



TEXTILES IN THE SOUTHWEST – SHORT ESSAY

The history of textiles in the Southwest is marked by a constant exchange of skill and knowledge among the Pueblo, Hispanic and Navajo peoples. Their textiles are remarkable as much for what distinguishes them culturally as for what they have in common. Materials, techniques and design systems have been exchanged with and imprinted on each culture's unique style.

During the 19th century, Pueblo, Navajo and Hispanic weavers experimented with new design systems and materials, most notable synthetic dyes, and, by the 1880s, synthetically spun yarns. Coal-tar derived aniline dyes came in a rainbow of colors, many of which were impossible to duplicate using the natural plant dyes available locally.

By the 1870s, Navajo weavers had come to dominate the weaving trade. The arrival of the railroad in the Southwest in the 1880s had a significant impact on Navajo weaving practices. Commercially spun cotton and wool yarns and a wide palette of inexpensive aniline dyes stimulated innovation and prompted design changes in all Navajo textiles. Brighter colors, emphasis on design and attention to tourists' demands were all changes that arrived with the railroad.