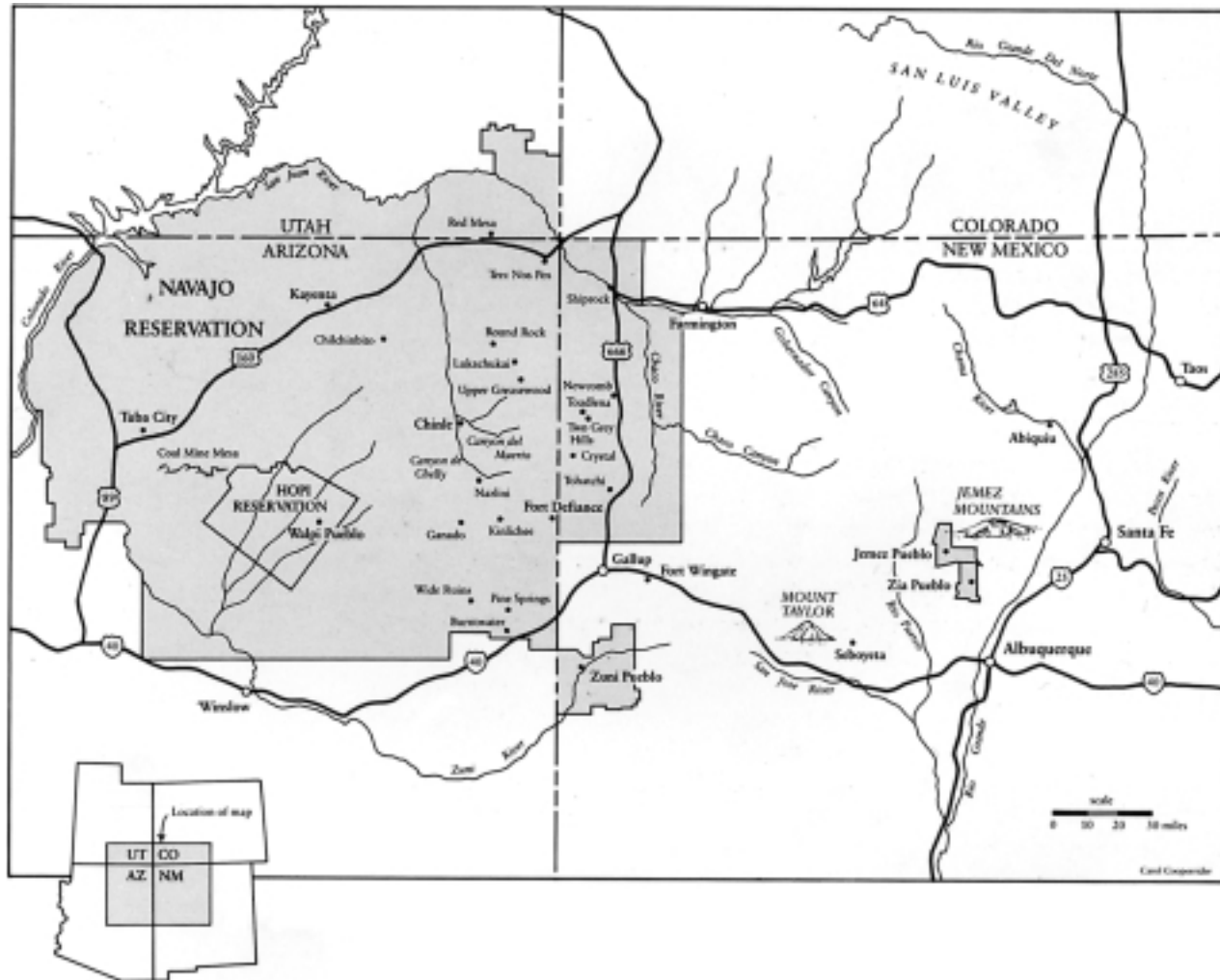


Navajo Weavings



Navajo weavers at loom, ca. late 19th c.

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Navajo women in blanket dresses, ca. 1865.

The Navajo

The Navajo are believed to have migrated southward from northwestern Canada and Alaska and settled in the Southwest about 500 years ago. There they developed a lifestyle based on farming, hunting, and sheep raising. They also made part of their living through raiding neighboring tribes and Spanish villages. After a period of conflict with the United States in the mid-19th century, a reservation was established for the Navajo in portions of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The present-day Navajo Nation is the most populous tribe in the United States, numbering approximately 150,000 members.

Development of Navajo Weavings

According to Navajo traditions, weaving is an art form learned from the spiritual figure Spider Woman. However, archaeological and ethnographic research indicates the Navajo acquired weaving skills from the Pueblo Indians in the late 1600s, using wool



Navajo Teec Nos Pos style rug showing Oriental rug influences, ca. 1910.

and were influenced by Pueblo and Mexican weavings. Navajo textiles during this time period were made from wool from the weaver's own sheep that was carded, spun, and dyed by the weaver.

After continued contact with white traders and settlers in the 19th century, Navajo weavers had access to new yarns, dye colors, and weaving techniques. They also began selling their woven goods to whites, which



Navajo "eye-dazzler" blanket, late 19th c.

from sheep obtained from the Spanish. Whereas weaving is traditionally a men's task in Pueblo cultures, it was the women in Navajo culture who specialized in this craft.

Navajo weavers adapted their textiles over time to suit the changing uses of these crafts. From the mid-1600s to the mid-1800s, they primarily created weavings that served the Navajos' own needs, such as wearing-blankets and belts. The patterns used incorporated linear Navajo basketry designs

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Navajo women carding, spinning, and weaving, ca. 1893.

worldwide and serve as a major source of income for the tribe. The 20th-century Navajo blankets and rugs on display in the Museum represent a variety of Navajo weaving techniques and designs.

The Weaving Process

Creating a completely handmade Navajo blanket or rug is an extremely time-consuming task with many steps. The process involves about a week of preparation (shearing the sheep, cleaning and spinning the wool, mixing dyes, and dyeing the fibers) and several weeks to a year of weaving depending on the size and complexity of the textile. It has been estimated that a high-quality 3x5-foot rug would take approximately 345 hours to create from start to finish.

Resources

Kent, Kate Peck. *Navajo Weaving: Three Centuries of Change*. School of American Research Press, 1985.
 Kaufman, Alice and Christopher Selser. *The Navajo Weaving Tradition: 1650 to Present*. Dutton, 1985)
 Navajo Nation Web Site [www.navajo.org].
 Wood, Leigh Hope. *The Navajo Indians*. Chelsea House, 1991.

Credits

Map from Kent (p. 6) Photos are from Wood (weavers, p. 16); Kent (blanket dresses, p. 13); Kaufman and Selser, (eye-dazzler, p. 65; Teec Nos Pos, p. 77; weaving, p. 131)