

army and the navajo the bosque redondo reservation experiment 1863 68

****The Army and the Navajo: The Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment 1863-68****

army and the navajo the bosque redondo reservation experiment 1863 68 marks a significant yet tragic chapter in the history of Native American relations with the United States government. This period, often referred to as the Navajo Long Walk and the Bosque Redondo experiment, involved the forced relocation of the Navajo people to an isolated reservation in eastern New Mexico. It was a dark experiment in cultural suppression, military control, and survival under harsh conditions. Understanding this event sheds light on the complex dynamics between the U.S. Army and the Navajo Nation during the mid-19th century, as well as the resilience of the Navajo people.

The Historical Context of the Navajo and U.S. Army Relations

Before the forced relocation, the Navajo Nation occupied a vast territory in the Southwest, primarily in what is now Arizona and New Mexico. Their traditional way of life, centered on farming, herding, and weaving, was deeply tied to their ancestral lands. However, as American settlers moved westward, tensions escalated. The U.S. government, seeking to assert control over the region, employed military campaigns to subdue Native resistance.

The Role of the U.S. Army in the Southwest

The U.S. Army was instrumental in enforcing federal policies aimed at relocating Native Americans to reservations. In the case of the Navajo, military leaders like Colonel Kit Carson were tasked with breaking Navajo resistance during the 1860s. Carson's campaign was particularly harsh, involving the destruction of crops, livestock, and homes to force the Navajo into submission.

Why the Bosque Redondo Reservation?

The Bosque Redondo site was selected by the U.S. government as a reservation where the Navajo and the Mescalero Apache would be confined together. The intention was to isolate these tribes from their traditional lands and to assimilate them into a settled agrarian lifestyle under federal supervision. The area, near Fort Sumner in New Mexico, was chosen partly because it was remote and supposedly had enough resources to support the relocated tribes.

The Forced Relocation: The Navajo Long Walk

One of the darkest moments in this story is the Navajo Long Walk, which began in 1863. Over 8,000

Navajo men, women, and children were forced to march approximately 300 miles to the Bosque Redondo reservation. The journey was grueling, with many perishing from hunger, exposure, and exhaustion.

Conditions During the Long Walk

The army's forced march was marked by harsh weather, inadequate supplies, and constant surveillance. Many Navajo were already weakened from years of conflict and raids. The trauma of the Long Walk deeply scarred the community, severing them from their homes and traditional way of life.

The Arrival at Bosque Redondo

Upon arrival, the Navajo found Bosque Redondo to be a harsh and unforgiving environment. The land was arid, the soil poor, and water sources unreliable. The army imposed strict regulations, limiting the Navajo's freedom and enforcing a new way of life that starkly contrasted with their traditions.

The Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment: Challenges and Failures

The reservation experiment was an attempt by the U.S. government to "civilize" the Navajo through confinement and agricultural instruction. However, the reality was far from successful.

Environmental and Agricultural Struggles

The Bosque Redondo land was ill-suited for the farming practices the Navajo were encouraged to adopt. Crop failures were common due to poor soil quality and inadequate irrigation. Livestock suffered, and food shortages became frequent. These conditions led to widespread malnutrition and disease.

Intertribal Conflicts and Social Strain

The reservation forced the Navajo to live alongside the Mescalero Apache, two distinct tribes with different languages and customs. This proximity led to tensions and conflicts, exacerbated by the scarcity of resources and the oppressive military presence.

Military Oversight and Restrictions

The U.S. Army maintained tight control over the reservation, enforcing curfews and limiting movement. The Navajo were often subjected to inspections and punishments, eroding their autonomy and cultural practices. The psychological impact of this surveillance created a climate of fear and resentment.

The End of the Experiment and the Navajo's Return

By 1868, it became clear that the Bosque Redondo experiment was a failure. The U.S. government acknowledged that the land was unsuitable and that the social and economic goals of the reservation were not being met.

The Treaty of 1868

The Treaty of Bosque Redondo was signed in June 1868, allowing the Navajo to return to a portion of their ancestral lands. This treaty was a significant turning point, marking the end of the forced confinement and the beginning of a new chapter for the Navajo Nation.

Rebuilding After Displacement

Returning to their homeland was both a relief and a challenge. The Navajo had to rebuild their homes, reestablish their farms, and heal from the trauma of displacement. Despite these hardships, the Navajo community showed remarkable resilience, preserving their language, culture, and traditions.

Legacy of the Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment

The army and the Navajo Bosque Redondo reservation experiment remains a powerful example of the consequences of forced assimilation policies and military intervention in Native American lives.

Lessons in Cultural Survival

Despite the suffering endured during the Long Walk and at Bosque Redondo, the Navajo Nation survived and adapted. The experience underscored the importance of cultural identity and the strength of community bonds in the face of adversity.

Impact on U.S. Indian Policy

The failure of the Bosque Redondo experiment influenced future U.S. Indian policies, highlighting the need for more thoughtful and respectful approaches to Native American relations. It also serves as a reminder of the human cost of displacement and cultural suppression.

Remembering the Long Walk

Today, the Long Walk is commemorated by the Navajo people and recognized as a pivotal moment in their history. Memorials and educational programs ensure that this painful chapter is not forgotten, fostering awareness and respect for Navajo heritage.

Exploring the army and the navajo the bosque redondo reservation experiment 1863 68 offers a window into the complexities of Native American history and the enduring spirit of the Navajo people. This period, though marked by hardship, ultimately highlights resilience, cultural preservation, and the ongoing journey toward justice and recognition.

Frequently Asked Questions

What was the Bosque Redondo Reservation experiment conducted between 1863 and 1868?

The Bosque Redondo Reservation experiment was a U.S. government effort to forcibly relocate the Navajo people to a reservation in eastern New Mexico, intended to confine and control them during the 1860s. It involved the establishment of the Bosque Redondo Reservation, where the Navajo were subjected to harsh living conditions and inadequate resources.

How did the U.S. Army play a role in the Navajo relocation to Bosque Redondo?

The U.S. Army, under the command of Colonel Kit Carson, conducted a military campaign known as the Long Walk in 1863-1864, forcibly removing the Navajo from their homelands in present-day Arizona and New Mexico and relocating them to the Bosque Redondo Reservation.

What were the living conditions like for the Navajo at the Bosque Redondo Reservation?

The living conditions at Bosque Redondo were extremely poor. The land was unsuitable for farming, there was insufficient water, food supplies were inadequate, and many Navajo suffered from disease and malnutrition during their internment.

Why is the Bosque Redondo Reservation experiment considered a failure?

The Bosque Redondo experiment failed because the reservation was poorly chosen, with infertile land and scarce resources, making it impossible for the Navajo to sustain themselves. The Navajo resisted assimilation efforts and eventually, the U.S. government agreed to allow them to return to their homelands.

What was the outcome of the Navajo experience at Bosque Redondo after 1868?

In 1868, the U.S. government signed the Treaty of Bosque Redondo, allowing the Navajo to leave the reservation and return to a portion of their ancestral lands. This marked the end of the forced relocation experiment and the beginning of Navajo self-determination.

How did the Bosque Redondo Reservation impact Navajo culture and society?

The Bosque Redondo experience caused great suffering and disruption to Navajo culture, including loss of life, displacement, and the challenge of adapting to new conditions. However, it also strengthened Navajo resilience and unity, ultimately leading to the preservation and revitalization of their cultural identity after returning to their homeland.

Additional Resources

****Army and the Navajo: The Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment 1863-68****

army and the navajo the bosque redondo reservation experiment 1863 68 stands as a pivotal, yet deeply controversial chapter in the history of U.S. military and Native American relations. This period, marked by forced relocation, cultural upheaval, and military oversight, reveals the complexities and consequences of federal Indian policy during the mid-19th century. The Bosque Redondo reservation experiment, initiated in 1863 and lasting until 1868, involved the U.S. Army's efforts to control and assimilate the Navajo people by confining them to a designated reservation in eastern New Mexico. This article explores the historical context, execution, and aftermath of this experiment, shedding light on its profound impact on the Navajo Nation and broader Native American policy.

Historical Context and Origins of the Bosque Redondo Experiment

The mid-19th century was a turbulent era for the Navajo people, as expansionist pressures from settlers and the U.S. government intensified. The army and the Navajo relationship during this time was largely adversarial, with frequent conflicts known as the Navajo Wars occurring between 1846 and 1866. The U.S. Army aimed to subdue the Navajo to open up land for settlers and secure the region.

In 1863, under the command of Colonel Kit Carson, the U.S. Army executed a scorched earth campaign designed to force the Navajo into submission. This campaign involved destroying crops, livestock, and dwellings, leaving the Navajo with no choice but to surrender. The culmination was the “Long Walk,” a forced march of approximately 300 miles from their homelands in present-day Arizona and New Mexico to the Bosque Redondo reservation near Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

The Long Walk and Forced Relocation

The Long Walk was a grueling and tragic episode in the army and the Navajo the Bosque Redondo reservation experiment 1863 68 narrative. Nearly 8,000 Navajo men, women, and children were compelled to march under harsh conditions, facing starvation, exposure, and disease. Many perished along the way, underscoring the human cost of the army’s military strategy.

Upon arrival at Bosque Redondo, the Navajo were confined to a 4,000-acre tract of land, which was ill-suited for agriculture or sustaining a large population. The location was selected for its perceived isolation and control potential, but it was ultimately inadequate for the Navajo’s traditional lifestyle and survival needs.

Life on the Bosque Redondo Reservation

The Bosque Redondo reservation experiment was marked by significant hardship and mismanagement. The army’s role extended beyond military control to overseeing daily life, resource distribution, and enforcing policies designed to “civilize” the Navajo.

Environmental and Agricultural Challenges

One of the primary failures of the reservation was its unsuitability for agriculture. The soil was saline and infertile, and water resources were unreliable, leading to poor crop yields. The Navajo, traditionally reliant on farming, sheep herding, and hunting, found their subsistence strategies severely disrupted.

Despite attempts by the army and government agents to introduce new farming techniques and livestock breeds, the environmental conditions undermined these efforts. The scarcity of food contributed to malnutrition and increased mortality rates among the Navajo population.

Military Oversight and Control

The army maintained strict control over the reservation, regulating movement and enforcing rules that limited Navajo autonomy. Fort Sumner, the military post adjacent to Bosque Redondo, functioned as the center of authority. Soldiers monitored Navajo activities, rationed supplies, and attempted to suppress traditional cultural practices.

This military presence created an atmosphere of surveillance and restriction, further exacerbating

tensions between the Navajo and their captors. The army's dual role as protector and enforcer complicated the dynamics of the reservation experiment.

Social and Cultural Impact

The confinement at Bosque Redondo disrupted Navajo social structures, religious practices, and cultural traditions. The imposition of Christian missionary efforts sought to assimilate the Navajo by eroding indigenous beliefs and languages.

Families were separated, and traditional governance systems were undermined by military and federal agents. The psychological toll of displacement and cultural suppression contributed to lasting trauma within the Navajo community.

Evaluation of the Bosque Redondo Reservation Experiment

The army and the Navajo the Bosque Redondo reservation experiment 1863-68 is often cited as a cautionary example of failed federal Indian policy and military intervention. Its outcomes reveal both the limitations of military solutions to indigenous issues and the resilience of Native American communities.

Pros and Cons of the Experiment

- **Pros:** From the army's perspective, the experiment temporarily reduced violent conflicts in the region and allowed for greater settler expansion. It also forced the Navajo into a controlled environment where the government attempted to introduce new agricultural practices and education.
- **Cons:** The environmental unsuitability of Bosque Redondo, poor management, inadequate supplies, and cultural repression caused immense suffering. The mortality rate was high, and the Navajo's traditional way of life was severely damaged.

Comparative Analysis with Other Native American Reservations

Unlike some reservations established in less harsh conditions, Bosque Redondo's location and management led to one of the most infamous forced relocations in U.S. history. Similar experiments, such as the Cherokee Trail of Tears, share themes of forced migration and cultural disruption, but the Bosque Redondo experience is distinguished by its experimental, military-run nature and the

extreme environmental challenges faced.

The Role of the U.S. Army

The army's involvement in the Navajo relocation was both a reflection of its military mandate and a manifestation of federal policies aimed at assimilation. While the army succeeded in achieving short-term military objectives, it failed to ensure humanitarian or sustainable outcomes.

Military leadership, including figures like Kit Carson, have been reassessed by historians for their dual roles as military commanders and agents of cultural destruction. The army's role at Bosque Redondo illustrates the complexities of using armed forces in social engineering projects.

The End of the Experiment and Its Aftermath

By 1868, the Bosque Redondo experiment was deemed a failure by government officials. The Treaty of Bosque Redondo was signed that year, allowing the Navajo to return to a portion of their ancestral lands. This marked a rare instance where a Native American tribe was permitted to reclaim its territory after forced removal.

The return home did not erase the scars left by the reservation experience. The Navajo faced challenges in rebuilding their society, economy, and cultural identity. However, the resilience demonstrated during and after the Bosque Redondo period laid the foundation for the modern Navajo Nation.

Legacy and Historical Significance

The army and the Navajo the Bosque Redondo reservation experiment 1863-68 remains a critical study in the consequences of militarized Indian policy. It exemplifies the dangers of forced assimilation, environmental disregard, and cultural suppression executed under the guise of federal governance.

Modern interpretations emphasize remembrance, reconciliation, and the importance of indigenous sovereignty. The Bosque Redondo site today serves as a historical landmark and a somber reminder of this chapter in American history.

In examining the Bosque Redondo experiment, one gains insight into the complexities of U.S. military involvement with Native American tribes and the enduring impacts that policies of displacement and confinement have had on indigenous communities. The lessons from this period continue to inform contemporary discussions on Native American rights, land stewardship, and cultural preservation.

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