



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáadi Nitsáhákees

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Navajo President Buu Nygren meets Dr. Jennifer Denetdale, Chief Manuelito's great-great-great granddaughter

Author, scholar, professor, Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission chair

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Following a meeting with the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission last week, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren met the great-great-great granddaughter of a Navajo leader who inspired him as a boy.

“I’ve always looked up to your great-great-great grandfather because he was from Utah,” the President told Dr. Jennifer Nez Denetdale, chair of the Commission and renowned author of *Reclaiming Diné History; the Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita*.

Dr. Denetdale, professor and chair of the University of New Mexico Department of American Studies, told President Nygren that Chief Manuelito, *Hastiin Ch’il Haajini*, was from Bears Ears in Utah. The President said that he could see the Bear Ears twin buttes from Yellow Rock Point, Utah, where he grew up.

“To think that it’s 150 years for a Utah-born person to lead the Nation again,” he said.



*Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren meets with Dr. Denetdale, professor and chair of the University of New Mexico Department of American Studies, great-great-great granddaughter of Chief Manuelito who inspired him as a boy, and chair of the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission. She shows him pages of interest from her book, *Reclaiming Diné History; the Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita*.*

Manuelito’s wife *Asdzáa Tl’ógi*, or Juanita, was Dr. Denetdale’s great-great-great grandmother.

Dr. Denetdale is the first Navajo and first Navajo woman to earn a Ph.D. in history. She received her

doctorate from Northern Arizona University which she refers to as her second home.

While visiting President Nygren, she presented him with a copy of her book.

"It took me a long time to do this book," she said. "I didn't know how to write English very well."

Chief Manuelito is one of the Navajo people's more esteemed historical figures and a signer of the Treaty of 1868.

He became his community's chief in 1855, the same year the U.S. Army built an outpost called Fort Defiance north of present-day Window Rock.

As a leader, he led Navajo warriors into battles against the U.S. Army from 1863 to 1866. It was that time when Major General James H. Carleton ordered Col. Kit Carson to defeat the Navajo resist-

ance through a brutal scorched-earth campaign of starvation and deprivation to force Navajo families into submission.

Some 10,000 Navajos of all ages – men, women and children – walked 250-to-450 miles across Navajo land in 53



separate marches to Bosque Redondo, or Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

Manuelito and his people were among the last to surrender. At the signing of the Treaty of 1868, he held out for the U.S. to allow his people to return to their own homeland rather than being taken to either Oklahoma or Florida as other tribes had been.

Manuelito came from a family of leaders, Dr. Denetdale said. When he was born, she said, "His father held him up and he was blessed to be a leader."

She writes that his father took him outside, "presented him to the east, to the Holy People, and prophesied that his son would be a great leader."

"He blessed his son, saying, 'My baby will touch the earth with his feet. He will hold his head toward the sky, hold his right hand to the east and his left hand to the west. He will know everything on this earth. His thinking will be valued and the People will listen to his words.'"

Dr. Denetdale said a Swedish-American photographer named Valentin Wolfenstein was at



Photo of Chief Manuelito, his wife Juanita and an unidentified man taken in 1868 by Swedish-American photographer Valentin Wolfenstein.

Fort Sumner to photograph the signing of the Treaty. He wrote in his journal that a couple of nights before the signing he heard a sound outside his tent, she said.

“He pulls up the window of his tent and it's our women and children,” she said. “He hears their feet as they're going to that place.”

Wolfenstein described the day of the Treaty negotiations. The Navajo men covered themselves with red ochre, or *chiih* in Navajo, before the proceedings.

“When you tell these stories, it makes you imagine them, see them, really think about what's on their minds,” she said.

“They hold the life and the death and the future of our children in their hands and in their ability to negotiate. They were very uncompromising. So I just wanted to share that with you because that's how much these stories mean to me.”

After the Navajos' freedom from Fort Sumner, Dr. Denetdale said Manuelito sent his two sons to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

“He sent his sons, his children, to Carlisle because he wanted to fulfill Article 6 in the Treaty of 1868,” Dr. Denetdale said.

Article 6 is titled The Education of Navajo Children.

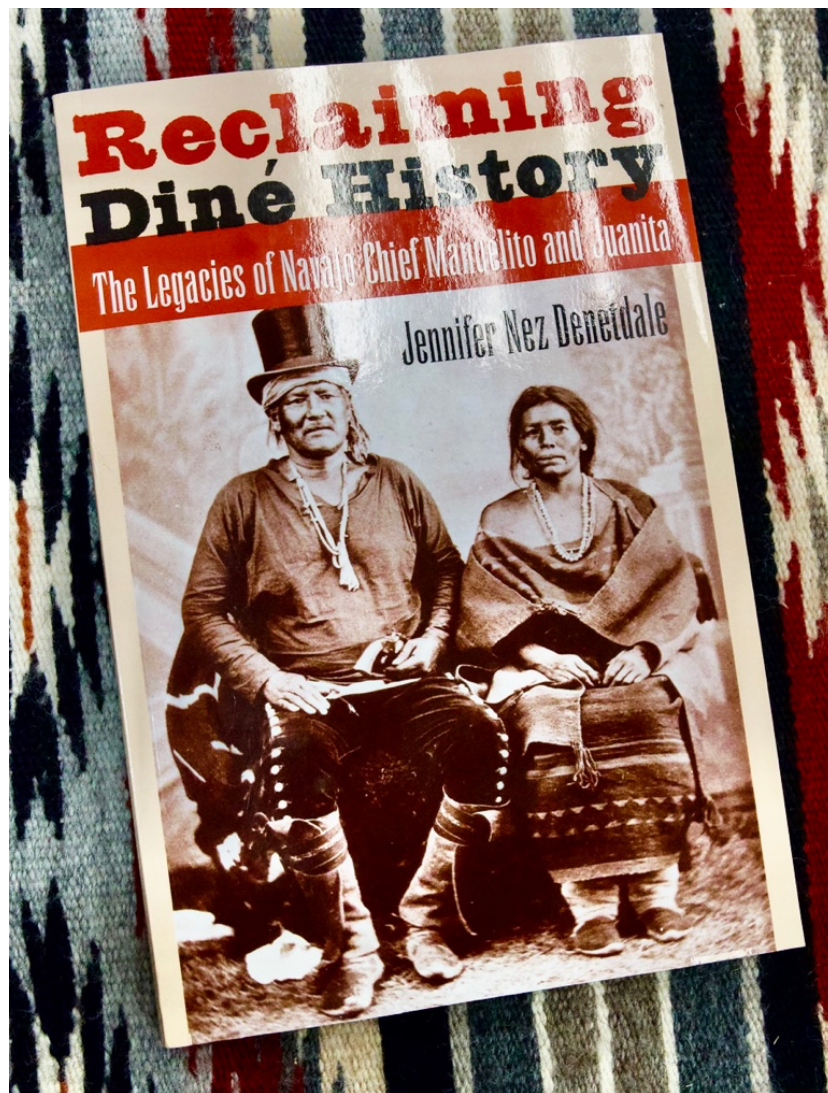
“Within eight months one son died,” she said. “The other one returned home sick and he died.”

After the death of his sons, Manuelito demanded the return of all Navajo children from the school.

President Nygren asked Dr. Denetdale for help to perpetuate and expand the use of the Navajo language, saying he uses it in his weekly radio addresses and wants it to be 100% Navajo.

“Thank you for meeting with me,” he said. “In modern Navajo politics, you would never assume someone from Utah would lead the Nation again.

“I'm an in-law from Arizona now,” he said with a smile. “I reside in and my homesite lease is in Arizona with Jasmine.”



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