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The native as image: art history, nationalism, and decolonizing aesthetics

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Chapter 1

Reading the Last Image and Beyond

"History" in America is a part of nostalgia, and nostalgia is a disease deriving not from loss but from a vacuum.
—Jimmie Durham (1993 200-201)

Photographs made by indigenous makers are the documentation of our sovereignty, both politically and spiritually.
—Jolene Rickard (1995 54)

In his essay titled "Ghost in the Machine," Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) muses about the Native appropriation of two related technologies: guns and cameras. He notes that the camera, as much as the gun, has been used as a weapon to subjugate American Indians. He writes that, as a result: "Exploration of the cutting-edge theoretical issues that photography presents is one of our traditions. Each of us has complex relationships with photography, and each knows it. That relationship is one of culture, of history, of politics" (7).

The connection Smith makes between the gun and the camera was one that Susan Sontag had explored in terms of the similarities in the vocabulary used for both technologies: "[W]e talk about 'loading' and 'aiming' a camera, about 'shooting' a film" (14). There is no doubt that the camera continues to yield much power; the critical difference today is who is doing the shooting.

In this chapter, I explore the uses of photography in the development of the image of the Native as a foundational figure in the production of the United States as a nation-state. In particular, I look at the aesthetic strategies used to produce a nostalgic vision of the vanished Native in order to contrast that view with Native-produced images that invite a different sort of nostalgic reading. My analysis begins with a discussion of the vast oeuvre of Edward Curtis as a case study of the production of a nationalist photographic archive whose purpose was to record, for the posterity of the nation, the vanishing of the American In-

dian. I will follow my discussion of the ideological implications of these nationalist nostalgic aesthetic practices by analyzing the work of contemporary Native artists whose own aesthetic strategies also result in the production of nostalgia. In their case, however, I identify works that maintain notions of community based on the production of a recuperative nostalgia, a nostalgia invoked in order to regain histories erased by the workings of colonialism.

A Nationalist Photographic Archive

I would like to begin by considering Foucault's notion of the archive, which he describes as:

> that which . . . defines at the outset <u>the system of its enunciability</u>. . . . Far from being that which unifies everything that has been said in the great confused murmur of a discourse, far from being only that which ensures that we exist in the midst of preserved discourse, it is that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration. (1972 129)

What Foucault is pointing out here is that the archive is not an innocent and incomprehensible accumulation of data, not merely a collection of evidence compiled in order to reinforce pre-existing truths. Rather, the archive is itself a practice that regulates, while at the same time being configured by, its discursive productions. My emphasis on Foucault's notion of the archive concerns his insistence on the archive as practice, as a performative process rather than a static geographically situated object.

The archive as practice is neither finite nor hermetic; it is, instead, a process of collecting, discarding, and organizing whose internal logic is constantly transformed as its parameters are reestablished. The process of adding to or omitting from its contents affects the various discourses constituted by it while, in turn, discursive practices directly affect the composition of the archive. In other words, there is a symbiotic relationship between an archive and its discourses. What I am describing here is akin to the relationship between text and context outlined by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson in their essay titled "Semiotics and Art History." Part of their analysis of the role of semiotics within art history includes an

examination of the relationship between the work of art (text) and its historical setting (context). They question the process of interpreting a work of art merely by setting it within a presumably established historical context. As they emphasize: "It cannot be assumed that 'context' has the status of a given or of a simple or natural ground upon which to base interpretation" (Bal and Bryson 177). Bal and Bryson establish the text/context relationship as being without hierarchy, both occurring simultaneously. So, too, can we consider the archive/discourse dyad to be as if two sides of the same coin—as an archive contributes to and legitimates the production of discourses, those discourses work to substantiate and cohere the archive.

In considering Curtis's project as a nationalist archival practice, it is helpful to locate it within the wider scope of U.S. nation building occurring at the end of the nineteenth century. In his analysis of the historical archive that constitutes the history of the United States, Michael Kammen explores the various strategies at play in the constant (re)production of this history. He stresses the malleability of historical accounts, for, as he states, "societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind—manipulating the past in order to mold the present" (1991 3). His own account posits a framework in which the tales that make up the historical archive of the U.S. oscillate from those fables told at times by traditionalists wishing to maintain the status quo and those stories told in the interest of promoting change and reform in the name of democracy. He is particularly interested in locating a period in which the opposition between traditional conservatism and democratic change are brought together to produce a uniquely nationalist project, one that narrates these two practices into one: the tradition of American democracy. Kammen's overall task in the book is to identify "when and how . . . the United Sates became a land of the past, a culture with a discernible memory" (7).

Although he discusses various nationalist impulses, often with competing interests, there is a period he identifies between 1870 and 1915 that is of particular interest for my purposes here. It is during this time that the U.S. turns away from setting the origin of its traditions within a European historical horizon and turns in-

ward in search of its autochthonous roots. This drive to inscribe the nation within a discernibly homegrown past requires that Native America function explicitly as the proper site of the nation's origin, and of its pre-destined future, its manifest destiny. This is a period in which the Indigenous past is appropriated as America's own, a time when manifestations of a Native presence were often forced into the past and made to function as the ancient ruins of a uniquely American Arcadia.

In addition to the re-invention of the nation's past, the process of constructing this imagined community required the public performance of remembering, which took the form of communal commemorations of the newly produced past. It is at the end of the nineteenth century that many nationalist traditions still observed today were invented in order to cohere the nation with a common memory. For example, the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was instituted in 1892. It was first used in public schools on October 12, Columbus Day, which also became a national holiday that same year. Flag Day was instituted the following year (Kammen 1991181).

In addition to these highly symbolic sets of nationalist practices, there was also a literal incorporation of the nation through a rapid process of geographic expansion. During a period of about thirteen years, nine states became part of the union: North and South Dakota, Washington (1889), Idaho, Wyoming (1890), Utah (1896), Oklahoma (1907), New Mexico, and Arizona (1912), becoming the thirty-ninth through forty-eighth states of the union. This extensive expansion, along with the meditated production of a national memory, coincides with the campaign to solve the "Indian problem," the elimination of the presence of Native Americans, which was perceived as an obvious obstacle to the growth of the nation.

It is also during this period expansion that efforts to cohere America that state endorsed institutions such as schools and museums are established as sites of communal engagement. Large metropolitan museums were founded during this time in order to represent a national narrative supported by vast archives, which were systematically collected, organized, and presented to the public. The major museums established during this time include the Metropolitan Mu-

seum of Art in New York, which opened in 1870, the American Museum of Natural History, founded in 1869, the Boston Museum of Fine Art in 1870, and the Chicago Art Institute in 1879.

While I will discuss the role of the museum in negotiating the Native as image more fully in chapter four, at this point I want to mention briefly the role of the museum in the grand project of re-imaging the United States as a popular site where civic performances took place. As Carol Duncan describes in her study of museums as sites for the enactment of civic rituals, the art museum is established at this time "as a ritual that makes visible the ideals of a republic state, frames the "public" it claims to serve, and dramatizes the unity of the nation" (1995 48).

Similarly, Susan Scheckel has paid particular attention to the ways in which the figure of the American Indian circulated through popular literature at this transitional moment. She notes that while the ways the image of the American Indian circulated through this literature helped to narrate the origins of the emerging nation-sate, these attempts were "inevitably undermined by the fact that living Indians remained to challenge the narratives by which they were relegated to a place in the history of a nation not their own" (39). Thus, it was the presence of real Indians that countered the facile nationalist narratives predicated on producing nostalgia for the vanished Indian.

Photography also becomes a practice that begins to address the public in the popular vernacular of nation. In American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture, Shawn Michelle Smith studies the ways in which scientific and commercial photography converge in contributing to the production ideal American racial, gender, and class subjectivities. She argues that the production of a massive archive of photographic types was integral to the production of middle-class identity in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. She specifically identifies the photographic representations of the body as constituting a photographic archive that "generated and maintained essentialized discourses of interior character, and trained observers on how to read the body for signs of knowable interiority"(4).

Her work builds on the seminal essay "The Body and the Archive" by Allan

Sekula in which he examines the ways photography worked to essentialize bodies visually encoded as deviant and criminal through the archiving practices of state surveillance. Both Smith and Sekula focus on the process of essentializing the body that photography invites, particularly because of its claims to indexically, rather than symbolically, represent the body. Sekula mentions the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, the late nineteenth-century philosopher, in distinguishing between these two kinds of sings. "To the extent that photographs are 'effects of the radiation from the object,' they are indexical signs, as are all signs which register a physical trace. Symbols, on the other hand, signify by virtue of conventions and rules" (55). The distinction between an invented image—the subjective product of artistic creativity and skill—and one that registers a subject's physical trace—perceived as the mechanical recording of a camera—ensured the reifying function of photography.

The photographic archive has been used not only in efforts to concretize race, gender, class, and deviance but also to provide a fixed visual form to the representation of history. Like Smith and Sekula, Alan Trachtenberg has critically engaged photography produced during this period in order to unsettle predetermined readings of this archive as a representation of history itself. In his analysis of "the image as history," he suggests, instead, an approach that assesses the practice of photography, like that of writing history, as an effort to "seek a balance between 'reproduction and construction,' between passive surrender to the facts and active reshaping of them into a coherent picture or story" (xiv). He advocates a reading of photographs as reflections as well as projections of history. "[T]he history they show is inseparable from the history they enact" (xvi).

These studies highlight the many consequences of the deployment the photographic archive as history, particularly for the regulation of subjects as visual signs. However, this vast accumulation of images produced at the turn of the twentieth century has been not only the site of production and dissemination of prescribed subjectivities within the project of nation building; it also becomes a site of resistance and contestation. And these oppositional practices have taken various forms, from the production and inclusion of alternative imagery to reassessments of the discursive contextualization of these archival practices.

Renegotiating the photographic archive has required changing the strategies and methodologies developed for conducting this economy of images. I am invoking market terminology here because of the ways in which images are given value by means of transactions across and within institutional settings. As a photographic image is exchanged throughout various sites—within academia, in the museum, through mass media—its value is reassessed—as scientific proof, as aesthetic object, as popular icon.

A characteristic of photographs that allows for this exchange is their relative equivalence as objects. Sekula begins his essay by quoting Oliver Wendell Holmes who likens photographs to paper money: "there must be arranged a comprehensive system of exchanges, so that there might grow up something like a universal currency of these banknotes, or promises to pay in solid substance, which the sun has engraved for the great Bank of Nature" (3). Sekula elaborates that: "the archive is a vast substitution set, providing for a relation of general equivalence between images" (17). Photographs, therefore, can be perceived as functioning like tokens that facilitate the transference of value from one institutional site to another.

Contemporary cultural critics, such as Trachtenberg, Sekula, and Smith, have attempted to trace the valuation of images by historicizing their discursive flow across these various sites. These kinds of historiographical projects allow an analysis of value that highlights the ways in which visuality itself is valorized. It is within this economy of the photographic archive at the turn of the twentieth century that I would like to consider the work of Edward Curtis.

Curtis's photographic production holds a prominent place in the history of the imaging of Native America. It constitutes a massive archive, not only because of the large number of photographs—over forty thousand images taken over a span of more than twenty years and covering most major Native groups in the contiguous United States and Alaska—and their vast proliferation, but also because of the various discourses his work and images continue to generate.[12]

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[12] Some notable critical assessments of Curtis's oeuvre include: Lyman, The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions; Faris, "The Vanishing Race: Edward Curtis," in Navajo and Photography; and Gidley, Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian, Incorporated.

These discourses range from examinations of Native cultures as foundational of the U.S as a nation-state to methodological and disciplinary discussions of photography as historical documentation. In terms of the former, Alan Trachtenberg has describes the role of Curtis's project in the production of U.S. nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century:

> At a time of major changes in America's ethnic and demographic composition, a time when melting pot reigned as the most persuasive figure for neutralizing differences and achieving national oneness, Curtis set about to assimilate "the North American Indian" not by acculturation—the method of the allotment policy and the boarding school—but just the opposite: by preserving differences as a beauty lost forever, the spectral beauty of national origins. (2004 171)

Trachtenberg emphasizes Curtis's intended audience; his images of "beauty lost forever" were not works of propaganda primarily addressed to a Native population in order to persuade them to leave their indigenous ways of life for a more "American" code of civility. Instead, these were meant to function as images of the other against which a fairly heterogeneous population of settlers could cohere.

In his study of Curtis's production of The North American Indian project, Mick Gidley has outlined its ideological implications. He describes the work as part of the cultural production that reflected and advocated the nation's western expansion under the leadership of wealthy entrepreneurs. As Gidley notes:

> The richest man in the world [J.P. Morgan] was its chief patron; its other primary subscribers encompassed not only government figures like [Gifford] Pinchot [chief of the U.S. Forest Service] and the Canadian governor-general, but also railroad entrepreneurs such as [E.H.] Harriman and Henry Huntington, several bankers with western investments, men with western mining and property interests, Andrew Carnegie and a variety of other prominent industrialists, and numerous others who were undoubtedly members of "a controlling entrepreneurial group"; and significant establishment scientists joined [Charles Doolittle] Walcott of the Smithsonian in giving support, including George Byron Gordon of the University of Penn-

sylvania Museum, for instance, and F.W. Putnam of Harvard. (1998 42)

But whether Curtis's work continues to be examined for its ideological content or its aesthetic form—a disingenuous distinction—it is imperative that the discursive scope of this oeuvre be supplemented by the work of Native artists and scholars who endeavor to decolonize this vast archive—an endeavor that is the focus of this study.[13]
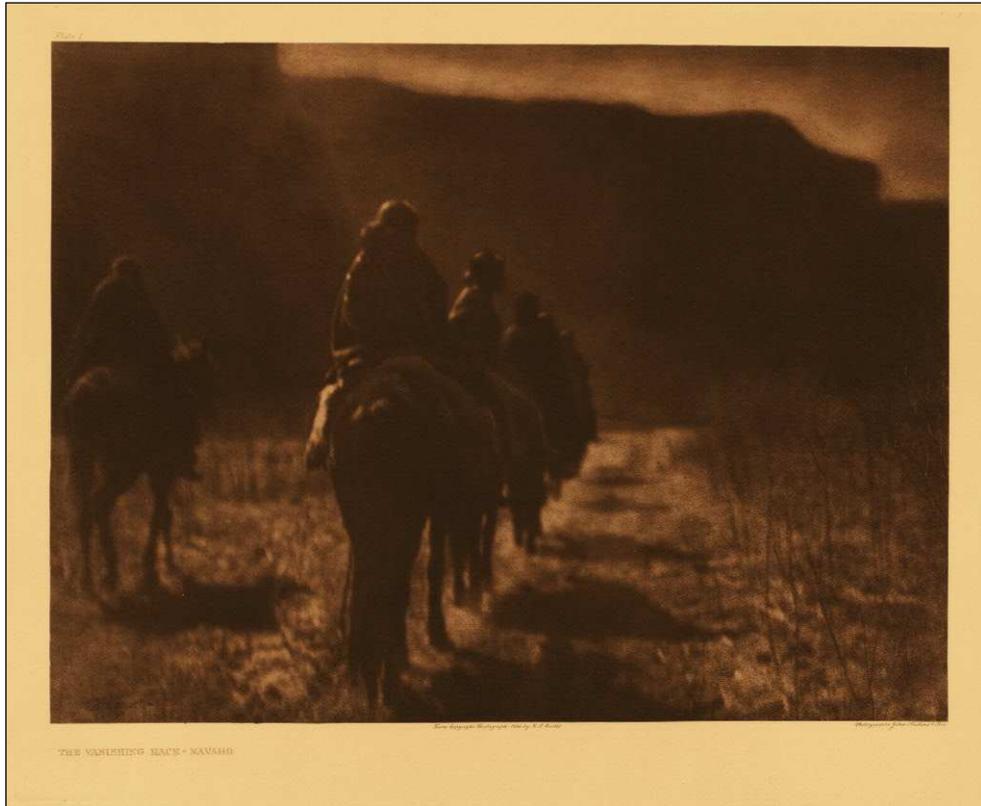
Figure 3. Edward S. Curtis, <u>Vanishing Race - Navaho</u>, sepia photogravure, 1907.

Visualizing the Beginning and the End

A paradigmatic image of Curtis's project is <u>Vanishing Race - Navaho</u>, a lament of the disappearance of Native Americans and their cultures (Figure 3). The pho-

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[13] For a critical approach to the photography of the other produced during this period in the name of anthropology, see Edwards, <u>Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920</u>. Also see the special edition of the <u>American Indian Culture and Research Journal</u> 20:3 (1996) titled "The Shadowcatcher: The Uses of Native American Photography."

tograph shows a straight line of Natives on horseback, their backs to the viewer, riding off into a dark and ominous landscape. It is an impressionistic image exemplary of the pictorialist style of Curtis's oeuvre. This happens to be the first image of Curtis's The North American Indian, a monumental project whose main goal was to salvage the visible vestiges of peoples whose demise was seen as inevitable. As Curtis stated in the foreword to the first volume: "The passing of every old man or woman means the passing of some tradition, some knowledge of sacred rites possessed by no other . . ." (1907 vol. 1 foreword). It was a common vision of Native Americans from a late nineteenth-century scientific perspective.[14]

The proclamation of the impending demise of America's indigenous populations was not meant to claim the end of Native cultures—after all, Curtis's twenty-year salvage project would not have been possible without the continued presence of the Native—but instead anxiously anticipated what was thought to be an inevitable and necessary outcome of colonization. The urgent need for this form of declaration was well understood by Curtis and his contemporaries. The desire to find a solution to the "Indian problem" led to a range of approaches, from isolating and confining Natives to reservations, to culturally assimilating them through enforced educational programs, to genocidal efforts to eliminate them altogether. These efforts were, to a great extent, brutally effective. Nonetheless, it was clear to many, especially Curtis who had such intimate contact with a vast number of Native communities, that despite the many violent efforts to eliminate and assimilate them, American Indians continued to survive. They were not, however, the Indians most Euro-Americans would have wanted to recognize; they were neither the innocent, pre-contact Natives who embodied the notion of the "noble savage," nor the fully assimilated Western subjects, unable to pose a threat to the coherence of the nation.[15]

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[14] For a discussion of the concept of salvage anthropology, see Dominguez, "Of Other Peoples."

[15] An irony of the production of this photograph is that the original negative was underexposed, making it too dark to be legible. The image was made to re-appear through darkroom manipulation, thus, saving an already vanished image (Curtis Graybill and Boesen 82).

In contrast to Curtis's project, which featured the romanticized last vestiges of Native cultures, there are a number of photographs produced at this time that offer the image of the contemporary Indian: the fully assimilated Native. These are images taken at boarding schools, which are often found in pairs depicting the "before" and "after "moments of the transition from primitive to modernized Native, images that elide the violence of the process.

Perhaps the most effective approach toward cultural assimilation was the development of the boarding school system designed as part of the "civilizing mission" to indoctrinate Natives to a Western mode of living in the world. The violence of this forced acculturation operated at every level of life at the schools, including linguistic, behavioral, and spiritual. It culminated in an effort to destroy all traces of Native traditions from students' lives—a system to extinguish all Native epistemologies.[16]

The disciplining of the students is most visibly manifested on their bodies; they were made a spectacle immediately upon entry to many of these institutions. At the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, established in 1875 as a model for other Indian boarding schools, Native children were often photographed upon entering the school and again shortly thereafter when most of the visual signifiers of their identity as Natives (such as their clothing and hair) had been forcibly removed. An example of this pairing of photographs—a concise narrative showing the beginning and end of the assimilation project—is identified as being taken by John Nicholas Choate and described as depicting a "group of Chiricahua Apache children upon arrival to the Carlisle School from Fort Ma-


For a thorough analysis of the trope of the vanishing Indian see Dippie (The Vanishing American). For a more recent study of extinction discourses, which described the demise of native cultures as an inevitable and evolutionary process, see Brantlinger.

For a historical perspective on the genocide of Native American, see Stannard (American Holocaust) and Churchill (A Little Matter of Genocide).

[16] For an overview of the native boarding school system, see Adams, Education for Extinction. The Cumberland County Historical Society maintains a website dedicated to serving descendants of former students of the school at http://www.carlisleindianschool.org. The site also lists a comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources on the Carlisle School.

rion, Florida, November 4, 1886" (left) and the same group two months later after their racial transformation (right) (Figure 4). These "before and after" images compress the story of the long and complicated process of assimilation enforced by these institutions to an abbreviated "beginning and end," effectively avoiding representing the actual transition itself. The retraining at these institutions took much longer than the short lapse of two months covered by these pictures and often involved extensive reconditioning of not only outward appearances but also a complete reconfiguration of the worldview of these children.[17]
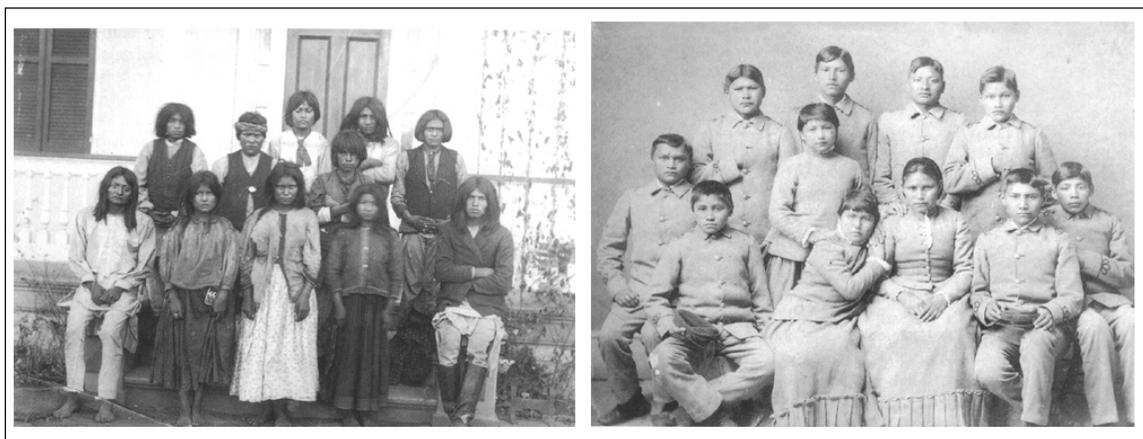
Figure 4. John Nicholas Choate, Group of Chiricahua Apache children upon arrival to the Carlisle School from Fort Marion, Florida, November 4, 1886 (left) and the same group two months later after being forced to alter their appearances (right).

The focus of these photographs is, then, on changes most readily visible on the surface of the body. The group of students in the left image stands outdoors, each child individualized by dress, hairstyle, and, to a certain extent, their posture. In the later image, these markers of individual identity have been eliminated and replaced by the uniformed clothing, short hair, and artificial poses imposed by the school. Another significant difference is that the group is now shown indoors; they have been relocated to an interior space, thus illustrating

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[17] John Tagg has discussed instances of this early use of the "before and after" for purposes of fundraising ("A Means of Surveillance").

For an analysis of the ways in which these images were produced and disseminated, see Malmsheimer, "Imitation White Man."

their "domestication." These images function as spectacles, as dramatic displays of the state's power to discipline Native bodies. They graphically depict the philosophy espoused by Richard H. Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian School. Pratt struggled to promote an approach to education for Native Americans that would allow them to become "useful citizens" by removing them from their communities at a young age so that "under continuous training . . . [they may] acquire our civilization in the environment of civilization" (Dippie 1982 119). After the Civil War, the U.S. government policy for addressing the "Indian Problem" turned from campaigns of extermination, segregation, and relocation to efforts that emphasized assimilation (77). Pratt notes the shift away from a policy of racial extinction to cultural extinction when he reaffirms: "There is no good Indian but a dead Indian. Let us by education and patient effort kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Dippie 1992 136).[18]

In addition to the various strategies employed to systematically eliminate Native Americans, there were many others that were meant to eliminate their ability to exercise their sovereignty. Many of these were acts of legislation that limited or eliminated not only the possibilities for Native nations to preserve their culture but also curtailed their access to their land base and traditional forms of government. Even their ability to engage the U.S. in government-to-government negotiations had been diminished by the refusal of the U.S. to observe the many treaties it entered into with many Native nations.[19]

Ironically enough, as Native people were being stripped of their traditional garments and their customary hairstyles, these same markers of Native identity were being appropriated by many non-Natives in their efforts to incorporate Native Americans within a national narrative. Significantly, these embodiments were

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[18] For a study of photographic archives available on the internet that depict the disciplinary function of Indian boarding schools, see Margolis, "Looking at Discipline, Looking at Labour."

For an overview of Pratt's approach see chapter eight, "He Can Be Saved: Agriculture and Education," in Dippie, The Vanishing American.

[19] For an overview of the legal production of Native America, see Deloria, Jr. and Lytle, The Nations Within.

a form of performative mimicry. There have been many studies of Native American representation that emphasize the appropriation of Native imagery by non-Natives, primarily within popular media, and often focusing on the stereotypes produced within cinema. However, Philip Deloria's <u>Playing Indian</u> is a study that emphasizes the performative appropriation of Native identity in more civically inscribed settings. Deloria analyzes the formation since the American Revolution of clubs and societies, such as the Camp Fire Girls and early incarnations of the Boys Scouts, in which non-Natives played out their fantasies of Native identity. As he explains: "[M]any people played Indian as a way of imagining new American identities, meaningful in relation to the successful Revolution, the emerging market economy, and the new governments and political parties busy consolidating and distributing power across the landscape" (1998 49). The process of performing these "new American identities" was an act of eliding contemporary Native identities, which, in turn, was justified by pronouncements of their disappearance. As Deloria notes, "popular American imagery . . . eventually produced the full-blown ideology of the vanishing Indian, which proclaimed it foreordained that less advanced societies should disappear in the presence of those more advanced" (64). Deloria quotes Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story's speech from 1828 to illustrate the attitudes that would intensify under Andrew Jackson's removal policies and culminate in the articulation of the doctrine of manifest destiny:

> By a law of nature, they seem destined to a slow but sure extinction. Everywhere, at the approach of the white man, they fade away. We hear the rustling of their footsteps, like that of the withered leaves of autumn, and they are gone forever. They pass mournfully by us, and they return no more. (64)

Story's speech not only invokes the kind of imagery that Curtis would later vividly produce—this excerpt could easily function as a caption for Curtis's <u>Vanishing Race</u>—it also points to a presence not explicitly pictured in the photograph, that of the colonizer. The agent responsible for the Native's vanishing lies outside the frame, conveniently cropped from the narrative. The elimination of the colonizer leaves the Native as merely disappearing "by a law of nature," and, by implica-

tion, bringing about their own end, becoming tragic figures resigned to riding in-to the darkness, toward the end of their history.

The process of visually representing the demise of Native Americans was essential to their subjugation, which, in turn, was critical to the production of the nation-state imagined by Euro-Americans. According to this vision, the historical origins of the United States needed to be set on a proper foundation, one that severed its ties to Europe while firmly planting its roots on "American" soil. To con-tinue the metaphor, it was a method of planting that required a clearing of the land; the new nation-state required the removal of all vestiges of other existing nations. Ironically, Natives could not completely disappear; their presence was necessary for producing a national myth of origin, the sort of national prehistory that Curtis's project compellingly illustrates. What needed to be elided, as in the boarding school pictures, was the representation—historical, literary, visual—of the genocidal campaigns since contact. [20]

And yet, the phenomenological presence of the photographic print, not only the result but the essential final element of a process involving an intricate technological apparatus for capturing and reproducing images, should give the viewer a sense of the photographer's presence. How can someone looking at an image whose physical dimensions and appearance are the focus of their gaze forget the significance of the photographic print itself? Nonetheless, as adept readers of photographs we have trained ourselves to ignore the distrac-tions offered by this medium, to read the content beyond the form. In fact fight-ing against these distractions often heightens our perception of reality. Like the scratches we sometimes see when viewing a film, we look beyond the disrup-tions of the medium and focus on the diegetic content. Of course, the metalep-tic contiguity of print-camera-photographer is easily conceived but, nonetheless, we tend to defer this analysis for the sake of content. Thus, in many ways the medium of photography and the practices of reading that we have developed

[20] For some recent titles dealing with popular culture imagery of Native Americans, see Bird, Dressing in Feathers; Huhndorf, Going Native; Churchill, Fantasies of the Master Race; Kilpatrick, Celluloid Indians; Singer, Wiping the War Paint Off the Lens; Deloria, Indians in Unexpected Places.

for viewing these images serve as excellent means of obscuring the manipulative qualities of photography. The camera requires that the photographer always be beyond the frame.
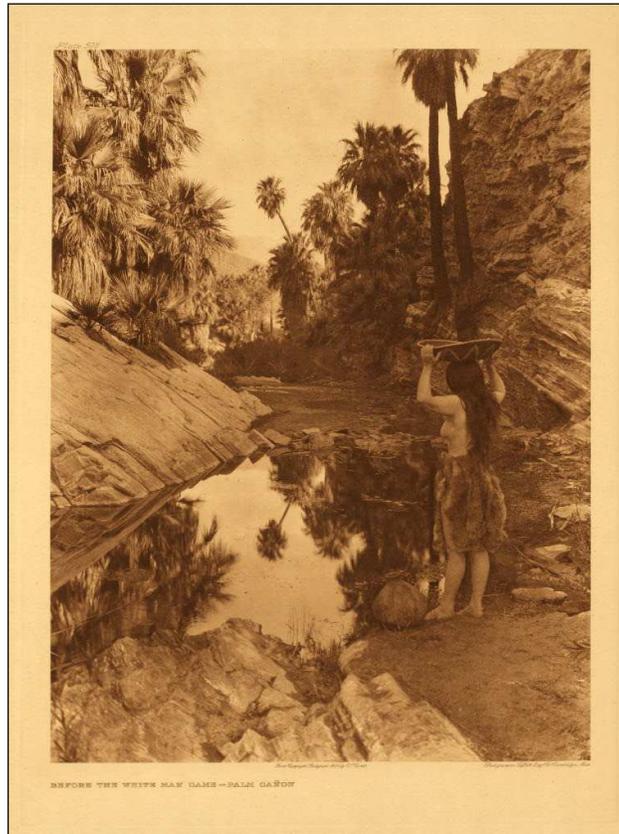
Figure 5. Edward S. Curtis, <u>Before the White Man Came - Palm Cañon</u>, from <u>The North American Indian; v.15</u>, 1907.

An image from Curtis's oeuvre that illustrates the suspension of disbelief he depended on from his readers is a highly theatrical scene titled <u>Before the White Man Came</u> (Figure 5). The photograph features a seminude Native woman wearing a fur skirt with a basket on her head, which she supports with both hands, and a jug at her feet She is seen at the edge of a water hole sheltered within a rocky oasis, which, despite the anachronism of Curtis's identification as Palm Cañon, is meant to conjure ideas of a pristine landscape, a Garden of Eden. Her pose is awkward and difficult to decipher. She has a basket on her head and at her feet lies a jug. Has she just arrived? If so, what is she doing with

an empty basket on her head? It is possible that Curtis posed her to resemble classical Greek statuary. The most enigmatic aspect of her pose, however, is that she stands with her back to us, indicating that all along she has been unaware of our presence. The viewer is forced to adopt Curtis's voyeuristic gaze, the gaze of "the white man" who captures first sight of the Native subject in a most artificial diegetic space, a tableau set outside history. This is the moment preceding the encounter, an eternal moment that allows full access to the natural Native—the Native in her essential, unadulterated original state. In terms of the production of a nostalgic past, this is the paradigmatic ontological Native state impossible to retrieve, except, of course, by means of a photograph.

I will return to a discussion of the nostalgia invoked by this image. For the moment, I would like to consider Curtis's presence beyond the frame. If we stood at the other end of the pond in the image, we would see, in addition to the Native model, Curtis, his equipment, an assistant or two, as well as the whole scene reflected on the surface of the pond—a view quite unlike that found in the image. The absence of Curtis's presence within these photographs is understandable. If we take his photographs as ethnographic documents, then the scientific requirement for objectivity of the time—an objectivity that within the visual field takes the form of the omniscient eye—would have justified, if not required, his absence. And it is the photographic apparatus that reifies the source of this disembodied scientific gaze in the form of the resulting photograph print. As with the position of the voyeur, whose line of vision precludes the inclusion of his or her own body in the field of vision, the position of the visual anthropologist is one that remains hidden beyond the picture's frame.

When this fiction is disrupted, when the trace of the photographer's presence is found—and there is always a trace to be found—the ruptured monologue about the other is immediately legible as a dialogue, as a second-person address to you, the viewer. The act of reading the image becomes an intimate exchange between you and the photographer, an engagement that conspires to determine, to some extent, the meaning of the other's image.

Bal discusses this dynamic in her chapter titled "A Postcard from the Edge," in Double Exposures, in which she analyzes examples of work by cultural

critics who, in their attempts to criticize the colonial gaze, end up re-inscribing the patriarchal position they work hard to undo. She discusses publications by contemporary anthropologists who fail to be fully self-critical when they gratuitously illustrate their work with images that reproduce the colonial practices of offering up the Native female body for colonial consumption, the same practices of dissemination and exhibition they set out to critique.

Figure 6. Detail showing photographer's shadow, from image reproduced by Raymond Corbey, <u>Wildheid en beschaving: de Europese verbeelding van Afrika</u>. Baarn: Ambo, 1989, 160, reproduced in Bal, <u>Double Exposures</u>, 219.

One example used by Bal is a postcard featuring a young African woman depicted standing in the center of her village, almost completely nude. The image is representative of a vast archive of a genre of postcards featuring images of nude women who come to stand in for ethnic types. These were particularly plentiful during the period of nineteenth century imperialism when European travelers sent them home as souvenirs. Because of the ways in which these postcards were circulated—as the public and yet pornographic trafficking of images of women considered exotic and, therefore, available for objectification and commodification—these images have become significant for anthropologists. They feature not only telling images but also preserve revealing text on the reverse, candidly written by tourists often commenting on their encounter with the exotic other.

For Bal, however, it is the current circulation of these postcards within contemporary anthropological texts that is the focus of her analysis. Among the critics she takes to task for failing to be self-reflective enough about the exploitation of these images is Raymond Corbey, the curator and author of the catalogue for

an exhibition titled "The Colonial Imagination: Africa in Postcards," both of which were meant to critically assess the colonial gaze recorded by these images. What Bal notes, however, is Corbey's failure to look closely enough for the presence of both the colonial gaze and the return of that gaze by the women featured in the postcards. It is his failure to take enough of a self-critical stance to see beyond his moralizing critique; he is too quick to put the blame "on the absent other of the scholar, the third person, the photographer or buyer of the postcards. The scholar is not to blame; on the contrary, he ought to be praised for denouncing the abuse" (Bal 1996 197).

In his haste to take this righteous critical stance, Corbey overlooks the ways in which the voyeuristic gaze these kinds of postcards elicit is disrupted in this particular image. The dark shadow of a man in a plinth helmet, possibly the photographer or his assistant, is clearly visible at the bottom of the image. (In fact, This shadow not only marks the presence of the holder of the omniscient colonial gaze, it also points to the place of the photographer, which is the same place reserved for the viewer (Figure 6).[21] Thus, the perception of this shadow also inculcates the viewer who must decide whether to share this dominating gaze or to disrupt, as Bal does, its intended framing. She describes this image as a "failed" picture, both in the sense of the failure of the colonizer to claim an objective, scientific gaze and in its failure as an illustration within the contemporary critic's expository text. The image fails both in its original intended function and in its exposition as a citation within a contemporary text.

Returning to Curtis's impossible image of pre-contact idyllic Native life, we find no shadow, no hint of the photographer's presence within the frame of the picture. However, the photographic print itself, as phenomenological marker of the presence of the photographic apparatus, metaleptically points to the author of the image and, thus, reveals the fiction of the deigetic space offered within the image. The ruse of this image—to provide a pre-contact, and pre-

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[21] I have cropped the image here in order to cite the pertinent detail of the image and to avoid the problem of citation as exposition outlined by Bal. As with any quoted textual passage, the reader should refer to the fully contextualized image found in Bal, Double Exposures, 219.

photography, photograph—of course depends on the viewer's collusion in reading past this most obvious marker of modernity.

It would appear that the inclusion of this kind of image would disrupt the overall archival narrative of historical documentation provided by Curtis. Instead, this picture, along with other similar images included in the project, tends to extend the documentary function of photography back beyond Curtis's present so that even the overtly fictionalized scenes stand as truthful documentation. These incongruous images become part of the project's overall scientific narrative voice.

I started my discussion of Curtis's work with the first picture of his encyclopedic project of recording Native Americans—which was meant to provide the last glimpse of the vanishing Indians—and have also examined an contradictory image before contact in order to consider the ideological implications of the production of this archive at the turn of the twentieth century. While these images gained, and continue to hold, their authority because of their function as scientific documents, as visual ethnographic records, I would now like to turn my analysis to their reception as objects within the discourses of aesthetics. While their political value is somewhat explicit when considering their role within anthropology, their ideological force when discussing their place within the history of art is not always readily apparent.

Pictorialism and the Aesthetics of Nostalgia

The inclusion of images such as <u>Before the White Man Came</u> within Curtis's project should not imply that his images are all ahistorical. In terms of their value as historical documents, Curtis's archive is fairly heterogeneous. It includes many images of individuals who stand in for cultural "types," as well as fully identified portraits and various genre scenes. Although the inconsistency of the project may appear to take away from its value as a historical archive, the oeuvre itself documents the conflation between the production of stereotypes and the representations of historical figures.

Despite the fact that Curtis's project is inconsistent in terms of its representation of Native history, aesthetically it is a homogeneous body of work. All the

images were printed using the process of photogravure and were reproduced using sepia ink. The tint produced by this ink, a rich rust color that allows for a broad range in tonal variations, connotes the fading that occurs through oxidation. The aging suggested by sepia is not unlike that of a patina, a layering that attests to the preciousness of the object it begins to replace. The oxidation process that often enhances the value of an object, a process akin to the reification of its aura, is in effect a process that, ironically, eventually destroys the object through corrosion.[22]

The nostalgia produced by the use of sepia tones within Curtis's project resonates with the ideological nostalgia of the nation's yearning for the vanishing Indian. Aesthetically, the use of sepia to invoke nostalgia is a strategy that also fits within the avant-garde approaches developed by pictorialist photographers eager to legitimize their process as high art and not just simply a mechanical reproduction of the everyday visual field. John Tagg describes the anxiety felt by pictorialists "who sought, by recourse to special printing techniques imitating the effects of drawing or etching, to reinstate the 'aura' of the image and distinguish their work aesthetically from that of commercial and amateur photographers" (1988 56).

As far as the composition of the images is concerned, Curtis's experience as a studio portraitist is evident in the way he poses many of his subjects. His interior images are carefully arranged and lighted to focus on the face, often set against a stark and dark background with no other cultural references than those worn by the sitter. His outdoor scenes often feature groups in carefully staged scenes set against dramatic landscapes, conveying his sense of the theatrical. Despite their apparent function as ethnographic photographs, it is important to keep in mind that their success was also due to their aesthetic qualities as pictorial images.[23]

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[22] For a discussion of patina as an index of value, see McCracken. Also see Appadurai's discussion of patina as a marker of value, Modernity at Large,75-79.

[23] For a further discussion of Curtis as a pictorialist, see Fleming and Luskey, Grand Endeavors of American Indian Photography,and Hauser,"Edward S. Curtis's Nostalgic Vanishing of the American Indian." I am grateful to Nora-Naranjo Morse for bringing this catalogue to my attention and for providing me with a copy.

To understand fully the aesthetics of Curtis's work, it is helpful to remember that, in addition to Stieglitz, Curtis's contemporaries include Gertrude Käsebier, Imogen Cunningham, Lewis Hine, and Darius Kinsey. In many ways, the place occupied by Curtis's images, somewhere between the fact declared by ethnography and the fiction of art, between truth and beauty, was the space staked out for pictorialism.[24] It is this place that Alan Trachtenberg, in writing about Curtis's Native American project, describes as the "marriage between science and art" (204 174). In 1899, eight years before the publication of the first volume of Curtis's series, Alfred Stieglitz used this same polarity to discuss the function of the pictorial aesthetic. In an article titled "Pictorial Photography," Stieglitz declared the end of thinking about art photography as the "bastard of science and art, hampered and held back by the one, denied and ridiculed by the other" (117).[25] Instead, he advocates an appreciation for the range of possibilities the medium allows and insists that the reader consider "that the photographic apparatus, lens, camera, plate, etc., are pliant tools and not mechanical tyrants . . . [and thus] the photographer, like the painter, has to depend upon his observation of and feeling for nature in the production of a picture" (119). Stieglitz is adamant about legitimizing photography as an art that, like painting, allows the artist to interpret an individual vision of the world.

A comparison of Curtis's work to that of Gertrude Käsebier allows insights into many of the differences in their approach to picturing Native subjects, differences that permit more complicated readings of the visual production of nostalgia at the turn of the century.

Although Curtis made extreme efforts to travel to his subjects in order to capture their images in situ, in their "authentic" place, Käsebier mostly worked out of her New York City studio. Curtis brought his images of Natives from their

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[24] For an argument to consider Curtis's work as belonging to what she describes as a "nativist movement," see Egan,"Yet in a Primitive Condition.'" She describes the nativist movement as "based on the idea that America possessed characteristics exclusively its own and ought to resist any aspect of foreignness in its imagined identity as a cohesive nation" (62).

[25] For an overview of the history of pictorialism, see Bunnell.

settings to a consumer who most likely was an urban dweller and whose geo-graphic distance from the photographed subjects worked to reinforce a sense of temporal discontinuity. Käsebier's images, on the other hand, not only offered up visions of Natives in a contemporary urban setting, she featured them in the inti-mate interior of her studio.[26]

Figure 7. Gertrude Käsebier, <u>Willie Spotted Horse</u>, gelatin silver print, c. 1900.

Käsebier established a relationship with a troupe of Sioux performers who visited her studio from about 1898 to 1912 while they were in New York as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Company. Elizabeth Hutchinson has examined this body of work in order to consider it in terms of the challenges faced by a female artist at the end of the nineteenth century. She argues that "Käsebier's interest in Native Americans was linked to women's complex exploration of economic, sexual, ar-tistic, and social empowerment at the turn of the century" (2002 43). In Käsebier's case, her aesthetic production at times was aligned politically with her advoca-cy for social reform. In fact, Hutchinson states that Käsebier corresponded with

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[26] For a study of women photographers engaged in recording Native life at the turn of the twentieth century see Bernardin, et al., <u>Trading Gazes</u>.

Richard Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian School discussed above, whose policies were perceived as education reform by many (65).

As with Curtis's images, these photographs tend to fall into two categories: the generic type, as in The Red Man, (Figure 8) or portraits of specifically identified individuals, such as that of Willie Spotted Horse (Figure 7). The latter picture is a portrait of one of the children of the Sioux troupe who stands awkwardly in full regalia, including a war bonnet, his hands posed stiffly with his elbow resting on a chair. The image is a bit blurry; the extreme depth of field was meant to have allowed the face to be in sharp focus but, unfortunately, the image is slightly out of focus, which gives the boy's eyes a glassy stare contributing to his overall sullen appearance. In her biography of Käsebier, Barbara Michaels describes this image as "perhaps her consummate photograph of a Native American. . . . Sorrowful, static and self-contained, he is the antithesis of Käsebier's typical child subjects who delight in exploring a receptive world" (36). This is a sentimental image of a young boy all alone and full of pathos. It is unlike most of her images of white middle-class children, whom she often depicted as carefully tended to by their mothers.[27] However, it may be difficult to conclude what Käsebier may have intended with this image. Like most of the other images of her Native visitors, it was not offered for sale and was seldom exhibited.

An exception to her reluctance to circulate publicly these Native images is The Red Man, which was included in many publications and most of her major exhibitions. It is an enigmatic image of the head of a dark-skinned man wrapped in a blanket, with only the eyes, nose, mouth, and what is probably an earring visible. The image is so closely cropped so that the dark background is only barely visible at the upper corners of the image. The lack of space makes for an intimate exchange with a face that looks directly at the viewer with an expression that can be read as a smile or a grimace, or both. There is no clue as to his identity, no indication of a personal or cultural profile, and while the figure is identified as male there is ambiguity about the gender as well. In many ways, this image is

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[27] Michaels describes how the relationship between mother and child that Käsebier often depicted reflected her interests in various education reform movements, such as the kindergarten movement founded by Friedrich Froebel (82).

a paradigmatic photographic representation of the "exotic other" that was a popular type fantasized by many studio photographers at the turn of the century, a stereotype of a spectral figure that can be read as representing the generic subject of imperialism, the Indigenous other.
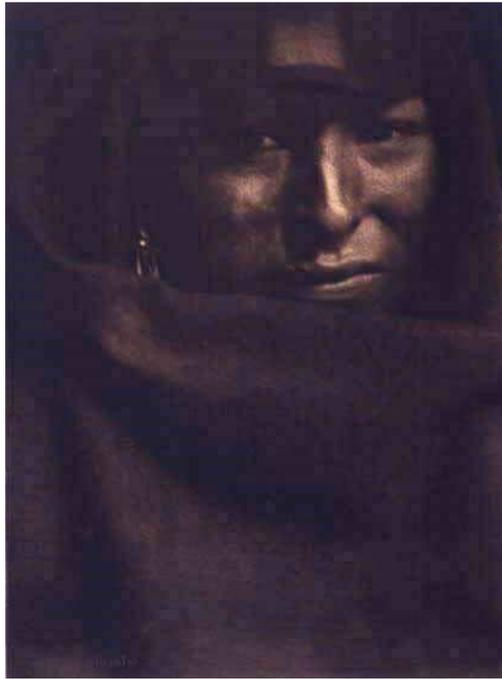
Figure 8. Gertrude Käsebier, <u>The Red Man</u>, gelatin silver print, c. 1900.

In terms of its formal qualities, <u>The Red Man</u> is an excellent example of the kinds of images championed by the Photo-Secessionists, a group of pictorialist photographers formed by Stieglitz in 1902. The group's aim was to promote the breaking away from the formal conventions of photography. As Stieglitz declared, they were seceding from "the accepted idea of what constitutes a photograph" (Michaels 1992 87). <u>The Red Man</u> was included in the first Photo-Secession exhibition held that year and became a signature work for Käsebier (70).

In addition to the portrait and the type, there is a third category of Native images produced by Käsebier—the contemporary and intimate interior scene (Figure 9). Hutchinson discusses this group at length, emphasizing the ways in which these indoor scenes feature Käsebier's studio, a workspace that, although

intimate, was not the domestic space typically associated with women's work. Instead, Käsebier shows the space of the studio as a professional, minimally decorated workplace; the appropriate site for the production of modern art (47-51).

Figure 9. Gertrude Käsebier, <u>Untitled (</u>Group of Native performers) ca. 1898. Platinum print, 6" x 6".

It is the modernity of these images—the depiction of contemporary Natives contextualized within the contemporary setting of a photographic studio—that I want to emphasize here. Hutchinson focuses on the reception of these images by Käsebier's contemporaries by noting that "the visibility of the studio in some of Käsebier's pictures makes the viewer aware that these models are engaged in a modern pursuit—posing for a photographer—in a contemporary space—a Manhattan artist's studio" (47). These are not images that convey the sort of nationalist nostalgic gaze so prominent in Curtis's oeuvre. There are no artificial backdrops or awkward props of theatrical spectacle. While their regalia were most likely used during their performances for the Wild West show—itself an extremely nostalgic depiction of the vanishing frontier lifestyle—the space inhabited by this group of Native Americans and the poses they take are explicitly contemporary.

      It is precisely the way these photographs have captured Native subjects

inhabiting modernity that today allows us the possibility of a different kind of nostalgic reading—a nostalgia predicated on the loss of contemporaneity. In other words, viewers today can see in these photos Native subjects who simultaneously inhabit the space of the photographer, a coevalness often denied Native subjects within the anthropological gaze. Käsebier's studio images, unlike the field images of Curtis or the "before and after" images from the Carlisle School, provide a glimpse of contemporary Native subjects comfortably occupying the space of modernity at the turn of the twentieth century. Käsebier's images are the result of a studio visit by a group of Native performers on tour through New York City. Today's viewer is left yearning for more images depicting such views. The scarcity of these types of representation increase the preciousness of these rare scenes.

The lack of this type of representation within the photographic record has led many Native artists today to pursue the reclamation of the "presentness" of Native subjects within the history of photography. The sight of Natives in candid poses comfortably lounging within an urban interior setting are rare representations. But, it is precisely the rarity of this type of image that can provide an account for today's production of images that supplement this colonial photographic archive. Although many studio images, such as those produced in Washington D.C. during visits by tribal dignitaries, do exist, there are far too few photographic images produced during this period that depict the Native as an agent within, rather than a product of, modernity.[28] Today, there are Native artists who are producing images that compensate for this lack, images that supplement the archive in such a way as to allow for the Native subject to exist in the past's present. I will discuss examples of this work later. At this point, I will return to Käsebier's images and continue to examine how her work has been assessed by recent scholars in order to consider the complexity of her gaze as found in these photographs.

The purposes for which Käsebier produced these images are not clear,

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[28] A sampling of studio photographs taken at the studio of James E. McClees in Washington, D.C. in the late nineteenth century are reproduced in the photo essay "Theatre of Diplomacy" (Alison 90-101).

but, in her biography of the artist, Barbara Michaels explains Käsebier's attraction for this group of Native performers as the result of "nostalgia for the Plains Indians she had known as a child in Colorado" (1992 29). Although she seldom exhibited or sold these images, she reproduced some of them along with articles published in photography and women's journals (Hutchinson 46). It is obvious that she thought of these as forming a special category of images. Hutchinson suggests that Käsebier's gender had something to do with why she produced this very different group of images. She states that "the experience by middle-class women of social marginalization and disempowerment may have led to greater empathy in their treatment of 'others'" (62). It is obvious that Käsebier was quite able to address the patriarchal marginalization imposed on women at the time, partly due to her strong sense of independence, as well as to her elite social and financial independence (Michaels13).

Laura Wexler explores a different aspect of the relationship between gender and domesticity that contributed to the production of these images. Her study of late-nineteenth-century women photographers, titled <u>Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism</u>, considers how the domestic images women produced during the time contributed to the project of empire building. She argues that their work denied "the structural consequences of slavery, colonization, industrialization, and forced assimilation" (9). Wexler devotes a chapter to Käsebier and pays particular attention to the Sioux images. She analyzes Käsebier's relationship to her subjects as a case study that furthers her argument that opportunities gained by women photographers at the end of the nineteenth century were not necessarily the result of their genius but, instead, because "their particular ways of employing the camera strengthened both the fantasies of white cultural superiority and the realities of white male domination that infused late-nineteenth-century family life" (207).

One of the incidents Wexler recounts to illustrate Käsebier's complicated role within U.S. hegemony questions the claims of her empathetic relationship to her Native subjects. Wexler quotes from an article published in <u>Everybody's Magazine</u>, which described the photographer's first encounter with the Sioux and the "special friendship" she developed that allowed her intimate access to

her subjects, particularly the children:

> From the standpoint of rarity, the children's pictures are by all odds the most valuable, for there is a most lively superstition, on the part of the Sioux at least, that to paint or photograph a child will bring about its death. Only by reason of special friendship was it possible to picture the children, and even with this aid it took three years before they could be persuaded to bring little Mary Lone Bear to the photographer. (204) [29]

Tragically, the child died approximately six weeks after her image had been captured. Käsebier's recorded response is her quip that "When the photographer next appeared, the mothers fairly ran from her with their children" (205). Her flippant disregard for the Sioux prohibition against the visual representation of children as "a lively superstition" and her inability to comprehend the possible consequences of its transgression point to a paradigmatic incommensurability between Western and some non-Western understandings of the power of visual representation. It marks the limit of conceptualizing the possible effects of image production that was prevalent during the time, and that continues today.

I will return to a discussion of the power of an image to injure and/or de-sacralize its subject in the next chapter, but pertinent to my current discussion here is how Wexler interprets this incident in light of Käsebier's vast representation of children. It is this anecdote that Wexler uses to claim that "Käsebier's own savagery is exposed by this incident. Domestic sentiment did not extend intact across racial lines" (205). The preciousness with which Käsebier imbued her images of white childhood did not apply, according to Wexler, to her images of Native children.

Käsebier treatment of her Sioux subjects provides an interesting contrast to Curtis's work. She produced images of contemporary Native people playfully inhabiting her Manhattan studio while Curtis is in the field supposedly capturing Native people in their authentic space, and in a time removed from the here and now of consumers of these images. Nostalgia is relevant to the reading of

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[29] Although this article was published anonymously, Wexler convincingly argues that Käsebier was most likely the author (316 note 22).

both artists' works. However, these are different sorts of nostalgia. The nostalgia elicited by Käsebier is one that is most legible today, and most likely by a Native viewer. It is a yearning for more of the kind of representation that allows Native subjects at the turn of the twentieth century the agency to negotiate the present on their own terms. We could call this a nostalgia for coevalness.

On the other hand, Curtis's nostalgia can be described as an <u>instant nostalgia</u>, to use Nanna Verhoeff's term. In her analysis of the development of the Western as a film genre, she describes instant nostalgia as a means of offering "the present-ness of the past as a consolation for its loss" (151). It is an approach to representing the past as still existing in, and constituent of the present—a readymade present. Verhoeff describes instant nostalgia as a necessary response to the forces of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century.

> Where the present is in crisis, the recent past whose loss partly accounts
> for that crisis can be invoked, absorbed, and integrated within the
> present. Thus the break that modernity threatened to cause in the tem-
> poral continuum, without which no culture can be at ease, could be re-
> medied by this particular kind of nostalgia. (149)

For Curtis, the only possible present available for Native Americans is that of their past, no matter how imagined. In terms of both content—images of "unadulterated" Native cultures—and form—a pictorialist aesthetic that emphasized austere compositions and dramatic lighting—Curtis's images exude instant nostalgia.

In fact, a photograph's frozen moment is always already perceived to be in the past. In that sense, photography is intrinsically nostalgic. And it is their ability to negotiate that past—reified in the form of the photographic print—that lends photographs such authority. Curtis's past is often too far in the past; it is a dislocated, disjointed past. And it is these questions of the role of nostalgia within modernity that beg for an analysis of the role of photography and its use in the representation of history, as well as the lack, and at times impossibility, of representation. Having considered Curtis's archive as both an ethnographic and aesthetic project, I will now discuss his project in terms of historiography, as a form of historical writing. I am particularly interested in thinking about what is illegible of

this history in order to consider the possibility of a traumatic reading for these images.

Cultural theorist Ulrich Baer has explored the ways in which photography has served in modeling how we construct history. His Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma is a study of traumatic photographs, images that "can visually stage experiences that would otherwise remain forgotten because they were never fully lived" (2). This is a helpful lens with which to read not only Curtis's disjointed project, but all those instances in the photographic archive in which the Native image is not fully legible as part of a coherent historical narrative of the West. By considering the psychoanalytical description of the function of trauma, we can better understand those images that fail the nationalist narrative promoted by Curtis's oeuvre, those photographs that appear enigmatic within the otherwise apparently coherent archive.

Baer begins his discussion by describing two different, although not necessarily incompatible, views of history. One model, which he identifies with the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, is that notion of history that perceives time as continuously flowing, a babbling stream of contiguous narratives. The other model Baer offers is one based on Democritus, another ancient Greek philosopher whose ideas of history posited a fragmented image of time as discrete moments that behave more like independent drops rather than a stream. Baer notes that the advent of photography coincides with the emerging perception of modernity as a state based on ruptured, segmented, and, thus, shocking instances of time. The photograph, then, becomes analogous to this Democritean view of history in which every event is "random, contingent, and remains potentially separate from any other" (5). Therefore, according to Baer, the emergence of modernity brings about a transition from thinking about history as a continuous stream of narrative to history as an accumulation of fragmented moments. But, as I mentioned, these are not incompatible models: drops come together to form a stream.[30]

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[30] Baer quotes photography theorist Vilém Flusser, who states, "The two world views [of Heraclitus and Democritus] do not contradict one another since rain is a thin river, and a river is dense rain" (5).

While photographs can be seen as fragments that shatter the historical flow—"it is the shutter that fragments the world"—there is, at the same time, a tendency to put these separate pieces back together in order to tell stories, to construct history (5). For Baer, it important to set up these two models of history in order to talk about photographs that do not register in either sense, neither as independent moments nor within the broader context of a narrative. However, these photographic representations that escape narration, what Baer describes as traumatic photographs, are not devoid of meaning. They contain the potential for signification. As he puts it, "photography can provide special access to experiences that have remained unremembered yet cannot be forgotten" (7).

The fact that an image exists does not necessarily guarantee that its meaning will be readily accessible. The meaning of a traumatic image is illegible, deferred until the significance of the moment represented is realized. Baer's discussion is an attempt to look at photographs that demonstrate the emergence—for the first time—long after the image has been produced, of meaning that is historically significant. It is an approach to making sense of those images that have never been integrated into a contextualized narrative. He emphasizes that "such images stage not the return of the real but its first appearance . . ." (12). Therefore, given the vast number of images in the Native photographic archive that fail to signify an immediate meaning, we can anticipate numerous opportunities for the traumatic emergence of Indigenous histories.

In terms of the ethnographic images produced by Curtis, these photographs function not as representations of historical events per se but as archived indexical records of disparate moments gathered and bound into a massive twenty-volume master narrative of the demise of Native Americans. At first glance, Curtis's images do not promise the potential for uncovering any traumatic meaning. Many of his images are portraits set against minimal background or posed scenes that contribute to his great story of lament. However, while these photographs offer the viewer numerous scenes that testify to Curtis's firsthand witnessing of what he interpreted as the disappearing Native, these can also be considered records of the kind of witnessing described by Baer. For him, the act of bearing witness "initially consists in the mere registration of an event without

understanding it." The recording of a photographic image does not guarantee a fixed meaning, or, for that matter, any meaning at all. A later stage in the under-standing of photographs is the act of testimony, which places the witnessed events into a comprehendible narrative (19). The gap between these two events—the witnessing and its testimonial narrative— is a traumatic gap, which in Curtis's work is elided. The witnessing recorded in his archive was produced fol-lowing an already scripted testimony; the narrative preceded its photographic representation. Curtis metaleptically fits his images into his story in order to illu-strate the vanishing of the American Indian.

Nonetheless, I would argue that trauma still inhabits these images, not so much because of what they reveal but for what they continue to conceal. And it is a concealment performed in plain sight, before—and with the complicity of—the viewer. As long as we continue to read these images as complementary to Curtis's chronicle of the death of the Native and the birth of a nation, we will miss what else these photographs may have captured. Baer describes this ap-proach to reading images in his discussion of Holocaust photographs as "an act of bearing witness—which initially consists in the mere registration of an event without understanding it—into an act of testimony that recognizes the Holocaust as a crisis of witnessing itself" (19). Similarly, Curtis's photographs provide us with an opportunity to participate in a process of witnessing the genocidal campaign against Native Americans at the end of the turn of the twentieth century that lead to alternative testimonial accounts of history. [31]

By severing moments from what is often seen as the diachronic flow of time, photographs also become convenient tokens for negotiating histories. As Susan Sontag puts it, photographs "turn the past into a consumable object" (68). We must keep in mind that, although Curtis and his supporters may have thought of the project as an ethnographic survey, the result was a product that was transacted as a commodity. Wealthy investors, who included Theodore Roose-velt and J.P. Morgan, provided substantial support to an enterprise that lasted

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[31] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have discussed the Holocaust as marking "a crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnessed in the given categories of history itself" (xviii).

thirty years and resulted in the production of twenty volumes, which were sold as subscriptions. The primary consumers were libraries and about 270 individuals, who Trachtenberg has described as "a small but telling portion of America's ruling class" (174). Curtis's volumes operated in ways similar to the kinds of consumerism ascribed to more popular modes of consumption, modes that interpellated consumers as subjects who, through their transactions, literary bought into the notion of nationhood.

This commercialization is similar to the kind of consumption that anthropologist Robert Foster has described as being part of the process of making and maintaining the nation. As part of his analysis of the processes of nation making in Papua New Guinea, he notes the "use of commodity consumption and commercial media in defining and promoting political community and collective identity in national (and sometimes transnational) terms" (2002 1-2). However, whereas Foster writes about a mode of consumption that is inclusive of most members of the nation, in this instance, Curtis's images were produced for and sponsored by an elite class of consumers, those whose purchasing power is reflective of their substantial interests in replicating the means of production.

The nationalist implications of this commodification also involved academic elitism. Early in the project, Curtis's academic credentials, which did not go beyond grammar school, were challenged by Franz Boas, who at the time was considered the most prominent anthropologist in the U.S. Theodore Roosevelt, who had heartily endorsed Curtis's project, gathered a committee to pass judgment on the academic validity of the project, which it quickly approved (Curtis Graybill and Boesen 28). The anxiety revealed by this incident points to the processes by which Curtis's project had become part of a national archive in the making. It points to the relationship between the commodification of knowledge production and the legitimization of the nation. [32]

In the following chapter I will focus on examining how the legacy of Cur-

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[32] Boas was the first professor of anthropology at Columbia University and had been the curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History. On Boas's role in the professional development of anthropology, see Stocking, A Franz Boas Reader.

tis's contributions to these nation-making efforts continue to affect Native communities today. I will pay particular attention to analyzing the art of contemporary Native artists who work with, against, around, and through Curtis's archive. I am particularly interested in the artwork by Marcus Amerman, whose mimicry enhances, and, thus, supersedes, Curtis's original images. I will also look at the work of Larry McNeil, whose trickster attitude involves the development of aesthetics approaches based on his Native community's own iconographical traditions. I also examine the work of Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, whose approach involves salvaging images, recovering them from disparate sites in order to recreate her own archive of Native imagery. All three artists are involved in producing a nostalgic desire through their work, a nostalgia that helps to recover lost pasts.