

Beyond Illustration *Illuminations of the Photographic "Frontier"*

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PHOTOGRAPHS promise a luminous doorway into history, but only through systematic contextual interpretation will riches be excavated. Like other primary resources, such as personal diaries or letters, photographs require systematic analysis to reveal full their potential. Consider Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's historical interpretation of the life and labor of an eighteenth-century midwife derived from Martha Ballard's diary. Ballard's diary seemed so spare that earlier researchers failed to detect its value.¹ Yet Thatcher Ulrich artfully teased out myriad intersecting social histories, relationships, characters, maps, criminal acts, and interpersonal antagonisms.

So too photographs. As Shawn Michelle Smith recently noted in her analysis of 363 photographs assembled by W. E. B Du Bois in albums for the American Negro Exhibit at the Paris exposition in 1900, contemporary understanding of historical photographs proves difficult. Their social and cultural significance, while self-evident to viewers of the original era, has been obscured by the passage of time, place, and shifting cultural conditions. Researchers necessarily reconstruct the circumstances of the photograph's time and production in order to "make the image comprehensible again for a contemporary audience, to recover their lost meaning, and to revitalize them," and, in the case of the Georgia albums analyzed by Smith, to make Du Bois's race-based cultural criticism intelligible.² Du Bois's hand in assembling the images in the album was purposeful, Smith proposed, serving as an effective counter archive to the oppressive classificatory race taxonomies of his time.

Thus, without careful interpretation, photographic sources, like diaries, can appear superficial or sketchy. This essay offers interpretive guidelines for historians who want to use photographs more effectively as primary sources in their teaching and research. Initially one must spend extended time studying all within the frame of the photograph, and, subsequently, learn to trust your trained eye in detecting what the photograph has to offer. A series of basic questions might be pursued in order to assemble a dossier of information about the photograph that reveals deeper significance. The basic questions include:

Who is looking?

For what purpose was the photograph produced at what Roland Barthes calls the "point of transmission"?³

What, in your estimate, might have been the intent of the photographer, or subject, in taking the image?

Has the meaning, or intention, changed as the photograph has circulated among users and over time?

This essay considers three genres of photographs — landscape, portraiture, and images of "Indian life." I draw on my research on photography in the Pacific Northwest to demonstrate an interpretative method useful for researchers, teachers, and students alike. Theories and methods from an interdisciplinary array of scholars, including Roland Barthes, John Collier, Catherine A. Lutz, Jane L. Collins, Martha Sandweiss, Shawn Michelle Smith, Joanna Scherer, and Geoffrey Batchen, among others, inform my views.⁴

Always keep in mind this fundamental practice: Never assume photographs are a literal illustration of what they represent. In other words, recall the specific context of the photograph's production and the audience who consumes it (for whatever purpose). As Barthes reflected, the photograph is "not only perceived, received, it is read, connected more or less consciously by the public that consumes it to a tradition stock of signs . . . gestures, attitudes, expressions, colors or effects, endowed with certain meanings by virtue of the practice of a certain society."⁵ While the photograph is indexical to an identifiable subject/thing/place or person in the world, it is also a portable and infinitely reproducible artifact. Thus the photograph is much more than mere referent because it is interpreted, consumed, and circulated by viewers in a particular time, place, and within a specific cultural framework of looking. The historical researcher or student reconstructs this situated knowledge of the spectator for the purposing of reconnecting the historical photograph to the web of social, cultural, and political relations within which it was produced, interpreted, and distributed. Moreover, the historian takes into account how captions, or any other text placed in close proximity, endeavors to fix or stabilize meaning on behalf of the photograph. Captions often infuse the photograph with meanings unanticipated by the photographer or subject.⁶

Photographs metaphorically represent much more



Figure 1: Hannah Maynard (British, active 1862-1913), "Studio portrait of unidentified Coast Salish woman," no date.
British Columbia Archives, Call #F-08915

than what is depicted within the confines of the frame. The photograph (and portraiture in particular) manifests an actual social encounter when two or more people met — the photographer stood behind the shutter, and the subject posed in front of the lens. Prior to the shutter movement, moreover, the participants negotiated the terms of the photographic event in some manner. As observed in *Framing the West*, photographs might therefore be understood to represent a social "frontier."⁷⁷ Portraiture, landscape, and portraits I termed "Indian life" were distinct genres, all bearing significance in generating a visual narrative of colonization and settlement of the American West. While each has defining characteristics, students should be taught to interpret none in isolation.

The portrait photograph often embodies a "frontier" of uneven relations of power; a meeting between people of varying social status or divergent interests. Drawing on Foucauldian concepts of power, W. J. T. Mitchell remarked that "the 'taking' of human subjects by a photographer (or a writer) is a concrete social encounter, often between a damaged, victimized; and powerless individual and a relatively privileged observer, often acting as the 'eye of power,' the agent of some social, political or journalistic institution."⁷⁸ Within the social

context of the nineteenth-century colonial Pacific Northwest, for example, the Anglo or Euro American photographer increasingly held greater sociopolitical power within the urban setting than did a female Coast Salish woman, the subject of the photograph to the left.

This woman, on the other hand, may have offered her service as a photographic subject for a nominal fee, either in barter or monetary form, thus entering a commercial transaction with the studio photographer. As the commercial value of photographs of North American Indians escalated in harmony with the gathering presence and force of tourism and, by century's end, with professionals associated with anthropology, the commercial photographer became, in some sense, indebted to the willing Native participant, in this case a female sitter. Like the itinerant field photographer, commercial studio photographers sought any and all profitable subjects to harness for the camera and the marketplace. The rise in popularity of Indian portraits thus profited a range of consumers, including commercial photographers, anthropologists, museum collectors, and tourists.

In sum, the motive for the taking of the photograph becomes viable historical evidence to expose the economic and social identities of two individuals: the photographer and sitter. Yet, by the time the photographic artifact falls into the purview of later researchers or students, the social motives that brought the photograph into existence may have been detached or lost. The original individual interests involved must be reestablished to revive the motives for, and functions of, the photograph. In the case of portraiture, the photograph serves as evidence that a social encounter occurred between the photographer and an individual or individuals. It also represents an exchange of some form, monetary or otherwise, that transpired between the subject and photographer, unless the photographer lacked explicit permission (frequently the case in colonial settings and early ethnography.)

In this particular portrait, the Coast Salish woman willingly entered a commercial negotiation with a studio photographer, probably for income. Indeed, as a street-based entrepreneur, a seller of clams, she perhaps recognized that her image as an Indian accrued commercial value. Photographer Hannah Maynard, on her part, had shown enduring commitment to her business, recognizing, in accord with her sitter, the commercial potential of portraiture of women as well as North American Indians.⁹ She worked as the primary entrepreneur of a successful commercial studio in Victoria, British Columbia, north of the San Juan Islands, for more than fifty years. Maynard might also have thought that this image of the clam seller suited a particular client (tourist, Indian agent, anthropologist, civic official, museum collector, etc.) to whom she could subsequently market it.

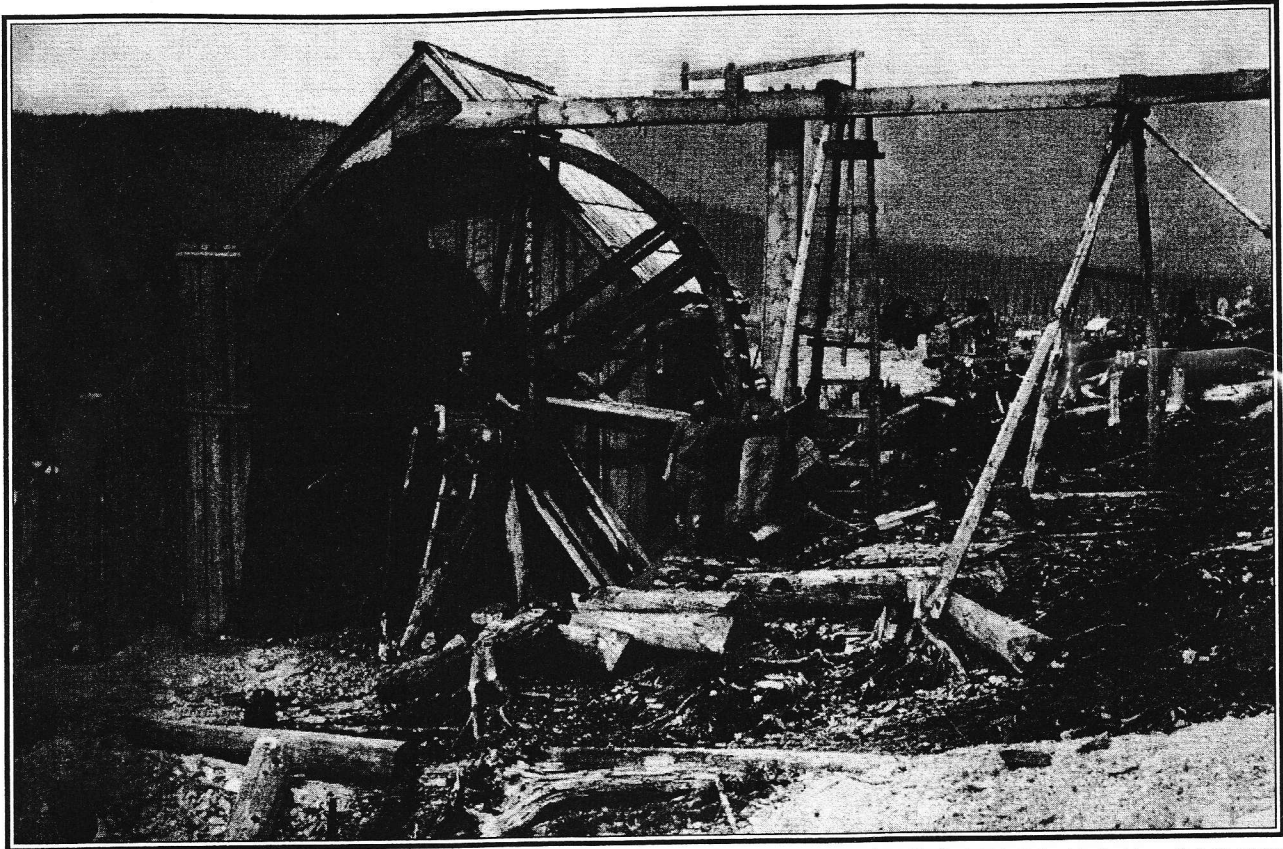


Figure 2: Frederick Dally (active 1866-1870), "Davis Claim Wheel and Flume, Williams Creek, Barkerville." *British Columbia Archives, Call #A-00558*

Landscape photography of the American West also represented an encounter of a sort. The landscape photographer traveled through an environment, along a worn or unfamiliar route with or without a local guide. The photographer's access to, knowledge, or ignorance of, the landscape depended on various conditions: gender, race, social mobility, and economic status. Thus the recovery of who has taken the photograph is again essential to any analysis. Prior to the advent of portable, hand-held cameras in the late nineteenth century, the photographer required transportation and capital. Photographers also had to hire assistants to carry large-format photographic equipment and materials needed to develop glass negatives in situ.

Women of the nineteenth century did not always possess the freedom or mobility of male photographers. Traveling without a male chaperone in a foreign or unfamiliar landscape was not always permissible, even for Anglo or Euro American women. Many women did, nonetheless, succeed at the occupation and business of photography across the American West, as Peter Palmquist among others have documented.¹⁰ While more men produced landscape photography, and their accomplishments are more easily retrieved from public documents, many women have also shaped the photographic vision and narratives of settlement.

The interpretation of landscape photographs also

illuminates the contest over territory, resources, and rights in the North American West. The camera served as an instrument of Euro and Anglo American colonization and settlement beginning with the earliest surveyors who used photography to officially chart the boundaries of land. Explorers with cameras, such as John C. Fremont, participated in the mapping of "virgin" territory of the West.¹¹

Above Oregon territory, in the western British colonies of British Columbia and Vancouver Island (the two colonies confederated with Canada in 1867), a host of professional and amateur photographers labored. They generated a vast corpus of images that recorded the civic and rural development of the region, including changes in the land, the erection of roads and wharves, evidence of mining exploration, and the growth of domestic and civic architecture.

Landscape photographs depicting mines, bridges, roads and other resource-based activity and structures, or civic and domestic architecture (as seen in figures 2-4) have generally been embraced by historians as signs of "development and modernization" of the North American West. Honorific portraiture of the earliest arriving Anglo and Euro American residents, especially the prominent and powerful, supported the fundamental assertion that settlement progressed in an orderly and authoritative fashion.¹² Students must be reminded

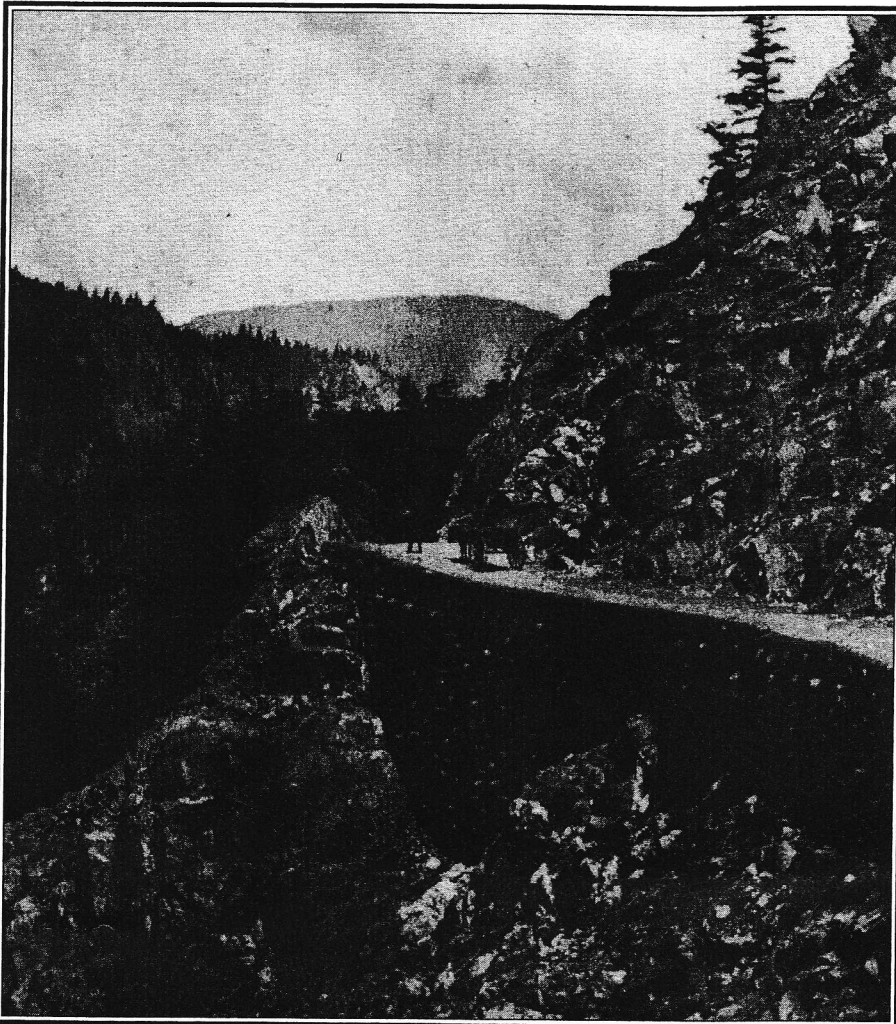
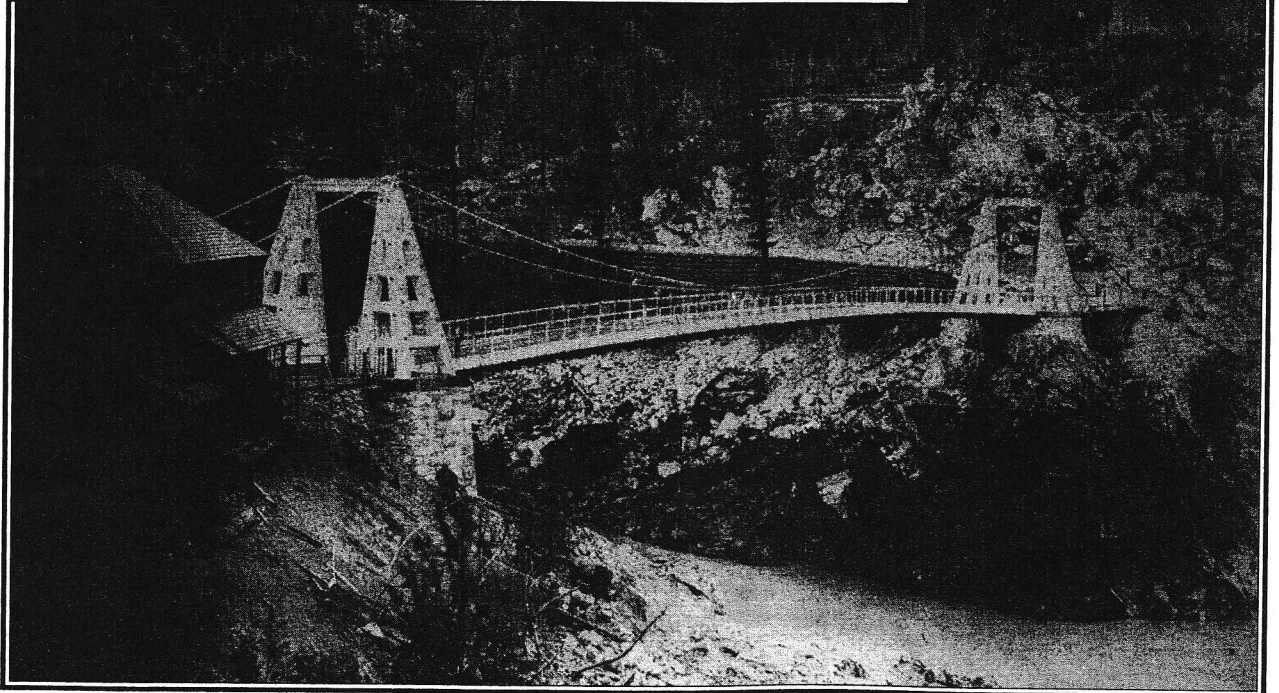


Figure 3: Frederick Dally (British, active 1866-1870), "China Bar Bluff on the Cariboo Wagon Road."
British Columbia Archives, Call #A03867

Figure 4, below: Frederick Dally (British, active 1866-1870), "Alexandra Suspension Bridge," built 1863.
British Columbia Archives, Call #A-03928



frequently that landscapes and portraits — indeed any photograph — cannot be viewed in isolation. The two genres operated hand-in-glove as visible markers of settlements' seemingly inevitable progress. Portraiture of those the community deemed worthy "citizens" or anyone who embodies model aspirations of wealth, affluence, or power underpinned settlement ideologies. By depicting those individuals who offered moral authority, or economic and political influence, the nation upheld the mandate of manifest destiny urging on the march of progress into so-called "virgin" or unimproved territory at the expense of others less inclined toward these values. Thus the portrait of the worthy citizen provides a counterpoint to images representative of the traditional Indian, the latter appearing reluctant or resistant to modernization. Settlement ultimately wrested territory and the control of maritime resources from the hands of the original indigenous inhabitants. Incoming Anglo and Euro American settlers and industrial speculators took control of resources and radically reconfigured individual and collective identities. Portraits, interpreted in light of the colonial ideology of modernization, harbor tangible evidence of the transformation of personal and "private" subjectivity.

The late nineteenth-century formal studio portrait of a woman named Annie Hunt Spencer (figure 5) on the surface appears benign and pleasant, but, when interpreted in the context of industrialization and the changes caused by settlement, the photograph yields additional meanings and nuance. As noted earlier, the simplest path to reconstruct the historical significance of the image is to identify the photographer to whom the photograph is attributed. Always pose the basic question: "who is looking?" The photographer of this portrait was Stephen Allan Spencer, a U.S. immigrant who briefly worked as a "modern portrait artist prepared to take pictures in the highest style of the art."¹³ Spencer's professional ambition, and his personal relationship with Annie Hunt and her kin, personifies some of the grander social and economic transformations characteristic of the era and region. By 1881, Spencer had sold the urban studio he operated in Victoria to permanently relocate in Alert Bay where he eventually managed the cannery. Alert Bay is well known as an industrial cannery village and maritime port, situated on the crescent-shaped Cormorant Island east of Brought and Queen Charlotte Straits on the inland passage (260 miles north of Seattle). Spencer's presence in the region paired with his photographic abilities gave rise to many of the earliest documentary images of Alert Bay. They are still widely employed in contemporary museum exhibits and in historical surveys.

Alert Bay's identity as an industrial port came about partially as a result of Spencer's entrepreneurial ambitions. In 1873, Spencer and a partner commercially fished the salmon of the local Nimpkish River, using the traditional fishing grounds of the local Kwak-

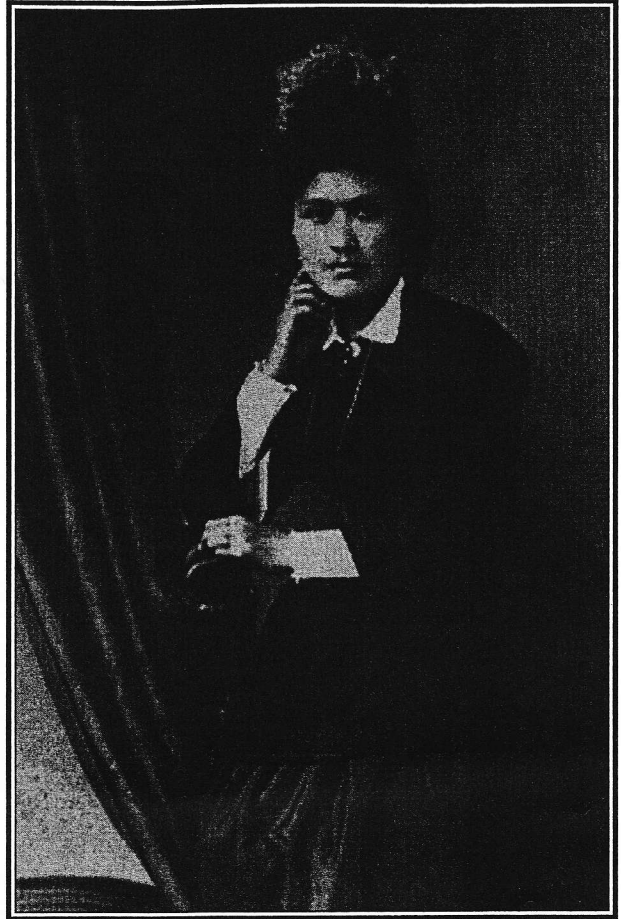


Figure 5: Stephen Spencer (American, active 1858-1883), "Portrait of Annie Hunt (Spencer)," produced between 1883 to 1885.

British Columbia Archives, Call #ZZ-95301

waka'wakw people who sustained seasonal villages at Fort Rupert, a former Hudson's Bay trading fort, and the nearby village (which eventually became Alert Bay.) Spencer met and married Annie Hunt, born from a mixed-blood union between Robert Hunt, a Hudson's Bay Scottish trader who managed trade at Fort Rupert, and Mary Ebbetts, a Tlingit woman. Cohabitations and marriages between local indigenous women and Anglo/Euro American men had long history in the region from the time of contact. Such liaisons profited the trader by advancing their prospects, status, and influence. From the beginning of contact, therefore, indigenous, and later mixed-blood women served as mediators between indigenous tribal leaders and kin and Anglo or Euro American traders.

By all appearances, Spencer's marriage to Annie Hunt enhanced his commercial prospects and harmonized his relations with local indigenous fishers on the north coast recruited to the seasonal labor of the cannery operation. Annie Hunt's marriage "out" to Stephen Spencer also transformed her identity from a child of mixed marriage, who straddled two cultures, to the status of affluent wife of an ambitious businessman.

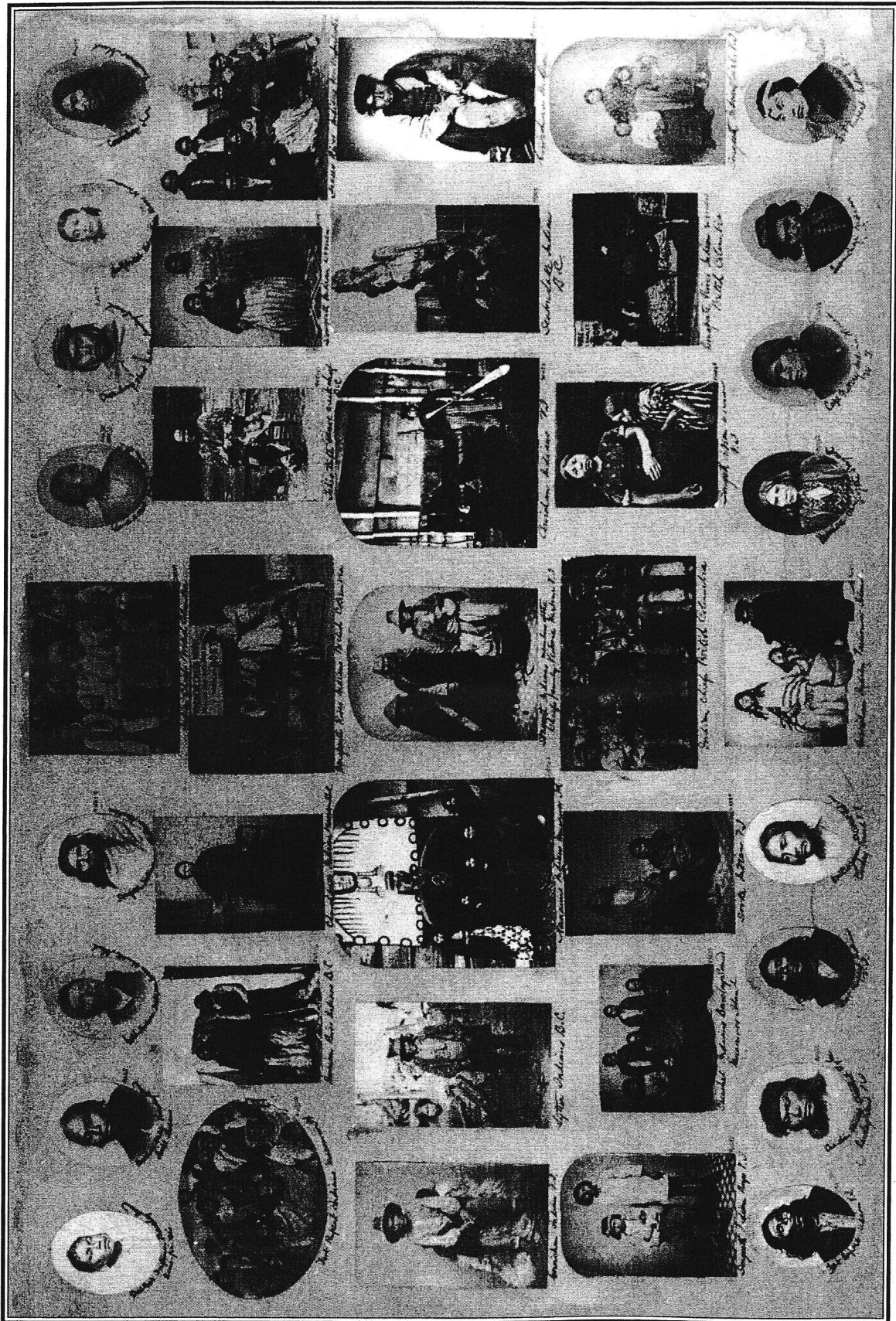


Figure 6: Frederick Dally (British, active 1866-1870), Collection of Portraits from Album titled "Photographic Views of British Columbia, 1867-1870."

British Columbia Archives, Call #G-04610

Once married and a mother, Hunt and the children of her union were increasingly perceived as white. In contrast, Hunt's brother George Hunt, who married a Kwakwaka'wakw woman and become a primary coastal regional informant of German-American anthropologist Franz Boas, was perceived not only as an authority on indigenous tradition and life ways but his identity was conceived as indigenous through and through.¹⁴

By 1892, Alert Bay had emerged as an important locus of regional industrial commerce and standard stopover of all Alaskan-bound traffic. Landscape images of Alert Bay or any other villages along the inland maritime route arose from industrial interests. Annie Hunt Spencer's portrait similarly emerged from the major socioeconomic and cultural transformations stimulated by Anglo/Euro American ambition for the region and its resources. Thus portraiture's signification often exceeds the sitter's appearance.

Historians of the North American West quickly grew familiar with images that depict Indians, not as modern subjects adapting to industrial change as represented by the portrait of Annie Hunt Spencer, but to images claiming to portray the culture of traditional "Indian life." The analysis of such images leads the researcher to understand the ideological functions of photography in the services of the state or its representatives: Indian agents, missionaries, and anthropologists. Opposite is a sample page showing images of North American Indians of the Pacific Northwest from an album assembled by itinerant British photographer Frederick Dally, active in the region from 1866 to 1870.¹⁵ Dally assembled numerous individual portraits he had taken in his capacity as an itinerant photographer (and dentist!) Looking closely you will observe that someone, Dally possibly, captioned many of the images after mounting them in the album.

Dally's access to these indigenous subjects was not mere serendipity. The opportunity to visit various tribal villages arose from an invitation by Governor A. E. Kennedy on a government tour of inspection conducted on the navy gunboat, HMS *Scout*. The purpose of this 1866 expedition was official and bureaucratic: the government wished to investigate and assess the conditions and attitudes of the Indian tribes. The expedition also hoped to mediate Indian relations with settlers, the latter residing in ever closer proximity to Indian villages and demanding greater access to indigenous hunting and fishing grounds. Dally's professional credibility as a photographer increased with this affiliation with those holding government office, subsequently permitting him to characterize his commercial specialties as "Photographic Views of British Columbia, Vancouver Island, Puget Sound, and of Indians." Other photographers worked on similar government-sponsored "tours of inspection" to the maritime villages of Mowachaht, Clayoquot, Haida, Tshimshian, and Kwakwaka'wakw tribes. Works by Richard Maynard (husband and partner of

studio photographer Hannah Maynard), Oregon Hastings, and Edward Dossetter appeared in official government reports that endeavored to portray the state of the Indian.¹⁶

Images of "Indian life" didn't merely sustain bureaucratic value within the time of their production and distribution; these photographs became increasingly significant to anthropological research and exposition precisely because they capture the subject at a particular time. Early amateur ethnographers recognized the value of the photographic document, as contemporary researchers have shown. By the mid-twentieth century, however, an interactive and expansive use of photographic and film sources produced innovations in anthropological research.¹⁷ Inspired by the documentary project of the Farm Security Administration photographers, such as Roy E. Stryker, John Collier, an anthropological fieldworker and photographer, argued that the camera, as a research tool, might be an extension of the eye.¹⁸ Discussing the camera as a tool of observation, Collier proposed systematic methods of documentation in the research field and a method by which to catalog and identify photographs taken. Indirectly, he addressed how researchers should interpret photographs. He sought "to outline how the camera can be used to explore and to analyze, so that [researchers] can use photography not only to show what we have already found out by some other means, but actually to extend our visual processes and to help us find out more."¹⁹

In the contemporary era, the analysis of historical photographs has been conducted by individual tribal researchers for the purpose of reestablishing family genealogies. They also collect tribal histories of land and resource use, compiling visual evidence toward settlement of modern land claims and treaty negotiations. The original purpose of the earliest photographs of "Indian life," however, was to represent the power and policies of the state over North American Indians in favor of territorial expansion and settlement. Such images do not necessarily represent actual conditions or circumstances experienced by indigenous subjects or sitters but rather might be understood as superficial glimpses or "outsider" perceptions of North American Indian existence of the time. This is not to say that these images did not embody truths of some kind or that factual knowledge cannot be derived from them, but the historian must be cognizant of the bureaucratic intentionality that gave rise to such imagery. The limits of the images must always figure in contemporary analysis.

Across the continent, cameras were employed on behalf of bureaucratic investigations conducted by agents of state policies. In her consideration of the companionate relationship between Idaho photographer Jane Gay and Dawes Act policy lobbyist Alice Fletcher from 1889 to 1892, literary theorist, Nicole Tonkovich suggested that Gay's photographs of the Nez Perces, among whom

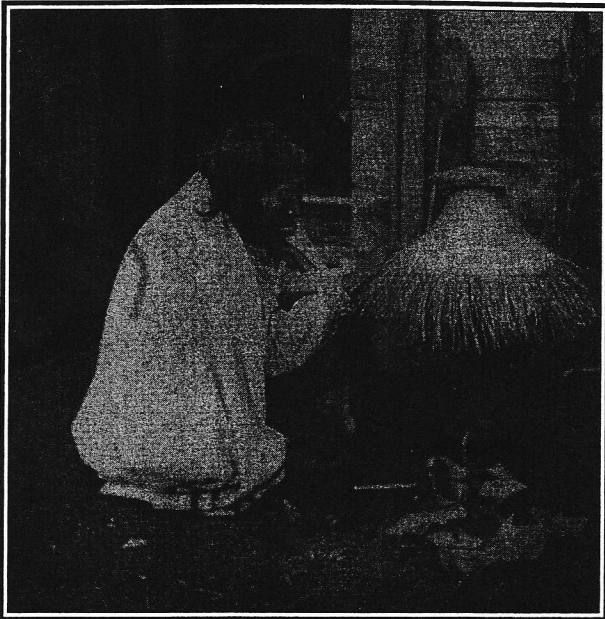


Figure 7: Edward Dossetter (American, active 1881-1890), "Old Hydah (sic) Woman," Yan or Massett, Queen Charlotte Islands.
British Columbia Archives, Call #B-03592

the couple were stationed, emphasized the "banal in an era of spectacular landscape photography . . . captur[ing] men and women engaged in the quotidian." Tonkevich argues that Gay's photographs avoided exoticizing the Nez Perces and, were as result distinct from the conventions of expeditionary photography. Nonetheless, Gay's presence in Nez Perce territory represented bureaucratic state interests, and ultimately her documentary photographs assisted Alice Fletcher in her assignment to implement the Dawes Act.²⁰

American photographer, Edward Dossetter, like Dally, was on an official tour of inspection to the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1881 with the Canadian federal Superintendent of Indian affairs, Israel Powell. Dossetter portrayed an elder Haida woman weaving a hat at Yan or Massett village, as shown in figure 7. He photographed the woman in profile, thereby directing the viewer's attention to the existence of the woman's lip labret. The labret, a traditional form of body modification to show status, had been roundly criticized by Anglo and Euro American travelers, amateur ethnographers, Indian agents, and government officials alike. They characterized the practice as obsolete, even



Figure 8: Charles Tate (Methodist missionary stationed among the Central Coast Salish from 1899-1913), "Potlatch Scramble at Quamichan (Duncan), Vancouver Island," circa 1913.
Royal British Columbia Museum, Anthropology collection, PN#1500

barbaric. Dossetter's photographic emphasis on the profile, and hence this culturally specific aspect of the woman's appearance, aligned his perspective with the much repeated moral disapproval expressed about the labret and other traditions of body modification, including the Salish practice of head binding. These judgments, exercised across numerous visual and written sources, retrospectively show that the contest of power used the bodies and cultural behaviors of disenfranchised women, as exemplified by Dossetter's portrait, as the staging ground to fight the struggle for cultural superiority.

Cultural bias also appears clearly in the motivations of Charles Tate, a well known Methodist missionary, who had been stationed among coastal Indians over fifty years, in his discussion of a photograph of a potlatch at Quamichan. The image, figure 8, captured the moment of the blanket giveaway to guests, when gifts are tossed off the roof of a large Coast Salish house. Tate, in Duncan located on southern Vancouver Island, apparently took the photograph, circa 1913, without permission of the subjects. Tate's motive for this, and others taken at the same potlatch, was not benevolent, ethnographic, or touristic. Rather in support letters, Tate expressed anger and resentment toward the local Indian agent who, as Tate opined, had failed his Native charges by allowing the potlatch to occur despite federal prohibitions against all rituals, dance, and traditional practices. Tate zealously supported the prohibition and harshly criticized the federal agent for his neglect of duty. In other words, the photograph offered evidence of a jurisdictional battle between two men, who each saw themselves as authorized to scrutinize and critique the actions of the Coast Salish at early twentieth century. While the perspective and motives on the potlatch prohibition held by the Coast Salish is less tangible in this context, they seemed willing to risk criminalization by ignoring the prohibition.

Methodists, as well as ministers of other sects in the region, commonly deployed the camera toward their aspirations to convert Native peoples, as demonstrated in the interpretation of the following two images (figures 9 and 10). The photographs depicting teen preacher David Sallosalton, who was stationed among the Nanaimo people beginning in April 1862, capture a brief interval in an eight-year process of acculturation and conversion. Figure 9 depicts Nanaimo convert David Sallosalton standing beside Methodist minister Thomas Crosby. Figure 10 combines a vignette portrait of Sallosalton with explanatory captions, celebrating Sallosalton's contribution as a young missionary prior to his death from tuberculosis at age nineteen in 1872.

Missionaries, like Tate and Crosby, encouraged cultural change among Native people. To advertise missionary success beyond the remote settings in which they worked, missionaries spun tales of individual

conversions by their constituents. They commonly illustrated these stories with a pair of photographs, one taken before conversion and another after. For the non-Native viewer, often those targeted to financially support the missionary campaign, the before- and after- conversion story and photographs symbolized rejection of negative traditions, practices, or habits associated with Indian "savagery" or tradition. As Crosby's comments that follow imply, Native acceptance of settler dress and Christian ritual announced a willingness on the part of the convert to embrace Euro American values. The two photographs depicted here, read in tandem with Crosby's descriptions of Sallosalton, subscribed to the formulaic conversion success story. However, these honorific portraits of Sallosalton are undermined when interlaced with the narrative of Crosby's memoirs. The photographs commemorate not Sallosalton but rather Crosby's personal aggrandizing claim of missionary success among the Nanaimo Coast Salish.

In retrospect, Crosby's statements reveal the disposition and bias of the interpreter more than the accomplishments of the subject. Of his initial encounter with Sallosalton, Crosby stated "a bright little fellow . . . with no clothing on except a short print shirt, and painted up in the strangest fashion, with a tuft of his hair tied on the

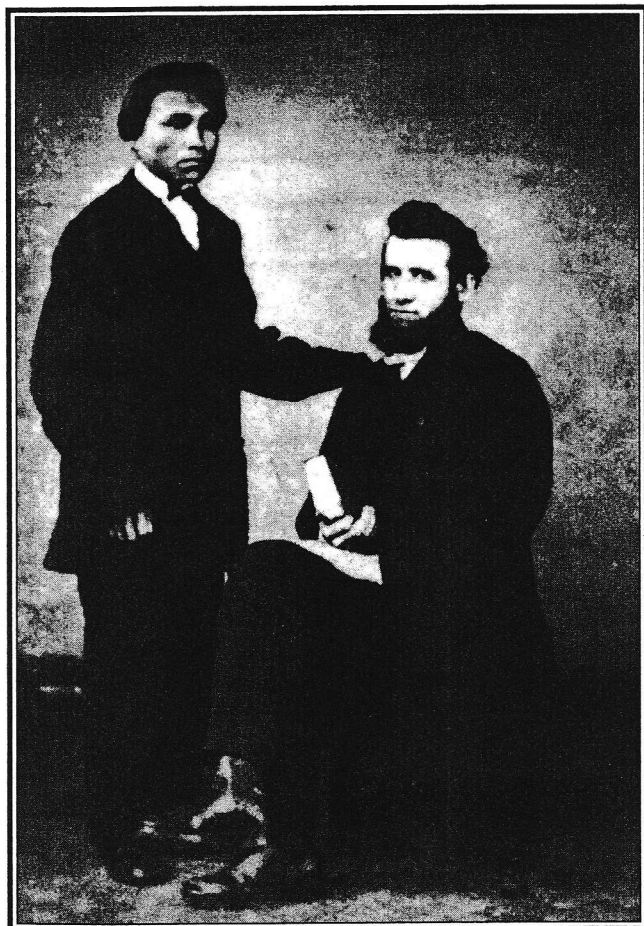


Figure 9: Unknown photographer, "David Sallosalton (standing) and Methodist Missionary Thomas Crosby (sitting)," circa 1870.

British Columbia Archives, Call #D-05223

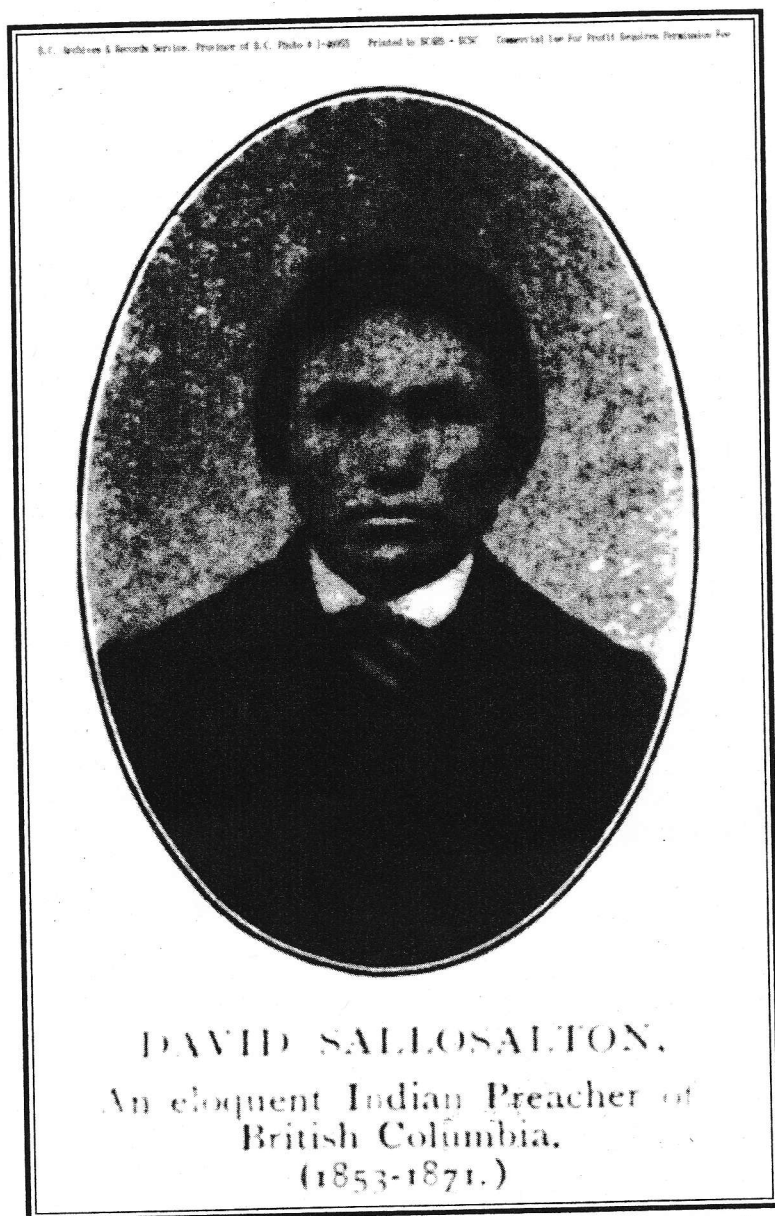


Figure 10: Unknown photographer, David Sallosalton, portrait card with caption, "David Sallosalton: An Eloquent Indian Preacher of British Columbia, 1853-1870." *British Columbia Archives, Call #1-46955*

top of his head. . . . Santana (Sallosalton was his Christianized name) was a real flathead Indian, and had endured all the suffering belonging to such a barbarous custom." "It was necessary," declared Crosby, as if inscribing the ideological message of the photograph, "to dress Sallosalton up a little more than he had been accustomed to if he was to live with a white man, and so a new suit of clothes was procured. He looked quite bright and neat in his new attire, and soon proved a useful and active assistant to the missionary in working inside and outside of the little home."²¹

Asked to respond to this first photograph (figure 9) without any context or historical background, students might speculate on the men's relationship. Describing the internal gazes of the sitters within the frame and the photographer's gaze at the subjects, students make com-

ments about the divergent poses adopted by the two men and consider the purpose and symbolic meanings of the props depicted. The presence of a book, or Bible, in the hands of Crosby is directly equated with his learned status and spiritual authority thus placing power in the realm of the older man. This portrayal leads to the perception of the Crosby and Sallosalton's relationship as unequal benevolent paternalism, with Crosby possessing the greater clout. The costume worn by each also emphasizes diverging status, notably the ill-fitting garment of Sallosalton. This kind of systematic response to the content of the photograph encourages the interpreter to initially work with what is depicted within the bounds of the frame and subsequently seek out other supporting documents that might aid in broadening and expanding the interpretation.

In conclusion, the photographic artifact may be considered the evidentiary remains of contact, or encounter, between individuals or the photographer's engagement with a particular landscape. The photograph — a material object — often survives beyond the existence of the sitter or the photographer and may acquire a commemorative function, as in the case of the Sallosalton card that was placed in Crosby's memoirs. The photograph's mobility is crucial to understanding photography and its effects. Photographs circulate well beyond their original purpose and meaning, and they can be infused with or emptied of meaning. To revitalize or resuscitate the meaning of the photograph, the motive for its production must be sought. For whom and why was a photograph originally produced? How did subsequent destinations and uses of the photograph change its ascribed meaning? These represent questions basic to encouraging student interpretations. In this way, photographs simultaneously serve as ob-

jects and ideas, and historians who use photographs as sources must conceive of the multiplicity of uses of the photograph.

The photograph is a complex intersection of meaning and function, embodying overlapping strands of history, memory, economics, and social relations. Meanings of a photograph are produced not only by the maker (the photographer) but also by the subject (the sitter) and by the viewer (or consumer). Infinitely reproducible, as long as the negative remains available, a photograph may be reproduced in more than one environment and for differing purposes. The captions may change with each use in an attempt to anchor the meaning of the image with a text.

Three common genres of photograph circulated in the nineteenth century American West — portraits,

landscape, and images of "Indian life." I have suggested methods by which instructors teaching historical interpretation might move their students beyond the use of photographs as simplistic illustrations. The extended set of questions that follow may guide you in teaching the interpretation of photographs to students. The aim is to create a dossier that allows contemporary viewers to reconnect the image with its original time, place, and function. The methods of Lutz and Collins, have been particularly influential in developing these questions, so reviewing their scholarship is heartily recommended.²²

- How did different viewers, depending on their investment in the photograph, interpret the significance of the object/photograph, according to their own needs, time, and purpose?
- Who, in your view, is the producer or sponsor of the photograph?
- Do you imagine that the sitter participated in any aspect of the production of the photograph?
- Where is the photographer positioned in relation to the subject? Describe the pathway of gazes between subjects depicted in the images?
- Based on all of the qualities of the photograph, is it possible to determine the nature of the relationship between the subjects depicted in the photograph, if more than one individual is shown?
- What, in your estimate, is the relationship between the person who took the photograph and the person portrayed?
- Who commissioned the photograph and for what original purpose?
- By what means and conditions did the photograph arrive at the place you found it? Why and how did this photograph find its way into an archive or collection?
- Would you consider this photograph a private or public image; does it embody a public or private function? Another important debate, as illuminated by John Berger and Geoffrey Batchen, concerns mythic or arbitrary division between public and private photographs. Historians most commonly explore photographs found in public archives, whereas anthropologists might elicit knowledge from an informant who shares private snapshots or photographs. Private and public images have different connotations.
- If the photograph has been placed in an album and has relationship to other images nearby, how does this "assembly" of images affect interpretation? Who assembled this album and for what purpose?
- Is the photograph captioned or titled in any manner? Captions may appear on the back or front of the photograph. They may have been added retrospectively — after being placed in an album or any other system of display. The captions inevitably influence the meaning of the image, and are sometimes entirely

contradictory to the image. In your estimate, who was/is the author of the text or caption and for what purpose? Does the caption anchor or fix the meaning of the image? Does the caption, title or text, potentially conflict with the original intention of the photograph or photographer?

- If the photograph is a portrait, is the status of the subjects classifiable in any way, as signified by props or costume?
- If this is a landscape photograph, is the place/region or time identifiable? If so, how exactly?

NOTES

1. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (NY: Vintage Books, 1990).
2. Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.
3. Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," *Image-Music-Text*, (London: Fontana Press, 1977).
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11. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 88-120.
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14. Carol Williams, "Fragments of a Rich Life, Comparative Modern Biographies of North American Indian Identity on the Northwest Pacific Coast: Annie Hunt Spencer and George Hunt," unpublished paper presented at University of New Mexico, September 2000.
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22. Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*.

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