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**title:** Chiefs, Agents & Soldiers : Conflict On the Navajo Frontier, 1868-1882  
**author:** Moore, William Haas.  
**publisher:** University of New Mexico  
**isbn10 | asin:** 0826314759  
**print isbn13:** 9780826314758  
**ebook isbn13:** 9780585187396  
**language:** English  
**subject** Navajo Indians--History, Navajo Indians--Government relations.  
**publication date:** 1994  
**lcc:** E99.N3M687 1994eb  
**ddc:** 973/.04972  
**subject:** Navajo Indians--History, Navajo Indians--Government relations.

Chiefs, Agents & Soldiers  
Conflict on the Navajo Frontier,  
1868-1882

William Haas Moore

University of New Mexico Press  
Albuquerque

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Moore, William Haas, 1947

Chiefs, agents, and soldiers: conflict on the Navajo frontier,  
1868-1882 / William Haas Moore. 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8263-1475-9

1. Navajo Indians--History.

2. Navajo Indians--Government relations.

3. Indians of North America--Government relations

1869-1934.

I. Title

E99.N3M687 1994

973'.04972dc20

93-35896

CIP

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*To Ginny*

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## Preface

The history of conflict between American Indians and the United States is partially explained and greatly confused by crucial American myths. Although they tell important truths about the people who composed them, they often limit explanations to landmark events that become static symbols of catastrophe or of resolution. Unfortunately, they neglect to tell us much about times after these events. Paradoxically, in a field dominated by myth, Native American myths receive little attention.

According to the Navajos, life began in the womb of the earth in the Black World, a small universe inhabited by Mist Beings. Among the first of these supernatural spirits was the trickster, Coyote, and it was within this embryonic world that the Navajo pantheon was born. First Woman was formed when yellow and blue clouds merged in the West; she represented darkness and death. In classic duality, another god, First Man, who symbolized dawn and became known as the Life Giver, emerged in the East. After four tries, he managed to meet First Woman. Despite this fortunate union, the Black World was quickly overpopulated, and the beings living there fought among themselves. 1

Movement was the answer. Floating upward, the beings traveled east into the Blue World, a land already inhabited by other creatures. This new universe was a place of sorrow that did not have room for everybody. After making sacrifices, the supernatural people were able to journey south and up to the Yellow World.<sup>2</sup>

Although not large enough to hold all the beings, the new world was larger than the areas below. It was inhabited by many spirits. Among them was Water Monster, who had a baby. First

Woman convinced Coyote to take the child, and he grabbed it, hiding it under his arm. As a result, the waters rose, and a flood followed. After four attempts, the people escaped. Once they were in the fourth world, they discovered the baby and urged Coyote to put it back. When he did as he was told, the waters receded. 3

The beings had reached the final world and called it Glittering. Narrative concerning the Glittering World is the story of the founding of life as it now is. It includes the creation of the Four Sacred Mountains, the building of the stars and traditional hogans, as well as an explanation of death and the origins of ceremonials. It contains a tale of the separation of the sexes, which explains how male and female oppose and complement each other. It also describes the birth of the Navajo mother goddess, Changing Woman, who was born of darkness and fathered by dawn. Maturing rapidly, she conceived her twin sons. When they learned that their father was the Sun, they journeyed to see him. After passing tests, the Twins were given the power to rid the world of monsters that had been terrorizing it.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of this myth, which details movement and constant change, the Navajos entered history. Coming to the Southwest just prior to the Spanish, the *Diné*, as the Navajos called themselves, used traditional Native American clans to organize themselves loosely. Originally a nomadic people, they made change a way of life. Borrowing some of their myths and ceremonies from the Pueblos, they also began acquiring and raising Spanish livestock, and by the time of Mexican rule they had become a regional military power.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, their adaptability came at a price, and Navajo society was hardly stable. Warfare had become constant. Their linguistic cousins, the Apaches, living to the south and east, stole Navajo livestock. Mexican armies, both official and unsanctioned, invaded Navajo country looking for sheep and slaves. The Utes also contributed to the slave trade by considering Navajo women and children as commodities easily exchanged for



goods in Santa Fe. And the Pueblos, viewing themselves as victims of Navajo aggression, were potential allies for any military force that wanted to inflict damage upon the Diné. 6

The Navajos resented their neighbors, but internal conflict kept the Diné from following a consistent policy that might have kept them out of war or brought them victory. The *ricos*, men who owned large flocks, favored diplomacy, but the poor, who relied on raids to enhance their wealth, insisted that conflict continue. Despite the fact that the *ricos* held most positions of authority, they were not able to control their humble relatives.<sup>7</sup>

The Americans conquered New Mexico in 1846. According to Navajo secular myth, the Diné welcomed them. Finally, they had allies in their war against the Mexicans. Much to their surprise, however, the Americans insisted that raids on settlements stop. This seemed ridiculous to the Navajos, especially since Mexican and Ute forces continued to invade their lands in search of livestock and slaves. With such provocation, poor but ambitious men continued to attack their neighbors. The United States Army retaliated, which usually led to a treaty, followed by provocation, Navajo retribution, army counterattack, and another treaty negotiated by the *ricos*. This process continued until the Civil War.<sup>8</sup>

When the South left the Union in 1861, American military units were withdrawn from New Mexico. The newly created Confederate States of America was quick to invade from Texas. Although the Confederate attack was successful at first, militia units from Colorado and New Mexico eventually defeated the invaders. Meanwhile, an army assembled in California under the command of Colonel (soon to be General) James H. Carleton marched east to free New Mexico of the rebel menace. When he arrived too late to participate in the Civil War, Carleton decided to take on the "wild" Indians of the territory, the Mescalero Apaches and the Navajos. His war against the Navajos was fought during the winter of 1863-64 by Kit Carson and the New Mexico Volunteers. By the spring of 1864, the Navajos were a defeated

people, and over eight thousand of them were exiled to the Bosque Redondo Reservation along the Pecos River in eastern New Mexico.

The Bosque Redondo years (commonly referred to as the Fort Sumner years after the fort near the reservation) are the central terror of Navajo secular myth. The trip to the Bosque was filled with stories of starvation and the kidnapping of women and children into slavery. Once they arrived in eastern New Mexico, conditions did not get any better. There was not enough to eat. They tried to raise crops as directed by the army, but their attempts failed. Carleton reasonably hoped to transform a people known for adaptability, but they refused to alter their culture substantially. Finally, in 1866, leaders who were able to consolidate power in the face of horror arrived at the Bosque. Ultimately, a treaty was signed in 1868 that allowed them to return home. Despite the fact that they had ended their exile, the Navajos now had to confront American power.

Like the Spanish and the Mexicans, the American conquerors carried Christian creation accounts with them, but they also believed in a secular origin myth that explained their greed for land. In its emphasis on change and movement, it resembled the Navajo myth. According to their tale, Europe, the Old World, was overpopulated and corrupt. A few brave individuals dared to leave. Venturing across dangerous seas, they came to the New World, which was populated only by savages. Without the influence of the old ways, a new breed of individualistic and democratic person was created. This new citizen formed a society that should have led to Utopia. After time, however, the new land experienced overpopulation, and it was time for more individuals, symbolized by Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and Kit Carson, to move like the Navajo spirit people to other worlds. Through several generations, they kept moving always west into newer and more perfect worlds until the fading of the frontier in 1890. Nevertheless, America was still more perfect than the rest of the world; it became the glittering symbol of human potential. 9

In large part, the Anglo-American origin myth adequately ex-

plained the conquest of a continent; in fact, it gained respectability as historical theory. An important addition to the myth, however, has lost its intellectual respectability because it offered justification for the poor treatment of Native Americans. As far as the myth was concerned, the Indian was a part of nature. Like the wilderness, he should be conquered. He was either a simple, ignorant savage who had to be conquered or a noble, uncomplicated savage who possessed innocence far beyond the capabilities of his white counterpart. In either case, he was destined to vanish as an archaic notion of the past, or to live on as a poor imitation of his white conquerors. 10

So go the myths. They describe two cultures compelled to deal with modern change. Despite the fact that these myths assist in understanding that openness to change was what helped both peoples adapt to the modern world and survive in it, neither Navajo nor Anglo-American myths go beyond pivotal events. How the Navajos lived through events after their defeat, exile, and repatriation is the subject of this study.

If the vanishing Indian myth was true, the Navajos should have suffered extinction or assimilated into the greater North American population. The fact is that they survived as Navajos. They and other Indian peoples adapted to new circumstances. How, and on whose terms, Indians changed is a historical topic just beginning to be explored. The histories of many Indian nations after U.S. military victories are few. There are some volumes dealing with government policy and a few concern themselves with Indian-government relations, but much more research about the various tribes has to be done concerning the crucial times immediately following military conquest. Many questions need to be asked. For example, how many peoples suffered psychological defeat? How did the tribes react to government policy? Which groups assimilated quickly into the larger society; who stubbornly resisted change, and who adapted according to their own priorities? Which Indian nations emerged from conflict and which ones died out? The answers to these questions and others will end a rather static view of American Indian history.

In his influential work, *The Great Plains*, historian Walter Prescott Webb stated that life for Indians after their military defeat was little more than imprisonment on reservations. <sup>11</sup> If the Navajos are any indication, Webb was wrong. American Indian societies were complex and hardly the same, but studies of postconquest American Indian history are needed to look past the seemingly obvious. A first step in understanding is the realization that conflicts and accommodations between native peoples and their neighbors did not end with military dominance and the accumulation, on one side, of superior numbers.

This fact is especially true for Navajos. Unlike some conquered peoples, the Diné played a great role in shaping their own destiny in the post-Bosque Redondo years. Yet, their accomplishment does not hold an important place among their own national myths.<sup>12</sup> Neither is it emphasized by Anglo-American sources.

Once back in their homeland, the Navajos faced two basic problems in addition to obtaining enough food. The treaty had not provided them with sufficient land, and the tribe had to avoid war. To alleviate the first problem, many Navajos simply lived off the reservation. It seemed, at first, that this Navajo solution to the land problem would lead to war, but it did not. In the time immediately after the Navajos' return home, non-Navajo settlement in lands previously occupied by the Diné was made primarily by Mexican Americans who faced discrimination at the hands of federal authority and were unable to provoke a war. Also important in this regard was the basic tactic of the Navajos' holding off-reservation land. They were militant enough in their occupation to scare off would-be interlopers and moderate enough in their response to government representatives to lessen official demands. As a result, the Indians avoided war. Nevertheless, they could not avoid conflict.

Navajo hunger and poverty added to this conflict. The government did not adequately provide for the Navajos. The Indian Bureau was slow in delivering rations, and when food finally reached Fort Defiance, there was rarely enough to go around. The treaty had also promised fifteen thousand sheep, which were

late in arriving and were too few to revive the Navajo economy. Many Navajos resorted to theft from their neighbors. Since raids endangered the whole tribe, the Diné had reason to continue to rely upon the chiefs. Acting as keepers of the peace, the chiefs did not have an easy job. Tradition dictated that they use persuasion as a method of control, and it was impossible to stop all raids. Nevertheless, Navajo leaders reminded their people of the Bosque Redondo and managed to keep depredations to a minimum.

Modern anthropologists, in observing isolated populations of Navajos during the twentieth century, have noted the informal structure of Navajo leadership and concluded that the chiefs were figureheads at the beck and call of agents. What these scholars have neglected is the fact that nineteenth-century Navajo leaders were useful to their people as well as powerful. The government had picked men who already had substantial followings, and recognition of these men by soldiers and agents only increased their prestige. Although the chiefs did not constitute a formal government, they met as a council and did a credible job. They seldom acted as pawns for any agent.

Nonetheless, the chiefs had to deal with agents because these representatives of the nation that had conquered the Diné administered civilian power and controlled the issue of rations and annuities. The agents had dictatorial power in theory, but they had to share it with the chiefs who were charged with persuading their people to avoid serious conflict. This was a difficult task since conflict was normal on the Navajo frontier. The chiefs, however, were usually equal to the challenge, for they proved at least as effective in controlling their own people as the United States government was in controlling its growing population in the Southwest.

Another factor in their early successes was the cooperation of the first three agents, who were practical men with military experience whose actions, if not always their words, showed that they were not interested in achieving the other goals of government policy if they interfered with maintaining the peace. They

spent a great deal of time trying to get enough supplies and rations to restore the Navajo economy. They were often unsuccessful. By working with the army, however, they managed to keep the Indians from starving. These agents also ended up respecting the chiefs and winning their cooperation.

Therefore, President Grant's first Indian policy, in which army officers were utilized as agents, was successful as far as the Navajos were concerned. With the support of the military agents, the Diné had been able, without formal government, to move toward a sense of themselves as a people and as a nation. Although they were dependent on the government for food and supplies, the Navajos managed to do some of the things that nations do. They had expanded their land base by settling off the reservation, they had maintained a semblance of peace on their frontier, and they had dealt with their criminals according to their own customs.

This independence contradicted the ideals of most Americans, and it appeared to be endangered when President Grant, in a fight with Congress, gave control over Indian appointments to the Protestant denominations. The Navajos were given to the Presbyterians. The implementation of policy was left up to the agents, and the men sent by the Presbyterians to Fort Defiance were less sympathetic to the Navajos than their military counterparts. They were also less competent, more likely to act according to preconceived notions, and less inclined to learn from circumstances.

To Navajo leaders, many of these agents were threats to their power and to Navajo needs. They often engineered rebellions, many of which were successful. Where they distinguished themselves from other Native American leaders was in eventually winning their battles with agents. They managed to do so by enlisting the support of the military and several powerful traders who lived in their territory.

The officers stationed at nearby Fort Wingate had to deal with the Navajos as much as the agents at Fort Defiance. Although they removed Navajo livestock from military lands and were

exposed almost daily to Navajo beggars, drunks, and prostitutes, they had come to respect the Diné and their leaders. Most of these officers had fought Indians all over the West and had concluded that the Navajos were a uniquely vital and intelligent people who wanted to improve their material condition and live at peace with their neighbors.

Mixed with this admiration of the Navajos as a peaceful people, however, was a military concern about fighting a Navajo war that worried even General Sherman. The Navajos were the largest tribe in the Southwest and the thought of fighting them was terrifying, especially since a few hundred Apaches were tying down most units in the region.

Reflecting this concern was the army's willingness to grant autonomy to the Diné. For the most part, they were willing to allow the Indians to handle their criminals in their own way. They regularly refused to move the Navajos onto the reservation and attempted to protect the Diné from settlers and prospectors. It also seemed that the chiefs were always welcome at Fort Wingate. Furthermore, when the Navajo leaders had a serious disagreement with an agent, the officers at Fort Wingate supported them. Even though this support can be seen as part of a larger conflict throughout the West between military men and civilian agents, what appears to be unique is that the chiefs sought military support and consistently provided the army with assistance.

As historians L. G. Moses and Raymond Wilson have commented, "the patterns of leadership among Indians have yet to be sufficiently explored, let alone explained." Nevertheless, there has been a tendency to lump native leaders in the nineteenth century into two categories: (1) leaders who resisted whites to the bitter end, and (2) leaders who recognized the inevitable and attempted to reach accommodation with Americans of European descent. <sup>13</sup> It would be difficult to fit postBosque Redondo Navajo leaders into either category, for the leaders themselves were a cross section of their society prior to Kit Carson's victory.

The three principal leaders, Barboncito, Ganado Mucho, and Manuelito, were all rich men prior to Kit Carson's attack, yet

their methods of dealing with Anglo-Americans were different. Barboncito had long been a peace leader prior to the 1860s, and his tactic had long been accommodation. When Carleton let it be known that the Navajos must leave their homeland or be attacked, Barboncito begged the general to reconsider. Carleton, however, could not be persuaded. Characteristically, Barboncito was one of the first to surrender after Carson's invasion. But the chief had not anticipated the terror of the Bosque Redondo Reservation, and he led an escape of five hundred of his followers in the summer of 1865. Attacked by New Mexicans, Utes, and Pueblos, his freedom was perilous, but he managed to hold out for over a year and was the last of the three principal leaders to surrender.

Ganado Mucho, of Hopi and Navajo ancestry, had attempted to remain neutral and sought refuge in his lands west of the Defiance Mountains. Despite provocation, his tactic had worked prior to the winter of 1863-64. Then Carson came with orders to round up all Navajos. Ganado Mucho went to war, although the struggle proved unequal. Hiding throughout the region, he did not surrender until the spring of 1866.

Unlike his two contemporaries, Manuelito had become famous as a warrior. Distrustful of the Americans, he rarely agreed to peace. When Kit Carson's troops attacked, there was little doubt about what Manuelito would do. He went to war. Since Carson's scorched-earth tactics surprised him, his war turned into a simple struggle for survival. Nevertheless, he held out until the fall of 1866, and his passionate style of leadership continued to frighten Anglo-Americans until his death.

Actually, Manuelito was as able to accommodate the conquerors as the others were, but there was something about his mercurial personality that kept officials off balance. In the end, he became the symbol of Navajo resistance at the Bosque, although it was Barboncito who negotiated the treaty. After their return from exile, Manuelito continued to be a symbol. Although Barboncito was named head chief by the government and Manuelito shared power with Ganado Mucho after Barboncito's death,



Manuelito's unpredictable combination of defiance, accommodation, and open rebellion was the tactic adopted by his fellow leaders.

Most Navajo leaders were willing to hunt down fellow Navajos who raided. Although Manuelito and Ganado Mucho rarely inflicted fatal punishment upon their fellow tribesmen, they did what had to be done to maintain the peace. At times, they asked the army to interfere in internal Navajo affairs, but they were also instrumental in removing agents and expanding the reservation by intimidating settlers, recruiting army and mercantile allies, and reminding the military that war was a possibility. Navajo leaders operated in a baffling manner, ever impressing upon their people that they should adapt to Anglo-American rule but also demanding their rights as a people. Although they often appealed to what seemed to be a static tradition of consensus and fragmented rule, they were really invoking the larger tradition indicated in Navajo myth, namely, that change was what enabled the people to survive new worlds. Thus, they established a new tradition of central power that later consolidated the Navajos into a nation, and it generally served the common good until the scandals of Chairman Peter MacDonald.

Unfortunately, the achievements of these leaders and the Navajo people have not been documented by historians. But as historian Peter Iverson has remarked, the Navajos are among the most studied Indians in North America.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the late nineteenth century has been largely ignored.

The Navajo histories that have been written, however, are useful for any reader wishing to begin a detailed study. Two writers, for instance, have dealt with the Bosque Redondo. Lynn R. Bailey writes of the crimes committed by the government while the Navajos were in exile. Although Bailey has the power of moral indignation behind his narrative, he is short on detail. Much more factual is Gerald Thompson's history. Through the careful use of detail, he chronicles the administrative horrors of a poorly planned and executed social experiment. Thompson also covers the reactions of Navajos.<sup>15</sup>

The next detailed narratives concern Navajos in the twentieth century. Lawrence C. Kelly has written a significant study of Navajo relations with the government from 1900 to 1935. Donald L. Parman has studied the Navajos during the New Deal years, and Peter Iverson has explored Navajo developments since World War II. These authors have also included excellent background chapters concerning earlier Navajo history. 16

Works that include nineteenth-century Navajo history after the Bosque Redondo are many, although they hardly include enough information to draw a complete picture. Most of the early survey histories were written by anthropologists such as Richard Van Valkenburgh, Ruth Underhill, and Robert W. Young, and they contain useful, if isolated, details about the Navajos and their relationships with the military, their agents, and their neighbors.<sup>17</sup> A number of popular authors have also attempted to survey basic events. The two most prominent, John Upton Terrell and Raymond Friday Locke, draw much of their information from the general histories written by anthropologists. They provide highly readable accounts that, nevertheless, contain information that is fragmentary and out of chronological sequence.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, there are scholarly works in print that try to make sense of events in nineteenth-century Navajo history. Edward Spicer, in his *Cycles of Conquest*, includes a chapter on the adaptations made by Navajos in the 1800s; it contains important insights. David F. Aberle attempts to make a brief analysis of conflict among the Navajos in his classic study of Peyote religion. In *Roots of Dependency*, Richard White examines social change among the Navajo in relationship to their environment and patterns of subsistence. Garrick Bailey and Roberta Glenn Bailey, in what they call an "ethnohistory," have published a detailed history of the Navajo culture and economy.<sup>19</sup>

A number of books and articles also give detailed insights into more specific events, regions, and individuals. Frank Reeve, in a series of articles in the *New Mexico Historical Review*, outlines the development of Navajo relations with the United States government and surveys the conflict over land between Navajos and

Anglo-American settlers in northwestern New Mexico. Frank McNitt's *The Indian Traders* covers the lives of several men who lived among the Navajos, while Lawrence R. Murphy carefully explores the life of one of the Navajos' most controversial agents, William F. M. Arny. And David M. Brugge has written a remarkably detailed history of Navajos living in the Chaco Canyon region of New Mexico. 20

Finally, two recent books deal with Navajos in the nineteenth century. Robert S. McPherson, in his *The Northern Navajo Frontier*, analyzes the relationships between the Navajos and their northern neighbors both Anglo and Native American between 1860 and 1900. In "New Hope for the Indians," Norman J. Bender traces the evolution of Grant's Peace Policy among the Navajo.<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, there is no year-to-year narrative of Navajos from the time of their return from exile in 1868 until roughly the beginning of World War I. It is easy to understand why this gap exists; any attempt to fill it would take several volumes. Nevertheless, such a study would deepen our understanding of a great people. The story of the Navajo fight for survival in the face of Anglo-American expansion would not only make interesting reading; it would also serve as a source with which to reexamine the conclusions reached by scholars who have looked at the late nineteenth century with limited access to details.

This volume attempts to begin the process of examining late nineteenth-century Navajo history in detail. Beginning with the defeat and exile of the Navajos in 1864, it focuses on a period lasting from 1866, when the principal Navajo leaders Barboncito, Ganado Mucho, and Manuelito surrendered until the removal of the last Peace Policy agent in 1882. This was a time when the Navajos were almost constantly involved in conflict; yet, they were able to establish themselves firmly upon their reservation, hold lands not granted to them in the treaty of 1868, and develop a sense of themselves as a people. It may be argued that it was during this period that the Navajos learned enough about dealing with Anglo-Americans to avoid being over-

whelmed by the large number of settlers who came with the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad in the early 1880s.

Whenever possible, this study attempts to record the voices of the Navajos and their leaders, although there is a limitation inherent in the historical process: the documents that record Navajo events were written by Anglo-American observers. Nevertheless, it is hoped that Navajo actions and words, when they appear in the documents, will convey their thoughts.

This study uses primary sources extensively, but it also attempts to synthesize the scholarly works of others, especially Brugge, McNitt, and Reeve. A number of regional and military histories are relied upon to bring the Navajo experience into focus in light of other developments in the Southwest. Books concerning the evolution of United States Indian policy also have been cited, and a number of anthropological texts have been consulted as well. Finally, for benefit of the reader who wishes to read further or to study the nature of literature about Navajos, books of a more popular and general nature have been cited whenever they make mention, no matter how briefly, of events that occur in the narrative.

It is hoped that this history will provide for a far broader understanding of the history of the Navajos, a successful people who have thrived in spite of forces that, upon surface examination, might have seemed overwhelming.