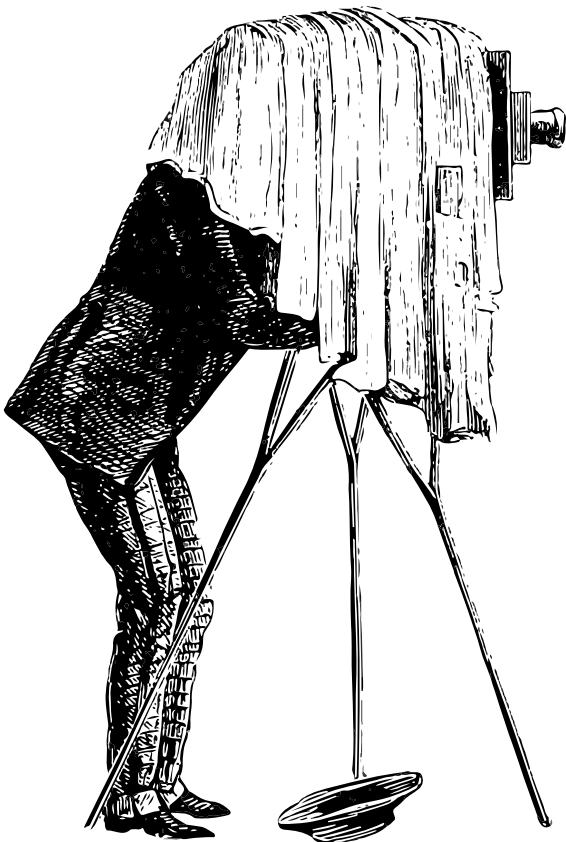


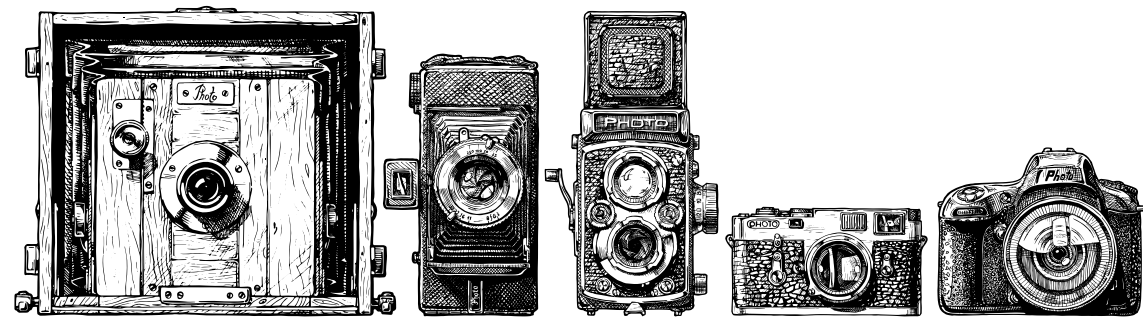
# The Power of the Photographer

By Jack Bishop



## The Power of the Photographer

The ability to examine and make sense of primary sources is an incredibly useful tool for students to possess. Photographs are a powerful primary source because they are a visual connection to the past and are immediately comprehensible once you have seen them. However, that immediate comprehension may not tell the full story behind the photograph; learning to examine photographs more closely often reveals additional information. And viewers need to consider how photographers manipulate the story by what and how they photograph. The Power of the Photographer, and the photographs inside, provide an opportunity to learn and focus this skill.



## Questions to Think About

1. How does the composition of a photograph impact the information it conveys?
2. How do a photographer's choices impact what you do or do not see?
3. What can you learn from a photo? What is impossible to learn from a photo?
4. What additional information do you need to interpret a photo? Where can you look to find it?
5. How does a caption help or hinder your understanding?



## Introduction to the Collection

The Wanamaker Collection of American Indian Photographs is a large collection of photographs from the Wanamaker expeditions. The collection contains more than 8,000 photographs, along with documents that provide context for the photos. Many of the photos were taken on expeditions that were funded by John and Rodman Wanamaker, a father and son duo who owned the John Wanamaker Store, also known as Wanamaker's Department Store. The Wanamakers believed that the store was a place for Americans to learn, so they expanded their store to house an Education Bureau. They hired Joseph K. Dixon to be the director of the bureau, and he led several trips and took thousands of photographs between 1908 and 1921. Dixon would continue to take photos of Native American veterans and add them to the collection until his death in 1926.



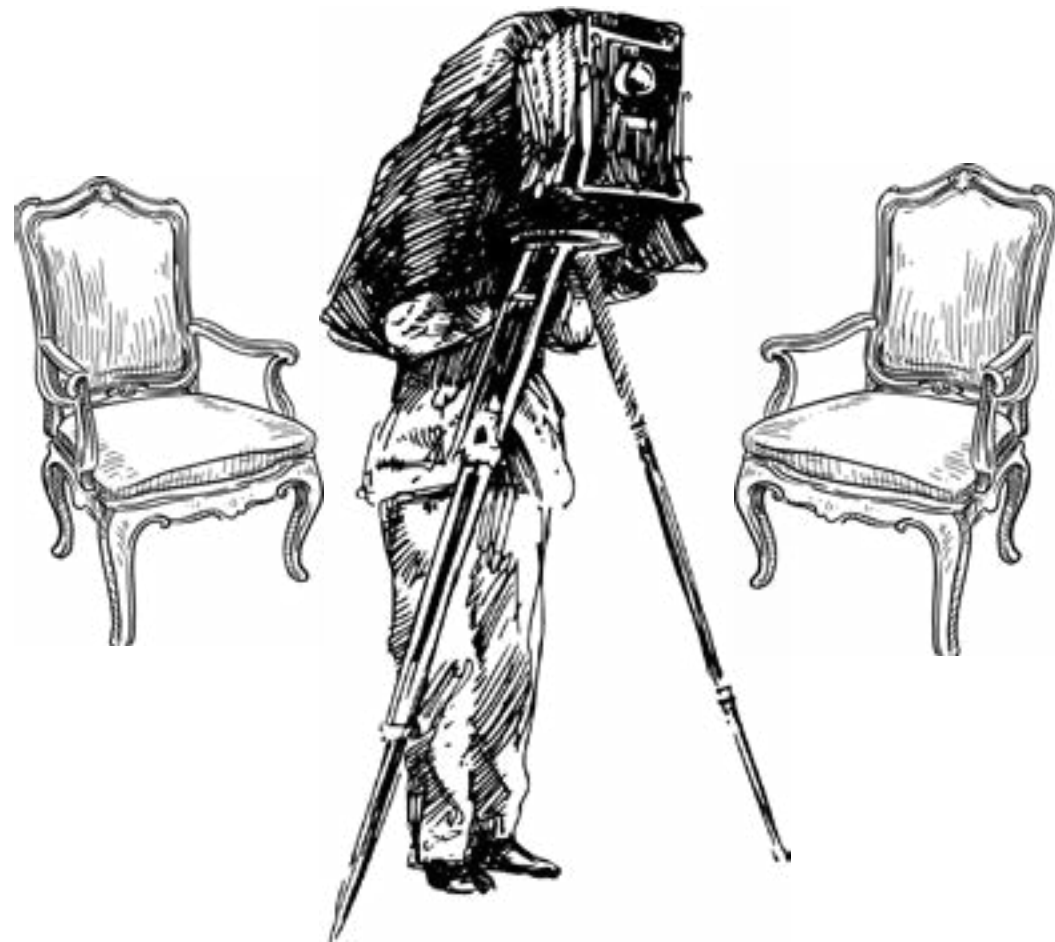
"Bird's Eye View of the Interior of the Wanamaker Grand Depot Soon After its Opening, 1877"  
Part of IU Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's Wanamaker Collection

While Dixon was giving lectures in the store, he felt compelled to head west and capture the "vanishing race" of North America: Native Americans. Dixon and the Wanamakers, like many of their contemporaries, believed that Native Americans were in decline as a race<sup>1</sup>, they believed that Native American populations were decreasing, and their traditional way of life was not being passed down to a new

<sup>1</sup>. At the time the idea of a person's race was rooted in biology rather than the social idea of race that we have today.

generation.<sup>2</sup> Dixon had an affinity and sympathy for Native Americans, a view shared by both John and Rodman Wanamaker. The Wanamakers planned to use the photos in their stores and agreed to fund his 1908, 1909, and 1913 expeditions. Dixon later used the photos to show visitors the conditions that Native Americans lived under on the reservations.

Joseph Dixon took thousands of photos; some were posed portraits while others were more candid. These photos let us see the images of the past and provide an opportunity for us to examine the photos for additional information. We can ask questions like: Whose clothes are they wearing? Are they in a natural posture, or has Dixon asked them to pose? Dixon also took many photos outside of these portraits. In these photos, he tries to capture what life was like for Native Americans. He believed he was a member of the last generation that would see Native Americans living as they had before European Americans arrived, and this motivated him to capture their way of life (Trachtenberg, 11). He ultimately used these images to advocate for citizenship for all Native American people.



2. This is contrary to statistics available at the time, which indicated Native American populations were increasing.

## The Photographer: Joseph K. Dixon and his Expeditions

Dixon began working for Wanamaker Department Store in 1908. Before he was the director of the education bureau, Dixon had a long and complex career.

Born in 1856 in upstate New York, he took a degree in theology, held churches in New York state and Philadelphia, seems to have lost both church and wife in an adultery escapade, and may or may not have taken a law degree along the way. He turns up next in England as a journalist and in 1904 as an agent for the Eastman Kodak Company (Trachtenberg, 8).

While at the Kodak Company, Dixon gave lectures on the power of photography, its moral force, and its ability to educate. It was these lectures, and his ability with a camera, that led to Rodman Wanamaker hiring him. Although Wanamaker was already interested in Native American culture, Dixon proposed the expeditions. The first was to film a movie based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem [\*The Song of Hiawatha\*](#). This included finding Native American actors. Although the poem is centered around an Ojibwe man and a Dakota woman, Dixon cast actors from the Crow reservation.

The second expedition, just a year later, was centered around "The Last Great Indian Council," where Dixon invited about one hundred Native Americans from many different tribes to gather at the Crow reservation to meet, talk, and exchange stories. He also asked them to re-enact Custer's last stand, and stage a scene with chiefs riding off into the sunset. During the time he spent on the reservations, Dixon gained firsthand experience of the conditions that Native Americans lived under in the early 20th century. What he saw disturbed him, although Dixon believed the Native American culture to be in decline, he also saw them as proud and noble people who should receive fair treatment.



It would be four years until the third and final expedition. In the time between the second and third expeditions Dixon, Wanamaker, and many other influential Americans began to work on a memorial to Native Americans. The motivation behind the memorial was their belief that the "Native American race" would soon die out, and no "true" Native Americans would be left in the country. The proposed National American Indian Memorial would have been in New York City, on the edge of Staten Island. Dixon used connections he had made with Native Americans and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to bring many Native American leaders to New York City, where they showed support for the Memorial and gave a speech pledging allegiance to the United States.

Dixon thought a memorial to Native Americans should be accompanied by real-world actions to improve their conditions, which led him to set out on his final and grandest expedition yet, The Expedition for Citizenship. Dixon felt that it was time for all Native Americans to be allowed to formally join this country and hoped to use the expedition to campaign for Native American citizenship. Dixon's goal was reached in 1924 when the [Indian Citizenship Act](#) was passed. While Dixon believed citizenship would improve the lives of Native Americans, sixty percent of Native Americans already had citizenship when the act was passed. It would clearly take much more, and much longer, for [conditions to improve](#).



On this final expedition Dixon visited 73 reservations, he gave every Tribe a flag of the United States, played recordings of speeches, and asked Native Leaders to sign a Declaration of Allegiance to the United States. Dixon hoped that after the expedition, the Declarations from each reservation would convince the government to grant citizenship to all Native Americans. However, because of the beginning of World War I in 1914, national concerns were directed

elsewhere. The memorial would never be finished (it had hardly begun) and all Native Americans would not be granted citizenship until 1924. It is unclear how much impact Dixon's expedition had on the 1924 act.

*Dixon began his expeditions intending to capture the "vanishing race" of Native Americans. However, once he ventured onto the reservations, and saw the conditions they were living in, and the poor treatment they received from the US government, he began to make efforts as an activist to improve their conditions. In this packet are photos from all three of his expeditions. With these evolving views in mind, try to see how Dixon's power is evident in the photos.*

## Themes

The photos in this packet are united by two themes, manipulation and power. Some of the photos have been physically altered, not unlike photoshopped images today. Others were manipulated before the photo was ever captured. These methods can be harder to detect, the Wanamaker photos were taken more than one hundred years ago, so the actual context of the moment is lost. But by applying critical thinking and historical knowledge, students can examine the photos and piece together some of the story behind the photos.



## The Photos



1962-08-2188 "Fording the Little Horn (council Picture)", 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

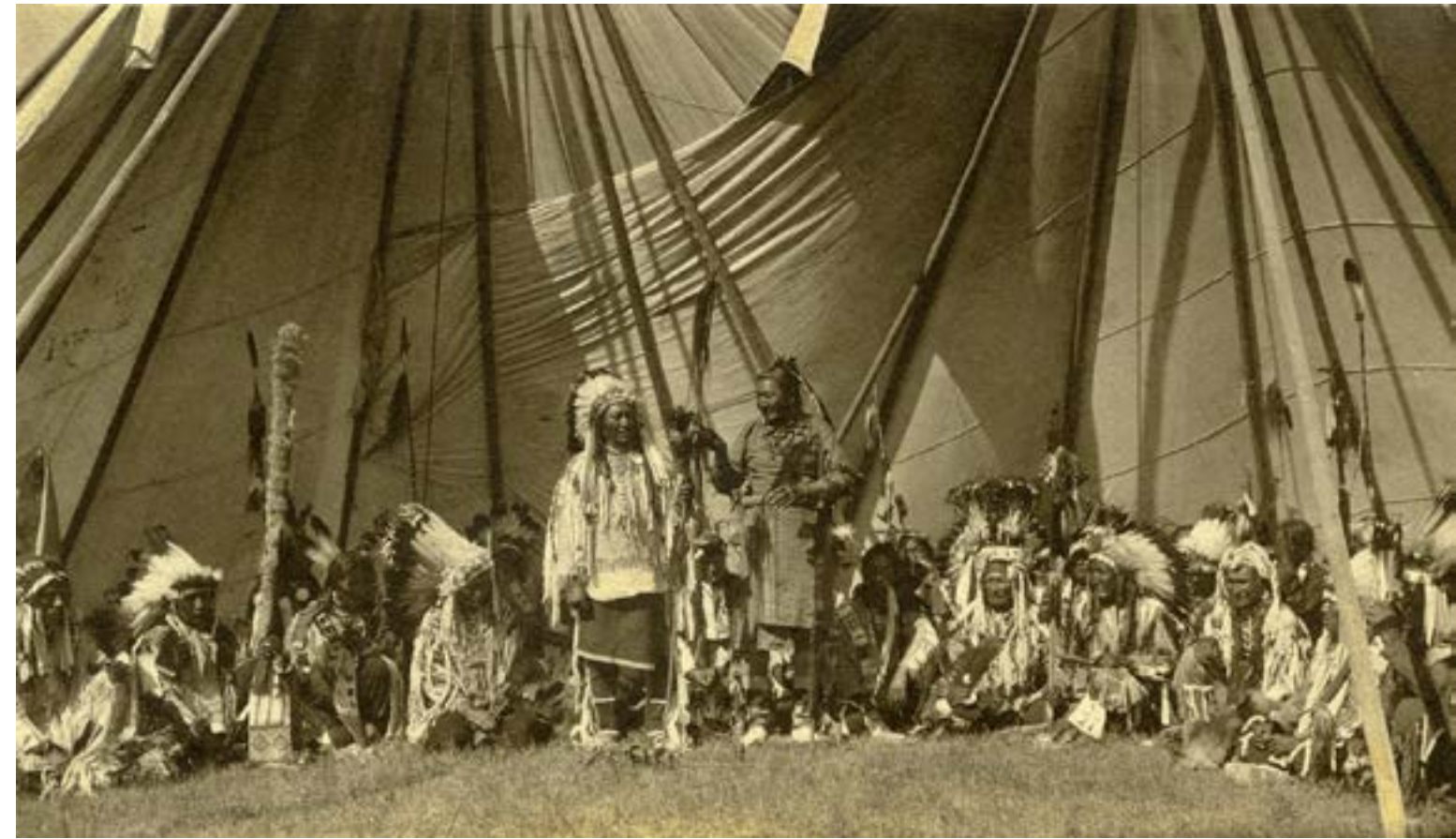
**Description:** A large procession of Native Americans on horseback rides away from the camera. They are fording a small river. The sky is filled with large clouds. There are around 30 riders in the photo. The ground near the camera is exposed dirt, but foliage and trees can be seen on the other side of the river.

**Note:** This photo has been manipulated, the clouds were added in (Kavanaugh, 1996).



1962-08-1935 "The Last Great Indian Council," 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A large group of Native American men are gathered beside two large tepees. There are around 20 people present. They are sitting down with their backs toward the tepees. The men are sitting in a semi-circle. Many are wearing large, feathered headdresses. The clothing suggests these are all men from Plains area Tribes.



1962-08-2556 "Two Moons addressing Plenty Coups," 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A large group of Native American men are gathered beside two large tepees. There are around 20 people present. They are sitting down with their backs towards the tepees. The men are sitting in a semi-circle. Many are wearing large, feathered headdresses. In the middle, two Native American men are standing up. The man on the left is wearing a light-colored fringed shirt and a feathered headdress. He is holding a staff in one hand. The man on the right is wearing darker clothing and has his hair pulled back. He is reaching a hand towards the staff.

**Note:** The notes on this photo state that the Northern Cheyenne, Crow, and Plains cultures are depicted. Plains is a geographic region, not a specific group of Native people.



1962-08-1987 "The sorrowful look" (Black Weasel) or "The Last Outpost" 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A cliff overlooking a river dominates the frame. One side of the cliff is sheer, the other is steep and covered in tufts of grass. At the peak of the cliff stands a man silhouetted against the sky. A bow is in their hand. They are looking out over the river.

**Note:** The catalogue record for this photograph states it is a Blackfoot person.



1962-08-2671 "Chiefs vanishing into sunset," 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A group of riders ride away from the camera. The ground is covered in patches of grass. One rider is far closer than the rest. Six other riders have already crested the hill in front of the camera, and they and/or their horses are obscured by it. The closest and most visible rider has a feathered headdress on and a long staff in hand. The staff is in front of him, and the camera only shows it sticking above his head. He has a long shirt on with tassels.

**Note:** this is part of the "Vanishing Race" image set along with multiple other photos including 1962-08-1485a. Plains Indians is noted as the culture, but Plains is a geographic region.



1962-08-1485a "Sunset of a Dying Race," 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A lone rider faces away from the camera. The rider has a feathered headdress on and a long staff in hand. The staff is in front of him, and the camera only shows it sticking above his head. He has a long shirt on with tassels. The ground around his is dark, but grass is visible against the horizon. The background is the sky, and we can see the sun is being covered by clouds. From the angle of the sun, it must be sunset or sunrise.

**Note:** see previous photo. This is part of the "Vanishing Race" series.



1962-08-2671b "Chiefs vanishing into sunset" 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A group of riders ride away from the camera. The ground is covered in patches of grass. One rider is far closer than the rest. Six other riders have already crested the hill in front of the camera, and they and/or their horses are obscured by it. It is obvious that two riders have been physically cut out of the photo. The closest and most visible rider has a feathered headdress on and a long staff in hand. The staff is in front of him, and the camera only shows it sticking above his head. He has a long shirt on with tassels.

**Note:** These three photos tell the story of how Dixon manipulated the photo to add in a sunset, clouds, and remove other riders (Kavanagh 1995, 11).



1962-08-0312, "Hiawatha. Portrait of Hiawatha and Minnehaha," 1908, Crow Reservation Montana

**Description:** Two people stand in the foreground. The man on the left has hair coming down to his mid-chest and has a feather in the back of his hair. His face has a neutral expression with both eyes open and looking forward. He wears no shirt but is wearing a necklace that has many strands. The strands range from close around his neck to hanging low near his naval. Both elbows have a medium to thick band of fabric wrapped around them. He has a strap running across his chest, and under the necklaces, a long object wrapped in fabric is attached to the strap and pokes out behind him. He has a pelt of some animal wrapped around his waist. He has on long dark fringed pants and decorated shoes. Both of his wrists are wrapped with thick fabric bracelets. He is holding hands with a woman standing next to him. She wears a similar, neutral expression. She has long hair, worn in two braid that go down to her naval. She has flat circular earrings hanging from her ear. She has a loose necklace around her neck. She is wearing a long, shin length, fringed dress. The dress has a design on its sleeves and shoulders but a plain chest. She has a brightly colored bracelet on one hand that is holding the man's hand. She has a wide belt around her waist. She wears similar shoes to the man. To the left and right of their feet are rocks. Tall grass grows sparsely all around them. Two trees are in the background, one close and one far. They are on a hillside, and it is daylight out.

**Notes:** Eli Black Hawk and Angela Star are the actors' names. They are both Crow people.





1962-08-0314 "Indian Hunter Entering camp with deer for Hiawatha," 1908, Crow Reservation Montana

**Description:** A rider on a horse stands in the foreground, facing left. The horse is dark brown or black and wears a bridle. The rider sits in a saddle. He wears a tall hat with a wide, flat brim. A band is tied around the hat. He wears a scarf or bandana tied around his neck. He has a darkly colored coat on. Both hands are resting on the horn of the saddle and are holding the reins. He wears neutral-colored pants that look dirty. His booted feet are in the stirrups. A rifle is in a saddle holster under him, and two dead deer are on the horse. Both are behind him on the horse, one is half covered by a blanket with a design on it. The horse and rider stand amongst teepees. One is directly behind him, one is farther away to the left, and another to the right. Some slender trees appear to the right and behind the teepees.



1962-08-0341 "Hiawatha bringing in Deer" 1908, Crow Reservation Montana

**Description:** Three people gather outside of a tepee. They are on rocky ground in the woods, a tree trunk takes up part of the frame. Two are sitting down in front of the tepee. The person farthest from the camera, has her hair in long braids and is wearing a dress. The other person sitting has his hair in long braids as well. He has a long-sleeved tasseled shirt on and is partly obscured by the tree. The other figure is standing, with a deer and a rifle slung on his back.

**Notes:** This image was used in Matthew W. Stirling's *National Geographic on Indians of the Americas* on page 16.



1962-08-0437 "Hiawatha sailing with his friends," 1908 Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A river flows towards the camera. The camera is on the left bank. Both banks are visible in the photo. Both banks have rocky shores with brush quickly turning into thick trees and bushes. Near the left bank, a canoe with three passengers is being rowed towards the camera. The person nearest the camera is rowing. They are shirtless, and a feather is in their hair. The middle passenger wears a feathered headdress. The third passenger wears dark clothing. Hills are in the background, and a rider and horse are visible on one hill overlooking the river.



1962-08-3617 "Standing Bear, ¾ length, full face" Sept 24, 1913, Harlen, Fort Belknap Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A portrait. A Nakota man poses in an upright position for a portrait. We see him from his waist up. He wears a large, feathered headdress, that sits very far back on his head, his hair is visible. He is looking off to the right. He has a stern expression on his face. He has a long-sleeved shirt, underneath a vest. He has a patterned cloth going down both sides of his chest. He is wearing a necklace that has many strands. He is holding a flute like instrument or a pipe in one hand, and a covered rifle in the other. The background is dark.

**Note:** Standing Bear is an Assiniboine or Nakota person. Today Nakota people are enrolled in the Fort Belknap Indian Community.



1962-08-3623 "Powder Face, 3/4 face," Sept 24, 1913, Harlen, Fort Belknap Reservation, Montana

**Description:** An Aaniih man poses in an upright position for a portrait. We see him from his waist up. He wears a large, feathered headdress. He is looking off to the right. He has a calm expression on his face. He has a long-sleeved tasseled shirt. He has a patterned cloth going down both sides of his chest. He is holding a flute like instrument or a pipe in one hand, and a covered rifle in the other. The background is dark.

**Notes:** Powder Face is a Gros Ventres person. The Gros Ventre are also known as the Aaniih people and today they are enrolled in the Fort Belknap Indian Community.



1962-08-1759 "Mountain Chief, bust, full face" 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A Blackfoot man poses for a portrait. He is sitting in an upright position. He wears a Blackfoot-style feathered headdress, so the feathers stand tall in a circle on the top of his head. A thick band with many small metal circles in it is covering his forehead. He is looking off past the camera, and his expression is serious. He has many necklaces ranging in size going down his chest. He is wearing a long-sleeved shirt with tassels on the sleeves. In his left hand he is holding a wooden carving of a horse. His right hand grips a staff. The staff is standing next to him and is decorated with many feathers. One knee is visible and is covered by a pant leg. He is sitting in front of a large piece of fabric, with designs in the lower left corner.

**Note:** Mountain Chief is a Blackfoot person.



1962-08-2126 "Dr. Dixon welcoming Blackfeet" 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** Five men stand in the woods. Four are facing towards one man. The man in the center, is shaking the hand of one of the four. The man in the center is wearing tight boots and very large pants. His shirt is tucked into his pants, and he has a wide brimmed military style hat on. He is facing away from the camera. The man whose hand is he shaking is wearing a three-piece suit and a tie. He has on a tall wide brimmed hat and a pocket watch chain. The man to his right is wearing a light-colored dress shirt and a coat. He has a brimmed cowboy style hat on. The man to his left is obscured by the man in the center. The man to his left is wearing a light-colored dress shirt, a tie, a coat and wide brimmed hat.

**Note:** The Native people in this image are members of the Blackfoot Nation. Dr. Dixon is a Euro-American.



1962-08-1951 "Singing deeds of valor" 1909, Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** The camera is looking up a hill. The hill has patches of grass tufts and small shrubs. At the top of the hill stand two people. They both have long braided hair. They both are wearing many necklaces that range in tightness. The necklaces go all the way down their chests. They are not wearing any shirts. They both have on long pants with thick embodied belts. The person on the left has a stick in their right hand and a drum in their left hand. The person on the right has a bow in their left hand and an arrow in their right.

**Note:** Catalogue notes say these are Blackfoot people.



1962-08-3170 "Signing the Declaration of Allegiance to the United States Government."  
June 21, 1913, Cheyenne-Arapahoe Reservation, El Reno, Oklahoma

**Description:** A large group of people is gathered around a table at the base of a flagpole. The table is covered with an American flag, which then has a piece of paper on top of it. Standing around the table are three men. The one on the left is wearing a feathered headdress and has long hair. His shirt has a star design on it and tasseled sleeves. He has a shin length skirt on that is tied around his waist. He is helping another man unfold the paper. The man standing behind the table is wearing a collared dress shirt and a tie. He is pointing to something on the paper. The man to the right of the table is unfolding the paper. He is wearing a three-piece suit. He has glasses on and is looking down at the paper. In his left hand is a short, brimmed hat with a band around it. There is a large group of onlookers, 12 in total. Starting on the left of the photo, a person with long braided hair stands behind the man with the feathered headdress. Next to them is a man with a three-piece suit, with his coat is folded over his arm. He has a hat on. Next to him is a man in a collared dress shirt. Next to him is a woman with braided hair and a collared shirt on. She is looking over the shoulder of the man with the tie. Next to her is a man wearing a feathered headdress. He has long braided hair. He is wearing a vest with designs on it, under the vest is a collared dress shirt and a tie. Behind him and mostly obscured is a man wearing a dark brimmed hat. Beside them is the flagpole. On the other side of the flagpole is a man with a long-sleeved white shirt on. He is holding fabric with tasseled edges. Next to him is a man in a dark three-piece suit, a tie, braided hair and a brimmed hat. Next to him is another man with a vest over a dress shirt, his hair is long under a brimmed hat. Next to him is a man with a collared shirt, a tie, and long pants. He wears glasses and a brimmed hat. In front of all three men is a man in a collared shirt with a bandana tied around his neck. He is wearing glasses. In his arms he holds an American flag.

**Note:** This was not reservation land in 1913, it is today. Arapahoe Chief Cut Finger is signing the declaration of allegiance with Dr. Dixon in the center of the image.

## Suggested Activities

### What's in a Name

Give students the photos without their titles or any associated documents. Let them study the photos and eventually ask what they think the photo should be titled and what story it can tell. Optionally, once the students are done, tell them the titles Dixon gave the photos, and ask what story he might've told with the photo. This exercise can be adopted for many things, like asking students why such a photo was taken.

### Native American Life

Dixon believed he was capturing Native Americans as they lived before Europeans colonized the continent. While obviously, this is not true, the photos do show Native Americans who were alive before the reservation system. These photos could be used to talk about the reservation system.

### See. Think. Wonder

Using the worksheet on the following page have students observe (see), interpret (think), and get curious (wonder). This Project Zero thinking routine is useful for photos, objects, and things like memes or other visual arts.

### Flag Raising Ceremony

Share the photo "Signing the Declaration of Allegiance to the United States Government." What does this photo say or imply about the American government? The Native Americans in the photo recited a pledge of allegiance, just the same as school children do. What does it mean to recite a pledge of allegiance?

These activities should meet Social Studies standards, and the Media Literacy standard under English Language Arts.



1962-08-0874 "Indian girl, carrying puppies as papoose," Crow Reservation, Montana

**Description:** A small Native American child stands in front of a tepee. They are wearing a blanket around themselves. They have an unhappy look on their face and are looking off to the side. In their arms is a puppy, the animal looks slightly uncomfortable. On the left part of the frame, half her body cut off, is a Native American woman. Her hair is long and braided. She is smiling. On the ground, close to the camera, is the shadow of someone in a wide brimmed hat.

**See.** (What do you notice? What people and objects are shown? How are they arranged? What is the physical setting? Are there any signs? What other details can you see?)

**Think.** (Why was this image made? What's happening? When do you think it is from? Who do you think the audience was/is? How was the image made? What can you learn by looking at it? How would it be the same or different if the image were made today?)

**Wonder** (What do you wonder about this photo? How could you learn more?)

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