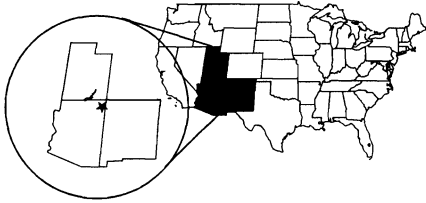


## NAVAJO



The Navajo are the largest tribe in the United States. They constituted over 14% of the Native American population in the 1990 census and number more than 250,000 (NAA, 36-43). They occupy much of the Southwest, spreading across parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah.

*Navajo* is how the Pueblo Indians referred to the area from which the Navajo came (ENAT, 154-158), while the Spanish called them *Apaches de Navajo*, eventually shortened to Navajo.

The Navajo flag, adopted on 21 May 1968 by the Tribal Council in Window Rock, Arizona, was designed by Jay R.

DeGroat, a Navajo student from Mariano Lake. It was chosen from among 140 designs (FBUS, 259-260). The flag incorporates elements from the tribal seal designed by John Claw, Jr. of Many Farms and adopted on 18 January 1952.



The seal bears a ring of 50 arrowheads representing the states of the United States (the original seal had 48; two were added when Alaska and Hawaii became states) and reflects the Navajo Nation protected by the United States. Within this ring of outward-pointing arrowheads are three concentric circles of turquoise, yellow, and red, open at the top. They represent the rainbow and the Navajo *hooghan* (hogan); the opening shows that the Navajo Nation's sovereignty is never closed. Within the circles are two green corn plants, the sustainer of life for the Navajo, their tips yellow showing pollen, a substance used frequently in Navajo ceremonies. Within the corn are four sacred mountains surrounding a brown horse, red cow, and white sheep—for livestock, a source of wealth for the Navajo. The

mountains are white, turquoise, yellow, and black (clockwise from the top). Above them a yellow sun shines, and arching over all is “GREAT SEAL OF THE NAVAJO NATION” in black (“The Symbols of the Navajo Nation”, *NAVA News*, May/June 1988, 4).

The Navajo flag is a pale buff color (perhaps representing sand), bearing a map of the Navajo Nation in the center. The original area of the 1868 reservation is dark brown, while the much larger current borders are copper (sample flag provided by the Office of Property & Supply, Navajo Nation, Window Rock, Arizona).

Elements from the seal are added to the flag. Surrounding the map are the four sacred mountains—black above, turquoise below, white to the right, and yellow to the left. These colors form a recurring theme in the legends of the Navajo, beginning with the Navajo creation story. In it the world began as a black island floating in the mist. Above it were four clouds, black, white, blue (meaning turquoise), and yellow (“Mythology of the Navaho” [sic], *Hobbies Magazine*, Nov. 1956). The story describes the colored clouds as successive worlds and narrates the themes of birth, propagation, flood, escape, and continuing life. Arching over the mountains and map is the rainbow of red, yellow, and blue—with red outermost in reverse sequence from the seal.

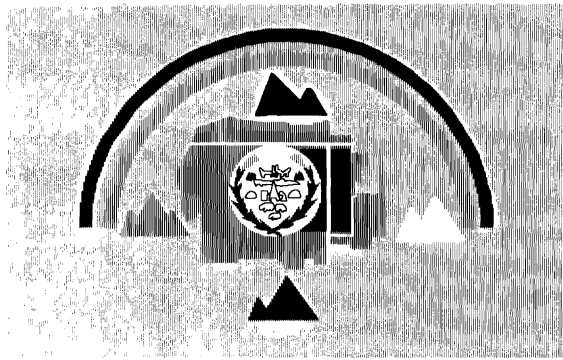
Centered on the map is a white disk bearing the corn stalks and domestic animals from the seal, along with symbols of other aspects of the Navajo economy: a traditional *wikiyup*, oil drilling equipment, forestry, mining, and recreational fishing and hunting. All but the green and yellow corn stalks appear in black outline.

The overall image of the flag recalls an art form closely associated with the Navajo—sand painting. Many of the flag’s details, and the sand-colored background, are frequently found in these temporary art works that initially served as altars in various healing ceremonies, although many traditional Navajo object to their sale.

The orientation of the sacred mountains on the flag differs from the seal. The Navajo consider east (*ha’a’aaah*) to be where everything begins and signifies all things good and beautiful, it is the location of the white

mountain. On the seal, east and the white mountain are at the top; on the flag they are to the right.

In 1995 the flag of the Navajo nation became the first Native American tribal flag in space when astronaut Bernard Harris carried it aboard the space shuttle Discovery (“Navajo Flag Flies in Orbit Aboard Shuttle Discovery”, *The Plain Dealer*, Cleveland, OH, 9 Feb. 1995). Dr. Harris is an African-American physician who lived on the Navajo reservation as a child. He had asked the Navajo for a token to take into space with him and the president chose the flag. Navajo medicine men first blessed the flag by sprinkling corn pollen upon it, and were assured that the Discovery’s flight path conformed to Navajo religious belief and would fly in a clockwise direction. After its space flight, the flag was proudly flown over the Navajo National Capitol in Window Rock, Arizona. 🌵



[Thanks to Peter T. Noyes, Compliance Officer, Navajo Nation, Historic Preservation Department, for relaying important aspects of the flag’s description.]