



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Indian-Made: Navajo Culture in the Marketplace, 1868-1940*  
(review)

Peter B. Dedek

Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 113, Number 2, October 2009,  
pp. 269-270 (Review)

Published by Texas State Historical Association  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2009.0058>



➔ *For additional information about this article*  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/408560/summary>

*Indian-Made: Navajo Culture in the Marketplace, 1868–1940.* By Erika Marie Bsumek. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008. Pp. 304. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 9780700615957, \$29.95 cloth).

*Indian-Made* describes how, between 1868 and 1940, Navajo craftspeople, who resided on reservations in Arizona and New Mexico and made rugs and silver jewelry, participated in the modern market economy of the United States. The Navajo, rather than being “primitive” victims of capitalism, actively sought to profit from exchanges made at trading posts and with Anglo art dealers. Bsumek’s intent is to describe how the Navajo influenced the markets and how the markets influenced the Navajo, and she argues that traders had to respect Navajo trading traditions to continue getting their business, describing how several white traders were even murdered by Navajos who had taken offense at their behavior toward them.

The book focuses primarily on the mentality and motivations of white “Indian traders” such as John Hubbell, who ran trading posts on Navajo reservations that exchanged food and dry goods for Navajo crafts; white art dealers, such as Grace Nickolson, who marketed Navajo crafts to American consumers; and white anthropologists and curators, such as Stewart Cullin who helped to create a market for Navajo and other Indian-made goods by collecting artifacts and displaying them in museums.

Building on the advertisements of the Fred Harvey Company, which operated a string of railroad hotels across the Southwest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, white traders and dealers created the image of the Navajo and other southwestern tribes as “primitive,” pre-industrial, and “vanishing” in order to create an aura surrounding Indian-made crafts. The marketing was so effective that the term “Indian made” itself became an asset. American consumers, eager to possess a hand-made piece of an exotic and disappearing culture, snapped up Navajo rugs and jewelry.

Bsumek argues that white dealers misrepresented Navajo culture and created a false impression for white consumers. While this is undoubtedly true, a weakness in the central argument of the book is that the narrative discusses the white views of the Navajo at great length but imparts little about the actual Navajo culture, leaving us without enough understanding of the Navajos themselves to fully comprehend how the Anglos were misrepresenting them. Beyond describing the Navajo custom of gift giving while making trade exchanges and providing a brief history of the Navajo and the Navajo removal in the late nineteenth century, the book tells us little about how Navajos viewed their own role in the market.

The book also argues that many Anglo Americans, especially women, collected Navajo crafts to express their desire to own “a symbol of the triumph of white Americans through manifest destiny and national expansion,” (127) a phenomenon that the author calls “domestic imperialism” (126). While the book effectively demonstrates that Anglos depicted Native Americans unrealistically, it does not effectively support the assertion that collecting Navajo goods amounted to imperialism. Many affluent collectors sought artifacts from a wide range of cultures during this period, including from the ancient Egyptians and Romans. Many

people collect art, coins, or crafts; perhaps collecting simply means that the collector appreciates the craftsmanship, history, or artistic quality of a given object.

*Indian-Made* provides an interesting and informative view into the mentality of white traders and consumers of Navajo crafts. Chapter six, which I consider to be the book's strongest, provides a fascinating description of the controversy surrounding the definition and use of the term "Indian made" in the 1930s. *Indian-Made* is well researched and gives valuable insights into the marketing of Navajo goods and culture.

Texas State University—San Marcos

PETER B. DEDEK

*Salt Warriors: Insurgency on the Rio Grande.* By Paul Cool. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008. Illustrations, notes, index. ISBN 9781603440165, \$24.95 cloth.)

Paul Cool's *Salt Warriors* is a welcome contribution to the literature on social conflict in Texas and to studies of the San Elizario Salt War in particular. Making effective use of disparate and scattered sources, Cool provides a detailed narrative of the events leading up to the conflict and its consequences. *Salt Warriors* gives readers both the essence and complexity of the political and social dimensions of this little known but significant West Texas rebellion of 1877. Cool argues that the imposition of market forces sets the stage for the clash between ambitious, newly arriving Anglo and local *Mexicano* residents with a long tradition of "Indian fighting" and guerrilla war. More importantly, Cool insists that lawless, racially motivated violence between Anglos and *Paseños* continued for more than a year afterwards.

*Salt Warriors* examines the personal background of the major figures who made bids for the lucrative mineral deposits. Thus, Cool provides ethnographic depth that helps explain the actions that precipitated the conflict. Cool is sympathetic to local *Mexicanos*, acknowledging the level of organization, military capacity, and political resolve that led to the outmaneuvering of the U.S. military, the capture of a Texas Ranger detachment, and the public execution of prominent Anglos. A significant portion of the study referenced throughout is Cool's painstaking examination of a wide variety of newspaper accounts that presented the views of prominent politicians and military leaders worried about the Salt War. More importantly, *Salt Warriors* exposes the national preoccupation with Mexican nationals violating U.S. territory and the fears of an impending war with Mexico. Cool reminds readers how the Salt War revealed the divided views of a nation ambivalent about its relationship with its southern neighbor.

Despite its strengths, Cool's narrative success is not, unfortunately, matched by his effort to situate the Salt War into broader historical debates. Cool evokes market forces, but he does not fully engage the literature on capitalist transformation in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands during the nineteenth century, thereby omitting older studies of northern Mexico's economic transformation and more recent monographs that examine the complex interdependence between the frontiers of northern Mexico and the American Southwest. A more careful race and class