

“NOTHING LEFT FOR ME”

Federal Policy and the Photography of Milton Snow in Diné Bikéyah

Co-curated by Dr. Jennifer Denetdale (Diné) and Lillia McEnaney
May 4, 2024 - May 3, 2025



Image: Milton Snow, Two sites of former hogans. Farthest [sic] occupied this year, nearest one occupied this year. Red Lake (Tolani Lakes, Leupp, Arizona), 1935-1936. Reproduction of gelatin silver print, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology Archives, 87.45.116

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Education Guide



Milton Snow, Flocks grazing on the range (Tolani Lakes, Leupp, AZ), 1936. Reproduction of gelatin silver print, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology Archives, 87.45.189.



Milton Now, Chapter corral, counting Navajo cattle, Red Lake (Tolani Lakes, Leupp, AZ), 1935-1936. Reproduction of gelatin silver print, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology Archives, 87.45.162.

“Places have long served as durable symbols of distant events and as indispensable aids for remembering and imagining them.”

-Jennifer Denetdale (Diné)
Reclaiming Diné History, 164

The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology encourages faculty and staff to visit our newest exhibition, *“Nothing Left for Me:” Federal Policy and the Photography of Milton Snow in Diné Bikéyah*.

We invite you to share information about this exhibition with your undergraduate and graduate students and consider integrating the content into your syllabi and scheduling a visit or a tour for your class(es). We have developed this guide to make this process simpler.

For more information, or to schedule a tour for the upcoming semester, please email our Education Division at maxeducation@unm.edu

Exhibition Summary

Using the photograph as a site of inquiry, this exhibition examines the impact of U.S. Indian Commissioner John Collier's brutal Navajo Livestock Reduction Program on Diné communities and homelands.

Imposed upon Navajo people in the 1930s, this federal program proposed to eliminate over half of Diné livestock herds. Against the backdrop of the Dust Bowl and the Hoover Dam, livestock reduction was an extreme response to reports of over-grazing throughout Diné Bikéyah, the Navajo homeland. Collier's policies were carried out in ignorance of Diné land management practices and community needs. Imprisoned for resisting, Diné people were forced to watch their livelihoods decimated as their sacred animals were taken from them. Livestock reduction resulted in widespread, harmful, and long-term sociocultural, environmental, economic, and political changes throughout Diné Bikéyah.

Diné communities resisted livestock reduction policies. They saw their domestic animals as gifts from the Holy People, who offered them as the foundation for the Diné way of life. As a result of Collier's tool of colonial control, Navajo people were no longer able to care for their land, their communities, and their herds in the ways they always had. In reflecting on this period, Marilyn Help (Diné) says, "You people... are heartless. You have now killed me. You have cut off my arms. You have cut off my legs. You have taken my head off. There is nothing left for me."

Hired by the Navajo Service in 1937, non-Native photographer Milton Snow (1905–1986) was instructed to document the federal government's supposedly well-intentioned program to address "the Navajo problem." Over the course of twenty years, Snow produced thousands of images of Diné people, homes, and landscapes, all of which were intended to provide proof that federal technologies were in fact working to "rehabilitate" Navajo lands and lives. Instead, Snow's photographs show us radically harmed and altered communities, landscapes, and homes. We see the construction of dams, mines, and imposed grazing and agricultural practices; and newly formed political, educational, and socioeconomic organizations, all of which point to the pervasive, oppressive nature of American colonial administration.

By placing Snow's images in conversation with a selection of archival documents and contemporary photographs, this exhibition foregrounds Diné perspectives on the intersecting and ongoing legacies of photography and American colonialism.

Educational Tools

Themes and concepts explored in the exhibit

- This period as a case study in the long history of American settler colonialism and its impact on socioeconomic and cultural practices throughout the Southwest
- The relationship between place/land/nature and self-identity/community-identity for Diné people
- The conceptual differences between notions of gender, sexuality, and family structure in Diné society and Western societies
- The effects of the imposition of Western notions of gender, gender roles, and family structure on Diné society
- The impact of the imposition of a new governmental structure on Diné communities
- The effects of the introduction of capitalism on the Diné economy and concepts of land and ownership
- Photographs and archives as technologies of power and producers of knowledge
- The effect of shifting political, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts on how photography is read
- The politics surrounding photography of/in Indigenous communities: themes of documentation, regulation, surveillance, consent, circulation
- Indigenous oral histories, intergenerational narratives, and lived experiences as valid histories
- Indigenous resistance, refusal, representation, and survivance in the face of settler power

Suggested pedagogical questions

- In what ways does American settler colonialism continue to impact Diné lives and communities?
- What policies continue to shape and influence Diné life?
- What are the histories of non-Native photographers among Native people, including the Diné?
- How can museums responsibly steward, curate, and collaborate in a way that foregrounds Indigenous agency and voices? How can museums be Indigenized?
- What do photographs do?
- How do photographs generate meaning, how do these meanings shift over time, and to whom does it matter?
- How has photography—as representations of Indigenous people and places—shaped the American sense of place and the making of American nationalism and its ideologies?
- How do Indigenous peoples respond to photographs of themselves, and can we make space for their perspectives around the uses of photography?
- For researchers and educators who work with Native communities, how can photographs be used as tools of inquiry to help shape ethical and responsible practices?

About the Maxwell Museum

Location

The Maxwell Museum is located east of University Blvd. between Las Lomas Rd. and Dr. M. L. King Jr. Ave. See <https://maxwellmuseum.unm.edu/about/visit-us> for directions

Hours (Museum & Store):

Tuesday - Saturday: 10am - 4pm
Closed Sundays, Mondays and all major holidays
Free and open to all

Parking

10 free parking spaces are available just west of the museum, parallel to University Blvd. Parking permits are available inside at reception. Paid parking areas are west of the Museum adjacent to permitted spaces and north of Las Lomas Rd.

Contact

To schedule a tour, contact the Education Division at maxeducation@unm.edu
<https://maxwellmuseum.unm.edu>

If you would like to bring your class for a self-guided visit, please let us know so that we can try to ensure that there are no other groups visiting during that time.

Maxwell Museum of Anthropology

Working toward greater understandings of the fullness of human experiences
in the Southwest and the world.

Vision

The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at UNM contributes to
Reconciling injustices
Restoring voices
Realizing community

Values

The Staff at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at UNM embrace these values in all they do:
Uphold integrity through honesty and transparency
Act with courage and take informed risks
Lead with humility and own our mistakes
Embrace inclusivity with openness and sincerity
Embody dynamism and manifest meaningful change
Excite curiosity and the passion for learning