

# Film Transcript

[ Narrator: ] The year was 1864. Events took place in the American West that would change the world of Navajos. Navajos call it, "the fearing time". Navajos saw soldiers and settlers coming to the Southwest. Conflict led to one of the most tragic, yet triumphant chapters in American history. It's still very difficult for us to talk about-- these stories.

[ Narrator: ] The aftermath shook their identity. Any time you say the word "Navajo" or something, they will shave a bar of soap and they put it in your mouth and they tell you to wash it out.

[ Announcer: ] This program was made possible in part by:

[ Narrator: ] Navajos saw threatening omens. Landslides may have predicted "the fearing time". January 1864--Canyon de Chelly seemed invincible to Navajos. The Redrock Canyon had spiritual and strategic meaning. Sheer vertical walls protect the canyon floor. It was a cold winter day. Snow blanketed the canyon. Orchards covered the canyon floor. There may have been as many as 3,000 peach trees. Red water flowed through Canyon de Chelly. Navajos knew soldiers were coming. Crops were destroyed in the summer and fall. Their sheep were killed or taken. This scorched earth policy was planned to make Navajos surrender. The war of starvation was effective. Few shots were fired. The United States' military campaign against Navajos had origins in earlier events. European explorers reached North America in the late 1400s. There were consequences for millions of Native people who lived there. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark made their voyage of discovery to the American West in 1804 through 1806. When Lewis and Clark first came up this river behind me, it meant actually many different things to many different tribes. Some embraced them, but truly it meant the beginning of the end of our life as we knew it.

[ Narrator: ] Conflict threw the West into decades of turmoil. The Spanish explorer Cortes conquered Mexico in 1519. Spain occupied the Southwest. The Spanish were the first Europeans Navajos encountered. The Mexican War of Independence separated Mexico from Spain in 1821. Mexico controlled the province of New Mexico until 1846. Navajos experienced slave raids throughout the Spanish-Mexican period. Slave raids were cause for much of the violence in the Southwest. Historian Peter Iverson quotes Navajo leader Armijo-- "More than 200 of our children have been carried off "and we know not where they are. "My people are crying for the children they have lost." Navajos resisted domination. Navajos rarely, if ever, receive back their own family members who have been taken captives.

[ Narrator: ] Navajos call themselves Dine or "The People". Their religion tells of five worlds from which they came. The creation of Navajos took place within four sacred mountains-- White Shell Mountain, Bluebead Mountain, Abalone Shell Mountain and Big Sheep Mountain. Chaco Canyon is located in the four corners region of the Southwest. Chaco is considered part of a sacred homeland for Dine. Chaco was a religious and trading center characterized by large communal dwellings. Ancient native people occupied Chaco Canyon. An exodus occurred at Chaco around the year 1150 AD. Native people dispersed throughout the Southwest. Navajo oral history tells of relationships with the ancient people of Chaco. Navajos call their homeland "Dinetah". Sacred rivers like the San Juan also define their homeland. The landscape of Dinetah is some of the most striking on earth. The sacred Chuska Mountains are punctuated by mountain lakes. Navajos consider their land sacred. Many wish to never leave this homeland bordered by sacred mountains. In the 1840s, Hispanic and White settlers found Navajos to be prosperous. Navajos were great herders with distinctive Churro sheep. Navajos were brilliant weavers. Navajo hogans are homes of earth and timber considered sacred. Motherhood is celebrated. Sheep means "life" to Navajos. Navajos believe sheep will care for them. Navajos watched

the village of Santa Fe in New Mexico territory in the 1840s. The Anglos-- the "new men"--arrived. It's ironic in some ways that there's such tremendous confrontation and clashes that promptly take place between the Americans who are coming in and the Navajos because, in some ways, they were very much like each other. They were ambitious, they were hard working, they loved to tell a good story and they believed in the possibilities of tomorrow. It's--It's in many ways an American story.

[ Narrator: ] The times were defined by "Manifest Destiny". This philosophy advocated settling the West. James Polk was elected the eleventh President of the United States in November 1844. President Polk wanted to expand America's boundaries to the Pacific. The United States and the populous of the United States had gotten itself whipped up into a kind of idealistic frenzy, believing that this was the right thing to do, and we were doing all these different people we were going to conquer a huge favor.

[ Narrator: ] Much of the West was claimed by Mexico. Navajos also believed their homeland belonged to them. And almost all native peoples that you can speak of have their "trail of tears" in terms of being removed in the face of White expansion.

[ Narrator: ] General Stephen Watts Kearny and the army of the West was dispatched to take Mexican Territories in 1846. The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican- American War in 1848. The United States now controlled vast tracks of new land, some 1.2 million square miles. The Navajo homeland was considered United States territory. General Kearny wrote, "The United States would protect the persons "and property of all quiet and peaceful inhabitants "within its boundaries against their enemies: "the Eutaws, Navajos and others." We were not citizens of the United States at that time. We were considered as enemy, so to do whatever they want to with us.

[ Narrator: ] The Dine saw their homeland as sacred. The Anglos and the Hispanos actually saw themselves as the victims of this massive wave of Navajo raiding in the 1850s, and believe that they were the ones that had to be protected. The United States Army was not gonna wage war on its own people, including the Hispanos, who were made citizens at the end of the Mexican-American War. They went up, and the people went up and raided and also the Mexican do the same thing too, so that's where it start.

[ Narrator: ] Fort Defiance was constructed in the southern part of the Navajo homeland in 1851. Tension escalated. The United States was in the midst of Civil War in the early 1860s. General James Henry Carleton was named military commander of New Mexico in the summer of 1862. James Henry Carleton was a, umm, a brilliant man. He was a civilian appointment to the United States Army in 1839. He had, prior to that, pursued a literary career in Boston.

[ Narrator: ] General Carleton believed a military campaign against the Navajo was necessary. Carleton wanted the famous mountain man and frontiersman Christopher "Kit" Carson to lead the effort. Kit Carson was now a colonel with the New Mexico volunteers. Kit Carson was 53 years old in 1862. Carson was living with his third wife Josefa and their family in Taos. Kit Carson followed his trend of obeying powerful, charismatic men. General Carleton and his soldiers twice explored an area along the Pecos River in the early 1850s. It was near the Texas border in southeast New Mexico. Carleton envisioned this place as a reservation for Navajos. It was called Bosque Redondo. Stark plains surround a tree-lined river. If the Indians in the American West were not put on reservations, they would be exterminated, federal policy makers believed. The reservation was considered a way of protecting the American Indians from extinction.

[ Narrator: ] General Carleton created Fort Sumner on the Pecos River in 1862. It was named for General Edwin Sumner, the former commander of the Department of New Mexico. General Carleton wanted Navajos moved to Bosque Redondo. He believed Navajos could live like Pueblos, as pastoral farmers. Another motivation that Carleton had for rounding up the Navajo and moving them was his believe, based on no particular evidence, that Navajo country was rich in gold.

[ Narrator: ] General Carleton also wanted Mescalero Apaches brought to the Bosque Redondo reservation. Carleton ordered a "Shoot to Kill" policy in 1862. Carleton ordered Kit Carson to kill all Mescalero men "wherever and whenever you can find them. "The women and children will not be harmed, "but you will take them prisoners." Kit Carson and his soldiers captured much of the Mescalero Apache tribe. About 400 men, women and children were brought to Bosque Redondo. Our people were not used to that. They were warriors, they were hunters, they were--they were fighters, they were braves. And they had to come and grovel in the dirt, which was something different for them, something new because they were not farmers like the Pueblos.

[ Narrator: ] Kit Carson wrote a letter of resignation to General Carleton on February 3, 1863. Carleton refused his request. General Carleton ordered Navajos to surrender by July 20, 1863. He said, "After that date, "every Navajo will be considered as hostile, "and treated accordingly." Carson's soldiers waged war on Navajos in the summer and fall of 1863. They destroyed crops, livestock and homes. Carleton and Carson also understood that they were probably not gonna kill that many Navajos if the Navajos would be able to get out of the way very often, so how else would you punish them? Well, you impoverish them-- you burn their hogans, you burn their fields of corn, you slaughter their herds if you get your hands on them. You just destroy their property and make it impossible for them to subsist.

[ Narrator: ] Colonel Kit Carson reports on August 19, 1863-- "We found and destroyed about 70 acres of corn. "Three hours afterwards "encamped in wheat and corn fields. "The wheat--about 15 acres-- we fed to the animals "and the corn-- about 50 acres--was destroyed." This destruction was effective. Now, you can ask the question-- Is it worse to conquer a people and do it because you believe it's right, or to do it anyway, even though you have reluctance about it? That's a good question, and it certainly doesn't let Kit Carson off the hook morally.

[ Narrator: ] Canyon de Chelly was the Navajo fortress. Spider Rock is home to Navajo deity "Spider Woman" who lives atop the spire. Canyon de Chelly in Navajo is said to be like our mother. It is often called "the mother" 'cause it's a place where you seek comfort, where you seek shelter and protection.

[ Narrator: ] Kit Carson's men assaulted Canyon de Chelly. When Kit Carson and his men stormed Canyon de Chelly, that was the beginning of the defeat of the Dine. The idea was to make the Navajos run constantly. And so he embarked on a "scorched earth" policy a full year before General Sherman led his more famous "scorched earth" campaign across the American South.

[ Narrator: ] Captain Albert Pfeiffer reports on January 20, 1864-- "At the place where I encamped, "the curl of smoke from my fires ascended "to where a large body of Indians "were resting over my head. "But the height was too great "that the Indians did not look larger than crows. "And as we were too far apart to injure each other, "no danger was done, except with the tongue." Navajos were starving from effects of the military campaign during a severe winter.

[ Navajo Woman: ] They began rounding up the people in the fall. Some were lured into surrendering by offers of food, clothes and livestock. So many of us were starving and suffering that year because the lagona kept attacking us. Kit Carson and his army had burned all the fields, and they killed our sheep right in front of us. We couldn't believe it. I covered my face and cried. All my life we have sheep. They were like our family. I knew then our lives were in great danger. This broke the Navajo backbone, and within the month, a large number of Navajos began to surrender.

[ Narrator: ] Navajos surrendered in large numbers with promises of food and shelter. The United States was embroiled in Civil War. General James Henry Carleton had the fate of Navajos in his hands. General Carleton's plan of forced relocation to Bosque Redondo was implemented. He also believed that he could not protect the Navajos from Hispanic slave raiders if they remained in their traditional homeland. He wanted to take them to the Bosque Redondo so that he could control them, but also so that he could protect them.

[ Narrator: ] Captain A.B. Carey wrote from Fort Canby on March 6, 1864-- "Since the 20th of last month, "126 Indians have died at this post, "making with those just sent to the Bosque "a reduction of 2,263 Navajos "from the population of this country. "This, I am satisfied, is a larger number "than could have been subdued "and forced to give themselves up, "had a vigorous war been continued."

[ Narrator: ] Navajos were escorted from their homeland. The destination was Bosque Redondo.

[ Crying ] There is no place-- no place like home.

[ Navajo Woman: ] We were all so afraid of that man Red Shirt and his army. Some people hid in the foothills of the Chuska Mountains and in Canyon de Chelly. Our family talked it over and we decided to go to this place. What would our lives be like without sheep, crops and land? At least we thought we would be safe from gunfire and our family would not starve.

[ Narrator: ] Many walked 350 miles or more. Some, including the elderly and infirm, would ride in wagons or horseback. The "long walk" of the Navajo begins. I suppose that, uh, there was a... The general purpose, as--as history shows, was to isolate and to civilize and to Americanize Navajo people. My grandma who was captured-- she did not have any blankets or any extra clothes. It was just what she was wearing. She wore that all the way in, mend it--mend it over and over again. By the time they got to Fort Sumner, they didn't have any shoes.

[ Narrator: ] Navajo omens of "the fearing time" came true. Bosque Redondo-- they call it, Hwééééldi. And the stories that the Navajo people tell about being so hungry and so starved... Some of the soldiers' reports say that when Navajos walked into the Fort, a lot of them were just naked-- almost completely naked. They might just have a piece of fabric to cover their private parts.

[ Narrator: ] The "long walk" of the Navajos didn't occur in one mass exodus. Archeologist Dr. Neil Ackerly documents 53 journeys beginning in August 1863. Ackerly reports groups numbered from about 20 to 2,400.

[ Narrator: ] General Carleton wrote on November 22, 1863-- "See that they're treated with great kindness. "Let Captain Fritz have four worn Sibley tents "for the use of the women and children. "You will please give your personal attention "to see that these Indians are well cared for." The American soldiers were under strict orders to treat the Navajos kindly and fairly. After all, this was an experiment to prove to the Navajos that you can become Christians and farmers and, you know, if you can't even get them to the site without, umm, without killing them, then this experiment is going to be a failure.

[ Narrator: ] Thousands of Navajos walked wagon roads and difficult terrain. They were taught to never leave a homeland defined by sacred peaks. They were not... It was not just moving along. People were dying, people were crying and just... People tried to escape, but there was no escape. The girl that I describe wasn't the only girl that was pregnant. There was a lot of others. And in the story, some of them were left. The ladies did bring kids into the world. They said they just left them wrapped under a tree. There were also New Mexicans, Utes and Pueblos that also came down and attacked along the way. There was not enough soldiers, you know, to escort them for protection, and so many of the people died along the way.

[ Narrator:] Navajos were marched beyond their sacred Bluebead Mountain.

[ Navajo Woman: ] The journey began and the soldiers were all around us. All of us walked. Some carried babies. Little children and the elderly stayed in the middle of the group. We walked steadily each day, stopping only when the soldiers wanted to eat or rest. We talked among ourselves and cried quietly. We didn't know how far it was or even where we were going. All that was certain was that we were leaving the natcot--our home. You had to be in a group because these soldiers would just get them there and molest them, and that's what my grandmother told me.

[ Narrator: ] Many Navajos refused to surrender. They escaped capture in remote areas of the West. Some went to Navajo Mountain and Black Mesa. Others went to the chasms of Grand Canyon. The maze of canyonlands was refuge. Navajos resisted. Navajo warrior Gus Bighorse tells of 30 warriors who stayed near Navajo Mountain. What this story reminds us is that we have probably exaggerated in our history the percentage of Navajos who went on the "long walk". There were thousands of Navajos who did not go on the "long walk".

[ Narrator: ] Manuelito, the "defiant spirit of the Navajos," resisted capture. He was a very imposing man. I think he was over six feet three in height and just had this, I think this aura about him that people knew immediately that he was a leader.

[ Narrator: ] Navajo oral history tells of people hiding on mesas near Monument Valley. There's Navajo people that said, "We never went to the 'long walk'. "We conquered the U.S," in dealing with this and this is the... You know, it's very fresh in their minds today. The other thing is that what followed the marches, the captives walking. You also had slave raiders picking them off and stealing the women and children as well. So it was a really horrendous time for the people.

[ Narrator: ] Captain Joseph Berney of the First Cavalry wrote on April 8, 1864-- "I lost 15 Indians on the road, "principally boys, three of which were stolen "by the inhabitants of the towns "through which I had passed, "two strayed from my camp on the Rio Pecos, "and ten died from the effects of the cold." And the women-- they tell stories about the pregnant women and the elders who couldn't keep up were taken out of line and shot by the soldiers. Women were raped and violated. And so this was a very, very traumatic time for my people, and we still haven't forgotten. It is still very much a part of our memories. These were men who had probably served in previous expeditions against the Navajos, their families had been involved in warfare with the Navajos in decades prior to Carson's "scorched earth" campaign. Uh, they were more racially motivated to inflict punishment upon the Navajos.

[ Narrator: ] The military underestimated the large number of Navajos. Captain Francis McCabe of the first New Mexico Cavalry wrote on May 12, 1864-- "I placed as many of the women, children "and old people as possible "in wagons and had one empty wagon placed every morning "under control of the officer of the day "for the purpose of traveling with the guard "to receive such sick and aged Indians "as might have given out on the march. "On the second day's march, "a very severe snowstorm set in, "which lasted for four days with unusual severity, "and occasioned great suffering amongst the Indians, "many of whom were nearly naked "and, of course, unable to withstand such a storm. "I left Fort Canby with 800 "and received 146 en route to Fort Sumner, "making about 946 in all. "Of this number, about 110 died. "25 were enticed away." I was just reading an account of one, umm, military commander who was so relentless in getting the people there that he was driving them 20 miles a day, and that when they got there, a substantial number of the people had died because of his relentless determination to get them to the reservation.

[ Narrator: ] Navajos didn't know how to cook coffee and flour. They survived. That was the main thing.

[ Navajo Woman: ] We had such a long distance to cover. Some old people fell behind and they wouldn't let us go back to help them. It was the saddest thing to see. My heart hurts so to remember that. Two women were near the time of the births of their babies, and they had a hard time keeping up with the rest. Some army men pulled them behind a huge rock and we screamed outloud when we heard the gunshots. The women didn't make a sound, but we cried outloud for them and their babies. I felt then I would not live through everything.

[ Narrator: ] The marches crossed three rivers to reach Bosque Redondo.

[ Navajo Woman: ] When we crossed the Rio Grande, many people drowned. We didn't know how to

swim. There was hardly any water deep enough to swim in at home. Some babies, children, and some of the older men and women were swept away by the river current. We must not ever forget their screams and the last we saw of them-- hands, a lake, or strands of hair floating. There were many who died on the way to Hwééééldi. All the way we told each other-- we will be strong as long as we are together. I think that was what kept us alive.

[ Narrator: ] The Rio Puerco was shallow with still, brackish water. The Rio Grande was sometimes frozen. Severe, cracked lands seemed endless.

[ Narrator: ] The Pecos River was the last significant crossing before reaching Bosque Redondo. And I think that if you know you hadn't done wrong, you have this identity that is strong.

[ Narrator: ] Pivotal events were happening in the American West. Colonel John Chivington led soldiers from Fort Lyon, Colorado, on November 29, 1864. Chivington's destination was the camp of Black Kettle. A group of Cheyenne and Arapaho were camped along Sand Creek. The Sand Creek massacre ensued. More than 150 men, women, and children were reported killed, with approximately 15 military dead. Over 8,000 Navajos went on the "long walk". There's really no way to know how many people died on the "long walk". One of the... The estimate that's mostly used is around 2,500 people died. Over 8,000 were imprisoned at the Bosque Redondo reservation, and a lot of them just died from starvation and from the cold. I mean, a lot of the marches happened in like March and February when it was just bitterly cold. It was just almost too much to bear and, of course, in many cases they were separated from other family members, or there were some people who went on the "long march" to maintain connections with the elderly or with the young. But it must have been a terrible, terrible thing. We know it was.

[ Narrator: ] Bosque Redondo appeared along the Texas border. Cottonwood trees lined the avenue leading to Fort Sumner. The Bosque Redondo reservation encompassed some 160 square miles. There was one of the first Navajo leaders who took his people to the Bosque Redondo, and by the time he'd gotten there, he'd lost, I think it was 15 people-- 15 people of his band. He gets there and the officer records, notes that he was met with such emotion by his kinsmen, his kinspeople who were already there, and they hugged and embraced, and he said there was much tears as they met and greeted each other.

[ Narrator: ] Kit Carson's military campaign surprised General Carleton. He anticipated three to four thousand Navajos. The Navajo surrender overwhelmed the army. Thousands of Navajos came in.

[ Narrator: ] A December 1864 report counted over 8,500 Navajos and over 400 Apaches. President Abraham Lincoln probably did not anticipate Bosque Redondo. He, in fact, did not pay a great deal of attention to the American Southwest.

[ Narrator: ] Disease spread through Bosque Redondo. They were not used to the food that was offered to them as rations. You had white flour, beans, green coffee beans, rancid bacon, and they weren't used to that, and so a lot of them ate it. They didn't know how to prepare it and then they died. They got diarrhea, dysentery, and died from the food as well.

[ Narrator: ] Pecos River water was alkaline and barely drinkable. And also they said that the soldiers made fun of them. They would take their young women to their quarters and use them as sex slaves.

[ Narrator: ] Wood near Bosque Redondo was quickly depleted. Available timber came from great distance. Journeys put Navajos at risk from raiders. And then, of course, as the years went by, the trees began to dwindle, and then they were reduced to using their hogans for firewood. And in the end, they were reduced to living in a hole which they dug into the ground and just cover it with canvas. It was a very terrible situation.

[ Narrator: ] Crops turned to dust under an onslaught of insects and drought. Bosque Redondo was one of Carleton's greatest miscalculations. The Navajos and the Mescaleros were unable to support themselves there.

[ Narrator: ] The defiant Manuelito surrendered after unrelenting pursuit. He was kind of like the most wanted man among the Americans. If they could make him surrender, then everyone would surrender.

[ Narrator: ] Snow sometimes covered the bosque. Winter was accompanied by freezing wind. Navajos and Apaches had little protection from the storm. Bosque Redondo itself is seen as a concentration camp, not unlike those that we have seen in Europe and in other parts of eastern Europe in more recent times.

[ Narrator: ] Mescalero Apaches at Bosque Redondo have long felt they were treated especially poorly. There was always brutality by the soldiers. When they wanted the Apache to do something that just was not allowed, well then, they would punish them and lock them up into the stockades and they would punish the people so that anyone could see what they were doing that they would do what they were told. And they were beaten, yes, they were.

[ Narrator: ] Mescaleros vanished in the night in November 1865. The Mescaleros were not recaptured. They would never return to Bosque Redondo. Nothing like that should happen to any people anymore. We suffered for it. We fought for our land. The only thing we were doing was fighting for what was ours. The only thing we were doing was fighting for what belonged to us, and it was taken away. And the lessons learned from that should be that this should not happen to anyone, or it should not be allowed to happen to anyone else regardless of who they are.

[ Narrator: ] Navajos wanted to return to their homeland. Promises for Bosque Redondo were not kept. I think that it was a terrible-- a terrible time. And I know with me, you know, my grandfather and my great grandfather who was buried there, a feeling of injustice, you know, a great wrong that was done. There was a coyote that was brought in to one of the ceremonies, and the people stated there that the coyote is gonna tell us where we're gonna be going.

[ Narrator: ] Navajo oral history reports the coyote wavered for moments. The coyote began running West at great speed. Navajos knew this predicted returning home. General James Henry Carleton was the architect of Bosque Redondo. Carleton was replaced in September 1866. He came under fire from federal policy makers, from politicians in Washington, D.C. Came under fire from politicians within New Mexico and local residents. Also the human disaster at Bosque Redondo escalated the call to end the Bosque Redondo experiment and to end Carleton's command of the Department of New Mexico.

[ Narrator: ] Kit Carson was 56 years old in 1866. Carson left the military when the New Mexico volunteers disbanded. He attained the rank of brigadier general. Kit Carson moved his family to Boggsville near Fort Lyon, Colorado. The Carsons shared a small house by the Purgatory River. Josefa Carson never fully recovered from childbirth. She died on April 27, 1868. Kit Carson died at Fort Lyon, Colorado, on May 23, 1868. The cause was an aortic aneurysm. He was 58 years old. Kit Carson and Josefa were buried by the Purgatory River. They don't really have a lot of good things to say about Kit Carson. They see Kit Carson as the person who was responsible for the senseless slaughter of over 2,500 Navajo men, women and children, and that he was completely uncompassionate when he conducted his "burn and scorch" policy. Umm, he completely humiliated and brutalized the Navajo people when he burned their hogans, slaughtered their livestock, destroyed their cornfields, and so that brought about the final military defeat of the Navajo people. And to this day we haven't forgotten it. The circumstances were forced upon him. I don't believe that he was a man who went out and sought to kill American Indians. I think that's a terrible distortion of this man's life. But as many frontiersmen in the 19th century did, he resorted to violence as a tool to defend himself and also to advance the cause of his allies and of his nation when called upon.

[ Narrator: ] Reports to congress were critical of conditions at Bosque Redondo. A Peace Commission was established in 1867. It was led by Civil War veteran General William Tecumseh Sherman and Colonel Samuel F. Tappan. This commission would decide the fate of Navajos at Bosque Redondo. Sherman found terrible conditions. Expenses were out of control. Sherman and the Peace Commission met with Navajo leaders in May 1868. Barboncito emerged as an eloquent spokesman. Barboncito's speech may be the most important in Navajo history.

[ Barboncito: ] "I hope to god you will not ask me "to go to any other country except my own. "It might turn out to be another Bosque Redondo. "They told us this was a good place when we came, "but it is not." Barboncito was also one of our great leaders. I think he is best known for his role in negotiating the Treaty of 1868. All of these leaders were incredible orators. They could speak very well. General Sherman was moved by Barboncito's speech-- a man who's not accustomed to being moved by anybody, and decided to grant him his wish to go back to Navajo country. Umm, no gold had ever been found in Navajo country.

[ Narrator: ] The Peace Commission concluded Bosque Redondo was a complete failure. The coyote ceremony prophecy was coming true. The Treaty of 1868 between the United States government and Navajos returned them to their homeland. The Treaty represented victory to Navajos. The agreement defined the Navajo Nation as sovereign territory. We tend to think of the 19th century in regard to defeat, endings, final chapters. But when the Navajo signed their Peace Treaty in 1868, it truly meant, in many ways, new beginnings, new possibilities, new tomorrows.

[ Narrator: ] Historian Peter Iverson writes, "They had begun to see themselves as a great people, "destined to do great things." It was called the "long walk home". A line of about 7,000 Navajos stretched for approximately ten miles. They were leaving Bosque Redondo. It was June 1868. Navajos were coming home. Days of walking were rewarded. Their sacred Bluebead Mountain came into view. Navajos broke into tears at the welcoming sight. There's a lot of people that were... They saw that, and what they did is they kneeled down and kissed the earth that they were going home. When they saw that mountain, the peaks, people cried because, you know, they were coming close to their homeland.

[ Narrator: ] Navajos of the "long walk" started over. When my parents talked to us about the "long walk", they were not in a hateful... Didn't teach hate.

[ Narrator: ] James Henry Carleton died at age 58 from pneumonia in San Antonio, Texas. The date was January 7, 1873. It's really a tragic personal story of Carleton, this great soldier, sort of declining into a very feeble man by early 1872. And I think a lot of that decline is a consequence of the enormous pressures he was under in New Mexico during the Civil War, and just the enormous political pounding he took over the Bosque Redondo reservation experiment, which was a complete failure. The Navajos knew that, in time, people like Carleton would leave or they would pass away. They could wait them out, they could delay things, they could fight against them in a variety of forms. And in the long run, the Navajos realized that they, in fact, had the upper hand.

[ Narrator: ] Important events were again taking place in the American West. On June 25, 1876, General George Armstrong Custer and the 7th Cavalry surprised a village of Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne. They were camped along Montana's Little Bighorn River. Custer's men were overwhelmed by a much larger force. The Battle of Wounded Knee took place on December 29, 1890. The location was a desolate plain near Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Wounded Knee was the aftermath of settlers coming into Sioux territory in expansive numbers. About 150 Lakota Sioux, including women and children, were killed. 25 military men were dead. The provision for education was an important part of the 1868 Treaty with Navajos. The Treaty states, "They pledge themselves "to compel their children, male and female, "between the ages of six and sixteen years, "to attend school." There was three other relative guys of mine that we were all round up, put in a bus in sort of like a cage.

[ Narrator: ] Boarding and day schools were started for native people. A school was started at Fort Defiance in 1870. Many Navajo parents had concerns about sending children to school. There was one school principal and superintendent over in eastern Navajo country who was sufficiently embarrassed, chagrined, unhappy, upset, whatever about the runaways at his school that he actually took the kinds of hobbles used for horses and shackled runaways-- chronic runaways. A lot of the time it was happy times because my sister was there with me. We shared one bunk bed and she slept towards my feet and I slept the other way. And sometimes I-- I could hear her crying and then I would start to cry.

[ Narrator: ] The most famous of the early boarding schools was the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Carlisle was run by an ex-cavalry officer named Richard Henry Pratt. Pratt's slogan was, "Kill the Indian, save the man." Pratt wanted photographs, before and after photographs taken. Two of the most famous photographs probably in Navajo history are of a man named Tom Tortalino when he arrived at Carlisle and what he looked like after he'd been there for several years. No one-- almost no one anyway-- has never asked has ever asked about Tom Tortalino. What happened to him after he left Carlisle? In fact, he went back to Navajo country and he became a farmer, and I think a fairly successful one.

[ Narrator: ] Carlisle's military regimen was the model for boarding schools at the time. 43 Navajos joined the intertribal population of 10,605 at Carlisle. Carlisle existed from 1879 to 1918. Navajo leader Manuelito was an early advocate of Western education. Manuelito sent two sons and a nephew to Carlisle in 1882. All three died. A son died at Carlisle. The other two died at home from tuberculosis contracted at Carlisle. The visionary Manuelito died in 1894. And that's the way I felt when I went to boarding school is I was always expecting that I might get killed. It was--It was scary. As you can imagine, there were many Navajo children and children from other Indian communities who were not very happy about being essentially incarcerated, and they ran away. And their running away often carried dire consequences, resulted in dire consequences. There were children who died in the snow. There were children who would go to sleep on a railroad track trying to find their way out-- be run over by a train. And, of course, their running away was the most direct and most effective kind of protest you can imagine because it simply said-- We do not like it here. We do not want to be here. We will do almost anything we can to get away.

[ Narrator: ] Some children never made it home. If you've ever been in boot camp, that is exactly what they did is take your identity and try to assimilate you, and it was very harsh. We were treated rough all the time-- always military style. Get in line for everything and straighten up and things like that. And whipped too-- they used a whip on us all the time.

[ Narrator: ] Life at school was a different world. I remember him going around my desk like this, circling around. What's wrong with you? "Dumb indian," and things like that. Oh, she was really mean.

[ Laughing ] I'd say she was really mean. She--She spoke to us, but I didn't understand a word she said. She just-- She just talked. I guess she was speaking English, and I didn't know anything. And then if we didn't understand or we were not doing what we were supposed to do, she had this long stick-- a pointer stick and she would hit us on the head with it, or either hit us on the hand with it.

[ Narrator: ] Most wanted to return to the life they knew. There was a time that I saw one of the kids... There was a young man, and he was hit in the side of the head so hard that he flew across the room, and when he woke... He got up. After he got up, he was... He had blood coming out of his ears, and I didn't realize what it was about until later on in years that I knew that he probably had ruptured eardrums from that.

[ Narrator: ] Speaking Navajo was forbidden. We used to get spanked in our classroom if we even speak one language, our own language, and we used to get whacked with a yardstick or a ruler. I just really had a hard time to get used to that because every time I get in trouble, I'd be sucking on a bar of

soap. We didn't want to stay there. We cried, cried, cried.

[ Narrator: ] Some children came to boarding school in native clothes. Their appearance soon changed. They came with the clipper and they were shaving my hair out. And I was so embarrassed of all the hair that I had and I never wanted to have another long hair because of that embarrassment, so I never grew my hair long again ever since then. She got crutches, and when you get caught with something, she'll let you have it with that crutch. At one time she hit me side of the face with her crutches and I kind of got blue... I guess it start swelling on one side of my face, but nobody did anything about it.

[ Narrator: ] Names were changed to Anglo names. At home, we're called by our Navajo names. At school, everyone seemed like it was either Betty or Irene or Marie. It was kind of humorous.

[ Narrator: ] The Phoenix Indian School is shuttered now. The school began in 1891 and closed in 1988. So I end up getting in trouble again. At one time I got so angry and I just didn't do what was right and I got me some thumbtacks and I put it on my teacher's chair 'cause she was so mean.

[ Narrator: ] Some Navajo parents didn't want children in school. Others thought Western education was correct. I was glad that I went to boarding school. My parents saw the need for education. That was the only way I could get it because there were no busses that came our way. If they should spank you, if that's what it costs to learn that powerful tool English. My great grandfather told me in order to overcome the White people and their ways, you have to learn to speak their language. Think the way they do. What I was exposed to was a cowboy and Indian movie. And the Indians were always the bad ones, and the cowboys were always the good guys.

[ Narrator: ] Schools were built closer to home by the first part of the 20th century. Boarding schools changed, with an emphasis on Western education. About 2,000 Navajos attended the Intermountain Indian School in Brigham City, Utah. The school was in operation from 1950 to 1984. Intermountain was closed as many students preferred being close to home. We also want to be careful not to solely make Indians into victims, make them into powerless people who didn't know what to do, didn't know how to defend themselves. There was a lot about the boarding school that, in terms of language and culture, that reflects a wider and more complicated scene.

[ Narrator: ] Dan Begay was filled with anger from experiences at boarding school. And I began to cry, and that was when my wife told me, "Those things happened a long time ago. "This is now. "You need to leave all of this behind you." And, uh, at that time I didn't realize how I was very much still connected to what had happened to me way back then as a child.

[ Narrator: ] The "long walk" of the Navajos is a story of courage and perseverance. Their sacred land remains. The "long walk" and the Bosque Redondo experiences of my ancestors to this day is still very difficult for many Navajo people to talk about. When we hear the stories from our parents and our grandparents, if we're fortunate enough to hear them... [ Crying ] ...umm, we can't help but get tearful about what they went through. The horrible, horrendous conditions that they lived through, the humiliation that they had to endure... They were treated as less than animals. And so when we think about it and we hear their stories, we get very tearful and we get very mournful and I get appalled and I get angry at the treatment of my grandmothers and my grandfathers. And yet at the same time, we also are very thankful and we marvel at our ancestors' courage and their integrity because, umm, if they hadn't endured this experience, we would not be here today, and so we always remember them.

[ Narrator: ] Tears stain the landscape of the American West. Navajos sometimes visit Bosque Redondo. Memories are painful. Stones are brought from the Navajo homeland as tribute to ancestors. It's a story of tears and triumph.

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