Pictures, not merely photographs: authenticity, performance and the Hopi in Edward S. Curtis's The North American Indian

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Pictures, not merely photographs: 
Authenticity, performance and the Hopi in Edward S. Curtis’s *The North American Indian*

by

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

In March of 1899 Edward H. Harriman (1848-1909), the newly appointed director of the Union Pacific Railroad and chairman of its executive committee, was encouraged by his physician to take an extended summer cruise to Alaska for some much-needed rest. Considering the proposed length of the voyage, Harriman chartered and retrofitted a large steamship, the George Elder (complete with a crew) to accommodate his family. But in his enthusiasm, he soon found his preparations for the voyage were disproportionate to the size of his party. To justify the extravagance, Harriman extended invitations to a number of special guests. While adding to the interest and pleasure of the expedition, Harriman meant for the additional guests to “…gather useful information and distribute it for the benefit of others.”¹ Quickly the passenger list grew from under thirty to one hundred and twenty-six.

In addition to the Harriman family, their servants and the necessary crew, passengers along for the cruise now included a host of scientific, literary and artistic luminaries including geographers, ethnographers, geologists, conservationists, zoologists, poets and photographers. These men (there were few female passengers other than Harriman’s wife, daughters, and their female servants) produced the major writings that would later make up The Harriman Alaska Expedition, a series self-published by Harriman and endorsed by the Washington Academy of the

Sciences between 1901 and 1914. The extensive fifteen-volume environmental and ethnographic study was published both for public and academic consumption. The expedition was further memorialized within a personal album, *The Chronicles and Souvenirs*, created in 1899 as a keepsake for the Harriman family. The album includes one-of-a-kind contributions from the ship’s passengers; the pages are lined with pasted photographs, detailed paintings of Native birds and flowers, improvised poems and song lyrics, listings of the ship’s glee club meetings, illustrated dinner menus and guest lists, and short fictional stories inspired by the voyage.²

Among the first pages of Harriman’s keepsake album is the steamship *Elder*’s manifest. Below a half dozen Harriman family members, names on the list of passengers include Clinton Hart Merriam (1855-1942), head of the Department of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and a founder of the National Geographic Society; the seventy-one year old Yale Professor of Agriculture William H. Brewer (1828-1910), founder of the Arctic Club; George Bird Grinnell (1849-1938), noted conservationist, founder of the Audubon Society, editor of *Field and Stream* magazine, expert on Plains Indians and advisor to President Theodore Roosevelt; and artists and writers Frederick S. Dellenbaugh(1853-1935), John Burroughs (1837-1921), and Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874-1927), among others. The third page of the manifest opens with the signature of John Muir (1838-1914), already at that time one of the nation’s most beloved environmentalists and conservationists. Below Muir’s signature is that of Edward Sherriff Curtis (1868-1952), a relatively unknown yet successful portrait

photographer from Seattle, Washington. Curtis was chief among three photographers invited to join the expedition to record the people and vistas of the Alaskan coastline.

When the Elder left dock in Seattle on May 30, 1899, Edward Curtis was a young man operating two successful photographic shops in downtown Seattle. A Native of Wisconsin, Curtis and his father, a minister, had moved to the rural outskirts of Seattle in 1887, where he worked on the family farm with his siblings. As the eldest, the support of the family was left to Curtis, a responsibility he found he could not meet solely with the farm’s earnings. He tried his hand at several occupations but later turned his interests toward investing in a photography and engraving company in the city. The booming business of portrait photography was not merely a financial interest for Curtis, but also a personal one. Years earlier, at the age of twelve, Curtis crafted a handmade camera using a lens given to him by his father. He taught himself the basic methods of image-making from a small manual describing general compositional framing and printing techniques, and furthered his understanding of commercial photography by apprenticing for a photographer in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1885. Curtis took advantage of his camera skills upon arriving in Seattle and realizing the demand for portrait photographers. He opened his first shop in 1892, specializing in portraiture and landscapes. The popularity of his unique photographs of Mount Rainer led to a chance meeting that Curtis later referred to as a defining moment in his life.

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3 A digital copy of the entire original album is available at the Library of Congress online collection database. For the specific image of the page referenced, see http://memory.loc.gov:8081/mss/amrvm/vmh/vmh00007.tif

The meeting took place in 1898, about one year before Curtis would sail with the Harriman Expedition. Curtis was wandering the Mount Rainer wilderness outside Seattle, looking for unique landscapes to photograph. He unexpectedly encountered a party of lost climbers, or “tenderfoots” as he called them, hiking on the mountainside. The lost party included George Bird Grinnell, Clinton Hart Merriam and Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), then the chief of the U.S. Department of the Interior Division of Forestry. Curtis led the party of prominent government scientists to safety, forming a particular relationship with George Bird Grinnell. Curtis's new friendship with Grinnell would lead to a lifetime of introductions and collaborations, and most importantly at that time, an invitation to join the Harriman Expedition as chief photographer.

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While ethnographers and anthropologists spread out across the Western United States to make records of the indigenous populations, the U.S. Government implemented a series of policies then meant to assist Natives in becoming Americans. Despite the initial emphasis of U.S. Indian policy centering around forced removal and resettlement on reservations, the 1840s and 1850s were considered “peaceful” in the relative estimations of policymakers. Although the Indian Wars were over, many tribes openly resisted restrictions such as forced education in progressive Indian schools, the denial of tribal self-government and lack of religious freedom.

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6 For an evaluation of the Harriman Expedition and its collecting activities among the indigenous populations, specifically with regards to the collection of totem poles, house screens, masks and other works of art from the Tinglit at Cape Fox Village, see Thomas S. Litwin, The Harriman Alaska Expedition Retraced: A Century of Change, 1899-2001, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
through the cessation of ceremonial performances. To combat the threat of uprisings and destabilize Native communities, the U.S. Government adopted several detribalization policies in the 1870s, followed by the General Allotment Act of 1871 and the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887.7

As Curtis sailed on the cold Alaskan waters with the Harriman Expedition, tensions on the Hopi reservation in northern Arizona were heating to a nearly explosive level. Just as true for nearly all Native peoples Curtis would later come to study, the Hopi, by 1899, were not only familiar with white ethnologists and their cameras, but had to continually tolerate “enthusiasts” and scientists for several decades.8 As Peter Whiteley succinctly writes, due to early the early popularity of Pueblo cultures in scientific circles “…anthropology practically begins at Hopi and Hopi is substantially represented, both descriptively and analytically, in virtually every theoretical paradigm…”9 The first descriptions of the Hopi from the Anglo perspective were composed by Army Surgeon P.G.S. T. Broeck and published by American anthropologist Henry Schoolcraft in 1852. Between Broeck’s initial writing and Curtis's first visit to the reservation in 1900, the list of anthropologists that spent time on the reservation reads like a virtual “who’s who of early disciplinary history within the United States,” and includes John Wesley Powell, John Gregory Bourke, Frank Hamilton Cushing, Matilda Cox Stevenson and Jesse Walter Fewkes.


8 In 1925, Curtis gave a lecture at the new anthropology museum in Santa Fe. The speech was a fiery response to increased Anglo-American interest in southwestern indigenous culture. As Shannon Egan notes, Curtis criticized activists visiting the reservations, calling them “amateur and professional mussers,” and accused them of “assisting Indians for selfish purposes only,” because they were “writers going upon reservations . . . in search of original material . . . something sensational.” For more on this discussion, see Shannon Egan, Yet in a Primitive Condition, 76.

whose Hopi writings would be one of the primary references for Curtis's team, among many others.\(^{10}\) The “pristine field” so idealized by anthropologists of this period was never attainable in Hopi studies, as the reservation was a popular destination for missionaries and traders—alongside the constant presence of government officers and officials from the Bureau of Indian Affairs—as well as packs of ethnographers and seasonal tourists.\(^{11}\)

At the time of the establishment of the reservation in 1882, a deep-rooted factionalism persisted among the Hopi voiced by two opposing groups, labelled as the “friendlies” and the “hostiles” by white researchers. Conflicting attitudes toward U.S. Government interference in tribal policies and customs was the primary cause of the schism. While the Friendlies held a positive attitude toward the U.S. Government and various Western visitors, the conservatives, or Hostiles, resisted any conciliation with government representatives and any foreign impingement on traditional culture.

During the period just before Curtis's first visit to the reservation, factionalism intensified specifically around the issues of schooling and land rights. In the early 1890s, the U.S. Government built a school for young Hopi boys and girls and required parents to send their children. While some children would attend, the situation intensified in 1906 when Hostile factions flatly refused—under strong government pressure—to send their children to the school. Several years earlier, government officials arrived at the reservation to survey and stake out

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\(^{10}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{11}\) Additionally, a large Mormon population settled among the Hopi during the 1870’s. In 1875, the Mormons built a church on the reservation, and with this foothold “…a significant period of Hopi independence and resistance to foreign domination came to a close.” Scott Rushforth and Steadman Upham, *A Hopi Social History: Anthropological Perspectives on Sociocultural Persistence and Change* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), Kindle edition.
property borders in accordance with the Allotment Act, the Hostiles pulled up every stake. The
government responded by sending troops, who were met by armed conservatives. Although no
battle was fought, at least nine conservative Hopi leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Internal
tensions on the reservation elevated.

Amid growing stresses, Hopis faced yet another devastating turn of events in the winter
of 1898. While still recovering from recent drought and famine, a severe Small Pox epidemic
infected nearly seven hundred people within the First and Second Mesa villages, killing 159.
Because the Hostiles refused vaccination, the U.S. Government quarantined the population at
Oraibi, placing the village under Indian police guard until forced vaccinations could be
implemented. Strained relations continued to typify interactions between progressive and
conservative factions; disputes continued over the division of lands, tribal authority, education
and willingness to cooperate with government officials on a variety of levels.

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12 President Grover Cleveland authorized surveys of Indian tribal lands with the intent to divide lands into
allotments for single families, thus undermining the communal land practices of most Native cultures.
Most allotments were 40 to 160 acres, but if the tribal lands were larger than the necessary allotments, the
government retained the right to purchase the excess land, which was often sold to non-Native settlers.
Over 60 million acres of tribal lands were lost.

13 With regards to the land disputes, even the leader of the progressive faction, Loololma, refused

14 Ibid., Kindle edition.

15 William Myers, the primary ethnographic writer and researcher of Volume 12 of *The North American
Indian*, in writing about the Hostile faction notes, “…they live with only the unavoidable minimum of
contact with the white race, whom they unostentatiously but cordially hate. For them a few officious
zealots are the American people,” Edward S. Curtis, vol. 12 of *The North American Indian*, 20 vols. (New
In late July, 1899, after two months and nine thousand miles of travel along the Alaskan coast, the Harriman Expedition amassed over one hundred trunks of specimens and nearly five thousand photographs and illustrations. The team compiled data relating to the size and location of major glaciers, conducted coastline surveys, made weather records, thoroughly worked out and illustrated detailed lists of the flora and fauna of the region, and made demographic counts alongside abbreviated ethnographic studies of the Tlingit, Haida, Yuit and Aleuts, which often included recordings of indigenous songs and photographic images provided by Edward Curtis. [Figure 1]

The published findings of the Harriman Expedition are structured around the accepted parameters for exploratory research set forth by the U.S. government through the Bureau of Ethnology, founded by John Wesley Powell (1834-1902) in 1879. Powell was at that time - and perhaps still is - best known for a series of expeditions along the Green and Colorado Rivers, beginning in 1868. Although the initial purpose of his expeditions was to examine the unique geography and topography of the canyon lands of Arizona, Utah and California, Powell unexpectedly became one of the first white explorers to spend time among various bands of the Ute people encamped along the Colorado River. Realizing the usefulness of a collaborative relationship with the Utes, Powell visited several camps and villages over the following decade. His relationship with the people living in and around the Grand Canyon led to an appointment as Special Commissioner for the Department of Indian Affairs in 1873, and in that role he was...

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tasked to determine the “conditions and wants” of the indigenous populations living in the canyons.\textsuperscript{17}

As commissioner, Powell strongly supported increased studies of what he believed to be a vanishing population — the untouched, pure primitive American Indian. During his tenure as Director of the U.S. Geological Survey from 1881 to 1894, he fought to establish a Bureau of Ethnology, which he believed would preserve much that would otherwise be irretrievable. He lobbied urgently for additional research and record-making in the West. In an 1878 letter to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior he sounded the alarm: “The field of research is speedily narrowing because of the rapid change in the Indian population now in progress; all habits, customs, and opinions are fading away; even the languages are disappearing; and in a very few years it will be impossible to study our North American Indians in their primitive condition, except from recorded history,” he wrote. “For this reason, ethnological studies in America should be pushed with utmost vigor.”\textsuperscript{18}

This salvage mentality — the belief that studies of Native populations must be made before their unique cultures, customs and languages are so totally changed by acculturation that they are lost forever — persisted in American ethnography and anthropology for several decades. It was at the forefront of American ethnologists’ minds as they took on studies of the indigenous


peoples of America, spurring the collection of ethnographic information that often included art objects, recorded songs and spoken word, photography and textiles.\textsuperscript{19}

The scientists aboard the \textit{Elder} hastily compiled and organized data during their short stints at port; collecting objects of cultural value, recording songs and spoken word and photographing dwellings, meeting houses and willing indigenous subjects.\textsuperscript{20} Curtis's time on the \textit{Elder} was spent learning how to produce aesthetically pleasing images to accompany scientific writings. Under the close direction of C. Hart Merriam, Curtis photographed every group with which the party came into contact. He photographed alongside Grinnell as he made his studies of Native inhabitants, their customs, crafts and dwellings at most ports of call, where there was opportunity to do so. [Figure 2] Nearly all investigations made by Curtis in the three decades after participating in the Harriman Expedition revolved around one central, overarching goal: to continue the work begun in Alaska. That is, to make a permanent photographic record of all Native peoples of the United States — through a monumental publication he titled \textit{The North American Indian}.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} In 1938, John Collier, then the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, reported the “astounding and heartening fact…” that the Indians “are no longer a dying race,” quoted in Brian W. Dippie, \textit{The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy} (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982), xi.

\textsuperscript{20} George Bird Grinnell was particularly critical of the ethnographic research completed while the steamship was at port. C. Hart Merriam hints and the lack of proper time among the researcher’s subjects in the introduction to the first volume of the expedition’s findings: “The shortness of the stops precluded serious ethnological studies; still numerous articles of interest were secured, and a series of photographs of permanent value was obtained. Among the latter, those showing the camps of Indian seal-hunters in Glacier and Yakutat Bays, and those of the Eskimo settlement at Plover Bay, Siberia, are worthy of special mention. These Eskimo were living in primitive fashion, clad in furs and dwelling in skin huts or topeks.” Harriman and Merriam, \textit{The Harriman Alaska Series, Vol. I}, xi.

\textsuperscript{21} At the close of the Harriman Expedition, E.H. Harriman released his copyright on Curtis's images from the voyage and granted Curtis the ability to freely reproduce and market the photographs through the Curtis Studio in Seattle.
The North American Indian

In its entirety, *The North American Indian (NAI)* is a narrative text of twenty volumes bound with hand-printed photogravure images. Each volume is dedicated to a selection of one or more tribes, generally three, located within close geographic proximity to one another. Accompanying each of the twenty volumes is an additional portfolio of large-scale photogravures that differ from those found within the narrative, to varying degrees. The imagery, in total, is comprised of over 2,500 photogravures made from original glass plate negatives deriving entirely from Curtis's fieldwork, which he began in 1898 and completed in 1930.

Curtis took it upon himself to compose the text in the early volumes. He drew inspiration from techniques he gleaned during time with Grinnell and others on the Harriman Expedition in Alaska and bolstered his interest in the research during a subsequent trip in 1900, when he joined Grinnell to attend a Piegan and Blackfoot gathering in northwestern Montana. The pair observed and photographed the performance of a Sun Dance ceremony. While *The North American Indian* is generally referred to as “Curtis's undertaking” and often painted to be the result of his singular vision, it was in fact the work of many. At any given time, Curtis had as many as sixty assistants and collaborators working on the project (all under his oversight), completing interviews with

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22 I am heavily indebted to Northwestern University’s Digital Library Collection, which contains a digitized version of *The North American Indian*, complete with all text and imagery from the series and portfolios. This project would not have been possible without access to their collection, which is freely available at http://curtis.library.northwestern.edu/. Northwestern University Library, Edward S. Curtis's "The North American Indian," 2003.

23 The final two volumes of *The North American Indian* was published in 1930, but Curtis's last time in the field was the summer of 1927. Shortly after volumes 19 and 20 were published in 1930, Curtis suffered a nervous breakdown and checked himself into the New Rocky Mountain Hospital near Denver, Colorado.
informants, gathering objects, prepping negatives, printing images, and compiling text to be sent for editing. The idea that the wealth of information within the pages of The North American Indian represents the work of one man is an image ultimately constructed by Curtis, who fashioned himself an intrepid outdoorsman; the photographer-cowboy living among the Indians of North America and gathering images, folk lore and sketches of everyday life before the old ways were lost. While it is true all the imagery created by the project was composed and shot by Curtis, the majority of the ethnographic text of the project was the work of William E. Myers (1877-1949), a Seattle-based newspaperman Curtis would hire in 1906 to assist with research.24 Frederick Webb Hodge (1864-1956), an officer in the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology, edited the entire series. Numerous other American Indian informants and translators worked on the project in the field, and Curtis hired a series of assistants and darkroom managers to complete editing and printing in Seattle and New York, respectively.25 The North American Indian in its published form contains nearly four thousand pages of ethnographic text, paired

24 Very little biographic information exists regarding William Myers’ life beyond The North American Indian. Mick Gidley provides the best biographic sketch available in his chapter “Diffident Ethnology” in Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian, Inc., 137-152. Myers majored in Greek, graduating with a degree from Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. in 1899. He is later listed in the Seattle City Directory in 1906 as a reporter for the Seattle Star newspaper. In 1926 Myers left his colleagues at The North American Indian to pursue a business venture, prior to the completion of the final two volumes of the project.

25 The most recently researched Native American informants working with Curtis and Myers on The North American Indian were Davy Bear Black (Cheyenne), Alexander B. Upshaw (Crow) and George Hunt (Kwakwaka’wakw). See Mick Gidley, Edward S. Curtis and The North American Indian, Incorporated, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), Shamoon Zamir, “Native Agency and the Making of The North American Indian: Alexander B. Upshaw and Edward S. Curtis” The American Indian Quarterly vol. 31, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 613-653, and Aaron Glass, “A Cannibal in the Archives: Performance, Materiality, and (In)Visibility in Unpublished Edward Curtis Photographs of the Kwakwaka’wakw Hamat’sa” Society for Visual Anthropology Newsletter vol. 25, issue 2 (2009): 128-149., respectively. The Curtis Studio was managed by Adolf Muhr from 1903 to 1912. Muhr, a noted photographer, was responsible for implementing Curtis's strict instructions regarding the printing and editing of the photographs sent from the field. Imogen Cunningham would later join the Curtis Studio for a short time to assist with the heavy workload. Muhr’s assistant, Ella McBride, and Curtis's daughter Beth took over management of the Curtis Studio after Muhr’s death in 1912.
with the aforementioned imagery divided among its twenty volumes. The project on whole is augmented by scores of unpublished writings and imagery left to the archives.26

Revisiting *The North American Indian*

The following chapters aim to offer new contributions to an argument currently being debated by cultural scholars - that is, can *The North American Indian* be read as a photo-textual document operating beyond salvage and with a progressive, coeval, and sometimes activist voice? Several projects published within the last decade began this conversation; most recently, Brad Evans and Aaron Glass’ *Return to the Land of the Head Hunters*, and Shamoon Zamir’s *The Gift of the Face*, both published in 2014. These recent publications have brought scholarship forward from debates over the existence of Native voices in Curtis's work to new, rich discussions of the multiple levels of Native interaction and evidence of active construction by Curtis in his photographic works.27 While Evans’ and Glass’ work focuses on the major cinematic project of Curtis's career (a large-scale cinematic release titled *In the Land of the Head Hunters* released in 1914) and Zamir’s work focuses purely on Curtis’s portraits, the current study will explore elements of Native collaboration evident in a particular volume. In order to

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26 Major primary collections are held at The Curtis Library at Northwestern University, Curtis Archive at the Library of Congress, the Charles Lauriat Archive, Seattle Public Library, University of Washington Libraries, and the Peabody Essex Museum, which houses a collection of prints made by Curtis in 1906 for an east-coast lecture and exhibition tour planned to help raise money for *The North American Indian*.

significantly hone the primary material and reduce the chances an overly broad conclusion, this study will focus on material from the twelfth volume, dedicated to the Hopi people.28

Focusing the current study around a single volume admittedly narrows the scope; nonetheless, this selection is significant and particularly suited to the task at hand. Curtis and Myers (and a fluctuating number of other members of the team) were among the Hopi multiple times over the course of a nineteen year period, during which they reacted to official and popular responses to the “Indian problem.”29 Biting political commentary and evidence of care given to the production of a coeval narrative voice are clearly evident in the text. When read together with the images, compelling evidence of a collaborative effort in shared record-making appears, often relying heavily on elements of performance and theater.

28 Among the twenty volumes that make up The North American Indian, only two volumes examine a single group of people. In 1915, eight years after the first volume was published, Curtis released the tenth volume dedicated to the Kwakiutl of British Columbia, specifically northern Vancouver Island and the adjacent British Columbian mainland. Because Curtis believed the Kwakiutl people provided “unusual material for the ethnologist and the artist,” his team spent four summers among the Kwakiutl between 1910 and 1914. They gathered such an immense amount of data and imagery that the interior pages of the volume were printed on a thinner paper in order to keep the volume “of uniform thickness with its predecessors…” (Curtis, introduction to vol. 10, The North American Indian, xi.) Curtis would later take on a massive project with the Kwakiutl—completely engrossing his personal and professional life between 1911 and 1914—to film In the Land of the Headhunters.

29 Curtis visited the Hopi at least seven times between 1900 and 1919, and his assistant and primary field researcher William Myers spent additional seasons working on the reservation.
The following chapter of this study will explore the cultural context that led to the abandonment of the salvage mentality within the volume, and align the construction of the volume with developing methodologies in the discipline of anthropology. Subjects in Curtis's work often exhibit a sense of presence and collaboration in their representation—sometimes in a very performative manner—which was very much a part of Curtis's photographic project. In the Hopi volume, photographs from the first years of the project appear alongside images taken decades later, and combine to present a coherent record of change, not salvage. Coevality and agency are not suppressed in the oeuvre as a whole. This an important element in the historiography of the project that was often overlooked by early scholars, who misrepresented and over-simplified much of Curtis's work as the romantic imaginings of an amateur Indian enthusiast.

The third chapter of this study looks closely at selected photographs from the Hopi volume, exploring how Curtis navigated a working environment in constant flux and undergoing dramatic change. Political turmoil and internal reservation animosities (both against whites and conforming Natives) plagued the Hopi just prior to and during the extended period of Curtis's work on the reservation. The third chapter considers specific imagery and select text in light these tensions and the fluid working environment Curtis found himself within. As a result, this

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30 The historiography of *The North American Indian* reveals an overwhelming interest in the photogravures but very little critical exploration of the ethnographic material. Only in the last decade have historians reconsidered the project in total, moving away from the redundancy of earlier considerations of the imagery without critical evaluation. What makes the *North American Indian* an especially valuable visual and textual document is the length of time spent effectively shaping the project. Because the work transpired over several decades within fluctuating political and cultural boundaries, Curtis and his team actively negotiated shifting definitions of authenticity in both disciplines of ethnography and photography; they accommodated a changing political environment relative to the “Indian problem” as conceived by the U.S. government; and achieved their goals while involving (to varying and sometimes problematic degrees) an array of the most well known ethnologists, naturalists, businessmen and politicians of the period.
study argues there is a resulting shift in representation evident in the final construction of the Hopi volume, which was compiled in 1921 and published in 1922. The argument is grounded in several images from the Hopi materials that directly work against the pictorialism and ethnographic salvage for which Curtis's images are most criticized; they are images that release their subjects from an ahistorical past and refer directly to dramatic change and dynamism in Hopi culture occurring during the time of their production.

Throughout this study it will be important for the reader to remember — as many historians of the project have noted — that *The North American Indian* is rife with methodological ambiguities. However, rather than try to navigate around them, this project seeks to embrace them and join with the small but growing number of revisionist voices arguing beyond - and at times against - the long accepted essentialist critique of *The North American Indian* as a pictorialist photo-book and amateur ethnology.

**Historiography**

Aside from a few scattered mentions of the work after the publishing of the final volume in 1930, no critical discussions of *The North American Indian* appear in the years spanning between the mid 1935 and 1972. In 1935, remaining materials from the project were liquidated by the Morgan Company and purchased by the Philadelphia-based rare books dealer Charles Lauriat. In 1972 the remaining glass-plate negatives, copper-plate photogravures and loose paper prints were found along with thousands of pages of unbound text and nineteen complete

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32 Between 1923 and 1928, during years of severe financial trouble, Edward Curtis gradually ceded his copyrights to the images and text of *The North American Indian* to the Morgan Company in exchange for the funds necessary to publish the remaining volumes. Less than 500 complete sets were printed.
sets of the work, virtually untouched since they were tucked away in the office basement of the Lauriat Company in 1935. Considered an immensely valuable visual archive, images from the project were mass-reproduced in the 1970s, appearing in print as well as on film, primarily as “documentary” illustrations of Native Americans. The rising nostalgia of all things American Indian contributed to a resurgence of popular interest in Curtis's images culminating in the republishing of The North American Indian later that decade. This same reemergence of interest in Curtis and The NAI spread through the humanities, sparking two major museum retrospectives and what one collector termed a “Curtis renaissance.”

One recent scholar linked the popularity of Curtis's images in America during the 1970s to the elevation of images as sacred documents; reviving earlier rhetoric used by Curtis in the 1900s. Curtis's proclaimed mission to gather traditional folklore and Native customs “...for the benefit of future generations, respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind...” also appealed to some American Indians in their continued search for authentic records of their collective past. Interestingly, the popularity of Curtis's work outside academia in the 1970s also brought increased animosity from academics who commonly rejected the project noting it did not deserve serious intellectual consideration.

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34 In relying on the visual over the textual, for example, see A.D. Coleman, “Edward S. Curtis: The Photographer as Ethnologist” Depth of Field: Essays on Photography, Mass Media, and Lens Culture, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).


37 Ibid.
Following the scholarly trends in literary, cultural and historical criticism, critical reviews of the images from the project shift between the celebratory claims of the 1970s to highly critical arguments formed in the 1980s. Most scholarly works published between 1970 and the early 1980s focus on issues involving authenticity, with specific concern regarding the production of the images and their popular reception as documentary records.\(^{38}\) Due to vast popular reception of the imagery, the majority of studies only looked critically at this portion of the project. A hesitant return to an appreciation for the \textit{The NAI} characterizes 1990s, alongside the rise of postcolonial criticism. In terms of the visual material, interpretation of \textit{The North American Indian} underwent an important paradigm shift in the 1990s, typified by interest moving away from debates over authenticity and toward an understanding of the imagery as inventive and collaborative.\(^{39}\) Only within the past two decades of research have scholars fully pulled the project from the methodological quicksand of the authenticity debate; a debate most strongly characterized by Christopher Lyman’s 1982 catalogue essay that accompanied an exhibition of the Curtis photogravures organized by the Smithsonian Institution.\(^{40}\)

Lyman’s essay came as the first academic revision of Curtis's photographic program via an exhibition entitled \textit{The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: A New Look at the Work of Edward S. Curtis}.\(^{41}\) The “new look” envisioned by the curators moved beyond the accepted

\(^{38}\) On the trend examining various claims of authenticity in the American West, see William R. Handley and Nathaniel Lewis, eds., \textit{True West} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).


\(^{41}\) The large-scale retrospective was mounted at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1972. Its popularity linked American Indians with burgeoning environmental movement. Paradoxically, during Curtis's time American Indians were consistently linked with the landscape; a distinctly American feature.
image of Curtis as an intrepid photographer recording the last of the vanishing race of North American Indians. Rather, the curators linked Curtis to popular contemporary critical trends appearing in both ethnographic/anthropologic and photographic criticism. Specifically, they were interested in placing Curtis's images into a sort of true/false binary. The Smithsonian exhibition was designed to deconstruct the images—examining their manipulation, not only in terms of their pictorial compositional qualities but as posed, constructed, and edited illusions reworked both in and out of the darkroom to exclude all signs of Western culture and contemporaneity.

Lyman’s essay within the catalogue carefully outlines examples of what he considers Curtis's deceptions, or occurrences of physical manipulation of the film, in several of the photographs in the exhibition. [Figure 4 & Figure 5] Lyman virtually ignores the ethnographic component of The North American Indian and never specifically addresses what the “partial truths” created by Curtis might tell us about his audience or more importantly—his subjects. The exhibition and Lyman’s essay established the prevailing tone of subsequent writings on The North American Indian over the next two decades, solidifying the accepted claim that Curtis documented “little of the impact of cultural change” and created illusions of a “relatively untouched aboriginally.”42 The biting criticism evident in Lyman’s essay and the curatorial direction of the Smithsonian exhibition provided a counterpoint to the popularity of the imagery from The North American Indian during the previous decade, when Curtis and his work were celebrated rather than demonized.43


43 Nothing of record was written about The North American Indian during the period between the mid-1930s and 1972.
The absence of discussion of the ethnography—specifically the text’s relationship to the imagery within *The North American Indian*—has severely limited most scholarship to the confines of the authenticity debate popularized in the 1980s. While the opposition between the subjective, expressive ability of an image and objective scientific documentation continues to be discussed by scholars of the visual material of *The NAI*, it has recently been examined in much broader manner by Mick Gidley (1998) Shannan Egan (2004) and Shamoon Zamir (2014).

By far the most nuanced and well-researched works on Curtis and his project are by Mick Gidley, whose writings appear in edited volumes and publications spanning from 1979 to his most recent publication, *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian Project in the Field* (2003). Gidley, professor emeritus of American Culture and Literature at Leeds University, shows primary interest in the complexity of the production of the project as a business enterprise. In several works, but most notably his book *The North American Indian, Incorporated* (1998), Gidley examines the impact of relationships built between Curtis, his financiers, and his supporters, as well as the influence of those connections on the production of the images and the successes of the project at large. Gidley’s studies rely on close readings of archival material and an interdisciplinary approach that considers the project as a business venture, heavily influenced by trends in photography, ethnology, popular entertainment and the personality—both popular and private—of Curtis as author.

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44 This exploration moves away from the debates of authenticity and assumes, as Shamoon Zamir recently put forth in his study of Curtis's portraits, that the theatricality of Curtis's images does not constitute inauthenticity — as long as authenticity is understood within the parameters of early twentieth century salvage ethnography. While I agree with Zamir’s premise regarding the nature of authenticity, this study will argue that Curtis moved away from the salvage model and consciously shifted his staged constructions of the present toward a more documentary image; a shift also apparent in the text.
As part of the critical revival brought on by New Western History and New Art History, Shannon Egan’s dissertation, titled *An American Art: Edward S. Curtis and The North American Indian* (2006) places Curtis within the larger milieu of artists, writers and activists working to define a national culture in the years following the First World War. Egan follows Curtis's work over the three decades of production, tracing the evolution the images from picturesque to an aesthetic influenced by the introduction of modern European art in New York. Egan links this change to shifting definitions of “the authentic” with regard to American Indianness and dynamic changes in American politics and art, ultimately arguing that Curtis made Indians more Indian in his attempt to make America more American.

Egan’s work reflects an early assessment of *The North American Indian* appearing in the *American Magazine of Art* in 1925. A few years before the final volume of *The NAI* would be published, Jesse Selkinghaus reviewed the project and surprisingly characterized Curtis's images as non-pictorialist, placing Curtis among a “small but earnest company of people - artists, writers, students of research - who have honestly tried to understand and appreciate the Indian for what he is in contrast to the sentimentalists who have endowed him with picturesque qualities…and laid over him a poetic sentiment.” In a much more nativist tone, Selkinghaus used Curtis's project to locate the American Indian within a developing nationhood - not as a remnant of a post-frontier West but rather an addition to a uniquely multicultural America.

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In a recent study focusing entirely on the portraits of *The North American Indian*, Shamoon Zamir’s theoretical study *The Gift of the Face* (2014) moves beyond the true/false debate simply by stating that the true nature of photography is “inhered in a perpetual mobility” across the spectrum marked by art and science. In reversing the often nihilistic tone of postcolonial studies, Zamir instead insists that Curtis's intention for the imagery of *The NAI* was to picture the subject’s protest: viewers of the images are not meant to gaze upon a subject denied coevality—rather viewers are asked to acknowledge the subject’s humanity and their protest against history. *The North American Indian* presents evidence of collaboration between photographer and subject as Curtis's Native subjects often were willing participants in the photographic project. For Zamir, the portraits of *The NAI* articulate a history that belongs to Native American men and women, “…and which they reclaim within the performative spaces of Curtis's images and ethnography from the altogether different History to which they have been subjected.”

In his discussion of “the honorific and repressive roles of photographic portraiture,” Allan Sekula refers generally to the context in which images are viewed by those not pictured; those in control of the picturing and the ordering of the pictured. Although no document exists revealing a combined American Indian response to the Curtis images as they were being taken and distributed, Native responses began to appear after the rediscovery of the glass-plate negatives in


49 See Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive” *October* (Winter, 1986), 3-64. Sekula argues that through portrait photography, society at large was engaged in an archival project, placing individuals into a social terrain through two dominant portrait types, the honorific and the repressive.
the 1970s. Vine Deloria Jr., of Standing Rock Sioux decent, writes in the introduction to Christopher Lyman’s *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions*, “…the romanticization of Indians was well received by the Indian community itself...” Simultaneously received both honorifically and as documents of repression, the Curtis images nonetheless are present, to varying degrees, in the cultural memory of the American Indian.

In defense of the honorific role of the Curtis portraits, many Native and non-Native critics refer to standard portrait practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sitters were directed to stay still, look at the camera, and hold their pose for several seconds while the exposure was made. Generally, a natural facial expression was preferred over smiling, a gesture that was more difficult to steadily hold for an extended period of time. At the turn of the century, having a portrait made was a special occasion. When visiting a photographic studio to have a portrait made, the sitter would generally have worn their ‘Sunday best.’ This tradition was common for the Eastern elite down to the Western pioneer farm family, and included the American Indian sitter, as well. When looking at an image taken by Curtis nearly one hundred years ago, a contemporary Blackfoot man remarked “…in this photograph of Yellow Kidney in his lodge, he’s wearing a weasel-tail suit. It’s just like wearing a tuxedo. It’s probably his best dress.” [Figure 5] The men and women in Curtis's photographs were not always ‘costumed’ in the sense that they wore clothing from outside their traditional garb, or that was crafted by a white photographer or ethnologist, but rather they often wore ceremonial dresses or tunics to display status or to formalize their appearance.

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50 Vine Deloria, Jr., in his introduction to Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions*, 12.

51 Interview from Anne Makepeace’s film *Coming to Light: The Edward S. Curtis Story*
The rise of American Indian nostalgia in the 1970s contributed to the popular interest in Curtis's images and the republishing of *The North American Indian* later that decade. Curtis's proclaimed mission to gather information for the disappearing generations of elders “...for the benefit of future generations, respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind...” appealed to some American Indians in the continued search for authentic records of their collective past. However, many contemporary American Indians are critical of Curtis's work, considering his images as representations of the overwhelmingly mythologized Indian, situated in what Johannes Fabian termed the *ethnographic present*. While the ‘ethnographic present’ will be more clearly defined in the following chapter, simply put the term refers to a mode of early anthropologic writing that relies on analyses and generalizations that portray its subject through a timeless description; always denying the historicity of the subject and creating a sense of a “pristine people” or “pre-contact” ethnography. When applying the ethnographic present to the images, critics are speaking directly to the negation of visible signs of modernity within the composition, the anachronistic garb many of Curtis's sitters appear in, and the reimagining of scenes of “war parties” or ceremonial events; all leading the viewer to believe that the Native subjects exist only in a vanishing, unchanging, primitive past.

An example of the divergent historiographic analysis of Curtis's photographic project can be briefly outlined by considering a series of photographs and a short film of the Navajo Yebichai ceremony taken by Curtis in 1904. In one of his earliest undertakings, likely tempered by his recent visit to the Blackfoot and Piegan Sun Dance with George Bird Grinnell, and his

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experience attending the Snake Dance among the Hopi, combined with his growing interest in
the “esoteric rights and ceremonies” of his subjects, Curtis set out to record one of the primary
sacred events among the Navajo, the nine-day healing ceremony known as the Night Chant, or
Yebichai ceremony.\textsuperscript{54}

The masks appearing in a series of images featuring Yebichai dancers from the first
volume of \textit{The North American Indian} were, in reality, handmade by Curtis for use in the filming
of the ceremony. With bolts of bright red and blue calico and silver dollars, Curtis paid three
Navajo men in the summer months of 1904 to assist him in the design and material selections.

[Figure 6] “For days and days Curtis was busy making the fourteen masks necessary for the
dance...so did those Indians dodge the religious sin they were committing, by telling Curtis how
to do the work, although they never lifted a finger to assist him, nor did they touch the masks
until the day they were donned and the dance began.”\textsuperscript{55} Curtis was uncompromising, and likely
hoping his undertaking would help raise funds for \textit{The North American Indian} project, funding
that mandated unique images “of something no white man had seen before,” to capture the
imagination of his supporters and financiers.\textsuperscript{56}

In 1999, Avery Denny, a Navajo traditionalist interviewed by Anne Makepeace for her
film \textit{Edward Curtis: Coming to Light} (2000), revealed the hidden agency present in the filmed
performance and still images of the Yebichai dance. After a sharp criticism for what Denny
considered bribery of the three Navajo men, as well as Curtis’s creation of the costumes and his


\textsuperscript{55} “A Seattle Man’s Triumph,” (1904, May 22) \textit{Seattle Times}. Quoted in Christopher Lyman, \textit{The
Vanishing Race and Other Illusions}, 34.

\textsuperscript{56} Curtis, Edward Sherriff, “Love, Marriage, and Divorce as The Indian Sees Them” (1908, May 3) \textit{The
World Magazine}. Accessed via Getty Archive request.
dissemination of imagery of a scared ceremony, Mr. Denny pulled back the curtain and revealed that Curtis ultimately failed in his endeavor. During a line of questioning from Makepeace about images of the performance, Mr. Denny pointed to a reproduction supplied by Makepeace and explained, “That footage is all reversed. All the dancers...they are going counterclockwise.”

This reading of the image could only be made by a Native observer; someone intimately familiar with the traditions of the culture being documented. Whether or not knowledge of the alteration of the ceremony would have dissuaded Curtis from including the images in *The North American Indian* will never be known — perhaps he knew all along. Although the performers secularized the ceremony by enacting the gestures backwards and removed the most sacred performative elements, allowing Curtis to create the masks (with specific instructions from his informants and their under supervision) and performing a make-shift ceremony (even in the wrong season) the Navajo performers participated significantly in the construction of the existing record.

This nuance in the reading of the images of Curtis's project is the primary failing of most pre-1990 critical writing on *The North American Indian*. The record of the alteration of the Yebichai ceremony depends completely on another layer of understanding: contemporary Navajo practice and cultural memory of living Navajo. Curtis's project will always lack primary documentation of the subjects’ interaction and consideration of Curtis, his team, and their negotiations and goals — the entire enactment of the project from the Native point of view is missing from the record. But rather than looking at what Curtis's photographs exclude, or cannot tell us, we should turn to what they do share - and the processes and interests that tempered those constructions.
CHAPTER 2

AUTHENTICITY AND CURTIS’ S PHOTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC PROJECT

“Vision, the noblest of senses, has been traditionally accorded a privileged status as a source of knowledge about the world. It was encapsulated in the commitment of modern ethnographers going out to ‘see’ for themselves. For in rejecting ‘hearsay’, the reliance on reports from untrained observers, the fieldworkers of the early twentieth century reaffirmed the association of vision and knowledge, enshrining it at the heart of a new ethnographic project.”

—Anna Grimshaw

With an invitation from fellow Harriman Expedition member George Bird Grinnell, Curtis visited the Piegan and Blackfoot of Montana in July of 1900, just under one year after returning from Alaska. Grinnell visited the Blackfoot people several times before, beginning in the 1880s, and was a respected expert in Plains Indian culture. He often photographed sites and indigenous peoples on his visits to the Midwest. Knowing his new friend’s interest in photographing American Indian subjects, Grinnell invited Curtis to join him for what he believed might be one of the last major assemblies of the Plains societies. Grinnell described the Sun Dance as the most important religious festival of the Plains Indians. Curtis recognized the displacing effects of Western expansion and the de-traditionalization of the American Indian that was rapidly occurring at the turn of the century. He would later reflect, “…great changes in practically every phase of the Indian’s life that have taken place, especially within recent years,


have been such that had the time for collecting much of the material... been delayed, it would have been lost forever.”

Curtis parted with Grinnell in the late days of July, returned to his Seattle studio, packed glass plates and cameras, gathered his wife and children, and immediately returned to the field to take up what would become his life’s work. In early August, just a handful of days after departing from Montana, Curtis and his family arrived in the Hopi village of Walpi, an ancient First Mesa village in northern Arizona. Curtis considered his arrival at Walpi as an extension of his work in Montana with Grinnell; to photograph the Snake and Antelope Dance, popularized as a great spectacle of indigenous ritual. Little information-gathering was done on this initial visit to the Hopi reservation. Curtis was yet to define parameters or secure finding for the project that would become *The North American Indian*. For now, his primary interest was with his earlier career successes: the photographs. However, it was among the Hopi in the villages of Walpi and Oraibi in the first years of the twentieth century that Curtis would begin *The North American Indian* project in earnest.

During the first decade of the project, many believed the closing of the frontier and post-Civil War westward migration threatened the survival of the American Indian. Critics wrote about Curtis's photographs as necessary documents for the preservation of the vanishing, picturesque American Indian. Early reviews of *The North American Indian* praised the “authentic


60 The term “First Mesa” refers to villages established after the Pueblo revolt of 1680 against the Spanish missions. In the opening years of the twentieth century, the Hopi were one of the most popular groups of Indians in the American imaginary.

61 Curtis was certainly not the first picture the Hopi during this sacred time. His interest in the theater and spectacle of the ceremony was a symptom of a larger national obsession with American Indian ritual life. Thomas Edison made his own film of a public performance of the Snake Dance at the Hopi Reservation in 1901.
quality” of the images, often alongside an outpouring of gratitude for the project. These early reviews — appearing around the same time of the first published volume of The NAI in 1906 and continuing through World War I— echoed the tone set by President Theodore Roosevelt in his short forward to the first volume dedicated to the Apache, the Jicarillas and the Navajo.

Within the forward, President Roosevelt congratulates Curtis for his ability to marry his aesthetic sensibility with his zealous ambition in scientifically recording the vanishing culture of the American Indian:

“In Mr. Curtis we have both an artist and a trained observer, whose pictures are pictures, not merely photographs; whose work has far more than mere accuracy, because it is truthful. All serious students are to be congratulated because he is putting his work in permanent form; for our generation offers the last chance for doing what Mr. Curtis has done. The Indian as he has hitherto been is on the point of passing away. His life has been lived under conditions thru [sic] which our own race past [sic] so many ages ago that not a vestige of their memory remains. It would be a veritable calamity if a vivid and truthful record of these conditions were not kept...” 62

While general understanding of the photographic medium at the turn of the century relied on the camera’s supposed mechanical objectivity, to create a picture rather than a photograph also required something more; something of the photographer’s creativity and intimate understanding of his or her subject. President Roosevelt and the wealthy financiers and subscribers to The North American Indian considered the beautifully printed photogravures accompanying the written text not simply as visuals accompanying records of fieldwork, but as aesthetic presentations of a reality inaccessible through the written word alone. By announcing Curtis's images as pictures and not merely photographs, Roosevelt was testifying to the

constructed nature of the image. Reading his celebration of the artfulness of Curtis's imagery alongside current revisionist examinations of the project arguably creates a new, more honest presentation of the nuanced goals and successes of the project that were so often dismissed in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The constructed nature of Curtis's images cannot be denied. He understood his medium and its established home in the liminal space between two the disparate disciplines of art and science, and the ability for his work to exist between truth and artifice. By calling his work in *The North American Indian* “art-science,” he never wholly assigned the project to a definitive category. And, perhaps most important to Curtis, the visual elements of the project were meant to be experienced in tandem with ethnographic elements. Furthermore, most images were meant to be read as part of the larger collection of photogravures within each volume or portfolio. Considering *The North American Indian* as a bricolage of cultural information orchestrated by Curtis, Myers and their Native collaborators and informants, the photography of *The North American Indian* begins to become a theater for enactment of the text.

The project on whole reflects a progressive relationship between Curtis's team and various indigenous collaborators. When taken out of context, often Curtis's portraits appear to be romanticized images of the white imaginary. Yet when they are considered alongside the text, and as part of a larger theatrical presentation of successive imagery, a coevality emerges between the viewer and the viewed; a sense of presence and agency can be read in the subject through

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63 Lippard, *Partial Recall*, 23. The idea of the constructed image would become “the linchpin of scathing criticisms” of Curtis's work during the demythologizing trend of the 1980’s.

both text and image. Often the visual and textual narratives that developed over the three decades of the project hinge on two primary elements: First, redefinition occurring in response to the radical restructuring of authenticity in the worlds of art photography and anthropology; and second, Curtis’s initial interest Native American ceremonies paired with his increasing interest in film and theater.

When the volumes making up *The North American Indian* are considered as phototextual documents that compliment one another— rather than images representing text, or text describing elements of the images— a more nuanced, creative project emerges. *The North American Indian* is especially suited for study as a microcosm of these developments given its unique existence as a non-government funded project conducted under the same authorship for a span of over thirty years and involving (to varying degrees) an array of ethnologists, naturalists, businessmen and politicians.

**Art-Science : Constructing a New Authenticity in Photography**

From the moment of its inception the verity of the photographic image was contested. The development of the Daguerreotype in 1839 sparked a frenzy that rapidly expanded the lineaments of popular visual culture at a pace parallel to the mechanized drum of the steam engine. From the beginning, the scientific world welcomed the discovery, and the mirror-like quality of the Daguerreotype was applied immediately to record-making and archiving, challenging the work of draftsmen and painters. In a report to the French Chamber of Deputies made the same year Louis Daguerre announced his discovery, the Deputy of the East-Pyrenees, Dominique Francois Arago, was already touting the photograph’s ability to create truthful
records of the facades of Theban monuments. "Innumerable hieroglyphics as they are in reality will replace those which now are invented or designed by approximation," announced Arago, surely to the dismay of those who were employed by such fastidious work. In tandem with scientific interest in the new medium, a burgeoning desire for records of a personal nature followed. The method developed by Daguerre of affixing an image to a silver-coated copper plate was made public with no patent; interested entrepreneurs lost little time in opening Daguerreotype portrait studios. By the late 1850s and into the 1860s, with the invention of glass-plate negatives, tin types and cartes-de-visites (all faster to produce, less expensive and available to more novice photographers) the photograph became a common fixture in American life.

By the turn of the century, the newly formed fields of anthropology and photography underwent simultaneous debates over the nature of authenticity in representation. Photographers began to turn away from early pictorialist methods, characterized by overly worked negatives, the use of double-exposure, diffused focus and sepia-toned prints; all visual elements frequently employed by Curtis in the early years of The North American Indian project. The pictorialist aesthetic was strongly influenced by Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), Edward Steichen (1879-1973) and Gertrude Kasebier (1852-1934), American photographers who were at the forefront of the twentieth-century movement aiming to elevate photography to the status of fine art. Early pictorial works often mimicked the aesthetics of turn-of-the-century painting, emphasizing subtle tonal shifts and atmospheric effects completed with a painterly finish. To further emphasize the artistic value of their work, pictorialists adopted labor-intensive techniques for production,

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including platinum and gum bichromate printing. Curtis invented his own highly laborious and expensive photographic printing process based on the silver print process, which he termed the “Curt-Tone” and is today commonly referred to as the Curtis Orotone. [Figure 7] His process, similar to the silver and platinum print methods, was realized through a process of exposure to a gelatin silver emulsion on a glass plate. The defining feature of the Curt-Tone is the gold-hued backing—most likely achieved through a mixture of banana oils and bronzing powders—that creates a warm translucence highlighting depth and moderation of value in the final print.

Many early photographers were interested in imagery of exotic locations and the people that inhabited them. Photographers working alongside ethnologists and anthropologists, such as John Karl Hillers (1843-1925) and Timothy O’Sullivan (1840-1882), were functioning within a discipline - as well as for a public - that favored pictorialist images of what would have been. The concept of the ethnographic present was in full swing when Curtis entered the ethnographic arena. As seen in his early Seattle studio portraits, his fine-tuned pictorial sensibilities granted him easy access into authorship of romantic assemblages of ‘Indianness.’

The creative construction of an image, including the use of props, costuming and negative manipulation did not interfere with a truthful or accurate portrayal of a subject, according to popular taste and definitions of authentic imagery. Examples abound of well-established ethnologists such as Franz Boas (1958-1942), an early critic of Edward Curtis, staging overly romanticized images that obscured Western influences or hid “modern” information generally visible on reservation sites. In these early years, for Curtis and others, a true Indian—the ‘fancy-free king of yesterday’—could only be imagined in a natural landscape
untouched by the West. Once an Indian began the process of acculturation, he was no longer an Indian.

When Curtis first began working on the Hopi volume his studio work was receiving popular attention. The Curtis Studio, at that time being overseen by Curtis's brother Asahel and photographic assistant Adolph Muhr, was the most popular studio in the Seattle area. Curtis had recently won first place at the National Photographic Convention, as well as first place in the photographic contest held by *The Ladies Home Journal* for the “Prettiest Children in America.” Shortly thereafter Curtis was invited by President Theodore Roosevelt to Sagamore Hill to make candid portraits of the president’s family on vacation. Images of the Roosevelt children frolicking in the long grasses just beyond Sagamore Hill, softly lit in a diffused light, appealed to popular pictorial aesthetic. [Figure 8] Curtis's early artistic methodology was not only acceptable, it was sought after.

Curtis carried many of his pictorial tendencies into the field when beginning his work on *The North American Indian*. His early work is often criticized by scholars who believed he created false records by constructing compositions that hid modern structures or amenities, asking his sitters to wear traditional clothing (sometimes he provided vests or headdresses for those willing to comply) or sending instructions back to Muhr at the studio regarding the manipulation of certain images in the darkroom, removing elements that appeared anachronistic to his visual narrative. While Curtis's intentions behind costuming some of his subjects are unknown—there are many proposals including efforts to bolster marketing, to play to popular taste, racist leanings toward creating images of a picturesque and uniquely American Indian, to

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efforts to reduce distraction from the portraits themselves. He was not the first, nor the last, to employ these techniques. For example, costumes sewn and decorated by Anglo researchers but worn by Ute and Paiute men are present in the photographic work of John Karl Hillers, who accompanied John Wesley Powell on several of his aforementioned survey expeditions in the late nineteenth-century. While the costumes may or may not have appeared “Indian” to the subjects to which they were assigned, they were Indian enough for Powell to later send some of them to the Smithsonian Institution for collection.

Go See For Yourself: New Methods in Ethnographic Research

The birth of American social anthropology is often located alongside Andrew Jackson’s devastating Indian Removal Act. In January of 1830, Alfred Balch, lawyer and close friend of Jackson, wrote to the president urging him to consider the Removal Act, which would forcibly relocate nearly one hundred thousand Native Americans westward over the Mississippi River and onto what was then referred to as “unsettled” land in present-day Oklahoma. Balch touted the philanthropic goals of the suggested removal by arguing that Native populations, whom he referred to as the “untutored sons of the Forest” could not exist independently within the vicinity of white men, “…or they may begin to dig their graves and prepare to die.”

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Many early scholars within the School of American Anthropology were advocates of the evolutionist theory that located traditional cultures on a Darwinian scale of human history, with some cultures existing and functioning at an earlier age than other older, more advanced cultures. This idea was further expressed by American anthropologist and social theorist Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) in his description of the progression of human societies from savagery, to barbarism, to civilization. Morgan, who was trained as a lawyer, believed culture developed along the timeline of history in a uniform and progressive manner. In considering Native populations as inhered in an early, savage society, nineteenth-century anthropologists relegated Native subjects to an ahistorical past. The use of the ethnographic present tense in early ethnographic writing not only made sense under these circumstances, but was considered scientifically sound, as people existing in the childhood of civilization could never exist coevally with those that studied them.

Curtis's project cannot be exempted from this temperament—as nearly everything written about the project will confirm. The early volumes of his project (the first three of which were written by Curtis with little assistance) remain trapped in the nineteenth-century paradigm insistent on cultural evolution, ethnographic salvage and the theory of the vanishing race. For example, the second volume of *The North American Indian* includes ethnographic text and images reflecting Curtis's research among nine different tribal groups primarily living in Arizona, including the Pima, Mohave, Papago and Yuma. Among the first images in the section dedicated to the Mohave the viewer encounters a portrait of an unidentified man; an image that refers to the

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70 In his best known work, *Ancient Society* (1877), Morgan explained the evolution of human culture through the basic categories described above, and further subdivided each category into upper, middle and lower stages. Stages were dependent upon technological development and social patterns of subsistence, marriage and political organization.
long established visual trope of the Noble Savage.\textsuperscript{71} [Figure 9] Curtis frames the figure as a full length portrait occupying the entire frame. The nearly nude figure is presented to the viewer from behind, highlighting his physique. Long strands of hair in numerous small twists held together with mesquite gum lay across his back, mirrored in form and texture by the loincloth hanging from his hips. He stands near the edge of a low cliff that drops to a body of still, silvery water. No foreground information is given, yet the tightness of the framing of the composition forces the figure closer and closer to the thin line that divides solid ground from unintelligible space below. In the text accompanying the image Curtis writes, “…motionless our giant bronze Mohave is watching the scene as his forefathers for generation after generation watched the same sunsets and the same river flow. Does the gorgeous coloring of yonder clouds, the current of the stream, and the spell of the hour mean anything to him? Perhaps far more than we dream.” The viewer is presented with a specimen of an exotic other; pushed to the edge, facing the divide between solid ground and the unknown - between his past and his future. The Mohave man aligns with the then-popular and widely spread allegory of a Native figure “…in a lost world, caught in its final moment of expression…”\textsuperscript{72}

The implication of the vanishing race in this image needs little explication here, but the photograph clearly was also meant to highlight the figure’s physique as an example of the Mohave ‘type’, one decidedly superior to other Native types. According to Curtis, Mohave men were physically superior “…to any other tribe in the United States. Men and women alike are

\textsuperscript{71} The Noble Savage is a literary and figurative trope used to symbolize the innate purity of the Native that has not been corrupted by civilization thus representing the innocence lost within civilized cultures.

big-boned, well knitted and clear skinned.” Here Curtis is also engaging in a discussion that aligns with early forms of cross-cultural analysis, a comparative method that grew out of early interest in cultural evolutionism.

While nineteenth-century anthropologists may have found it adequate to study distant cultures from the comfort of college libraries—using notes from observations by missionaries or colonial officials—by the turn of the century a new emphasis was placed on fieldwork. Researchers now travelled to the people they wished to study, observed traditional life in all its forms and built their social theories around data collected first-hand in the field. Often categories of race were used to organize evolutionary hierarchies. Data gathered based on the measurable physical characteristics of a group of people became markers for locating that group on the hierarchic scale of evolution.

Taking photographs of Native types became a required field activity, alongside carefully recording measurements of various physical characteristics of indigenous subjects. Vision, whether attributed to one’s presence before the subject or activated through a camera lens, was central to this emerging fieldwork-based ethnographic project. The reliance on an image over a textual description to portray the reality of a moment in time—its truth—permeated these new methodologies. Photographic or filmic documentation was often considered more reliable than hand-measured data, which could not replicate the supposed mechanical objectivity and infallibility of the camera. Therefore, ethnographers and anthropologists often travelled not only with teams of assistants to help secure interviews, make notes and organize travel, but also to

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74 Grimshaw, The Ethnographer’s Eye, 20.
assist in taking pictures, to create wax cylinder recordings of songs and oral histories, and in some cases to shoot film of ceremonies and landscapes.

*The North American Indian* certainly grew away from the social-evolutionary theory as the project progressed.\(^7^5\) This shift in voice has been attributed primarily to William E. Myers, who was far more aligned with the historicists coming out of the Columbia school of anthropology rather than the older methodology of evolutionism first introduced to Curtis in the early years of the twentieth century. The theory of historical pluralism was pioneered by Franz Boas, a social anthropologist who argued in favor of alternative explanations of cultural change. Boas postulated that cultural change could be reconstructed and studied through the collection and organization of ethnographic data from various societies. The collective data would aide in the discovery of the distribution of universal cultural traits—and through the reconstruction of a particular society’s history one could then understand the individual processes of cultural change at work. Thus, cultures could independently develop concurrently, based on the particulars of geography, climate, access to resources, and occurrences of cultural borrowing. These categories of culture were clearly of interest to Myers in his construction of the latter volumes of *The North American Indian*, including the Hopi volume. Myers often organized his studies by categories including historical sketches, clan legends, religion, ceremonies, warfare, arts and industries, social customs, origin and migration, and others, when applicable.

\(^7^5\) For the first three volumes, Curtis would be the voice of the narratives of *The North American Indian*, with editorial assistance from Frederick Webb Hodge. William Myers, the newspaperman-turned-ethnologist responsible for much of the latter text, was the primary writer of *The North American Indian* and definite authorial voice within the Hopi volume, but he did not begin working with Curtis until 1906.
Throughout his time in the field with *The North American Indian* project, Myers communicated with John Wesley Powell and also frequently wrote letters back and forth with Alfred Kroeber (1876-1960), one of Franz Boas’ most influential and successful students. Meyer’s relationships with major figures in the field like Kroeber and Powell kept him abreast of current developing anthropological theories. His contacts also often recommended readings prior to his arrival among certain peoples and on occasion asked him to research particular areas that lacked exploration in earlier texts. Myers is remembered by the Curtis children as always having a large trunk in his field tent, filled with books and papers for reference and cross-reference.

The Hopi

“If we were to select the most intelligent, imaginative, energetic, and emotionally stable third of mankind, all races would be present.” —Franz Boas

The twelfth volume of *The North American Indian* was published in 1922 and dedicated solely to the Hopi, who were at that time living within a small number of villages on their current reservation site in northeastern Arizona. In deconstructing the Hopi volume and aligning images and text with their distinct modes of representation, the following chapter will build upon the previous argument that *The North American Indian*, by following new trends in photographic

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76 By studying the archive of communication between Myers and his ethnographic advisors, Mick Gidley has argued that a definite struggle for authority—between the text and the photographs for the project—was present. See “Diffident Ethnology” in Gidley, *The North American Indian, Incorporated*, 2003.


79 The Hopi Reservation was established in 1882.
representation and ethnographic research, took on a much more progressive, non-pictorial and coeval tone after the First World War.  

This shifting methodology—which often frustrates researchers—has been recently characterized by Shannon Egan as discernible over the length of the twenty volume project. Yet it is arguably more evident in the Hopi volume due to its unique construction. Images within the Hopi volume were taken by Curtis during early visits to the reservation, at first with his family, and later with his assistant and primary field researcher Myers, primarily between 1900 and 1912. However, the bulk of the text was written by Myers between 1906 and 1920. Curtis returned to the Hopi reservation to take additional images to complete the volume several times between 1906 and 1919, and openly lamented the evidence of cultural loss and assimilation.

Myers, too, writes of the changes that occurred in the span of two decades—in a notably more political tone—describing the “gradual abandonment” of the old order as a result of the “blundering interference” by government officials in the “…harmless religious and personal customs” that he found had become more and more effective.

As a project undertaken over two decades, the Hopi volume often fluctuates between a progressive narrative voice in the text, and imagery that retains Curtis's early pictorial aesthetic. While some photographs may stand alone as pictorial assemblages aimed at cultural salvage, the

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81 Curtis first visited in 1900, then visited again in 1902, 1904, 1906, 1911, 1912, and 1919. A variety of factors may have contributed to Curtis's decision to extend the time for fieldwork among the Hopi, including the need to spend more time raising funds for the project on the lecture circuit, the First World War, preparation for his film *In the Land of the Headhunters*.

82 In his introduction to the volume, Curtis writes that he was fortunate to get the bulk of the research done early, because so much had changed among the Hopi between 1900 and 1922.

following chapter will argue that when read together, collections of text and images from the
Hopi volume create spaces expressing collaboration in the creative process. As Alan
Trachtenberg argues, in order to glimpse the scale of Curtis's work, the written text deserves to
be read as closely as the pictures, “…not only for clues to [Curtis’s] beliefs and intentions but
also for signs of the larger frame of reference.”84 And as Curtis ultimately had the final word in
the physical ordering of the volume—deciding what images would be included, in what order
they would be placed, and what text they would correspond to—we cannot ignore the
relationship between these categories of construction.

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84 Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 197.
CHAPTER 3

PORTRAITS OF INDIAN TYPES:

THEATER AND AGENCY IN CURTIS’S HOPI PORTRAITS

In the summer of 1903, Curtis visited Washington D.C. hoping to secure funding for his travels and photographic equipment, a boost that would make his imagined project come to life. Riding the wave of popularity created by the success of his Seattle portrait studio, which Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce visited for an official portrait that same year, Curtis was encouraged to develop a large scale project. He arrived in Washington with a plan to make full use of social connections procured by George Bird Grinnell and Clinton Hart Merriam, Curtis's friends and mentors from the Harriman Expedition. This particular trip to Washington brought about a new friendship with one of the most highly respected American anthropologists—a relationship that would prove to be an important one over the coming decades.

Frederick Webb Hodge, a self-trained anthropologist, was best known for his work among the Pueblos and for such publications as Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico (1910). At the time of his first meeting with Curtis, Hodge was employed by the Bureau of American Ethnology and serving as an executive officer for the Smithsonian Institution and editor of American Anthropologist. In 1895, Hodge visited the Southwest and spent time among the Hopi with Jesse Walter Fewkes, the leading scholar of Hopi culture. They were joined by photographer Adam Clark Vroman (1856-1916), whose images from the expedition are of a

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much more candid and personal nature than Curtis’s later photographs. [Figure 10] Vroman accounted for his own time on the reservation as a result of his personality—describing himself as a “general wanting-to-see fellow.”

Although Hodge did not grant Curtis's requests for direct support during their first meeting in 1903, he encouraged Curtis to continue his fieldwork and promised to write if he was able to make any connections for him while he was away. The following October Curtis reported back to Hodge that a considerable amount of work had been completed since their meeting. He also wrote a colorful letter to Gifford Pinchot describing the hustle-and-bustle of his fieldwork and his ability to get “a very large amount of splendid new material,” which included images from his visit to the Hopi reservation to see the Snake Dance. He spent additional time among the Acoma, Jicarilla, Navajo and Apache during what he described as “eight hard, happy weeks!” Hodge would join The North American Indian project as editor in 1905, and would maintain steady correspondence with Curtis for the life of the project, as well as with Myers, who often contacted him with ethnological questions relating to his field research.

Meetings and continued correspondence with anthropologists, ethnographers and various government officials typifies Curtis's promotional activity during the period from 1900 to 1905. In general, this period was a period of promotion; Curtis was desperately seeking financial support for his undertaking and making use of his early social connections to get images and

89 Ibid., 147.
articles published and install public exhibitions of his photographs. *The North American Indian* was doomed to fail if Curtis could not secure support from financiers and subscribers.

In March of 1905 some much needed attention was paid to the project. The widely-read *Scribner's Magazine* published a short article written by George Bird Grinnell, aimed at sparking popular interest in Curtis's project, hopefully garnering new subscriptions. By the time the article was published, Curtis had spent at least one full field season photographing and collecting cultural information among the Hopi, as well as the Piegan of Montana (alongside Grinnell), the Navajo, the Mohave, the Apache and the Jicarillas.

Within the *Scribner's* article, titled “Portraits of Indian Types,” readers may have expected to find a catalogue of frontal and three-quarter images of the photographer’s subjects (which Curtis did often create), paired with a written typology of the physiognomic characteristics of each “type” of Indian pictured. However, Grinnell focuses his writing first on furthering the concept of the vanishing race. He laments the loss of the picturesque quality of Indian life before contact, when Indians were their “own masters” and able to wander “at liberty over the broad territory which each tribe claimed as its own.”

He notes the loss of natural habitat for the Indian, and as a conservationist he cannot help but mention the population loss of the buffalo and antelope, or the success of corn and wheat crops that “thrust out the blue-joint and buffalo grass.” Grinnell makes no reference to the scientific “type” of any particular group of Native peoples; rather he uses the idea of the “Indian type” as a foil for his critique of the

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90 George Bird Grinnell, “Portraits of Indian Types” in *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 36, no. 3, March 1905: 259-274. “At the present day, his picturesqueness has wholly disappeared, and to the eye he has become unutterably commonplace. Yet when he lived his natural life, he and all about him were startlingly picturesque.” 269.

91 Ibid., 268.
then-popular method of handling of the study of the Native populations. For Grinnell, an avid writer and well-respected scholar of Native American culture, studies of the Indians too often approached their subjects without humanity, as “natural history specimens…described wholly from the outside.”

It is here that the interests of the writer and the photographer converge. As a collaborative effort, the article included thirteen portraits by Curtis. The images were all taken between 1900 and 1904, during the very early years of fieldwork for what would later become *The North American Indian*. They are typical of Curtis's early work, and in keeping with Grinnell’s assessment of the state of Indian studies, not one of the images uses the established vernacular for straight-forward “scientific portraiture.” In fact, the images offer little-to-no ethnographic or scientific information at all. Each of the thirteen images appearing in the article are artistic renderings, constructed in a mode akin to Curtis's Seattle studio portraits, showing more interest in the sitter as an individual than as a representation of a cultural type.

Early in the imagining of the project, Curtis planned for *The North American Indian* to simply include (as mentioned by Grinnell) short descriptions of objects, ceremonies or other relevant facts that would aide his viewers in further understanding his images. For Curtis, as for Grinnell, truth of the situation facing the Native population in the western United States really could only be accessed through imagery. Words might convey “inexact impressions of things” —

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92 Ibid., 270.

93 During this period, Curtis gathered basic cultural information relevant to the images, primarily for their descriptions. Including a full-fledged ethnography of each Native group as part of the project was not considered until 1906, after suggestion by his financier, J.P. Morgan.
readers could interpret an author’s text differently than another reader. Images, on the other hand, “…tell us the truth,” wrote Grinnell. “We are not in doubt about their meaning.”

Grinnell, like Roosevelt, grappled with issues surrounding the “vividness” and “truthfulness” of Curtis's images. Grinnell’s regard for the veracity of Curtis's imagery recalls phrasing used by Roosevelt in the introductory remarks for *The North American Indian*. Both men would agree the “ways of the Indian” were passing and it would be a “veritable calamity of a vivid and truthful” record were not kept. For Roosevelt, Curtis's images contained a truth only accessible through beauty; and for Grinnell, Curtis's images were of “high artistic and scientific value,” as they told of Indian life in way that “no word picture could ever tell it.”

Of the twelve images appearing the *Scribner’s* article, three picture Hopi subjects that sat for Curtis during his first visit to the reservation in 1900. The remaining nine images include sitters from the Navajo, Apache, Mohave, and Nez Perce people. Of the three Hopi images, two also appear as part of the portfolio of photogravures accompanying Volume Twelve: a portrait titled *Hopi Mother and Child* [Figure 11] and *A Hopi snake chief, from the village of Hano*. [Figure 12] The remaining image, *Hopi girl, from the village of Walpi*, was never reproduced as part of the *The North American Indian* materials, but the portrait aligns in terms of style and content with existing examples of portraits of young Hopi women.

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94 Grinnell, “Portraits of Indian Types,” 260.

95 Roosevelt, introduction to *The North American Indian, Vol. 1*, xi.

96 As best we can tell, the images all have a copyright date of 1900, and were taken during Curtis’s first visit to the reservation.
The portrait titled *A Hopi snake chief, from the village of Hano* offers viewers the most direct encounter with the image’s subject. In the portrait a middle-aged man is seated frontally before a curtain of canvas (the interior of Curtis's mobile studio-tent), creating a soft, flattened mid-tone background wash. He is in full ceremonial costume including headdress, body paint, jewelry and wampum. The image is cropped from the original exposure, made on a glass-plate negative, to include only the priest’s upper body and lap. [Figure 13] By cropping the image and removing the excess visual information of the lower third of the original composition, Curtis creates a sense of urgency in the portrait. The priest does not passively pose before the camera, but rather leans forward slightly, his face extending toward the viewer to break the barrier of the image surface. The portrait does not allow for a casual or disengaged exchange between the viewer and the viewed; it is impossible to ignore the the priest’s confrontational gaze. Further framed by the bend of his arms —his elbows recessing in space and shoulders pressing forward—the viewer is presented with a figure in motion; a figure only pausing for the moment of the camera-snap; a figure that is not extinct or nearing extinction, nor inactive, but present before the camera and in the time of the viewer. As an active participant, the snake priest takes full advantage of the photographic occasion to reinforce his presence in the viewer’s time and space.

Some cultural historians have argued that in general, turn-of-the-century photography struggled to master the voice of the Indian and thus turned to a mapping of the Native body, creating images that are generic masks of actual individuals. However the image of the snake priest contradicts this reading, as do so many of Curtis's portraits. In the case of this image, even

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though the priest is unnamed and perhaps “masked” — not literally but through his costuming — it would be difficult to confine the image to a reading of the Native body.

The man is not an anonymous type or a specimen for examination, but an active participant in the photographic process; a participant that forcefully announces his presence within the space of the frame. The photographer, through the composition, extends intentionality and agency to the priest, and in return the priest engages his viewer through his body language and in the directness of his outward gaze. The restricted composition brings attention away from the space of the portrait (by condensing the background information) and returns attention to the subject. The gesture of the upper body pushing forward in space complicates the portrait— the figure is not fixed in an ahistorical past, he is active. This realignment reinforces the forward motion of the upper body, mirrored in placement of the priest’s hands in the foreground of the image. The clenching on his left fist, holding tightly to the eagle feathers that diagonally cross his lap, sets this image against the othering of time that typically occurs in salvage ethnography.98

The Visual Oeuvre of the Hopi Volume

Three separate portraits of snake priests were carefully selected by Curtis, extracted from the other visuals and reproduced prominently in the portfolio of large-scale photogravures. Of the thirty-six large plates that supplement the twelfth volume, ten refer either directly or indirectly to the Snake Dance or associative ceremonies. Seventeen are portraits of young girls or

98 The clenching fists provide the punctum of the image, or “the accident which pricks.” Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).
women, three are portraits of unnamed male subjects. The remaining are a mix of landscapes and village views.

The image of the anonymous snake priest from the Scribner’s article also appears as the nineteenth large-scale photogravure in the portfolio of thirty-six that accompanies Volume Twelve. Appearing as the ninth photogravure is a nearly identical image — a portrait of a much younger Hopi snake priest, frontally seated in full regalia, also directly engaging the viewer. [Figure 14] For this portrait, Curtis provides the identity of the sitter as “Honovi, a snake priest from the village of Walpi.”

Honovi's portrait is captioned and provides not only the identification of the sitter, but a specific time and place for the portrait: “Honovi - Walpi snake priest, with Totokya Day painting.” In the extended caption, Curtis writes, “This plate depicts the accoutrement of a Snake dancer on the day of the Antelope dance (see Volume XII, pages 146-149). The right hand grasps a paring of eagle-feathers - the “snake whip” - and the left a bag of ceremonial meal. Honovi was one of the author’s principal informants.”

Honovi’s portrait is the viewer’s first invitation to a visual narrative that unfolds through the portfolio, as an addendum to the images of the ceremony that appear in the volume itself. Again, turning the large photogravure plates of the portfolio reveals yet another snake priest, this time near the end of the portfolio, and again featuring a tightly composed composition with a centrally seated young man - a snake priest in full ceremonial garb - and identified by Curtis as “Koyawaima” or “gray [dawn] walking.” [Figure 15]

100 Ibid., caption for Plate No. 498.
101 Ibid., Plate No. 429.
As a set within the portfolio, the subjects of each of the three snake priest portraits are very similarly seated and dressed. The backdrop is nearly identical; the sitters are placed upon the same stool within the same location in the mobile studio space. These illusions to the act of making the images create narrative of time and space; when encountering the images as a set, the series asks the viewer to imagine the men arriving at Curtis's tent together on the same afternoon, on the day of the Antelope dance, to have their portraits taken. The three men, two young and one elder, ask the viewer to allow them into a coeval time and space.

The portrait set is a testament to Curtis's consideration of cultural survival, rather than cultural salvage, in the Hopi volume. Curtis presents the viewer with a multigenerational cast for Myers’ discussion of the ceremony within the volume. The voices of many Hopi men and women are evident in the narrative within Volume Twelve, some remain unnamed and others are identified. As previously discussed, Curtis and Myers spent many years building relationships with individuals on the Hopi reservation, and honored their informants anonymity when it was necessary. An important interaction with an unnamed snake priest is quoted at length by Myers in Volume Twelve. The inclusion of information form this source, among others, contradicts the overwhelming claim in the historiography of *The North American Indian* that Native subjects have been entirely silenced the work, both in the text and the images.⁹²

Surprisingly, the interjection of first-person narrative is not unique, either within the Hopi volume or the bulk of the latter ethnographic text of *The North American Indian*. Curtis and Myers chose to include narrative of anecdotal stories related by the elders, or “traditionalists” as

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⁹² The inclusion of personal narratives from Natives is further explored in Zamir’s *The Gift of the Face*, with regards to Vol. 10 of *The North American Indian*, dedicated to the Kwakiutl.
they are referred to in the text, to help color general discussion of nineteenth and twentieth century Hopi life.

**Yesterday and Today**

One particular image not in the portfolio—but within the volume itself—requires a more direct suspension of the disjunction between *then and over there* and *now and over here*. In an image that abruptly breaks any sense of the time of the other, Curtis presents the viewer with a causal, almost candid photograph of two men identified only as *Hopi farmers, yesterday and today*. [Figure 16]

The viewer is presented with two men standing within a weathered corn or melon field in an image where the past and present appear to exist together. The figure in the center of the composition looks out toward the camera. He stands just as we expect the monumentalized Native body to be presented: his body turns slightly to the left as he shifts his weight to his right leg, in contrapposto. His arms rest casually at his sides, his face is turned directly toward the camera. The lighting does not allow the viewer to meet his gaze. His eyes are cast in shadow, leaving the viewer to feel as though they are invisible—undetected. The man looks beyond the frame of the image, beyond the camera. He is framed perfectly by the rise and fall of the landscape behind him; his figure does not break the horizon but rests comfortably with its boundaries. He is dressed sparingly in traditional garb: a thin band of leather wraps tightly over

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his hips and holds his breechcloth in place. Around his neck a beaded necklace hangs alongside
two packets wrapped in cotton and bound with leather. Except for a modern cotton shirt tied
casually by its sleeves and hung around the farmer’s neck, he is presented as the farmer of
yesterday, representing in flesh a mode of dress — a Native body— that has since disappeared.

Perhaps metaphorically, the Hopi farmer of yesterday stands in the long long late-
afternoon shadow of the second figure, at the right of the composition, presumably the Hopi
farmer of today. Breaking the classical pose, the farmer of today stands more alertly. With his
right leg extended he stands not completely in profile but turned slightly away from the camera,
and makes no attempt to engage the photographer. The light of the setting sun rakes over his left
shoulder and highlights his left cheek and brow, leaving the rest of his face in shadow. He is
wearing a light cotton tunic and cotton trousers in a style contemporary to the photograph—he is
the Hopi farmer of today. With his hair shorn and kept in place with a cotton bandana, his
physical presence just breaks the horizon line—the band of landscape to which the Hopi farmer
of yesterday is confined. The farmer of today appears to be caught in a momentary halt in his
walk; he is not stationary but momentarily paused while moving through the frame of the
photograph.

Here Curtis presents a theater of difference; the men are not enacting a rite, performing a
ceremony or engaged in labor, they are not presenting a scene or object to the viewer, nor are
they posing for a formalized portrait. In fact, both men exhibit differing levels of indifference
toward the camera. One looks off in the distance, camera left, and the other appears to look out
beyond the camera. One man, costumed; the other, not. The image is reminiscent of candid shots
from studio lots with actors in period costuming casually passing time between scenes with
members of the crew, whose modern dress markedly distorts the temporality proposed by the actor. Entirely at ease, the Hopi farmers appear to be waiting; perhaps passing time between scheduled shots.

Not a single image of a Hopi farmer appears in the volume or portfolio save this plate. Although a few images of by Curtis of Hopi farmers exist in the archives of the Library of Congress, thus confirming that the “Hopi farmer” was the subject of at least some of Curtis's photographic work among the Hopi, for unknown reasons he chose only to include this image in the volume. [Figure 17 & Figure 18] The fact that Hopi farmers - yesterday and today was selected to represent an important element in Hopi culture—farming—testifies to Curtis's interest in the nature of this image itself as a signifier of the more literal disruption of the creation of an ethnographic present. In Hopi farmers - yesterday and today, Curtis takes care to remind the viewer of the intersubjective spaces of his project, and the cultural change occurring on the reservation.

An important incongruity exists in the portrait of the two farmers that deserves a brief investigation. While the distinction in dress, and perhaps in gesture and placement, is made between the Hopi farmer representing the traditional past and the farmer representing the present, Curtis (or the two Hopi men) did not push the comparison to a possible extreme: the Hopi farmer of yesterday does not wear a wig to cover his shorn hair. Curtis often supplied wigs for men to wear during reenactments or if they appeared in sweeping shots of landscapes, even sometimes in formal portraits. The inclusion of a wig in this particular image would have further
accentuated the difference that appears to have been Curtis's goal in this photograph. The exclusion of a wig perhaps lends itself to the reading of the image as a candid moment.\footnote{104}

A related reading emerges when the image of the Hopi farmers is considered as part of the larger textual project. The image itself appears in the first half of the volume, within the “general description” chapter and just before the chapter examining the clan legends of the Hopi. The entire section about food production and preparation is an elaboration of the visual metaphor presented by the image of the Hopi Farmers: change and adaption. For example, opening the section with a discussion of corn, “the principal primitive food of the Hopi,” the text announces changes made in harvesting crop.\footnote{105} According to the text, the dibble was primarily used at the time of the writers’ visit—likely 1905 or 1906—but by the time the volume was to be published in 1922 a significant change in farming had occurred. A footnote informs the reader that between the writing of the text and the publishing of the volume, the horse-drawn cultivator had become “a familiar sight” in Hopi fields.\footnote{106}

**On the Housetop**

It should be apparent that when viewer engages only with the imagery of the Hopi volume, they are significantly narrowing the scope of the project. As the series of snake priest portraits and the *Hopi farmers - yesterday and today* double portrait illustrate, we need not only

\footnote{104} The two different modes of dress could also be read as referencing different attitudes toward modernity and assimilation, not directly referenced in the text of the volume but an undercurrent in Hopi culture, and the ongoing disruption between the Hostiles and the Friendlies, here possibly represented as “yesterday” and “today.”


\footnote{106} Ibid., 41.
to read text and image simultaneously, but consider the images as sets designed to convey visual narratives. In order to convey the importance of this reading, this study will consider one final set of images as markers of historical change present in the Hopi volume.

As we have seen, the Curtis's photographic project, although veiled in ethnographic salvage and often caught up in early twentieth-century racist attitudes toward indigenous populations, still could—and did—function as a platform for Native performance and self-expression. The project not only permitted but encouraged performance, in both still photography and in film.\(^{107}\) The final image set this study explores images that portray a sense of performance guided by theatrical direction from Curtis. When paired with a reading of Meyer’s text on the subject, the project on whole creates a narrative not of cultural salvage, but of cultural change and resilience.

The transformation of Hopi culture between past and future is not always presented as straight-forwardly as in *Hopi farmers, yesterday and today*, although in a similar photograph Curtis presents for his viewers a composition picturing both temporal and cultural disjuncture. Appearing as the tenth photogravure plate in the portfolio accompanying Volume Twelve is an image of four young Hopi women perched atop an adobe home in the village of Walpi. The image is titled *On the housetop* and was likely taken in 1906. [Figure 19]

\(^{107}\) In describing what Mick Gidley has called “the most extraordinary thing” about Curtis's filmic work, he turns to contemporary performances of traditional Kwakwaka’wakw ceremonies, which were recently performed in celebration of screenings of the reconstructed film “In the Land of the Head Hunters” created by Curtis in 1914. “These literal reverberations, in themselves, testify to the power and, just as important, the continuing viability for a new generation of the wholly indigenous aspects of Kwakwaka’wakw culture, a century after Curtis shot his film.” from “Edward Curtis and In the Land of the Head Hunters” by Mick Gidley, in Evans and Glass *Return to the Land of the Head Hunters*, 58.
Four young women occupy the middle ground of the composition; typical of Curtis's pictorial aesthetics, the foreground and background are in a slight blur. Adobe structures recede in space from the right of the composition toward the left, providing a rich layer of overlapping rectangles; the stairs, exposed bricks, open doorways and niches give patterned form to the massive, roughly textured structures. Like ornamental decorations, two young Hopi women dressed in indigenous robes and blankets sit atop the upper reaches of the structure, looking out over the vista before the camera, backs turned. Their placement in the composition is central, creating the vertical axis that balances the composition. Just below this pair, two additional women stand slightly to the right, dressed in similar ceremonial garb and with their backs to the camera.

This subjects of this composition—four women looking out over a housetop in Walpi—also appear in an image within the Hopi volume and in a second image in the portfolio. [Figure 20 & Figure 21] Within the two pictures—which are nearly identical—Curtis more tightly frames the composition, only showing the top of the adobe structure and the four women, allowing the sky to take up nearly half of the picture plane. As one composition among many of young Hopi women, it appears almost redundant.

In fact, pictures of young Hopi women are sprinkled throughout the volume. In an almost cinematic ordering of images, the reader is presented with a series of images featuring the same young women dressed in what Curtis notes in one caption as their “holiday attire.” In what Alan

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108 Curtis's caption for the image reads: “A typical village scene illustrating many features of pueblo architecture. At the extreme left is the entrance of an underground kiva, with the tips of the ladder projecting. In the central foreground is a baking-room, where piki is prepared, and to the left is an outdoor oven for baking loaf-bread.” from The North American Indian, Vol. 12 (1922), Portfolio Plate No. 409, copyright 1921.
Trachtenberg describes as an “an unspoken motive,” Curtis here is perhaps trying to “re-enchant a world the white Americans had stripped of charm, magic, and mystery.” He presents his reader with the series in a non-linear fashion, and although the images are intermingled with other photographs, they are distinct images that are meant to return the reader to an enchanted world through a reoccurring photographic/cinematic narrative.

The series begins with an image of the women on stairs leading to a rooftop, and proceeds with a group of women (some of which are included in the image discussed above) lounging on the banks of a water-hole (sentimentally titled *Gossip at the Water-hole*); these images are followed by a series additional scenes: four young girls grinding meal, a more straight-forward portrait of four girls who appear in almost all of the images simply standing against an adobe wall (this image will be discussed at length below) and another view of the girls sitting atop another house (titled *An Afternoon Chat*).

In all of the images, the young women are dressed in ceremonial clothing, wearing heavy blankets over mofsapu, an undyed cotton robe. Myers explains that this mode of dress is “rarely seen at East mesa….but the rule in Western villages.” The one-piece moccasins and pure white leggings worn by the young women in the photographs are described as only for ceremonial occasions. With regards to the styling of the photographed women’s hair, Myers comments, “The picturesque whorl fashion is so fast disappearing, at least in Walpi, that in three months’ observation in the winter of 1911-1912 only one girl was seen with hair so dressed except on

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ceremonial occasions.” He adds, almost as a personal aside, “To arrange the whorls is too laborious a task for women with a school education.”

If the viewer accepts the group of women as a cast, variously placed and photographed by Curtis over the course of one afternoon, one particular image stands out as a sort of “cast portrait.” Within the volume, among the scattered images of the young women at the watering hole, or at “the trysting place,” is an image of the four young women, here lined up before a large stone wall and presented for the viewer in a shallow space, reminiscent of a post-performance curtain call. [Figure 22] The two girls flanking the group look directly at the viewer, one smiling, the other more reserved. The two girls in the center of the image both look to their right, one laughing, the other with her armed blurred on movement. Similar to the portrait of the Hopi Farmers, this informal portrait appears as a candid moment of relaxation, possibly caught in-between the taking of the more formal, posed images also present in the series.

Most important to the current study is locating moments when Curtis reveals his constructions to his reader. The Hopi volume provides several opportunities, as we have seen, due to the incongruity between the early date of the photographs and the editing of the volume nearly two decades later. Upon reexamination of Figure 19—the large plate featuring the Hopi women found in the photogravure portfolio—one is drawn to a curious detail hinting at Curtis’s figuration of cultural change and contemporaneity with his subject. In the lower left corner of the image, balancing the visual weight of the black-and-white blankets draped over the backs of the young women on the housetop, sit three figures. A mother, dressed in a modern commercial-style dress, looks up directly at Curtis's camera. She has a small child in her lap, also wearing modern

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111 Ibid., 25.
clothing. Behind the pair is a more ambiguous figure—perhaps that of the father or an elder sibling. In this composition, Curtis intentionally crops the image to include these figures within the lower left corner, providing an important temporal disjuncture within the presented scene. Here Curtis is plainly picturing change, and providing a record of his own brokerage in the construction and theatrical direction of the young women.

As noted earlier, *On the housetop* carries a copyright date of 1921, yet given the identity of the subjects in several other images appearing in the volume but dated 1906, we can infer that this image was taken in 1906 but not used professionally (thus not requiring a copyright) until the construction of the volume in 1921. Perhaps Curtis, after two decades of work among the Hopi, decided ultimately to reveal a bit of his artistic influence in the series and highlight cultural change — an element of Hopi life commented on throughout the text of the volume by Myers. His decision to leave this image in the archives and out of public consumption until 1921 leads to the conclusion that the placement of the image in the portfolio was neither accidental nor an unintended contraction; rather the image is a purposeful offer to the viewer to explore the simultaneities of time present in early twentieth century Hopi life.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

“The results of the invention [of the photograph] cannot, even remotely, be seen - but all experience, in matters of philosophical discovery, teaches us that, in such discovery, it is the unforeseen upon which we must calculate most largely.”

- Edgar Allen Poe

“It has been said, for example, by Umberto Eco, that if photography is to be likened to perception, this is not because the former is a ‘natural’ process but because the latter is also coded.”

- John Tagg

The North American Indian, a project “more famous than read,” is more than a compilation of outmoded images of cultural salvage accompanied by amateur scientific text. Certainly there are elements of the project that cannot escape this description. However, in looking specifically at visual and textual elements of the Hopi portfolio, this study augments current conversations aimed at pulling Curtis’s project from the stasis of the early ethnographic categories it has been relegated to since the 1980s. While some historians argue that current studies are still falling prey to the dominant cultural logic that identifies the Native subject as “inscrutable, monumental and past,” new conversations are aimed fundamentally shifting


interpretations of Curtis’s work. Although the disciplines of photography and ethnography will always read their subjects through the lens of the culture of the record-maker, both media also offer a powerful avenue for their subjects, in this case Curtis’s indigenous collaborators, to write in and shape their own narratives.

Current studies of Curtis and The North American Indian are undergoing a paradigmatic shift, moving interpretations of the project toward two interrelated categories: scholars are looking beyond the tone originally set for the project as a salvage endeavor, strongly influenced by the natural historians of the late 19th century, who looked to their Native subjects as remnants of civilization’s lost childhood. Simultaneously, new work is appearing aimed at uncovering the influence of The North American Indian’s indigenous collaborators, both within the imagery and the text of the massive publication.

This paper argued that The North American Indian allowed for, and perhaps actively encouraged, various levels of collaboration through the course of the construction of the Hopi volume. The volume offers a unique opportunity to see Curtis and Myers at work; the physical volume was ultimately constructed two decades after fieldwork commenced. The nature of the extended dialogue between Myers, Curtis and their NAI field assistants and Hopi informants, guides and collaborators creates a text that reads as a palimpsest; the volume is literally dotted with footnotes and asides that update observations written in the opening years of the century—as part of the early manuscripts—before reviews and additions were made for publication in 1922. Similarly, many images taken at the turn of the century that did not follow the popular pictorial aesthetic and parameters established for visual authenticity in the ethnographic arena--

discussed in the second chapter of the current study—were relegated to the Curtis Studio archives and were not seen by the public until they appeared in the published volume. Images such as *Hopi farmers - yesterday and today* created a collapse of temporalities that quite possibly would have been too far from the salvage paradigm for inclusion in an earlier publication. Although the photograph was likely taken in 1906, it did not appear anywhere in connection with Curtis's project until 1922. In the case of the Hopi snake priests and the performative elements of their portraits, Native authorship and shared temporality was veiled just enough for the images to appear as typical “Curtis portraits.” However, the revised reading proposed by this paper is evident especially when the images are read as a series and as part of a larger reenactment before Curtis's camera. Curtis is often noted as initiating the reenactment of major events—ceremonies, raids, even staging Sioux bands to re-stage battles near Little Bighorn—over the course of his production of *The North American Indian*. Evidence less obvious, though arguably more important, of this type of cultural brokerage is evident in the Hopi volume. When images from the volume and portfolio are read as a series, a narrative of change and performance arises. This narrative, although ultimately crafted by Curtis and Myers, cannot be washed of elements of indigenous authorship. As Aaron Glass argues, Curtis’s images “…likely appealed not only to white Americans but also to the ambitions of Native intellectuals and reformers with whom he [Curtis] worked or with whom he might now be associated from our own historical perspective.” Glass continues, explaining that the images were often not rebuked, but rather the subjects of the images often used them to “carefully refashion themselves in ways aimed at obtaining stronger
recognition in both cultural and political spheres for Native survival and persistence."\textsuperscript{116} Curtis’s portraits of the snake priests assert Native presence in space of the viewer; each figure exists in a shared time and place, within a more complex and fluid temporal agenda. It is this agenda that this study seeks to begin to unveil; an agenda that is currently underwriting much of the new Curtis historiography.

\textit{The North American Indian} is being reconsidered as a project composed under multiple levels of authority, illustrated through the intersubjective relationships that occurred in the field, in both dialogue and translation, as well as the act of writing text and taking pictures. An overwhelming number of Native Americans and First Nations peoples present in the text and imagery of the project are not “lost, in disintegrating time and space,” waiting to be salvaged by Curtis and his team.\textsuperscript{117} Rather, a careful reading of the project, in this case the Hopi volume, unveils instances of Native authority in shared time.

Images referencing performance directly and indirectly, both within and beyond the Hopi volume, appear sometimes as single presentations but most often are presented as a series of views. While the obvious theatrically of images picturing ceremonies or rituals is arguably self-evident, the performative nature of several portraits and genre scenes within the Hopi volume may have been influenced by Curtis’ particular interests and growing aspirations to create cinematic epics based on his fieldwork experiences. During the season of fieldwork in 1912, Curtis wrote a letter to his subscribers, updating his various investors on the progress of the publications. Within the letter, Curtis casually hints toward a project on the horizon. He writes,

\textsuperscript{116} Aaron Glass, introduction to Glass and Evans, \textit{Return to the Land of the Head Hunters}, 7.

“It has been suggested that I make...motion pictures of the most important tribes, such pictures illustrating, so far as possible, the activities of their lives....” Work for his major film project *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (1914) was underway at the time the letter was written; sources note preparations for the film may have begun as early as 1910.119

Just months prior to arriving in Vancouver Island to begin filming, Curtis was in the field on the Hopi reservation. The strikingly modern aspects of many images from the Hopi volume could be attributed to their conception as preliminary works; remnants of a sort of image-scouting for vignettes and tableaux in preparation for a cinematic treatment of Hopi life and culture. As Anna Grimshaw points out, the way in which photography was used in anthropologic projects at the turn of the century “owed much to the older, established aesthetic of theater.”120 The possibility of a Hopi-centered cinematic project may have been possible had *Head Hunters* been a commercially successful film, but sadly, overshadowed by the heightened political atmosphere of the start of World War I, the release of *Head Hunters* in December of 1914 was met with little fanfare. This disappointment would have surely kept Curtis from undertaking a similar venture with his Hopi materials. However, the influence of a cinematic voice does appear in the volume, both in the images and in several instances through the textual narrative.

The Hopi volume offers one example of the complexity present in *The North American Indian* as a historical document, and the difficulty of separating techniques employed by those involved from the ideological dimensions of the project on whole. Ultimately, this study reveals

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instances within the Hopi volume of *The North American Indian* where the veil of salvage is lifted, and new narratives are allowed to emerge. As scholars approach the project with a broader understanding of the layered intentions and multiple expressions that permeate the textual and visual record left by Curtis, Myers and their Native collaborators, additional nuanced narratives will emerge. As one historian recently wrote, if we approach photographs as not merely “being of things, but as something to think with,” they emerge as sites of dialogue and interaction. In this light, early ethnographic photography allows us to expand our investigative reach with regards to this project, and understand the photographs as dynamic historical sources. The photography and the ethnographic texts of *The North American Indian* deserve continued scholarly examination as active sources that—even over a century later—play an important role in the making and remaking of histories.

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Caption: Little Plume and son Yellow Kidney seated on ground inside lodge, pipe between them.

Note the clock on the floor of the lodge in Figure 4 that is removed from Figure 5, the published version of the image.

Figure 5. “In a Piegan lodge” (1910)
Edward S. Curtis
The North American Indian Portfolio 6, Plate No. 188

Caption: Little Plume with his son Yellow Kidney occupies the position of honor, the space at the rear opposite the entrance. The picture is full of suggestion of the various Indian activities. In a prominent place lie the ever-present pipe and its accessories on the tobacco cutting-board. From the lodge-poles hang the buffalo-skin shield, the long medicine-bundle, an eagle-wing fan, and deerskin articles for accoutering the horse. The upper end of the rope is attached to the intersection of the lodge-poles, and in stormy weather the lower end is made fast to a stake near the centre of the floor space.
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Figure 7. “The Three Chiefs” (1900) Goldtone. Originally sold as a Curt-Tone by the Curtis Studio, Seattle, before also appearing in Portfolio 6 of *The North American Indian*. Shot during Curtis’ first trip in the field; a visit to the Piegan in Montana with G. B. Grinnell. This image is still marketed today as “Curtis’ cardinal image, taken during his first encounter with Native Americans in their natural state.” (Cardozo Fine Art)
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Caption: The white markings, typifying the antelope, indicate that the subject is accoutred [sic] for the semi-final day of the Snake dance, when the public performance consists of the dance and the ceremonial race of the Antelope fraternity.

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Figure 13. “Snake priest” (1900)
Call number LOT 12315
Figure 14. “Honovi - Walpi snake priest, with Totokya Day painting” (copyright 1921) Edward S. Curtis, The North American Indian, Portfolio 12, Plate No. 408

Caption: This plate depicts the accoutrement of a Snake dancer on the day of the Antelope dance (see Volume XII, pages 146-149). The right hand grasps a pair of eagle-feathers - the "snake whip" - and the left a bag of ceremonial meal. Honovi was one of the author's principal informants.
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Caption: This subject is Koyawaima ("gray [dawn] walking"), who has been chief of the fraternity since 1899.
Figure 16. “Hopi farmers - yesterday and today” (1906)
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Caption: A typical village scene illustrating many features of pueblo architecture. At the extreme left is the entrance of an underground kiva, with the tips of the ladder projecting. In the central foreground is a baking-room, where piki is prepared, and to the left is an outdoor oven for baking loaf-bread.
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Figure 21. “Watching the dancers” (1906)
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Caption: A group of girls on the topmost roof of Walpi, looking down into the plaza.
Figure 22. “Hano and Walpi girls wearing atoo” (copyright 1921)
Edward S. Curtis, The North American Indian, Volume 12, Plate facing page 30
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