



US SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING

“CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY SERIES: MODERNIZING THE INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFTS ACT TO HONOR
NATIVE IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION.”

FRIDAY, JULY 7, 2017 @ 10:00 AM

SANTA FE INDIAN SCHOOL (GYMNASIUM)

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Testimony by Joyce Begay-Foss (Diné), Director of Education, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture; Navajo weaver and former IACB chairperson

Thank you to Senator John Hoeven, and the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for scheduling a field hearing on the topic of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act.

I am an accomplished weaver for over 40 years and have won numerous awards at the Santa Fe Indian Market, the Eight Northern Pueblos Arts and Crafts Show and the San Felipe Arts and Crafts Show. I draw on this expertise as a writer, instructor and lecturer on traditional Navajo textiles and dyeing techniques. I have curated several exhibitions at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture on Navajo textiles. I have been involved in addressing issues and concerns of intellectual and cultural property rights of the SW tribes especially with Diné (Navajo) weavers. I am in contact with local Navajo weaving groups such as Ramah Navajo Weavers Association and Sheep is Life (Dibé bé liná).

<http://navajolifeway.org>

My clan is Nakaiidiné (Mexican Clan) born for Tachii'ni (Red Running into the Water People). I was born in Shiprock, New Mexico and on my mother's side my great aunts were weavers and lived in Lukachukai, Arizona. About 30 miles from Lukachukai in Canyon de Chelly there is an 800 foot tall rock spire (Spider Rock). As a child, I was told stories of Spider Woman (Naashjéii Asdzáá) and that she lives on top of that rock and that she gave the Navajo people the gift of weaving. For the Navajo people weaving is not just an artform but a direct connection to our environment and lifeways. Today I feel we are losing the

cultural knowledge as well as our language. It also disturbs me that people throughout the world are misappropriating our traditional designs and profiting from it.

Cultural Misappropriation of design by import market

Our earliest designs came from our baskets and then transitioned into our women's dresses, chief blankets, shoulder and child's blankets. These textiles were finely woven from handspun warp and weft woolen yarns.

Colors were limited to natural brown, white, black and indigo dyed yarns. In these textiles patterns were specifically woven a certain color and placement for a reason. However, today the import market has taken some of these very traditional designs and have displaced or rearranged them in knock-offs that I find offensive. We also have regional styles throughout the reservation that have been misappropriated as well. These styles are: Storm Pattern, Ganado, Crystal, Two Grey Hills, Teec Nos Pos, Yei and Yeibechai to name a few.

Navajo Rug Economy

Besides the misappropriation of designs of the import market Navajo weavers face competition in the lower cost of the imported item. Unfortunately some consumers prefer to buy a cheaper knock-off of a Native American designed product. Currently Navajo knock-offs are being woven in over 15 countries, including Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Thailand, Nepal, India, the Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Japan, Egypt and Turkey.

Weavers on the reservation have limited venues to sell their rugs. There are a few trading posts which will purchase or trade for rugs/blankets but again weavers are probably getting a lower price for their weavings. Weavers that can get their work juried at different arts shows in the country can gain recognition for their work and also collectors can have consumer confidence in their purchases.

Other issues to be considered:

- ❖ Weavers need to have better labels on their weavings showing: Cultural affiliation (i.e. Navajo/Diné), Description of weaving and materials used.
- ❖ Museums and art markets should have: How To Buy Authentic Native American Art on their websites.
- ❖ Indian Arts and Crafts Board should be holding workshops nationally on different issues regarding Native American Indian Art for Native Artists as well as the general public. Currently working with Indian Arts And Crafts Board on a Navajo weaving brochure. This brochure is very important to educate consumers and also to address import/knock-off Navajo weavings.
- ❖ Only 12 states—Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Texas—have enacted laws prohibiting the misrepresentation of Indian arts and crafts. Other states need to enact laws as well.

- ❖ Have stricter US custom laws regarding imported non-Native American Indian Art products coming into the country. There are obvious manufacturers that can be identified.

Thank you, Senators and the committee for allowing me to submit my testimony regarding the issues about Navajo weaving.