balance and reservation development which men like J.C. Morgan embodied. Stereotypes still lingered in government minds, and a would be modernizer like Morgan simply did not figure into their picture of how a Native American might think about the world. By disregarding local knowledge of land and water as folk wisdom, the BIA and SCS created enemies in the younger generation of Diné leaders. When Collier returned to the reservation in 1934 to announce his Indian Reorganization Act as well as a second livestock reduction, Morgan and his followers would represent one major strain of resistance, women the other.

The Second Livestock Reduction

“Old John Collier came in and just raped those herds.”

“There came hundreds of Navajo to see him and listen to him and see for what he has to say” when Collier arrived in Fort Defiance, Arizona for the Tribal Council meeting in mid-

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182 Keedo Descheenie ONEO interview, p 4, NNIL.
183 Maurice Knee in Moon, *Tall Sheep*, 89.
March, 1934.\textsuperscript{184} The entire first session was devoted to discussing the Wheeler-Howard Bill (later the Indian Reorganization Act), Collier’s massive reform package which reversed the Dawes Act allotment system and increased tribal autonomy. In keeping with his commitment to self-rule, Collier ensured that tribes would only be subject to IRA reforms if a plurality of tribe members approved it in a referendum.

That first morning, Collier painstakingly described each portion of the bill’s positive impact on the tribe. He seemed to be genuinely excited, but his tone drifted from didactic to paternalistic. The value of the changes, he argued, was that the government would have reduced power on the reservation. Previous discriminations, like restrictions on credit to Native Americans, would be lifted, and the government would grant five million dollars to the tribes of the United States in a lean fund, from which they could take individual or group loans. In arguing that reducing the government’s power would benefit the tribe, however, Collier repeatedly emphasized the current powers of the government over the tribe. “We could take away every bit of your authority and we could deny every one of you to sit in the council and do it as arbitrarily as we wanted to,” under current rules, he told the Council.\textsuperscript{185}

Given that the council was simultaneously taking up another livestock reduction proposal, this line of argument was transparently threatening. At least implicitly Collier was suggesting that he would become increasingly dictatorial if the referendum did not pass. Reading the transcript alone makes it difficult to fully indict Collier on this count, however, as emphasis is hard to discern. He also explained with great pride how the Indian Reorganization Act would improve local government, grant the power to incorporate, give the tribe power over

\textsuperscript{184} J Barton, Interview by Tom Ration, Feb. 1969, tape 313, reel 2 AIOHC.
\textsuperscript{185} Collier in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, March 12 1934, p 5-6, NNRMC.
Congressional appropriation distribution, and the ability to appoint officers. Such a sweeping overhaul of the federal-tribal relationship would indeed devolve considerable power to tribal institutions; by all accounts these provisions were in the tribe’s interest. Even extremists like Morgan were not advocating that the federal government retain total control.

The benefits of the bill were tied to further stock reductions at that evening’s night session. Land division chief J.M. Stewart began by discussing the progress of proposed reservation expansion, now in Congress as the New Mexico and Arizona Boundary Bills. These bills, according to Stewart, each asked the government to spend $500,000 on land, and could only pass if the Tribal Council agreed to a second herd reduction. “we have got to have your cooperation to get this money and this land,” he told the Council before pedantically reading back to them their own stock reduction resolution from the previous winter’s meeting in Tuba City.

“Those boundary bills will not be enacted if the program of soil erosion and range control is not carried forward” he warned, but after a reduction of around 100,000 goats, half the reservation’s total head count, “we will not ask again of you to reduce your stock. It won’t be necessary.” This promise would be used against the Diné come January of 1935, when the New Mexico boundary bill stalled in the House; one of Collier’s closest advisors suggested postponing further council meetings because the tribe would condemn the broken promise of more land. The connection between stock reduction and the boundary bills was blatant. “There is no other word than blackmail for this approach,” wrote eminent Diné historian Peter Iverson, and in Weisiger’s words it was “in essence, extortion.”

There was another, implicit connection to be drawn, however, between the pain of goat

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186 Collier in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, March 12 1934 p. 10-12 NNRMC.
187 Stewart in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, March 12 1934 p 22- 23 NNRMC.
189 Iverson, Diné, 148.
190 Weisiger, Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country, 170.
reductions and the supposed promise of the IRA. When it was his turn to speak, Collier apologized for the appearance of threatening the Council, but told them flatly that failure to pass the goat reduction would result in removal of Soil Erosion Service money, as well as “the other big expenditures that are going on and that are planned for the Navajo Reservation.”¹⁹¹ Not hours before he had touted the monetary value of the Act’s credit provision, so it would be logical for the councilmen and gathered Diné to understand the Bill as one of the “big expenditures” Collier mentioned, thus connecting goat reductions and the IRA in their minds. Considering the carnage of goat reductions, it makes sense that so many Diné expressed their anger on the IRA ballot.

As in the 1933 meetings, Collier pressured the Council to make an immediate decision without consulting their regional communities, again unknowingly offending Diné political convention. J.C. Morgan was evidently tired of being treated with such superficial respect. He poked fun at Collier, wondering “May I ask the Commissioner how long it took to write this bill?” “A good many months” Collier replied, not anticipating Morgan’s rebuttal, “Then it will take us a good many more months to study it out.”¹⁹² Despite the pressure they exerted, government officials could not even settle on an answer to simple questions about how many animals would be expected from each agency.¹⁹³ In one exasperated moment, Nal Nashi, alternate from Leupp agency humorously recalled the alternative plan to improve water resources, asking, “Why not take some of that money and pay the people up above who have charge of the rain?”¹⁹⁴ The Council ultimately met the government half way, agreeing to the principle of further stock reductions but insisting on language allowing delegates to “return to their people” and find more consensus before proceeding. The final resolution also exempted

¹⁹¹ Collier, in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, March 12 1934, p 26 NNRMC.
¹⁹² Collier and Morgan in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, March 12 1934 p12 NNRMC.
¹⁹³ Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, March 13 1934 p 43, NNRMC.
¹⁹⁴ Nal Nashi in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, March 13 1934 p 49 NNRMC.
families with one hundred head or fewer unless the majority were sheep; in that case purchasers were instructed to replace goats with sheep they would buy from owners of large herds.195

Before the next meeting in early April, delegates held their promise to meet with their regional communities and try to establish a fair mechanism for reducing the goat population. With the exception of Leupp which had few goats, the delegates found that people were confused about the details of the government’s plan, and universally opposed losing more of their herds.196 Five or six hundred Diné people even went to Crownpoint to witness the meeting firsthand, so many that some listened outside under shady trees to hear what would happen to their goats.197 Their presence was also a form of political pressure, a reminder to the councilmen that even without the recognition of the federal government, their opinions mattered.

The Council meeting format made it difficult for these other perspectives to be heard. At no point in the proceedings were non-Councilmen called to testify. Even in absentia, John Collier dominated the beginning of the meeting, having instructed Stewart to prepared statements as his proxy. The conversation about the Act picked up where it had left off in Fort Defiance a month earlier, beginning with new tribal-government charters, but this time the councilmen were more active, referring frequently to the needs of their people back home. J. C. Morgan was the most critical, reminding those gathered that “We are discussing something which the Navajo Indian has not asked for. It is something that we never dreamed of.” He warned, “It is nothing like anything that has ever been offered to us, which if we accept, it will cause us pain in days to come.”198

195 Navajo Tribal Council Resolution, March 13 1934, NNRMC.
196 For example, April 7th 1934, Southern Navajo chapter meeting minutes, Thomas Dodge Papers Box 3 Folder 2, ASU
197 Ben Morris, Interview by Ration, April 1969, p. 1, tape 415, reel 3 AIOHC; Bicenta Begay, interview by Fern Charley and Dean Sundberg, 10 April 1974, p 41, in Sunderberg and Charley, Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews, CSUF.
198 Morgan in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, April 10 1934, p 43, NNRMC.
Women had undoubtedly made up a large contingent of the regional gatherings, and their interests also made a subtle appearance in the meeting when Henry Taliman asked whether a new charter would continue to allow women to vote. “They wanted to know,” he said of his Southern Navajo constituents.199 In his mind, the IRA encouraged Native Americans to live separately from mainstream America, while he wanted “my people to have and enjoy freedom of a citizen and not to be treated as a foreigner . . . . to pull these people up out of the ground to a higher level of life.”200 The council was split, however, and only four of the twelve voting delegates agreed with Morgan’s assimilationist stance when the council voted on the Bill. Despite the defeat, Morgan’s fight was still ahead, as the IRA had yet to pass Congress or be approved by the Diné people.

When the meeting turned to the proposed goat reduction, the Council members again repeated what they had heard at home. “We are not in favor of the plans . . . I am speaking for the people in general and they don’t like the idea of reducing their goat herds” insisted Toadechenie Cheschillie, alternate from Southern Navajo.201 Albert Sandoval finally asked the question at the forefront of everyone’s mind: Would the goat reduction be the last stock reduction requested by the government? “Absolutely,” replied Stewart, “the assurance was given by Mr. Collier himself.” That evening in closed session, the Council approved a resolution to borrow money from the government to purchase 150,000 of their own goats and 50,000 of their own sheep, to be repaid in future Diné oil royalties. They would need to meet yet again because there was still no plan for how the reduction would actually take place.

As the pressure increased, Diné not represented on the Council tried to make their presence felt in ways that New Dealers could recognize. The Commissioner called a final

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199 Henry Taliman in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, April 9, 1934, p 22, NNRMC.
200 Morgan in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, April 10 1934, p 44, NNRMC.
201 Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, April 10 1934, p 53, NNRMC.
meeting for July 10 in Keam’s Canyon, and he was eager to get the goat question out of the way. The Indian Reorganization Act had passed Congress in the interim between Council meetings, and he assured all in attendance that the New Mexico boundary bill would pass in the next session.\footnote{Collier in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, July 12 1934, p 71 NNRMC.} That first evening, women and elderly Diné tried to make themselves heard by the Council in a Diné-only closed session. They pleaded with the delegates to defend their herds, pointing out that they could not benefit from conservation work project jobs.\footnote{Collier, Morgan, Bicenta Bega, in Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, July 12 1934, p 69-76 NNRMC.} At that moment, even the council did not anticipate “the criticism which would come from the Navajos, especially the women.”\footnote{Carl Beck, “History of Stock Reduction” in Committee on Indian Affairs, \emph{Survey of Conditions}, pt. 34, p. 17988.} Unfortunately, many Councilmen had grown accustomed to their new power, and ignored appeals of the people.

Morgan’s faction was the exception. Speaking for himself and the Returned Students, Morgan said that Collier’s proposed replacement of boarding schools with day schools was “simply slapping the boys and girls in the face.” Twice he mentioned recent tours of the reservation to “find what is most needful for our people,” indications of the process by which he built a network of supporters and confidants with whom he could mobilize against the IRA.\footnote{Tribal Council Meeting Minutes, July 11 1934, p 74, 88 NNRMC.} The other delegates, especially Chee Dodge, former chairman Dashne Cheshillige and Henry Taliman, flatly disagreed that the IRA would mean a “return to the blanket.” They led the seven man vote in favor of the legislation, while Morgan and his cohort abstained.\footnote{See council minutes; Parman, \emph{The Navajos and the New Deal}, 56.}

The second reduction was badly mishandled from the start. The Diné had agreed to sell their goats to the Relief Administration for $1 each, and the goats were supposed to be sent by train to packing plants and canned for emergency food. As it turned out, the summer of 1934 was plagued by drought, and many weakened animals died on the long drives to the railroad
station. In some cases, field workers recognized the futility of even attempting to move the animals, and Diné families were allowed to kill and eat their goats to meet quotas. Northeastern Diné ate some two thirds of their quota, while the rest of the reservation ate about one third. In other highly publicized cases, however, field workers disposed of excess goats by shooting them and leaving them to rot. According to Chief of Extension Carl Beck’s report to Congress, 3,500 goats were shot at once in Navajo Canyon.

These acts of violence deeply ingrained the goat reduction period in Diné collective memory. As Lamar Bedonie recalled, “About 160 of our goats were killed. They were driven into a canyon corner and were shot to death.” Rumors circulated that the government had also put “the corpses in a big heap, poured oil or gasoline on them and set fire to them.” Maurice Knee, a trader near Monument Valley, remembered that animals “starved to death, or just collapsed, and they’d come along and shoot them. It was just legal murder.” Howard Gorman also remembered “another tragic incident happened over in Kayenta where a large herd of sheep was gathered. There were over 3,000 corralled, and nobody knew what to do with that huge flock; so it was decided that the best solution was to shoot them, and that’s what was done.” A multitude of small owners who lost an unfair proportion of their stock, directly contradicting the Tribal Council’s express wishes. Even though the council had amended the goat reduction resolution to provide sheep to small herders whose goats were taken, it was never acted upon.

The devastation hardly escaped notice. ER Smith, a BIA forester, told interviewers that “I was aware that there were instances of considerable brutality and insensitivity on the part of

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207 Weisiger, Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country, 175.
208 Lamar Bedoni, interview by Fern Charley 30 July 1972, p 7, in Sunderberg and Charley, Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews, CSUF.
209 Billy Bryant and Fred Descheene in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction, 141, 190.
210 Maurice Knee in Moon, Tall Sheep, 89.
211 Howard Gorman in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction, 47.
some Indian Service personnel.” He stopped short of apologizing, and instead offered his assessment that “considering the size of the area and the difficulty in achieving communication, I think it is understandable that there occurred in some instances very grave injustices and inequities.”

In parts of Diné Bikeyah the results were truly catastrophic. At J.C. Morgan’s urging, Collier sent SCS employee Richard Van Valkenburgh to the southeastern Checkerboard area to assess the damage done. Van Valkenburgh did not mince words. He reported that “the general situation is beyond belief. I have never seen on the reservation proper anything that could compare with the misery of these people.” He calculated that groups with between zero and one hundred stock lost 23.1% in the reduction, an astounding figure especially compared to the mere 5.4% which was taken from groups owning five hundred to one thousand head. Van Valkenburgh further explained that the reduction “was unjustified by the range conditions. For every head of Navajo stock that left the ranges one white man’s animal replaced it.” Such blatant mistreatment by the government reopened the fresh wounds of Hwéeldi, reinforcing Diné antagonism toward the federal government.

**Political Alliance**

“Is it true that Jake Morgan has advised you people to fight the government?”

This fury reached a crescendo just as the IRA referendum vote approached, creating an expedient reason for opponents of government policy to unite. By late fall 1934, J.C. Morgan’s assimilationists and women had emerged as the two principle poles of resistance to continued federal government intervention, and the vote accelerated their alliance. The Diné people had

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212 ER Smith Interview by Ration, April 1969, p. 7, tape 642, reel 4 AIOHC.  
213 Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Conditions*, pt. 34, p 17758.  
216 George Castillo to Iral Alcock and Van Valkenburgh near lone pine NM, August 2, 1937. Parman Papers Box 1 Folder 20, CSR-UNM
suffered New Deal liberalism, and they took the Indian Reorganization Act referendum as an opportunity to repudiate the very premise of government power on their land. Even though the bill promised increased tribal autonomy, the Diné people rejected it on the principle that the government could intervene in the first place.

The vote in Diné Bikeyah was scheduled for March 29th and 30th 1935, and J.C. Morgan wasted no time gathering opposition. Morgan had been visiting with remote Diné herding families since the 1920s, and he called on these old friends now, “traveling to different areas of the Reservation, trying to get a lot of sheep owners to join him in protesting against the action.”217 Local communities were also holding meetings to discuss the referendum, and Morgan promoted resistance at these gatherings as well.

Morgan’s childhood herding sheep in the Checkerboard served him in these meetings, helping him putting the arguments into Diné terms far more effectively than his government opponents. Howard Gorman, Morgan’s ally from the Returned Students Association, recalled a particular community meeting in Niinahnizaad (Fruitland, New Mexico), when Morgan made a cooking analogy which everyone could understand. Morgan asked the crowd to “‘suppose you have two huge pots filled with water . . . . In one pot you put fresh mutton, cut into small pieces, and in the other pot you put all old and new laws and regulation papers concerning livestock.’” According to Gorman, “The people replied, ‘For heaven’s sake, who would want to go for cooked paper? It’s mutton the people would go for. Naturally the people prefer mutton.’”218 Morgan knew that many of the illiterate herders would not relate to policy discussions, but they could certainly understand more attacks on their herds. The Diné audience members were not being tricked into changing their opinions as previous historians have suggested, they were being

217 Howard Gorman in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction, 43.
218 Howard Gorman in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction, 45.
drawn into Morgan’s political alliance.

Morgan’s campaign was all the more effective because his main Diné political opponent, Chee Dodge, initially refrained from taking a public position on the IRA, and was later opposed. William Zeh tried to convince him to support the bill by flying him to Washington D.C., but apparently to no avail. After the government began its own information campaign in earnest, Dodge rejoined their cause, but his change of heart came amidst allegations of bribery, and was too close to the vote to have much impact anyway.²¹⁹

Dodge’s reticence did not mean that there was no Diné support for the bill. One of Francisconi’s interviewees recalled,

> When the Indian Reorganization Act passed Navajos were seriously divided on its support. At Crownpoint we supported, but the Shiprock delegation opposed it. The debate was between Christians and supporters of traditional Medicine men. Also people argued over full citizenship in the United States and having a Navajo self rule.²²⁰

As accounts like this remind us, it is important to remember not only the Diné resistance movement, but the many different ways Diné people reacted to the New Deal. There were major players and factions, certainly, but not all positions fit into neat categories.

Tom Dodge was certainly incensed when J.C. Morgan went to Washington in February 1935, first in his brief stint in the far right-wing American Indian Federation, and later to testify before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. In both instances, Morgan fought to change the election procedure to more fairly reflect Diné views. According to the bill’s original formulation, a non-vote by an eligible tribe member was counted as a vote in favor of the bill. With Morgan’s help, the committee amended the bill so a simple majority of votes cast would determine the

²¹⁹ This discussion of Dodge comes from Parman, *The Navajos and the New Deal*, 75. See his third chapter for more detail. Eli Gorman, in Roessel, *Navajo Livestock Reduction*, 29, also remembers the details of Chee Dodge’s changing alliances.

²²⁰ Interview 16: 159 065 in Francisconi, *Kinship, Capitalism, Change*, p 207.
outcome."\textsuperscript{221} The younger Dodge was concerned that Morgan was misrepresenting himself during these visits, and sent Collier an angry telegram to inform him that a committee of Tribal Council members had met and “declared that JC Morgan has no authority to speak for or represent Navajo Tribe or any portion of tribe."\textsuperscript{222}

Dodge’s telegram suggests that some Tribal Council members disagreed with Morgan, but the oral history record directly contradicts his claim that Morgan had no authority to speak for any Diné people. Here again Howard Gorman’s memory for detail is invaluable. He remembers that during Morgan’s tours of the local community meetings “money was collected to be used toward a trip to Washington, D.C., to protest the situation. That was done, and a group went to Washington. J.C. Morgan headed it.”\textsuperscript{223} Buck Austin, interviewed for the same project as Gorman, had a similar recollection, as did J. Barton in his interview for the AIOHC.\textsuperscript{224} These accounts suggest that Morgan did have substantial support amongst regular Diné people – why else would they have sent him to Washington D.C.?

The oral history accounts not only verify how completely J.C. Morgan was associated with the referendum vote, they also show how Morgan’s assimilationist position was associated with opposition to livestock reductions. The links are especially clear in John Nez’s interview for the AIOHC:

The cross belonged to Mr. Collier, the round circle belonged to J. C. Morgan. . . Mr. Collier said that the cross was good but that meant a productions and some other things that was not good, worth doing. . . the cross got beat, and Mr. Collier got beat. . . Mr. J.C. Morgan wanted the people to live like the way they are, scattered out wherever they want to, it is a free world.\textsuperscript{225}

\textsuperscript{221} Parman, \textit{The Navajos and the New Deal}, 72.
\textsuperscript{222} Western Union Nite Letter from Thomas Dodge to Collier Feb. 5, 1935 Parman Papers Box 1 Folder 9, CSR-UNM.
\textsuperscript{223} Howard Gorman in Roessel, \textit{Navajo Livestock Reduction}, 45.
\textsuperscript{224} Buck Austin in Roessel, \textit{Navajo Livestock Reduction}, 17; J Barton tape 313, reel 2 AIOHC.
\textsuperscript{225} John Nez, Interview by Ration, Feb. 1969, p. 6, tape 344, reel 2 AIOHC. Many oral accounts refer to reductions as “productions,” but it is unclear whether this is an error of translation, transcription, or perhaps a common misuse amongst primarily Diné speaking interviewees.
For John Nez, the vote was about more than the legislation actually at stake, it was about sending a clear message to the government that they opposed further stock reductions. Judging by Nez’s statement, it seems that Morgan successfully combined his own beliefs about industrial modernization and cultural assimilation with the frustrations of livestock owners. Otherwise his peer group of returned students could not have politically united with men like Nez, who wanted to maintain the sheep herding way of life. There is also no evidence to suggest that voters like Nez were not fully aware that refusing the referendum was a political statement against Collier’s autocratic paternalism, and were willing to forego the potential benefits of reorganization to back it up.

If there is any lingering doubt about Morgan’s influence on the vote, look no further than Roman Hubbell’s angry letter of consolation to Collier after defeat. In his estimation, the people had been “blinded by religious prejudice,” and would never have refuted Collier’s measure “if certain missionary groups had preserved any form of religious integrity.” It’s a wonder he did not mention J.C. Morgan by name.

Women’s influence on the Wheeler-Howard rejection is much more difficult to prove. Far fewer attended school or spoke English, making it difficult for American scholars to collect their oral accounts. While J.C. Morgan could write letters to his associates and enemies, have his name transcribed into meeting minutes, and spread his acclaim through mobilization tours of the reservation, Diné women were exerting a less tangible influence, and one without a clear documentary record. Morgan and Collier are exemplars of their positions, but there is no equivalent for female leaders. Still, it is possible to glean tidbits from oral accounts and some written documents which help explain women’s influence on the IRA vote.

226 Roman Hubbell to Collier, June 16 1935. Parman Papers Box 1 Folder 14, CSR- UNM.
Quite telling are the numerous petitions which Diné regional chapters sent to their representatives in Washington, and on occasion to Collier himself. In April 1935, for example, the Northern Navajo chapters gathered 139 signatures in protest of further livestock reductions, which they sent to Collier. Unlike this one, most of the petitions were sent after the vote was cast, but they often discussed their points of protest in light of previous grievances. Even more importantly, 40 percent of signatories were women.

Some of these women may have attended the Tribal Council meetings if they were nearby, but for the most part these women had been an unseen part of tribal politics (from the government’s perspective) up to that point. These were the women whose opinions the councilmen considered crucial to decision making in 1933 and 1934, and these were the women whose personal property and livelihood had been mistakenly attributed to their husbands, and seized by the government anyway. Some of these women, like Kitty At’inii had even taken their livestock and “hid them over there in the canyon” as a last resort. They had borne the brunt of the livestock reduction burden, giving them strong grounds to oppose the IRA referendum, while New Dealers relied on the Tribal Council as a gauge of Diné support. It was a mistake “when Collier, as he repeatedly did, argued that the Navajos themselves agreed in the council votes to reduction,” writes White, because “he was making the narrowest possible defense. He would later admit that real consent had never been obtained.” Only in the aftermath of the vote, did Collier finally recognize that women’s opposition to further reductions was a major factor in his defeat.

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227 Petition to Commissioner Collier April 13, 1935. Parman Papers Box 1 Folder 10, CSR- UNM.
228 This figure from Weisiger’s research; Weisiger, Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country, 212.
229 See also Ason Attakai in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction, 129.
230 Kitty At’inii, interviewed by Fern Charley and Dean Sundberg, 13 July 1972, p 5, in Sunderberg and Charley, Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).
231 White, Roots of Dependency, 268.
232 Weisiger, Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country, 179.
The government did not give up without a fight. In the wake of Morgan’s successful campaigning and the further foment of Diné women, Secretary of the Interior Ickes delayed the voting twice, once immediately after Morgan’s visits to Washington, and again under the pretense of bad weather, finally settling on June 14-15, 1935. In an effort to regain support, William Zeh held a meeting at Fort Wingate to convince traders to support the referendum, and also worked hard to change Chee Dodge’s mind. Perhaps following Morgan’s model, Zeh conducted his own tour of the reservation, holding large meetings to explain the government’s position. Collier himself flew to the reservation, insisting that “There can not be and will not be any discrimination against a tribe which in the exercise of its best judgment declines to accept the Act. It will merely drift to the rear of the great advance open to the Indian race.”

For the government, it was too little too late. Ninety-eight percent of the roughly 15,900 eligible voters went to the polls in mid July, casting 7,679 votes in favor of the bill and 8,197 votes against it. Unsurprisingly, Morgan’s Northern district went overwhelmingly against the referendum with 2,773 Xs and only 536 Os. The Eastern, Southern, and Western districts all voted down the referendum as well, but by smaller margins; only Leupp and Keams Canyon supported the IRA.

The Indian Reorganization Act stands as a moment when Diné political factions allied in powerful repudiation of John Collier’s approach to Indian Affairs. As much as they welcomed the idea of reorganization in 1933, the terms laid out by Collier were unacceptable, and reflected his own arrogant self-assurance, not the political or cultural realities of the reservation. In an interview, Howard Gorman reflected on the results with pride and commented on the

234 John Collier, “Facts About the new Indian Reorganization Act” in Thomas Dodge Papers Box 6 Folder 11, ASU. The letter is undated, but must have been issued between June 1934 and June 1935.
implications it had for later Diné-government interactions:

From then on we were considered and called the Disorganized Tribe, and up to the present day we are still recognized as a Disorganized Tribe. But, really, when one comes down to it, we’re more organized than any other tribe. We’re more free; we discuss our problems. We can go to Washington and go right straight up to Congress and talk to our Congressmen. We can talk to our President without having to go to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.\footnote{Howard Gorman in Roessel, \textit{Navajo Livestock Reduction}, 73.}

If passing the Indian Reorganization Act meant more stock reductions, they would rather remain disorganized.
Conclusion

“The Interior Department will continue to give that tribe or reservation the same amount and quality of services as it receives today. Its vote against the Indian Reorganization [sic] Act will not alter the policy of the Department.”

The vote would not mark the end of New Deal programs in Diné Bikeyah. In fact, tensions would escalate in the latter 1930s and early 1940s, resulting in numerous jailings and even violence. Instead of looking back at the failures of the first half of the decade, the Navajo Service pushed forward, continuing to ignore critical centers of power in Diné Bikeyah. Collier told the tribe that their vote had not changed the fate of “one sheep or goat,” but that they had lost access to huge amounts of federal funding. The Diné people had “made its task infinitely harder,” he continued, “and has added grievously, even critically, to the handicaps under which it and its old and young people must labor.”

In context, his promise that “the tribe will be reminded that its actions with respect to the Indian Reorganization Act will not deter the Government from its purpose and effort to help the tribe in every possible way” sounded suspiciously like a threat.

J.C. Morgan protested that “we are being pushed under this Wheeler-Howard Act,” to no avail. The new General Superintendent Chester Faris was busy dividing the reservation’s old six jurisdictions into eighteen new districts based on grazing, and organizing a systematic grazing permit system to ensure that range quotas could not be exceeded. By necessity, the new program included more livestock reductions. After July 1936, however, Navajo Service workers were forbidden from referring to the cuts as “livestock reductions.” The Navajo Service Newsletter decreed, “Henceforth the term ‘livestock adjustment program’ will be used in

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237 John Collier, “Questions and Answers concerning the Indian Reorganization (Modified Wheeler-Howard) Act” (noted in pencil, c.1935), p 13. Thomas Dodge Papers Box 1 Folder 7, ASU.
238 Collier to People of the Navajo Nation, June 21 1935. Thomas Dodge Papers, Box 1, Folder 13 ASU.
239 Testimony of J.C. Morgan in Committee on Indian Affairs, Survey of Conditions, pt. 34, p 17480.
referring to sales and removal of livestock from the Reservation. . . Let us all forget about reduction and remember to say ‘livestock adjustment.’”  

240 The Navajo Service had finally found the right words for the song it had been singing since 1933.

* * *

“We live by our stories, prayers and songs. Those that we tape possibly are for the use of our grandchildren or great-grandchildren. . . . We always listen for good, acceptable words. These are based on the stories. These stories I tell should be connected with prayers and songs, telling of the suffering we went through. . . . I only tape the main parts of stories people come to me about – historical events that actually took place.”  

241 A memorandum could not erase the horrors of stock reductions from Diné memory. As the twentieth century rolled on, anthropologists and Diné researchers returned over and over to the stories of Diné elders who had experienced the tragedy, asking them to tell their stories. The translations and transcriptions of these conversations are sometimes criticized for imprecision of detail, but what these accounts may lose in perfect accuracy is offset by the rich coloring of time. Years of reflection bring the most emotional moments to the surface while other recede, and help the historian understand though processes, values, and complex relationships, in addition to events of historic importance.

In this story, three motifs weave throughout every oral history collection, giving a glimpse into the formation of collective memory. First, many Diné remember the sound of women crying over their lost animals. Lamar Bedoni told her interviewers, “I remember there were a lot of Navajo women crying,” a sentiment echoed by Pearl Phillips’ recollection, “I heard that some women who had their sheep taken away were just crying.”  

242 Howard Gorman mentioned women crying in interviews for both Ruth Roessel’s collection and the American

240 Navajo Service News, July 1 1936. Parman Papers Box 1, Folder 15.
241 Chee Carrol in Roessel, Navajo Livestock Reduction, 154.
242 Lamar Bedoni and Pearl Phillips, interviews by Fern Charley, 30 July 1972, p 12, 9, in Sunderberg and Charley, Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews, CSUF.
Indian Oral History Collection.\textsuperscript{243} “Near what is now the [Ganado]Trading Post was a ditch where sheep intestines were dumped, and these were scattered all over,” he began, “the womenfolks were crying, mourning over such a tragic scene.”\textsuperscript{244} The image clearly stayed with Mr. Gorman, as he pointedly told AIOHC interviewers, “I tell you the women folks cried over this thing, they did not like it, it still remains the same, they still do not like it.”\textsuperscript{245} Although few individual women left documentary evidence of their struggle, these accounts reflect Dine value in femininity, sheep, and land.\textsuperscript{246}

The motif of animal bones lends itself to a similar analysis. As with mention of women crying, Diné interviewees return again and again to images of sun-bleached bones, the remains of stock reduction victims, still visible in the desert. Hite Chee, Lula Stanley, Neda Todichi’ii’iini, Kitty At’ini, Pete Sheen, and Buck Austin, and many others were eager to tell interviewers that “the bones of thousands of sheep and goats that were killed are still visible in some areas, especially near Kayenta and Piñon where thousands of these animals were slaughtered.”\textsuperscript{247} Even more than the sounds of women crying, these references are an attempt to situate the New Deal tragedy in contemporary Diné life. For the speakers, the bones are more than artifacts of history or memorials to wanton slaughter, they are symbols bridging past pain to present experience. They suggest that if the memory can be successfully transferred to successive generations, perhaps future disasters can be averted.

The final motif is John Collier himself, appearing in the majority of oral history accounts of the period. More than any other figure, memories transform Collier from a man into a villain,

\textsuperscript{243} Howard Gorman, in Roessel, \textit{Navajo Livestock Reduction}, 46.
\textsuperscript{244} Howard Gorman Interview by Daniel Tyler, Oct. 1968, p. 3, tape 533, reel 2, AIOHC.
\textsuperscript{245} See appendix.
\textsuperscript{246} Buck Austin in Roessel, \textit{Navajo Livestock Reduction}, 22. For more accounts see Rossell \textit{Navajo Livestock Reduction}, Sunderberg and Charley, \textit{Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews}, CSUF.
personally responsible for every slaughtered animal and broken promise. Some speakers malign Collier in the strongest possible terms. According to them, “He was a devil,” who “ground our faces against the hard sand.”248 “John Collier ruined my life,” contended John Slim Nez. Other resist mythologizing, instead condemning Collier’s specific plans. Buster Whitehorse put it best when he said simply, “John Collier told us to kill our sheep, goats, and burros. They were brutal orders.”249 Perhaps the consolidation of so much anger in one person is unfounded, but it is an understandable feature of collective memory. Collier became a canvas for the many legitimate grievances against the federal government. These accounts may not be correctly assigning blame, but they no less valuable records of emotional response to tragedy.

*   *   *

This story begins on Diné Bikeyah, but it has broader implications for the twentieth century history of American progressivism. We see in this example how policy goals can be obstructed by the means taken to achieve them, and how an imbalance of power as drastic as the Diné relationship to the federal government can wash away even the best intentions. There would be no story to tell if federal bureaucrats had always disdained Native Americans, and treated them with the particular combination of contempt and neglect which marked the assimilationist period. It is not remarkable when closed-minded people do closed-minded things. But when sympathetic social values are put to the test, and when they fail as spectacularly as they did here, it should give us pause.

My sincere hope for this paper is that it begins to chip away at the question of how a progressive social outlook – one which genuinely values egalitarianism and multiculturalism – can become so twisted by political power imbalance. From 1933-1936, Collier’s rhetoric

248 Ben Morris, interview by Ration, AIOHC, and Lamar Bedoni Navajo Stock Reduction Interviews, p 14, CSUF.
249 Buster Whitehorse in Moon, Tall Sheep, 99.
reflected his principles, but the policies he oversaw had disastrous results for the Diné people. His kind words melted away as soon as the IRA votes were cast. The problem seems not to be with the ideas Collier espoused, but with the unbridled power of his office, which allowed him to implement policy from a position of ignorance.

Anthropologist and Cherokee Robert K. Thomas wrote that “an Indian reservation is the most complete colonial system in the world that I know about.” Indeed, the impetus to change the social, economic, and political systems of the people under state jurisdiction, and to control the very physical landscape which sustains them, all in the name of modern or progressive improvement, is recognizable as the way so many colonial powers justify their interventions. But even Thomas admits, “I don’t want to give you the impression that the U.S. government goes out with big imperialist designs on Indian reservations. Were it that simple, were there nice, clean-cut villains, you could just shoot them or something. But it isn’t that simple.”

Aimé Césaire famously wrote that colonialism was not only oppressive of colonized people, but that it works to “decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism.” Indeed, the story of livestock reductions can count government bureaucrats, including John Collier, amongst its victims. His career, and his idealism, were shattered by the failure of the Indian Reorganization Act.

This is not meant to serve as a defense of Collier, but to support Césaire’s basic thesis about colonial power relationships. Intentions ultimately mean very little if one side is endowed with coercive power over the other, especially if those in power feel that moral righteousness is on their side. The New Dealers were so convinced that their understanding of soil erosion, their

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logic, and their truth were superior to Diné interpretations, that any means to achieve range control were justified. Twelve years after the fact, Collier could see the destruction, but not his complicity. “Today, on the Navajo reservation, anguish of spirit is a wolf against the breast, and struggle rages, hardly less than any year before,” he wrote, but “there are no large lines of the endeavor which the Indian Service would erase if it could go back.”

Glossary

Biligáana – Americans of European descent.

Diné – The Navajo people.

Dinétah – Literally, “among the people,” the traditional homeland of the Diné extending throughout northeastern Arizona to Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico.

Diné Bikeyah – The Diné homeland.

Diyin Diné’é – Spiritual ancestors and creators of the Diné.

Hahjeénah- The emergence, part of Blessingway chant.

Hataali- Spiritual leaders.

Hóchxǫ – The balance to hózhǫ, negative things broadly construed.

Hogan – A traditional round Diné dwelling.

Hózhó – The balance to hóchxǫ, positive things broadly construed.

Hózhǫoji – Blessingway chant

Hwéeldi – Bosque Redondo internment camp at Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

Naat’áanii – Regional headmen.
Appendix

BOUNDARIES OF THE NAVAJO RESERVATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency or Land Management District</th>
<th>Carrying capacity, SUYLA</th>
<th>Percent deviation from capacity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SU per mi²</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern (Ft. Defiance)</td>
<td>207,465</td>
<td>28c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern (Shiprock)</td>
<td>141,490</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern (Crownpoint)</td>
<td>18,185</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western (Tuba City)</td>
<td>194,000</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leupp (Leupp)</td>
<td>37,345</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>598,485</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Management Districts</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kaibito</td>
<td>34,221</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Navajo Mountain</td>
<td>20,506</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Tuba City</td>
<td>47,288</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Black Mesa</td>
<td>23,372</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Leupp</td>
<td>26,351</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Hopi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Bidahochee</td>
<td>49,727</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Kayenta</td>
<td>29,978</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 TseeNoshPos</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>10 Chinle</td>
<td>33,717</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>11 Tsaile</td>
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<td>12 Shiprock</td>
<td>52,385</td>
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<td>13 Fruitland</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 on res. Standing Rock</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 off res. Crownpoint</td>
<td>46,584</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>16 Gallup</td>
<td>71,001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Klagetoh</td>
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<td>18 Ft. Defiance</td>
<td>33,008</td>
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<td>19 Counselors</td>
<td>35,682</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>512,922</td>
<td>23f</td>
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</table>

*Sheep units year long.

*Kelly 1968:114.

*Using area from U.S. Senate 1932:9399, 9461.

*Calculated from Young 1961:169−70.


*Excludes LMDs 15 (off reservation part), 16, and 19.

### Navajo income, 1930–1980

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<tr>
<td>Livestock and agriculture</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>Arts and crafts</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Wages</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>Public assistance and retirement</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average annual income per person</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Current dollars</td>
<td>$98</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>667[^b]</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>2200[^c]</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967 dollars</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>564</td>
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</table>

**Sources:** U.S. Senate 1932:9135 (1930); Young 1958:102 (1936 and 1940); Young 1961:228 (1960); Wistisen *et al.* 1975:8, 14 (1974); *Navajo Times*, November 10, 1982:16 (1980).

*Figures include Hopi

[^b]: Calculated with population figure from 1960 census

[^c]: Based on U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Arizona Department of Economic Security figures. U.S. Census Bureau figure for 1980 is $2414 but excludes Eastern Navajo Agency, according to Ron Faich, Navajo Nation Division of Community Development.

Sheep intestines were dumped in piles in a ditch. Navajo women mourned and cried.

J. C. Morgan traveled all over the Reservation persuading stock owners to join him in opposing livestock reduction.

The Navajos argued loudly with John Collier who finally ran to his plane, saying, “I am going back to Washington.”

Bibliography

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