Southwest, the railroad brought tourists to pre-selected stops to be entertained and offered a variety of curios for sale. Cultural authenticity was often sacrificed to please the stereotypical notions of the tourists.

Native Americans and Europeans exchanged more than corn and tobacco—the two groups traded symbols, images, and icons. Native Americans transformed these metaphors and folded them into their own art. New techniques and markets fueled an artistic explosion.

After 1920, tourism to Indian country was on the rise. Entrepreneurs and the federal government saw an opportunity to transform America’s romantic notions of the West into a cash crop for Native Americans. The arts became a new tool of salvation, but in order to sell to visiting Easterners, artworks had to conform to their tastes. Art competitions also shaped the notion that Native Americans produce “arts and crafts” rather than fine art.

While much of this new art was made for trade, many of the objects bespeak great creativity and are now valued heirlooms. This section looks at some of those “tourist” pieces, and considers what catering to outside demands has meant for Native Americans.

Economic realities forced Native Americans to do things that seem degrading by today’s standards. In the Southwest, the railroad brought tourists to pre-selected stops to be entertained and offered a variety of curios for sale. Cultural authenticity was often sacrificed to please the stereotypical notions of the tourists.