



Library podcast

Beyond The Frame Symposium - Part 1

[00:00:05] Welcome to The Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and library events. Library podcasts are brought to you by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts, visit our web site at www.spl.org. To learn how you can help the library foundation support The Seattle Public Library go to foundation.spl.org

[00:00:35] This podcast is being presented in two parts. You are listening to part 1.

[00:00:42] Ok watch a class. Jordan Remington. So good morning everyone. My name is Jordan Remington and I am the coordinator for this symposium. So now to get us started we have asked our friend Clay Jenkinson to say a few words just to get the vibe out of the symposium go and

[00:01:05] Good morning everyone and welcome to this symposium I think it's going to be just a tremendous day. My name is Clay Jenkins and I live in Bismarck North Dakota. I'm fascinated by Edward S. Curtis. My friend Jody Fenton about two years ago asked me if I would like to have a role in this set of commemorations and I said Of course I would be absolutely thrilled but let me say that I the most important thing I have to say is that I've come to listen and I've come to learn.

[00:01:36] I know a fair amount about Edward Curtis but when I look over at the the roster of events for the next day amazing and I can't wait to yield to the next people on the list I want to start. If you don't mind by taking your photograph. And so I'm going to go three to one then I want you to hold still for eleven seconds and not move. Even slightly. Maria got it all right. Because. It's so important before you really begin to think about Curtis to realize what he was doing physically. So when Jody and I talked about this I said. I'm going to get a camera made for myself. I'm going to really do this.

[00:02:27] And so I had this beautiful 5 by 7 dry plate box camera made for myself by a craftsman in New Jersey. He does a lot of this sort of work and I just want to show you what it would have meant for Curtis to take a photograph of one of you. So this is the slide where the image where the glass plate is going to go.

[00:02:50] So I'm going to disappear into a darkroom here and using Braille only I'm going to open this up and put in the five by seven pre treated glass plate. This is not a wet plate photography beginning around 1880. Dry plate was invented. It revolutionized the nature of photography and made it just almost infinitely easier. So for a while I'm gonna be groping in the dark and I'm going to install

that plate. Now I have it. It's unexposed because it has this slide. Now I'm going to pull this slide right now. That would have ruined played

[00:03:29] But you would try of course to keep it that way. Then you take the camera and you use this bellows with this ground glass to focus on your subject. So in this case the bellows becomes the focusing tool. And so I would do this for quite a while. I'd have a black cloth over my head so that I could see in the bright light of Arizona or or South Dakota.

[00:03:56] Finally I would get the the frame and the focus that I want and then with this camera I'm going to pull the ground glass to the side and I'm going to mount the film container and now I'm going to say Hold still with dry glass it's a much quicker image than with what plate what plate 10 15 sometimes longer number of seconds with drive plate it could be half a second. It could be a second and a half depending on light conditions. And then when I'm ready when you're ready I'm going to pull this I'm going to put the lens cap back on that's my shutter I'm going to pull this off.

[00:04:42] Now the glass plate is vulnerable and ready to be exposed you got to pull this off and say a thousand one thousand two whatever it is and put the lens cap back on.

[00:04:56] Then I'm going to insert the slides then I'm going to pull the frame and I'm going to go into a tent it's 120 degrees in the shade here in Arizona and I'm going to develop that plate and then I'm probably going to put it on a frame to make a contact print it might be a psionic type could be several types of contact prints so I can see if I like the image he sometimes did this and he sometimes debated that's how it works.

[00:05:31] Some of you are of course well aware of this but think of this Edward Curtis took we think forty thousand plus photograph this is just think of that for a moment.

[00:05:44] Forty thousand is kind of an arbitrary number but it's tens of thousands of photographs he took using one form of this or another five by seven was pretty small for him. Some of those cameras were eight by 10. He had an eleven by sixteen and even larger formats. In addition to which he used the just emerging technology of the Edison cylinder recorder. You know they look like water glasses and he recorded more than ten thousand cylinders of song vocabulary origin stories coyote stories cetera he took down using a fairly elaborate vocabulary grid more than seventy five Native American vocabularies some of which for tribes whose languages have subsequently been lost he with others Myers and with Frederick Hodge of the Smithsonian produced more than 7000 pages of ethnography and then in the middle of this around 19 four or five Curtis decided to produce a monumental 20 volume set of photographs text songs etc. 20 volumes proper and then 20 accompanying volumes of portfolio photographs he thought he could do it in five years.

[00:07:19] Fortunately he didn't think it through because it couldn't have been done in five years in fact one of his friends later said you're doing the impossible it would take at least 51 people to do what you have in mind. There were dark years there were times of economic chaos his creditors hounded him. There were several seasons when he simply couldn't go out in the field because he

couldn't scratch together the funds the JP Morgan money ran out almost immediately but he had a second wind. And by 1931 he had completed the project he had produced as 20 volume. It is an epic achievement that ranks with de DeRose encyclopedia ranks with Dr. Johnson's dictionary of the English language Erasmus produced the Church Fathers and he also produced the first Greek New Testament in 15 16.

[00:08:15] It's one of the major publication triumphs of all time. The books were printed on the finest Japanese or Dutch paper the most advanced printing techniques of the time their gorgeous works of Dibley a graphic art. In addition to what they contain. But he couldn't sell them. One of Morgan's demands was that he Curtis be the principle creator of subscriptions to market them. It wasn't able to sell them very well. And because of that the project was just cash starved in every possible way.

[00:08:54] Let me just give you a little sense of what it took to do this. He was swatted in the hip by a whale off the northwest coast after which he never walked without a limp again. He got himself and a couple of others taken out to a SEAL rock near Alaska. He hadn't thought it through he hadn't done proper research and when he got to the top of the SEAL rock in the middle of the ocean he realized that the tide was going to come up above the rock and there was no rescue fortunately the tide came only a few feet above the top. They actually tied themselves to the rock so they wouldn't be swept off into the sea. And they survived. This was a man who went back to the Hopi reservation 12 years in a row hoping that eventually he would be permitted to participate in the most sacred of all Hopi rituals. The snake dance the snake prayer dance. Year after year they said no that can't be done.

[00:09:58] It will never be done. And he came back and he pushed just as far as he thought he could every time. And finally in the 12th year he was told. You have obviously earned the right to do this. We're going to let you participate in the Hopi snake dance.

[00:10:13] These conditions you must go through the fasting and sweat lodge purification then you must go with us and help capture the snakes the rattlesnakes we bring the rattlesnakes back then you must sleep in the keep up the those some subterranean prayer chamber you must sleep in the key but with dozens of live rattlesnakes.

[00:10:39] Would you and then when the dance proper starts. These individuals of those who had earned the right amongst the Hopi to be in this ritual had to take rattlesnakes live rattlesnakes and drape them around their neck.

[00:10:57] And then actually put the rattlesnake just below its mouth into their mouth. And bite it. Would you do this. My point is that this is not someone who flies in gets the photograph and flies out in many cases. Curtis had to be with a tribe the crow or the Oglala Sioux or the Shoshone or Nez Perce for weeks even months before he got the photographs that he wanted. And he realized that to come in as a as a kind of a white colonial extractor of photographs simply doesn't work. You have to stay long enough you have to humble yourself. You have to carry firewood. You have to do what other whatever tasks are made you take a fair number of insults and abuse you may not ever get the

photographs that you want but patience embedding yourself in the culture is the only way you're possibly going to succeed.

[00:11:53] So this is not somebody who was a ruthless come in get the photograph and depart sort of man show you a couple of photographs. This is his family that's Clara on top. His older daughter Beth his younger daughter Florence his son Harold or how there's a later daughter Katherine not photographed here. You all know that Curtis was so devoted to this project.

[00:12:26] That he was absent from his family in Seattle for extended periods of time.

[00:12:32] It's hard to quantify.

[00:12:34] But let's just say most of the time he would go out to the Crow Reservation in South Dakota and spend two months three months four months there and then leave there and go to Arizona for a couple of months or for six weeks when that was all done when their summer fieldwork was done. Then maybe he would come home for a few days and maybe not but that he knew that if he came home and tried to write the book in Seattle it would never happen because he would be distracted by too many other holes on his time and concentration. So he and Meyers and a few others would actually find a cabin or a hut in the middle of the middle of nowhere and then spend six weeks eight weeks writing the book. And Curtis said they would spend 16 to 17 hours per day doing this.

[00:13:20] They wouldn't even go to the post office because they were afraid of the distractions and they stayed in the field until the book was done. So now he's been gone for eight months he comes back to Seattle to see his family. Claire is not in a very good mood. As you might expect he's been holding together the business fighting off the creditors trying to continue the portrait work in his absence longing to hear from him desperate for cash and he would come back maybe collapse in bed for two weeks out of sheer physical exhaustion and then get on a train and go to New York to try to sell subscriptions or to meet with the Morgan people or to see President Roosevelt. Well you know what happened in nineteen sixteen Clara finally filed for divorce. I'm sure there were endless painful conversations between them about whether the marriage could be held together under such circumstances. He was in the grip of a of an obsession and he was right to finish this project even in twenty seven years he had to leave everything out in the field. There was no Curtis really left when he got back into the city and Vera filed for divorce. It was a nasty divorce it was all over the public papers at that time a celebrity divorce like that was was a huge scandal here and as you know at one point it seemed clear that Claire was going to get all the intellectual property of the studios and everything in them. And Beth his daughter much older then and several of the employees took many of the glass plates. These these precious irreplaceable vase plates cross the street and smash them to keep them out of the hands of Clara. When you read this and Timothy Egan's book or other accounts of this suggested just makes you cringe actually to think that intellectual property of an art of world importance was smashed in a nasty divorce. So I feel great sympathy for Clara.

[00:15:32] At the same time I think he knew what he had to do.

[00:15:38] And if he had been a better husband and a better father he actually did work out excellent relations with his children but if he'd been better at those things we might not have this monumental work.

[00:15:51] I love this photograph. Some of you know where this is from this is Theodore Roosevelt's children at Sagamore Hill and that's Curtis on the right.

[00:16:03] They're torturing one of the many family dogs. But the dog looks as if it's not its first rodeo. Doesn't it. Here. Here we go. This is only light torture in the Roosevelt family. But you see the reason I show this is first of all Roosevelt heard about Curtis and he invited him to come all the way to Long Island to photograph the Roosevelt children. And the photographs are magnificent. Some of the best presidential family photographs ever taken. But you see that Curtis was not someone just on the other side of the lens. Here he has embedded himself with the family. He said he had a great time. That's a cousin by the way on the right of the frame and he was able to get not only get these photographs but to produce an extremely meaningful friendship with President Roosevelt which came back to serve Him in all sorts of ways.

[00:16:52] Just one photograph from the series you can look them up. They're absolutely gorgeous. This is Quentin my beautiful I guess the one of the points I want to make is that Edward S. Curtis was a great artist who happened to choose photography as his medium and his principal subject became Native American but it needs I think to be seen in that way.

[00:17:18] He was a great artist a genius in my opinion. He had an eye. He took photographs of people. And if you'd had seven or 10 or 15 other photographers doing the same. They might not have gotten what he got and almost certainly wouldn't have gotten those unbelievable expressions that he got in the portraits that he created through the course of his life. He was a great artist whose medium was photography and whose subject turned out to be Native Americans. He took this picture of Theodore Roosevelt. And this was Roosevelt's favorite photograph of himself.

[00:17:53] It's this presidential photograph and somewhat shamelessly.

[00:17:59] Curtis wrote my picture of the president is great. It is quite different from anything before taken and I believe will be considered by all who know him a splendid likeness. I made no effort to retouch up the face and make him a smooth visage individual without a line or anything to show his character.

[00:18:18] And if you know anything about the Roosevelts I won't linger here. We're talking about Curtis the Roosevelts made for Curtis play their favorite family game it's called Point to Point. You know of this here's how it worked. Somebody was it. So we choose one of you and you'd say let's walk to the space needle.

[00:18:40] We go out of the library and get in single file and then we would walk to the Space Needle if we came to a house we'd knock on the front door go through the house and come out the back.

[00:18:48] If we came to a lake we had to swim the lake. If you come to a haystack you climb up over the haystack. But if you deviate mm you go home in shame. It's called Point to Point Roosevelt made everybody into this cabinet officials foreign diplomats. Once swam across Rock Creek in Washington D.C. naked as president and made all these foreign ambassadors get naked and follow him Rosa I love this sort of thing. You thought it built character Here's Port Curtis embedded in this story they made me feel like one of the family. Curtis writes and I had my initiation into the president's obstacle walk. He led the procession over under and through followed by the children their friends and any guests that wish to be included. It was a strenuous game. The right word for Roosevelt. Follow the leader.

[00:19:36] But believe me no place for sissies and mortification for anyone who dropped out. When he returned exhausted and out of breath all right. So Roosevelt then had Curtis photograph his daughter Alice's wedding the famous Alice Roosevelt Longworth. It was the only photographer he had a monopoly on this moment that meant that every newspaper in the world wanted photographs of the wedding and they had to work through and then obscure Seattle photographer by the name of Edward S. Curtis caused a lot of controversy actually. Then Roosevelt agreed to write a letter of introduction for Curtis to wealthy individuals wealthy capitalists in New York City that led to the meeting with J.P. Morgan. Then Curtis somewhat boldly said the Roosevelt as long as you're at it would you write the preface to the 20 volumes. I think you're the greatest American if you wrote the preface. That would certainly play a role. Roosevelt did it. The preface was separately published and used as a sales and marketing tool. When there was a controversy led by France Boaz of Columbia saying that the Curtis had no credentials and his work must be shoddy. Roosevelt stepped in. Put together a three member panel of experts to evaluate Curtis's work. They signed off on it. It saved the project. When Roosevelt was inaugurated in nineteen five he had Curtis come and take photographs at the inaugural parade including of six Native American chiefs who had been brought almost like a Roman triumph for this moment.

[00:21:11] And then there's a moment in the controversy over the Custer battle in which Roosevelt got involved. My point is Curtis was operating with the help of one of the most powerful men in the United States. And Roosevelt opened a lot of doors for him.

[00:21:25] This is a picture of the pig in Blackfeet.

[00:21:30] This is nineteen hundred. This is in northwestern Montana under a glacier it's Browning. He was invited. He had a chance meeting on Mount Rainier with three of the great naturalists of this country. GIFFORD pitched show George Bird Grinnell C. Hart Merriam.

[00:21:46] They were a little bit bewildered up on the mountain. Curtis was adept at Rainier said later it went up more than 20 times with hundreds of cameras he helped them out.

[00:21:59] It became their friend. And because of that Grinnell invited him to be the official photographer on the Harriman Alaska expedition in 1899 for which Curtis took 4000 photographs.

[00:22:10] Or like this and then in nineteen hundred Grinnell invited Curtis to come to Browning see to witness and photograph the last observance of the Sundance among the big and people of the religious crime act of 1883 by the United States government for bad Native American religious practices that forbade pop matches powwows sweat lodges peyote cults.

[00:22:37] Sundance is the keeper ceremony. Sense was that these were pagan observances and they needed to be outlawed so that native peoples could become fully assimilated. Grinnell invited him to the last Sundance he wasn't allowed to photograph the piercing or the crying for a vision but almost everything else and he had a kind of halting conversion experience on the plains of Montana.

[00:22:59] So this is what I'm going to do I'm going to devote some of the best years of my life going to all of the semi intact some traditionally intact tribes in the American West Mississippi and I'm going to get as much of this recorded in as many media as possible before it's too late.

[00:23:17] At the same time I also take a good look we're not going to see this kind of thing much longer. It already belongs to the past and I'll close with that thought in just a minute. I want to look at this photograph for a moment.

[00:23:30] This is Mosa of the Mojave and this is the photograph that convinced JP Morgan to fund the project Curtis wants to see JP Morgan.

[00:23:43] Morgan was his usual arrogance his dismissive self he said there are lots of demands on my time I'm not going to be able to help you go away and Curtis said I will not go away till you look at my portfolio laid out a number of photographs and look through them when he came to this one he said I'm going to fund you. I want you to go out and get photographs like this in the American West. There's a little an amazing photograph. That's the one that convinced JP Morgan.

[00:24:20] Well let me just ask you a couple of questions because I hope that the discourse today complicates all of this the best thing that could come out of this is that you never look at a Curtis photograph again without asking questions about what you're seeing.

[00:24:37] Let me just ask you about this famous tremendous painting or photograph that she volunteer was she persuaded or coerced what she paid. If so where she paid or was her family paid that she chose to paint her face this was how she would have wanted to be depicted or was that somebody choose this for her. Was there a chaperone. This occurred in attempt. Was there a chaperone. What about the necklace. Is it hers is it. Where does it come from. Did she ever see the photograph. Probably not. On the basis of this. Was she a little like a celebrity or was she a pariah or somewhere in between but what's the

[00:25:30] What's the effect that Curtis is trying to create here.

[00:25:34] We were behind taking snapshot after snapshot this representative poses this suppose that he helped to coordinate the relationship going on here. These photographs they're constructed they're composed. They're by no means snapshots so for every photograph no matter what it is we need to ask under what circumstances was it taken how did Curtis persuade the person to be in it. What was the person's feeling about being in the product. Did the person really understand what was happening here.

[00:26:09] The money change hands was there was there coercion of any sort. Who benefited if anybody. It's a hard question but they're really important questions. And if you go through it whenever you look at a photograph.

[00:26:24] Now if you think just this this is not a snapshot taken by a 35 millimeter photographer floating around a reservation.

[00:26:33] This is a carefully constructed carefully composed work of art by somebody who has that technology extraordinary artistic capacity and comes with an idea of what he thinks an invasion should look like.

[00:26:49] So important to remember that these are not objective documents as if a snapshot were taken by the universe. These are photographs taken by a good and decent white artist brought political social cultural baggage. Everything that he did. Just as you and I would listen this is what he said about her. It would be difficult to conceive of a more Aboriginal and this more hobby girl.

[00:27:20] Her eyes are those of a form of the forest questioning the strange things of civilisation upon which it gazes for the first time no one would write that way today.

[00:27:34] Right. The romanticized nation the form of the forest the collapsing of a human being with the quadruped of the forest a lot of baggage here unfortunately you didn't write about every photograph that you ever took that I wish you had we'd be in a lot better position but just quickly this is his purpose. What might be called Rescue ethnography or rescue photography the passing of every old man or woman means the passing of some traditions some knowledge of sacred rites possessed by no other. Consequently the information that is to be gathered for the benefit of future generations respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind must be collected all at once or the opportunity will be lost for all time. You can proliferate thousands of statements like this from Theodore Roosevelt George Bird Grinnell on this would be about Native peoples and their customs. That would be about the ice and the unplowed grasses of the American West.

[00:28:32] The conservation movement led by Theodore Roosevelt was born out of notions that the conquest of the Americas had been a great thing but it had come at a cost and that while there was still a little of that primordial left we needed to record it if you think that he is in any way just swashbuckling around.

[00:28:54] This is a document from the University of Washington special collection. This is his list of things he's trying to find out amongst any tribe.

[00:29:02] Number 11 mortuary customs number 12 their ideas of the future world number 13 astronomical beliefs number 15 social order.

[00:29:09] He's doing all this. And to that he has some excellent help and a man name Myers who had a beautiful ear and terrific shorthand. The end of the day they type up all their notes and ask follow up questions. This is a list that Lewis and Clark would have found daunting because it is so extensive and he's used dutifully trying to accomplish this.

[00:29:31] Move on here. Yeah.

[00:29:34] You wanted to form a comprehensive and permanent record of all the important tribes that still retain a considerable degree their primitive customs and traditions and he says while prime is in the introduction to Vol. 1 while primarily a photographer I do not see or think photographically hence the story of Indian life will not be told in microscopic detail but rather will be presented as a broad and luminous picture. If you just memorize that and watched all the photographs you're going to see for the rest of the day.

[00:30:05] A broad and luminous picture. All right. So just again how do you earn the right to beat Edward S. Curtis. You put a snake in your mouth. Now this is a modern painting of what that looks like.

[00:30:20] That's suffering for your art.

[00:30:23] This is a photograph of someone he calls typical Apache.

[00:30:27] Look he's not wearing ceremonial garb. He's wearing something like what you would wear.

[00:30:34] On a Tuesday or a Thursday in the Apache world the backdrop is what's important here.

[00:30:42] You see this photograph. It feels timeless and internal then you see the photograph from which it was cropped.

[00:30:51] Look at that. It changes it doesn't it. Now you're in the tent there's a backdrop. It's not timeless anymore it's definitely in time. I'm glad we have both photographs.

[00:31:03] You're gonna see more of those later but having both of them really helps us complicate what this was. This idea of timelessness it's really a double edged sword because it creates the illusion that the native peoples don't exist in time. But it also imprisons them because they do like the rest of us existed time. Time is contingent for all of us. There's no static culture.

[00:31:28] When Lewis and Clark got to the Mandan people in North Dakota in October of eighteen five The man then had horses they had guns and ammunition.

[00:31:36] They had metal objects they had silver from Santa Fe and most parks.

[00:31:42] Oh we discovered them. This way always way way way more complicated those apart left behind a hatchet.

[00:31:52] At the Mandarin villages and then went beginning April 7th eighty five went west to the Nez Perce when they got to the Nez Perce people on the Pacific side of the Bitterroot Mountains. The hatchet that they had forgotten back and forth man that was waiting for them.

[00:32:08] Because of Nez Perce had been way ahead of them. Hey you forgot your hatchet. But every day Lewis was saying we have now stepped on a piece of country that no civilized man has ever been on before. It's just so much more interesting.

[00:32:20] And speaking of contrived photographs one of my favorite my friend Theodore Roosevelt in his authentic Western tunic a studio in New York City that's perfect.

[00:32:37] That is on I'm from what I can tell you that North Korea does not look like that we are a treeless windswept place. But he thought this was authentic and use it as the frontispiece.

[00:32:52] Of his first book about the West. So it's not just about native culture is it. What are you photographing me. I don't know. I don't know who took this when he had a bunch of it take it. When he took off his glasses.

[00:33:02] By the way that night was hand carved by Tiffany.

[00:33:08] There's your authentic Roseville. Just two more.

[00:33:13] This was Red Cloud of the Oglala the original photograph on the right the colorized lettering glass is on the left. My friend Bob wouldn't put it on so that it looks here as one of the great collections of Curtis B has digitized a bunch of his colored slides and gave me this one last week.

[00:33:35] In 1911 people loved the colored one much more than the black and white one because it was color they know our attitudes are not quite that Red Cloud said.

[00:33:47] Maybe this should have been my first line Red Card said white men have come here and made many promises so many promises I cannot remember what they have kept. Only one promise to take our lives our land.

[00:34:02] We have done it the only one that promised whatever.

[00:34:09] Whenever you get into a grumpy mood about Curtis to hear some.

[00:34:16] His achievement was monumental. Really.

[00:34:20] Take down culture. Help preserve parts of culture. For which there has been enormous cultural erosion sense and sometimes what we have to be careful of is always more complicated than that.

[00:34:37] Here I want to just quickly close by saying raising the problem for Curtis alive to number one.

[00:34:46] Often manipulated his subjects offered money when they wouldn't do it.

[00:34:50] He offered more money when they wouldn't do it.

[00:34:52] He offered more money still if you are from the dominant culture carrying a lot of money to a desperately poor people.

[00:35:00] At some point they are likely to agree even though they might not want to because the money becomes so gigantic in quantity that it's a year's salary or that it solves health problems etc.. So the everyone was using money to do this but he was not afraid to up the ante even when he could. He knew that there was an enormous resistance to what he wanted to do. He also played off informants against each other. He would say well if you don't want to tell me your origin story I know this person will go to him because I know that makes me more famous than you. And so he played people off against each other or if someone wouldn't tell him a sacred story he would say why no love story.

[00:35:40] Then he would give a deliberately garbled version of it and say No that's not how it happened and then he would take down the authentic story spied on people of all these people at times so those were pretty standard practices in his time but they don't sit so well with us do they.

[00:35:59] That's one. Number two we romanticize people showing number three.

[00:36:04] This is the one that bothers me.

[00:36:07] He trespass upon the sacred so you can take a picture of a TV and you can take a picture of a horse and you can take a picture of someone getting water at the well.

[00:36:16] But there are parts of Native American culture that were sacred and they were so sacred that they did not want Curtis or anyone else to be intruding into that zone and he would do whatever it took to do so sometimes with extremely damaging results. Go show any of the Apache having pulled out after a long badgering and finally told Curtis the origin story of the Apache came back three days later.

[00:36:41] So I shouldn't have done it. I had a dream that I will die young because I did it I betrayed my tradition I betrayed my tribe. Please give it back. Curtis refused came back to Seattle six months later shown it was dead.

[00:36:55] The one that bothers me even more is the man that sacred turtle. These are the Manda and Sacred Turtle photograph lives in my North Dakota. We should never have been photographed.

[00:37:06] The host of posts the post would never have them photographed.

[00:37:10] You worked hard at it for weeks to get from shaman to finally do it for him. He finally got to take the picture on the left like the turtles are covered with feathers and then he said you got to take another job.

[00:37:25] And the shaman reluctantly did so and they came out of the hot. After an hour of this twenty five armed men then were surrounding the pot and Curtis had to talk his way out of this situation which could have ended in his death.

[00:37:40] Certainly in his management of the tribe.

[00:37:42] Is it OK to shatter a very deeply held sacred tradition that ever OK to intrude in that way on something that private that no non man them had ever seen. Most men then that never seen certainly no Anglo had ever seen. And yet he made it possible from a purely anthropological view we're glad we have these photographs. But he shouted something and when you shot or something how bad things come about then you can go through the hurt of story and see a fair amount of that finally raw animals that we are vanishing from the earth.

[00:38:18] You all know this famous painting it's the first in the published version Curtis perpetuated the myth of the vanishing race.

[00:38:30] The idea was that at the time of Columbus there were tens of millions of native peoples in North America by 95.

[00:38:38] There were approximately 250 out many people vote for Grinnell Jackson very often.

[00:38:49] Richard Pratt. Theodore Roosevelt. Many people predicted that Native Americans would simply blink out.

[00:38:56] Either physically just disappear or culturally but they would be so completely absorbed into the dominant culture that they would effectively cease.

[00:39:08] This was a very widely held view it goes back to Thomas Jefferson and George Washington Maximilian and bomber had it in the 1930s Kaplan headed in the 1830. It certainly wasn't invented in this era.

[00:39:18] But it reached its apotheosis now. And here's the thing about it. Hey it didn't happen. Now those peoples are still here. Many of them on earth are part of a cultural recovery and restoration population growth. Some economic progress. That's number one.

[00:39:33] Number two we didn't have this myth until the conquest was complete or nearly complete. And once the conquest is complete then you have the luxury of nostalgia I think.

[00:39:44] The very thing you're just so ruthlessly presents a picture of Indians as a finished we know that that's simply not true. If you put Jefferson here or Roosevelt you're the number one surprise they would have the native peoples and not only that they have not been assimilated fully. They have kept their cultures allowed to keep them. They pay a price for it but they are not willing to say yield.

[00:40:11] This photograph actually was underexposed. That's why it's so dark.

[00:40:17] Red and gold leaf tone bring out what imagery there was.

[00:40:22] But the metaphor here Indians are leaving picking the way for what the more dominant culture finds another expression of James or prejudice under the frail going to hear later about the of the vanishing race. So city is Smith without a basis of cultural understanding of the city of

[00:40:53] Fantasy almost wishful thinking.

[00:40:56] That is not going to form of a problem but it might take away the person's point of view of the photograph.

[00:41:12] As you look at the photographs today and for the rest of your life I hope you will look at the data on trouble. You are a condemnation of Curtis what we should not ever look at them as a two dimensional after the photographs were made of life again. Way way

[00:41:45] Ok I want be conscious of time but I'd like to just make a little correction and apologies when I welcome you today. I welcome you and kill you but this is not the quibbling territory and I forgot to recognize that this is Coast Salish territory of the multiple Squamish and the unrecognized to almost people. So I just want to make that correction. I meant no disrespect.

[00:42:07] Yeah and so just so you know for the rest of today you will have sessions in this auditorium. There will also be some sessions up on level 4 that elevators right behind me and that will be in Room 1.

[00:42:20] Yeah you're free to move around.

[00:42:24] Welcome everyone. We're gonna go ahead and get started. My name's Valerie wonder and I'm the community engagement manager here at the library and I'm so pleased to be introducing Tim Gray heap and excuse me. Tim is a writer a researcher and photographer based in Seattle. He integrates his work to explore transitions in photography from 9th the 19th to the 21st century. His images have appeared in many publications and over the past 20 years his photos have been exhibited in public and private galleries across the country including the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of Natural History. Currently Tim devotes much of his time to researching and writing about photography. His initial research on funding for photography projects led him to develop the photo Fund's database a free searchable list of more than 2000 grants awards and crowdfunding campaigns for photography. He has been compiling a census Web site of all known sets of Edward S. Curtis's the North American Indian and invites viewers to contribute information. This is the first time any accounting of the existing sets have been done since the mid 1930s. We're very pleased to have him here today to share his talk on framing Edward Curtis please join me in welcoming him

[00:43:51] Thanks Valerie and thanks especially to Clay for that great introduction. I think you really set the tone for a lot of what we're going to be hearing you're talking about today. Clay began setting the tone for this beyond the frame symposium. I thought since we're here to talk about beyond the frame it might be good to ask this basic question what is a frame. And I believe the frame is different things to different people. And I put this right up here. One of Curtis's most famous photos. Canyon de Shea give us some examples about framing so for photographers I know there are a few in the room framed might be how we look at a picture. Or it might be how we want others to see a picture. Still for others a frame might be one place. Where is Canyon shape. What does it look like today.

[00:44:48] And can I go there that's the last one is yes it's a national monument managed in cooperation with another people. Still another frame might be what does this picture evoke. I feel when I look at that I get a sense of the sacredness of the place or the timelessness of this landscape where people who have lived in that place for thousands of years.

[00:45:16] There may be an entirely different frame. It could be one of the history the culture the experiences that have happened there many not so pleasant and the experiences that continue to happen there as their nation continues to move forward. And finally there's a frame of history Curtis took this picture in 1980 for what was going on around that turn of the century that was taking place and I think it's really important to try to put the context of history around Curtis's work the decade that ended the 19th century and the start of the 20th century had some of the most significant changes that ever took place in our history. Here's some examples. Society went from horse and carriage to automobiles and telegraphs to radio from oil lamps to electricity and train travel to the promise of light all four of those changes happened in the first five years of the 20th century so it might be easy to say if you're living at that time. Looking back at the 19th century the previous decade the previous 20 years and say boy that was a really distant history. That was really the past. Things are changing.

[00:46:41] The 20th century brings us progress that brings us technology that we never dreamed about we might be able would even fly. So that's the world that young Edward Curtis stepped into.

[00:46:55] This is a drawing of Seattle around the turn of the century. This is 22 year old Edward Curtis. When he first arrived here in Seattle he came with his father and they put a homestead together over the kids at Peninsula and Curtis came from the simplest of backgrounds we had what we might call today six years of elementary school education we had no real formal training in photography but he did have about a year's experiences in practice and a photography studio in Minnesota. We don't know what he was taught there but it was he was a teenager at the time but with that knowledge and that sort of he decided to mortgage the family homestead after his father passed away by a partnership and Rasmus Ruthie's studio here in Seattle and become a photographer question in my mind is how does this rather innocent looking young man within ten years time turn into this rakish adventurer that we see and this really is ten years or nine years even 1899 that he went from being tied up in photography to one of the most famous photographers in the world and more importantly I think in my mind is how did he go from taking portraits like this in his studio which he was well-known for.

[00:48:28] People would flock to his studio to get their portraits taken. But how do you go from portraits like that to portraits like this as part of the North American.

[00:48:40] We know that he didn't have much training in photography. So how did he learn how you learned to put together this amazing set called The North American Indian this picture is one of two sets that are here at Seattle Public Library. Thanks for the great leadership of Jodi Fenton and others here for protecting these assets for future generations but the North American Indian. If you've ever had a chance to look at them either in person or online the entire set has been digitized through northwestern university age through it on your own. But if you ever have a chance to look through it this is one of the conundrums one of those complex things that Clay talked about because even though there are some 22 hundred photographs throughout the books for every photograph there's two pages of text Curtis collected documentary evidence about biographies of the leaders of these nations of their histories their genealogies about the music about the ceremonies the dances. And it was a rigorously scientific examination of what was going on in those communities at that time and then there's Curtis's photographs. Which are artistic which are seemingly meant to evoke emotions and they're almost two separate entities in the same publication. In fact the photographs themselves are rarely referred to in the text. It's only about a half dozen times that Cruz mentions a specific photograph in the text. So you begin to wonder is what's going on. Why do we have on one hand this artistic expression of the photographer on the other hand is detailed ethno logical investigation and that's part of the complexity. We don't know exactly why he decided to make this combination. Maybe it was to get the funding to start it. Maybe it was because he was influenced by people like George Bird Grinnell or maybe it was because he just saw a larger purpose you wanted to record this life that he thought was vanishing at the time and this was the best way for him to do it. How did he learn to take these photographs that are so present in this publication. Here he is on the slopes of Mount Rainier.

[00:51:20] I can around with some of his photography gear and have to look and see well.

[00:51:28] How do you transfer himself from those sort of wilderness guide wilderness and backpacker wilderness photographer into the man who took these astounding photographs. Well we know that you read photography magazines of the time. These are some of the photography magazines you might have read and I put this one up there particularly just to show you the cat photos were popular even back then. But but in these pages of these magazines and others the main thing that Curtis read about was this. There was a movement and a trend in photography starting in the late 80s 90s and going up through the 1920s called pictorialism pictorialism was this approach that emphasized the beauty of subject matter rather than the documentation of reality. You can see in some of these examples that pictorialism photos are marked by sort of a fuzziness deep dark shading and lighting.

[00:52:30] People sort of staring off into the distance is as though they're contemplating their their reality and paternalism came about because for the first 40 years of photography people thought that it was this amazing new invention to record reality in more detail than any one else could do.

[00:52:55] We recorded more details and even painters or people who were great making great drawings but people wondered what was photography more than that and pictorialism came about as a result of photographers saying well perhaps if we put our stamp on the image if we manipulate the image slightly some way or other then we can be true be called true artist and beauty realism was all about the fight to say photography is an art so we know that Curtis was influenced by materialism especially by the man on the left there Alfred Stieglitz who is the leading proponent of pictorialism in America. These are some of his images and he not only took photographs he wrote extensively about it and promoted pictorialism and in fact 1905 at the great Lewis and Clark Centennial expedition in Portland Alfred Stieglitz and his colleague Edward Steichen and were asked to bring together some of the best pictorialist photographers in the nation. And in addition to themselves they selected 14 others including Edward Curtis Curtis was the only photographer west of Chicago to be included in this exposition and some of the other names there you might recognize if you know pictorialism is in this Clarence Clarence quite as to Casimir. Just you know these are some of the top photographers of the day who were selected by Stieglitz and Curtis was one of them nineteen 05 so we also know Curtis knew this man who went by the I had the wonderfully British name of Alfred. HORSLEY Hinton now hoarsely as wanted to be called

[00:54:54] Was the leading proponent of the toilet in England and he not only took amazing pictures he wrote extensively about it and horseman his main point around pictorialism was what he called this expressive sea in this landscape a sort of foreboding or moody looking clouds. The indefinite distances the stream wandering off into the distance. And he promoted more than anything else what he called the atmosphere. Picture we talked about the poetry and the beauty is due to the presence of this atmosphere so we know that Curtis knew personally Hinton's work because Curtis spent several months writing advice columns for local photographers here in Seattle and one of those columns he said that after looking at hoarsely Hinton's photograph. Any lover of pictures and tell them instantly OK and then he went on to write in a separate column sort of an echo of that that everyone's work show its individuality and you can almost see him taking his own advice here as we move forward with his career. He picked a style that was so pronounced that anyone back then and

certainly even today you can pick up a Curtis picture and pretty much you know it's a Curtis picture without ever having to look at a name. And he was also influenced by other photographers of the time not that he copied but he looked at the style.

[00:56:32] This pictorial style of the lighting and the shading the composition all of these things are important in how he wanted to move forward as a photographer. Not only did he learn from other pictorial list he learned from other photographers around him. This man Adolph Muir made dozens of portraits that were sold under the name of his boss Frank Rinehart. These are some of the pictures that he took which if you look at them closely I think there is a similarity in the style between some of Curtis's portraits and Senator Muir's portraits. And we don't know who influenced to him on some of this but we do know that when Curtis finally got the funding to go out in the field for the North American Indian project he Hauer hired Adolph Mueller to run his studio and to do the printing for most of the images that he took out in the field. Another man that Curtis looked at was Frank LaRoche who is a Seattle photographer here versus not as well known but he took studio portraits of many of the Northwest native people and in 1899 Curtis was looking for a new studio space. He moved into the empty studio that had just been vacated by Frank Laroche.

[00:57:52] So another influence that might have been there is Curtis's famous picture of Princess Angelina on the left is Frank LaRoche his picture taken two years earlier. Some might argue that LA Roche's picture is actually a better picture of Princess Angel. At least she looks a bit friendlier there or not as sad but I think the important thing is that there were dozens of pictures of Princess Angela just a few examples every photographer in Seattle wanted to get her picture. People would travel through Seattle stop and get this iconic photographs of this iconic woman and yet today we remember princess and join as photographed by Curtis more than anyone else. I think partly that's because of this pictorial style captured this expressive pensive look of hers. This mood ahead is this artistry to it that other photographs just don't quite ever reach this. So going back to our friend HORSLEY You not only took pictures as you said he wrote about them and you wrote this manual which was widely used by photographers a time practical instructions in the application of photography to artistic ends.

[00:59:18] So this is published around nineteen hundred and in it he gave no instructions on how to take photos not just the technical aspects but what it meant to be a photographer trying to practice pictorialism trying to create art with your photographs. These are some of the chapters that are in this book about the means to the end how to give expressions to a picture and controlling the formation of the picture or its pictorial effect and then toward the end he wrote this chapter of my favorite fidelity to nature and justifiable and true justifiable untruth. I mean that's a phrase right out of today's headlines and yet it was something he applied to Pictorial Photography in the idea that it is fine for photographers to perhaps exaggerate or emphasize something or to suppress something that was not quite as important in a photograph. I bring this up because of this image which many people were familiar with. This is in Volume 6 and a peak in lodges is one of the large plates and in book 6 there is a slightly different version that the same photograph. One of the few times that Curtis used most of the same scene in both the books and the plate most people were familiar that the controversy around these is why these are really interesting scenes of the ceremonial objects the original native the negatives that we know included this object which was an alarm clock. And some people have

argued that Curtis purposely removed the alarm clock because it was a sign of modernism and he didn't want the modernism to be part of his photographs show he wanted to show the old way of ending life at the time well the problem with that is if you look over at the man on the left he's wearing a very contemporary modern trade cloth shirt.

[01:01:32] And in fact the historian Moon Zamir has looked at all of the photographs in the North American Indian and he's found that at least a quarter of the photographs show some sign of modern life including clothing modern houses and other objects in the photos and in volume twelve Curtis included this photo showing someone in clothing from about 30 to 40 years earlier with modern clothing so there's a beer makes the point that if Curtis was trying to hide my during these photos he did a really poor job of it and you wrote this about not the particular photograph but about the peak in that he said saying they didn't confine their ceremonies to a fixed time place but they were constantly in the act of replicating the then.

[01:02:35] That's again his colorful language which you couldn't get away with today.

[01:02:39] But I think in that mindset of pictorial lives and romanticism of the time suffocating the infinite meant something to Curtis in terms of this particular picture because in the picture are peace pipes and other ceremonial objects that did have almost an infinite sense of history to it.

[01:03:02] The clock did not so we don't know exactly why he took the photo the clock out of the photo there's no written documentation one way or another but it's possible he took it out because it was a sign of modernism.

[01:03:19] I think it's also possible that he took it out simply because it was an object that represented a finite sense of time in something he thought should represent the infinite something to consider. It's my opinion. Others may find some other way of thinking about it. But going back to Mr. Hinton this is sort of his last word on this subject which is back the question as he calls it about who's to be the judge about whether a departure from the absolute truth is or is not inferior to the degree to which the aesthetic senses.

[01:04:00] Here's another example was the less dramatic one. But many people have seen this wonderful portrait in Volume 2 Princeton University library holds the proof set of photographs were all volume one and volume two. And on the left is this rarely seen proof of the same image. And if you look at it closely you see there looks like there's a lot of dust on the original image but in fact it's not dust. It's snow herders use tents that had opening up above to let the light in it was cold when you took this photograph and it was snowing so there is this fairly distracting in his eye. Snow coming down through the photo when he wrote at the bottom of this cut out the snow again it's that aesthetic sense that he was trying to put forth in his pictures. And this is just one way that he did it. I wish we had more notes to his other photos so we'd have a better sense of what he was really trying to get at. But I think that is authentic appeal to him was paramount and every single photograph that he took. There are some other examples of how he experimented with aesthetics. This is a famous photo a photo of the Zuni governor and this is an experimental print that he made

using a brush strokes which are very common in pictorial photography. He also experimented in just how to print it on an image. What did it look like if you use different techniques is for different techniques all used to print the same image so he wasn't he was always looking for that next way of expressing this is static appeal in his image.

[01:05:50] Now this doesn't mean that Curtis didn't also pose photographs as he certainly did with the one at Crater Lake. We know that he paid people to re-enact ceremonies to re-enact battles to pose for him. We know that he had took certain clothing around with him and ask people to use the clothing over and over again. So he's not without criticism certainly the lengths at which he went to an aesthetic appeal to his photograph. But part of the reason he was able to go to these links is because photographers have been active on Native lands since 1860. By the time Curtis got there camera photographers photography equipment we're very familiar. And most native lands. So and in fact there's a there's growing amounts of writing and documentation showing that not only where native people were used to the cameras being around but they began to manipulate photographers for their own purposes. I love this picture. This is the great Apache leader Geronimo 1904. He was asked to come to the St. Lewis World's Fair one of many expositions of that time. News asked to be there as quote unquote an attraction which meant essentially he would pose. People would take photos of him and he decided OK I would do that for about a week.

[01:07:26] That was his plan to go there and get somebody and why not. But then this is what happened. He stayed there six months.

[01:07:35] He said he made more money than he ever earned in his life at that time. I'm centrally manipulating the market. At the end of six months you walked away with about two hundred and fifty dollars which is in today's money. In 2018 money is about seventy five hundred dollars. So for him he wasn't just a tool to be used. He was lining his own pockets. That being said now moved to some of the native photographers who were active at the same time as Curtis. This man is one of the truly underrated photographers out there Richard Throttle was an adopted Crow grew up as his mother is half Cree lived in Montana on the Crow reservation and had his own photography studio in Billings. He went on in his life later to become a two time state representative in the Montana state legislature but also took these amazing portraits some some hundreds of them in a style that is somewhat reminiscent of Chris Curtis. And in fact we know that in 2007 Curtis and Thor also met on the reservation and they exchanged stories about photography and about some of the people on the reservation. I think if you look at these images you can see a bit of a similarity in that direct sort of stare of people between Curtis's work and throttles where there's a debate that's ongoing about who might have influenced whom some of these kind of portraits were taken after Curtis was there.

[01:09:17] But some were taken before he came as well. I think there might have been an exchange of the interest between this native photographer who is now rarely known compared to Curtis certainly but who also had this beautiful style of photography also because of his familiarity with his people and being living and living there on the reservation was also able to capture these more spontaneous moments that Curtis lacked because he mostly used staged group scenes in his scene in his photography another photographer who I really like as Benjamin how Dane whose mission

China and Southeast Alaska. And he's shown here in his own studio there in this small village and met in a catalog. And while he is surrounded there mostly by the markings of photography and of Western civilization if you look closely his arm is resting on the model of a totem pole at the very bottom of it. There is a representation of the Wolf clan which was his house. So he brought into this photo even though he was adapted to Western style clothing he brought. And part of this history to this photo and not only was a great photographer. He was a great musician as well. He was the organist for the local church choir. And here he is on the right

[01:10:49] Back there.

[01:10:51] He is on the right as the director of the metal Catholic concert band multi talented guy and again he took these portraits in his studio more formalized than throttle certainly. But this shows him kind people as they were in their village at that time. This was no pretending to go back in history but he also was able to capture a bit of their life that they wanted to live by going around to pot latches and the image is a scene over in British Columbia where pot latches had already been outlawed by that time and so he risk a great deal to go photograph some of these secret pock ledges that took place and he continued at the same time to take photos of families around metal Katla is a great collection of his work at the museum in Juneau and finally there's this woman Jenny Ross Cobb who is identified by many people as the first Native American woman photographer and she started taking photos when she was 15 of her classmates at the Cherokee Female Seminary where she went to school as well. Her photos represent a different style photography. There's more. They're more like what we consider snapshots of today they're a bit sort of off center. They're informal there's no posing. And she took these pictures around town there of her classmates all Cherokee women young women dressed in the fashions of the time. But she also had this style of things just a little bit off center that captures our eye. So I think even though she was young she was not had any formal training. There's some real charmer photographs and finally there's this man Parker McKenzie who is Kiowa who also took some photographs at the Phoenix boarding school where he went to school as well. And again you see this informality of people posing in the clothing that was popular at the time and I could go on. I wish I could go on actually because there's more being found out about native photographers at the time every year.

[01:13:19] But in the interest of sort of moving forward I do want to talk about some non-native photographers as well.

[01:13:28] This concludes part 1. Listen to part two for the conclusion of this podcast

[01:13:37] This podcast was presented by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.