

# Looking Through the Lens: Changing Interpretations of Edward S. Curtis' Photographs of Western Canada

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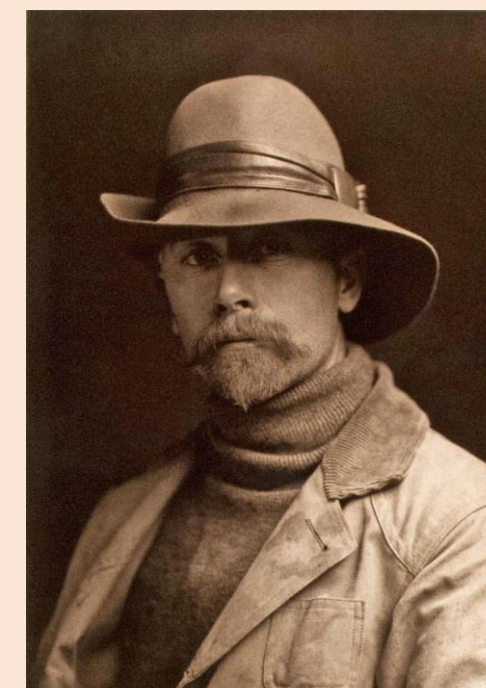
## How had historians' analysis of Edward S. Curtis' documentation of Western Canada changed through time?

Through the analysis of writings by historians from the mid- 1990s to the early 2000s, a distinct shift from a singular accusatory and critical view in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century became a relatively more positive view with analysis by professionals from a multiplicity of disciplines in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Background on Edward S. Curtis

Edward S. Curtis was a professional photographer, film maker, and amateur ethnologist who set out on a journey in 1900 to document the last of the "Vanishing Indians" in the North American West. Curtis had spent around thirty years of his life fixated on capturing photographic evidence of the traditional First Nations' way of life, but after his death in 1952, his photographs would not return to the public and academic eye until the 1970s and 1980s counterculture era. Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to early 21<sup>st</sup> century, historians have heavily debated the authenticity of his ethnographic work in Western Canada due to his tendency to stage the settings or pose the models in his photographs and films.

### Curtis' Photographs and Stills



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### Conclusion

Edward S. Curtis' documentation of the Canadian and American West began in the 1900s, but is still a topic of discussion for historians one hundred years later. The many different historical narratives discussed show how History is forever changing. By re-evaluating a certain character or point in history at different periods of time, one is able to extract new information from the same moment in history.