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A History of the Navajos: The Reservation Years (A School for Advanced Research Resident Scholar Book)

Garrick Bailey, Roberta Glenn Bailey

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When ethnohistorians Garrick and Roberta Bailey arrived in Farmington, New Mexico, in 1977 to conduct field research on the Navajos, they soon realized the truth of what they had been told by members of other tribes: Navajos weren't like other Indians. While many Native Americans have subordinated their tribal identity to their identity as Indians, unique historical circumstances have allowed the Navajos to maintain their uniqueness.

A History of the Navajos examines these circumstances over the century and more that the tribe has lived on the reservation. In 1868, the year that the United States government released the Navajos from four years of imprisonment at Bosque Redondo and created the Navajo reservation, their very survival was in doubt. In spite of conflicts over land and administrative control, by the 1890s they had achieved a greater level of prosperity than at any previous time in their history.

Economic disasters such as the drought of the 1890s and the government's program of livestock reduction in the 1930s did not compromise their rural integrity. Through two world wars, the change from a herding to a wage economy, the coming of the white man's schools and religions, and a growing desire on the part of young people to own the goods and emulate the ways of the predominant culture, Navajo social identity remains intact. As one of the authors' informants put it, "They're still Navajos."

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