



## NAVAJO WEAVING: THE “KIT CARSON” RUG

This is a Navajo weaving that was completed around 1900. The weaver is unknown. It is an unusual textile in that it is made to be viewed from only one direction. This would indicate that the weaver created this textile for a specific purpose, beyond its use as a floor or wall covering. In this instance, the general consensus is that the rug was made to tell a story about the Navajo people.

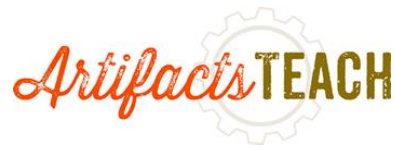
The symbols woven into the rug lend themselves to the following generally accepted interpretation:

The bow and arrow at the top of the rug symbolize the Navajo people as they were until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Note that the arrow is tipped with a sharp arrowhead and the fletches are black. The six-pointed star is said to represent the Navajo culture. The large black and white arrows symbolize the male (black) and female (white) contributions to that culture. Arrows also symbolize freedom in Native American cultures. Note that the arrows are “balanced” in their presentation: white arrow with black fletches and black tip; black arrow with white fletches and tip. There is a long grey arrow tipped with an arrowhead just above the black and white box. This represents the freedom to roam, hunt and to protect the people.

In the middle of the weaving is a five-pointed star with a face in its center. This is said to represent Colonel Kit Carson, the Taos resident responsible for defeating the Navajos and moving them to the Bosque Redondo in Eastern New Mexico. It is important to note that his face is superimposed over the star, indicating that he has taken over Navajo culture. Also note that the black and white symbols are now in the form of a rather precise rectangle, with specific boundaries, just like the reservation. In other words, the roles of both males and females have been proscribed by the move to the reservation and Kit Carson is dictating the culture. Life is not the same as it was before the relocation.

The bottom of the rug represents the Navajo people after their return to their homeland in western New Mexico in 1868. Note that things have changed significantly:

1. The large grey arrow representing freedom is no longer tipped with an arrowhead. The freedom to hunt, roam, and protect have been limited, or eliminated.
2. The arrows representing the male and female roles are not the same. The fletches on both arrows are now mixed black and white. This would seem to indicate not only change, but also some confusion with traditional roles.
3. Beneath the arrows is a five-pointed star. The Navajo culture has changed. It is missing something from before 1860. The missing point may represent the 25% of Navajos who died during the relocation, or it may indicate that the culture will never be the same again.



4. At the very bottom are a bow and arrow. Again these are symbols of the Navajo people. However, the symbols at the bottom are very different from those at the top. The arrow is no longer balanced. The sharp arrowhead that existed at the top is no longer present. The freedom of the Navajos has been limited. Further, the fletches on the bottom arrow are black and white, one again indicating confusion and uncertainty about the future.

For the Navajo, relocation to the Bosque Redondo was a traumatic event physically, emotionally, and culturally. After the Bosque experience, the Navajo knew that their lives and their culture would never again be the same. This tapestry tells that story in a poignant fashion

NOTE:

This is the generally accepted interpretation of the symbolism for this tapestry. The Navajo tradition is an oral tradition. The person who wove this rug remains unknown. As a result, we will never know the actual intent or interpretation. There is no documentation with which to verify our ideas.