



## THE NAVAJO DRESS

A Navajo *biil* (pronounced “beel”) is typically referred to as a “rug dress.” It is composed of two panels, usually warped and woven side-by-side to ensure that they are identical. The two panels are then sewn together at the top, leaving an opening for the neck and head. The *biil* hung down below the knees and was open on both sides. There is usually no shaping, but the *biil* was gathered at the waist with a sash belt, leather belt, or, later with a concho belt. The *biil* and its sash belt are the only two items that Navajo weavers still produce for their own use.

The *biil* dress was standard clothing for Navajo women prior to the Long Walk (1864). The *biil* was a product of the excellent weaving skills that the Navajo had developed since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. These weavings were simple, often with only one or two bands of patterning in an otherwise plain weave. The advent of manufactured wool clothing replaced the traditional *biil* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However the *biil* is currently making a comeback among Navajo young women as a replacement for caps and gowns at graduation ceremonies.