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The Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute - I

Lead: The Navajo-Hopi land dispute involves an excruciatingly complex mix of tradition, religion, economic exploitation, scarce energy resources, and environmental devastation.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In the American Southwest, the states of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah come together at a precise point in the middle of the desert. The region surrounding that point is known as the Four Corners. This is the home of

two Native American tribal groupings, the Hopi and the Navajo.

For centuries, these two clans existed in relative harmony. Indeed, they share many religious, cultural, and ethnic characteristics. Yet they are different. The Hopi are pacifists, domestics, farmers. Since ancient times they have lived in pueblos on the top of mesas, since their ancestors determined that living on top was much more easily defended than living at the bottom. The Navajo traditionally have been ranchers, herders, and horse-riding raiders, hunting particularly the buffalo until the coming of Europeans drove that animal almost to extinction.

The two tribes had little conflict because they lived apart until the Navajo began to move into Hopi territory in northeastern Arizona to avoid the Spanish and the Mexicans. By the end of the 1800s there was friction between the tribes because they were increasingly living on top of one another. In 1882, the Bureau of Indian Affairs tried to separate them by carving out separate reservations but this was largely unsuccessful. The Navajo outnumber the Hopi significantly and Hopi land is almost completely surrounded by Navajo land.

Yet, there was much in common between the tribes and they could probably have reached some degree

of accommodation had there not been a significant energy crisis in the 20th century. Just beneath the surface of the Four Corners resides one of the richest concentrations of energy related minerals on the continent - uranium, probably oil, but especially coal. This heralded the arrival in the region of the Peabody Coal Co. Next Time: competing interests.

Research assistance by Erin Morgan, at the University of Richmond this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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