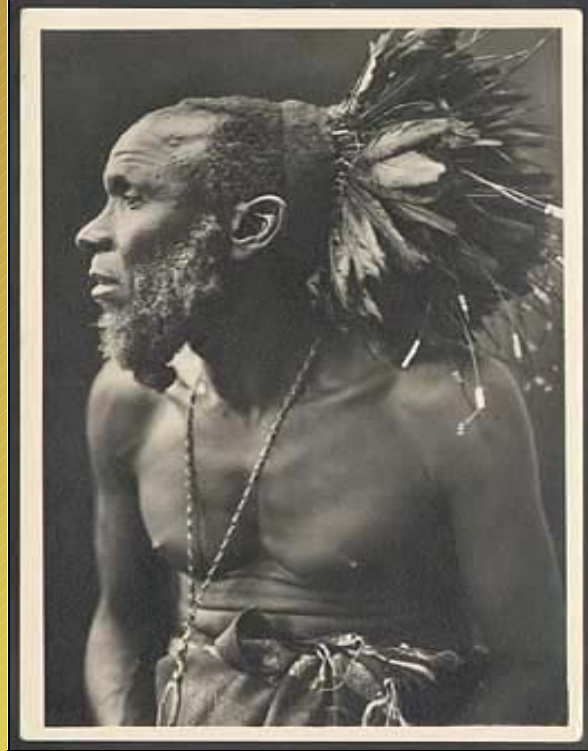


Session 3

Early Ethnographic Photography: Contexts and Trends



REALISM

Linkages: Positivism—photography—ethnography

Photography: mechanical (i.e., “objective”) reflection of reality = “evidence”

Realism = the verisimilitude of photographs

Camera: similar to an eye

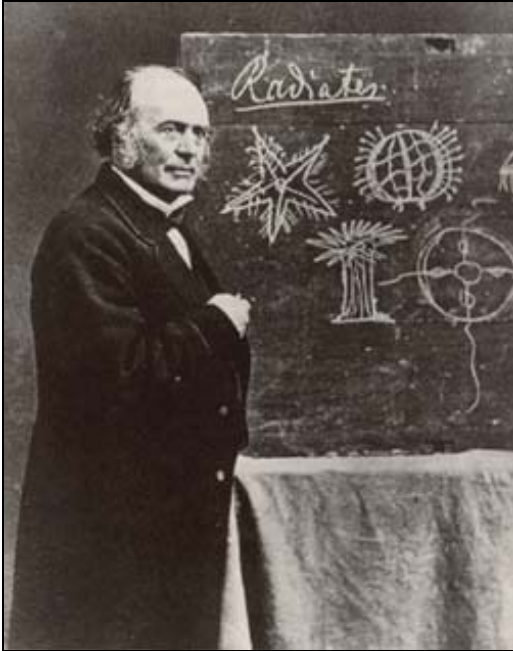
Realist readings of photographs: focus on the content shown within the photograph

CRITICISMS OF EARLY ETHNO-PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM

- **Obscure the context of photo production**
- **Manipulate the content of photo representation**
- **“showing the Native as he really is”**

EVOLUTIONISM

1. **Polygenesis**—multiple human races, each with different origins
2. **Monogenesis**—single origins, all evolving along the same path (unilineal evolution)—cultural evolution (LH Morgan, EB Tylor)

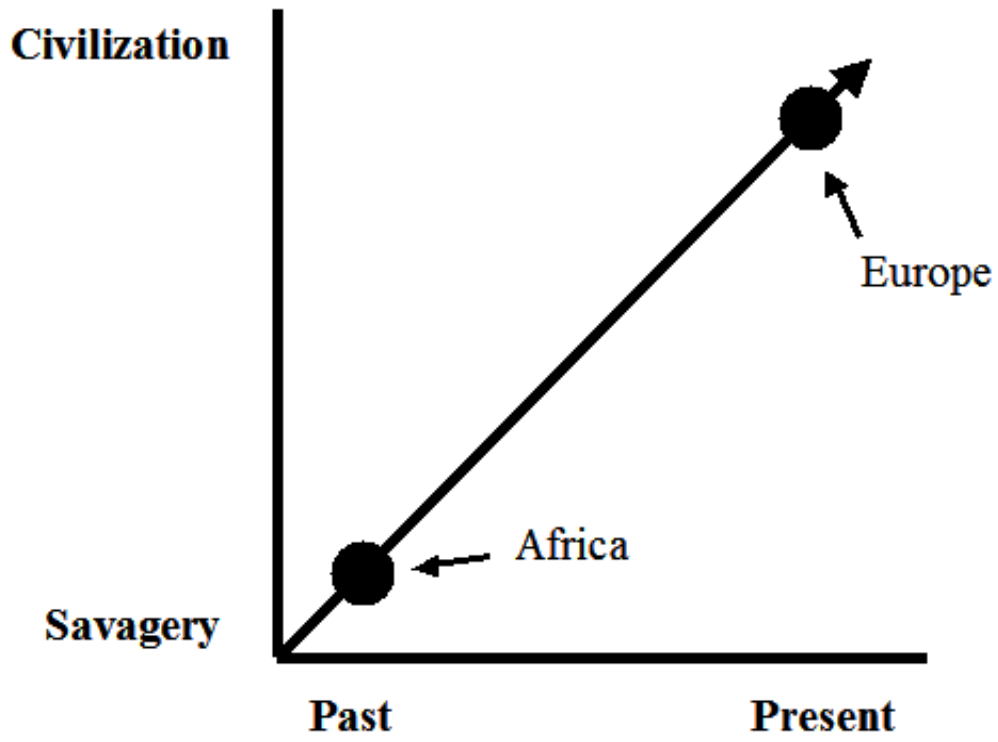


Louis Agassiz

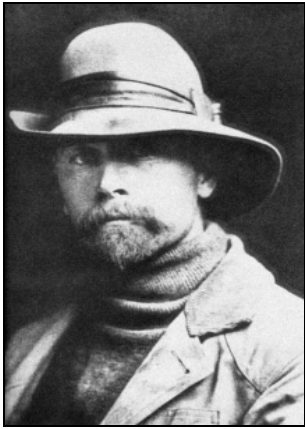


E. B. Tylor

Unilineal Evolution

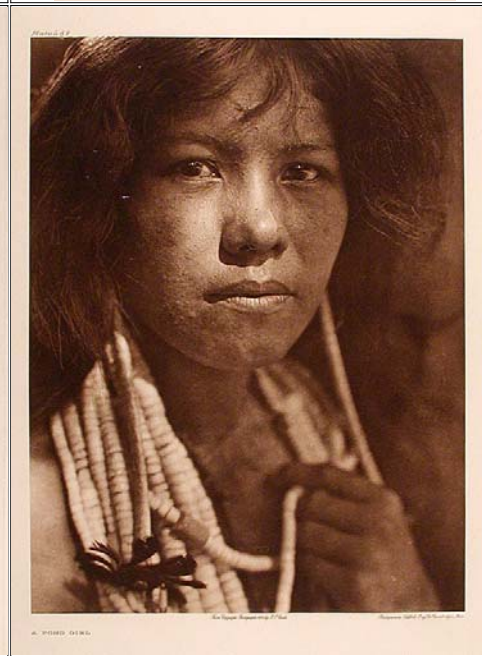
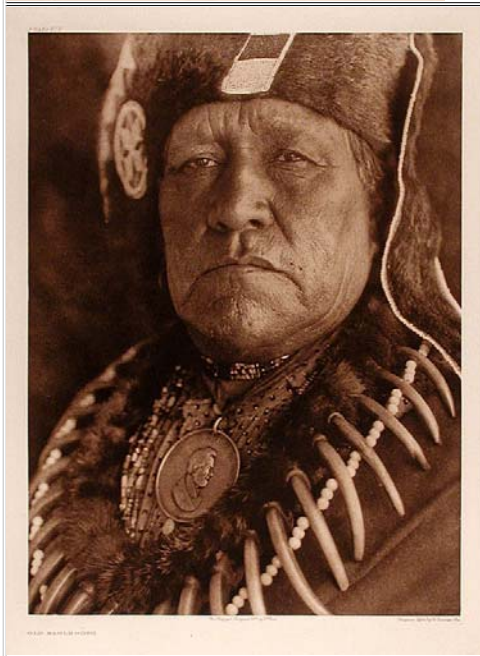
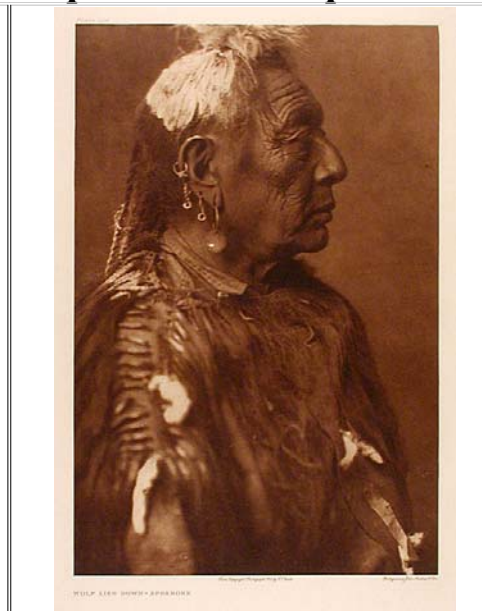
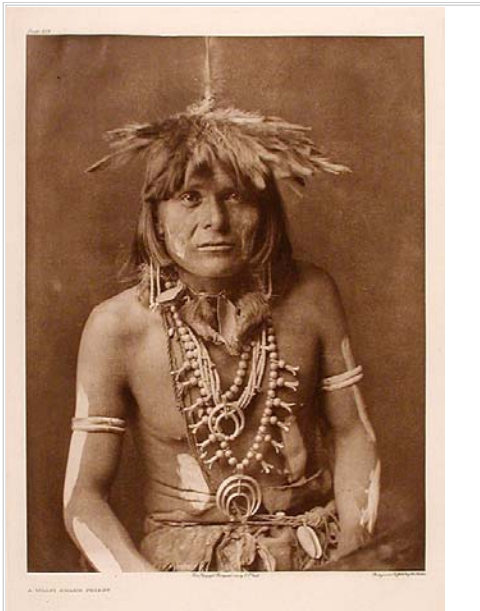


ROMANTIC PRIMITIVISM



Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952)

- major work from 1896 to 1930
- 40,000 images of 80 Indian tribes
- photos of Indian leaders, rituals, costumes
- recorded songs and chants
- recorded histories, myths, demography, lifeways, biographies, ceremonies
- artistic, pictorial & impressionistic approach





Edward Curtis filming a scene for his film, *In the land of the War Canoes*

**For reproductions of the text shown in the film, see
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/daniels/curtis/movie.html>**

SALVAGE ETHNOGRAPHY



Franz Boas (1858-1942)

- against evolutionism
- emphasis on cultural relativism
- anthropologists undertaking fieldwork
- need to collect data about all aspects of life of the American Indians, before they “disappeared”
- worked in the Pacific Northwest



Kwakiutl Indians:, “the way the Hamaselal Dancer Dressed in winter dances. I send you this mask of wasp dancer I Bought from Denax'dox tribe.” 1920



Kwakiutl Indians:, "The way ts!onog!wa Dancer Dressed in winter Dance." ca. 1920

clearly “shot primarily for research purposes. That is, Boas did not intend to use it...to be shown to the public. The viewer must ignore...the exterior location of dances which are supposed to be conducted inside at night, and the telephone or electrical poles in the background. These images were not made to be seen by the lay public but by analysts who ‘look the other way.’”—Ruby, 1980

OVERVIEW OF STRUCTURING THEMES IN EARLY ETHNOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHY

- ◇ **Polygenetic Evolution, Anthropometrics, “Race”—visual characterizations, what is visible demonstrates intellectual and moral characteristics, different origins**
- ◇ **Unilineal Evolution—different stages of development (savagery → barbarism → civilization)**
- ◇ **Assimilation—progress & civilization**
- ◇ **Culture Traits—showing tools, dress, traits and practices**
- ◇ **Salvage Ethnography**

CONCLUSIONS FOR EARLY ETHNO-PHOTOGRAPHY

- contexts of early ethnographic photography
- ideological purposes
- early ethnographic photography \leftrightarrow renewed colonialism

Photographic practices did not take shape, and take place, in a social and cultural vacuum:

Pierre Bourdieu--“the most trivial photograph expresses, apart from the explicit intentions of the photographer, the system of schemes of perception, thought and appreciation common to a whole group”

- 1. Colonialism—the early context**
- 2. Scientific support for colonialist ideologies**
- 3. Positivism—image as revealer of truths**
- 4. Power relations—he who pictures, defines**