



REMEMBRANCE TO AVOID AN UNWANTED FATE

BY

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Sixty years ago, the United States turned to the tiny atom to unleash the most destructive force known to mankind and bring an end to World War II. Ironically, the uranium used to create the most technologically advanced weapon ever invented came from the land of the most traditional indigenous people of North America, and was dug from the earth with picks and shovels.

Nuclear weapons transformed the United States into the greatest military force the world has ever known, and the term “Super Power” was coined. Lost in the history of this era is the story of the people – the *Diné* – who pulled uranium out of the ground by hand, who spoke and continue to speak an ancient tongue, and who pray with sacred corn pollen at dawn for good things for their families. By the thousands, these were, and remain, the forgotten victims of America’s Cold War that uranium spawned.

The Navajo People and Uranium Mining is the documented history of how these Navajo people lived, how they worked and now, sadly, how they died waiting for compassionate federal compensation for laboring in the most hazardous conditions imaginable, and which were known at the time yet concealed from them. These Navajo miners and their families became, in essence, expendable people.

Today, the Navajo Nation, with the help of law firms, environmental groups, writers, photographers and historians, is doing all it can to correct this horrendous wrong done to Navajo uranium miners, their families and their descendants. This excellent book allows the people who lived this to tell their story in their own words.

Genocide. There is no other word for what happened to Navajo uranium miners. The era of uranium mining on Navajoland was genocidal because the hazards of cancer and respiratory disease were known to doctors and federal officials, and yet they allowed Navajos to be exposed to deadly radiation to see what would happen to them. As a result, radiation exposure has cost the Navajo Nation the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, stories, songs and ceremonies – to say nothing of the lives – of hundreds of our people. Now, aged Navajo uranium miners and their families continue to fight the Cold War in their doctors’ offices as they try to understand how the invisible killer of radiation exposure left them with many forms of cancer and other illnesses decades after leaving the uranium mines. No one ever told them that mining uranium would steal their health and cripple their lives when they became grandparents. But it did. They continue to leave us to this day only because they were the ones who answered the call.

Because of this painful history, in 2005 the Navajo Nation passed the *Diné* Natural Resources Protection Act. This law prohibits uranium mining and processing in all its forms on Navajoland. It protects our land and our water from being contaminated as it was in the past. Despite our sovereignty and our will, there are those today who still seek to weaken our resolve in order to gain access to the uranium under our land just to enrich themselves. Only the telling of this story, as *The Navajo People and Uranium Mining* does so excellently, can protect us from this unwanted fate and a repeat of one of the more sorrowful periods of the Navajo Nation’s history.