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The Making of Edward S. Curtis's *The North American Indian*

MICK GIDLEY

AT the end of 1905, Edward S. Curtis (1868–1952), then an energetic and enterprising photographer based in Seattle, was on the verge of achieving a national reputation. His portrait studio had become the most prominent in the city, his landscapes were being reproduced beyond the Northwest, he had already won national prizes for his genre studies of Puget Sound Indians, and his contacts with members of the Harriman Alaska Expedition of 1899—for which he had been appointed official photographer—were leading to commissions in the East. During the first years of the twentieth century he had redoubled his efforts to launch himself on the national scene: he gained third place in a *Ladies' Home Journal* competition for the prettiest baby picture; he placed his portraits of Theodore Roosevelt's family—taken to commemorate Roosevelt's first inauguration—in *McClure's* magazine; and, perhaps most effectively, he mounted exhibitions of his Indian photographs—an expanding collection that by then included representations of culture areas far beyond the Northwest—in a variety of socially prestigious East Coast venues, such as New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. And the press paid attention.¹

One of his most influential sponsors was a fellow member of the Harriman Expedition, George Bird Grinnell, an authority on the native peoples of the northern Plains who also edited the natural history and sporting magazine *Field and Stream*. Grinnell cooperated with Curtis to produce "Portraits of Indian Types" for the widely read *Scribner's* magazine. This article, published in March 1905, outlined various Indian issues for a general audience and then extolled Curtis's virtues as both an "artist" and an insightful "historian with a camera" of the indigenous peoples of North America. It reproduced a num-

¹ For a full account and analysis of the North American Indian project, see Mick Gidley, *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian, Incorporated* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); uncited information here and hereafter is taken from this source.

ber of his most evocative Indian images and generally gave the impression that his was a project that recorded the elemental difference of Native life. Curtis, declared Grinnell, had exchanged “ease, comfort, home life, for the hardest kind of work,” which involved “frequent and long-continued separation from his family ... and ... the heart-breaking struggle of winning over to his purpose primitive men, to whom ambition, time, and money mean nothing, but to whom a dream or a cloud in the sky, or a bird flying across the trail from the wrong direction means much.”²

The pivotal moment came in February 1906, when Curtis secured the patronage of the powerful banker J. Pierpont Morgan for his Indian work. What finally swayed Morgan, apparently, was a viewing of some of Curtis’s images; but what he agreed to help fund was not only, or even primarily, a photographic project. The business plan Curtis presented to Morgan was for a multivolume book—to be illustrated, for sure, by photogravures or mechanical engravings made from Curtis’s photographs, but to consist also of thousands of words per volume, and to be based on original research in the field. According to several accounts, Morgan demanded that the results of the research should be published in a physically beautiful book, one that would rival the King James Bible in its significance.³

Remarkably, only a little more than a year later, the first volume of *The North American Indian* appeared. Eventually there would be twenty such illustrated volumes, each accompanied by a portfolio of some thirty-five large-sized photogravures, which could be individually framed. The volumes were a truly monumental publication, the result of probably the largest privately funded anthropological project ever undertaken. They treated more than eighty different Indian tribes residing west of the Mississippi River, tribes that, in Curtis’s prefatory

² Grinnell’s extensive Indian work includes *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1892); the ethnographic parts of C. Hart Merriam, ed., *Harriman Alaska Expedition*, 13 vols. (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co.; Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1901–1914), especially the “Natives” section of volume 1; and “Portraits of Indian Types,” *Scribner’s* 37 (March 1905), 259–73 (quotation at 273).

³ A version of Curtis’s plan for the project, presented to Morgan in January 1906, is reprinted in Gidley, *Curtis and the North American Indian*, 44–45. See also Douglas C. Ewing, “The North American Indian in Forty Volumes,” *Art in America* 60 (July–August 1972), 84–88.

words to volume 1, “still retained some semblance of their traditional ways of life.” Although it was not, of course, one of Curtis’s objectives for the publication, the complete set has always been a rarity, to be found only in major libraries, such as Princeton, and the private collections of the very wealthy.⁴

Although *The North American Indian* states on its title page that it was “written, illustrated and published” by Edward S. Curtis, the project in fact involved much collaborative activity at every stage, from the production of pictures and text, through the editing and physical making of the books, to the sale of subscriptions to the resulting set of luxuriously bound volumes. The Morgan funds—initially \$75,000, ultimately hundreds of thousands—were for the production of the book, fundamentally for the research, fieldwork, and writing, while Curtis was made solely responsible for the marketing and sale of subscriptions. In effect, the agreement placed him on a kind of treadmill, forced to dash hither and thither raising funds in the East between western photographic and, sometimes, ethnographic field trips.

Curtis’s own appetite for personal aggrandizement fed into the need constantly to publicize “the work,” as he termed it. That pressure led to the launch in 1911–1912 of his elaborate traveling show, the musicale or “picture-opera” titled “The Vanishing Race,” and, indirectly, to the making, in British Columbia’s Kwakiutl country, of what was to be the very first feature-length narrative documentary film, *In the Land of the Head-Hunters* (1914). Looking for still more ways to advertise *The North American Indian*, Curtis mounted exhibitions, produced popular articles for newspapers and middlebrow magazines, and issued two short illustrated books, one of which, *Indian Days of the Long Ago* (1914), was aimed primarily at younger readers. In the longer term, it was these popularizing ventures, rather than *The North*

⁴ Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian*, ed. Frederick Webb Hodge, 20 vols., 20 portfolios (Cambridge, Mass., and Norwood, Mass.: University Press and Plimpton Press, 1907–1930). Volume 1 treats the Apache, Navaho, and Jicarilla; volume 2 covers a range of other peoples from the Southwest culture area. Of a planned edition of 500, approximately 227 numbered sets were eventually sold, with the remainder of the bound and unbound sets passing to the Charles Lauriat Company of Boston when the project wound up in 1930. (For many years Lauriat sold further sets and parts of sets.) Princeton’s set is number 24, and was presented by J. Pierpont Morgan himself. The thousands of images in this publication and, more recently, the whole of its text have become accessible on the Web through the Library of Congress’s American Memory site.

American Indian itself, that ensured the abiding influence of Curtis's visual representation of American Indian peoples.⁵

The agreement with Morgan enabled Curtis to gather a project team, most of whose members were actually employed in the field, but there were also personnel changes in the running of the Seattle studio and in the establishment of an office in New York, known as The North American Indian, Incorporated (an office that later became more managerial and controlling on behalf of the Morgan Bank). Certain of Curtis's employees were to stick with the project throughout, but most were attached to it for shorter periods of varying lengths. Frederick Webb Hodge (1864–1956) of the Bureau of American Ethnology was engaged almost immediately as the named and credited “editor” of *The North American Indian*, and he stayed until the end. He was paid by the word for his anthropological advice, for his fact checking against existing published ethnographies, and, intermittently, for his work as copyeditor and proofreader. He certainly helped to see the first few volumes through the press. Educated Native Americans—most prominently early on, Alexander B. Upshaw of the Crows, and later George Hunt, a Tlingit/Scottish resident among the Kwakiutls on the Northwest Coast—were retained as cultural brokers, informants, and interpreters. And significantly, although not apparent from a reading of the volumes themselves, there were people who both conducted detailed ethnological fieldwork and—without receiving authorial credit—actually wrote most of the text of *The North American Indian*. William E. Myers, a linguist and former newspaperman from Springfield, Ohio, was the most important such figure: he wrote the bulk of volumes 1 through 18.

The circumstances of the production of *The North American Indian* and, even more, the fact that it was sold in a severely limited edition, on a subscription basis, at high prices mean that, as I have pointed out elsewhere, it is a text more famous than read.⁶ Not surprisingly,

⁵Further information on all of these activities may be found in Gidley, *Curtis and the North American Indian*. More detailed studies of particular phenomena are Gidley, “The Vanishing Race in Sight and Sound: Edward S. Curtis’ Musicales of North American Indian Life,” in *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, no. 12, ed. Jack Salzman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 59–87, and, for the movie, Bill Holm and George I. Quimby, *Edward S. Curtis in the Land of the War Canoes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980).

⁶Mick Gidley, “Introduction” to *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian Project in the Field*, ed. Gidley (Lincoln, Neb., and London: University of Nebraska Press,

given its scale—and given other vicissitudes too complicated to detail here—the publication took a very long time to reach completion: volume 20, with text and portfolio devoted to the Eskimo peoples of the Alaskan coasts, did not appear until 1930. Moreover, far less is known about the research, writing, editing, and other processes that brought the volumes into being than should be the case. Fortunately, the Rare Books Division of the Princeton University Library possesses bound proof-stage copies of the first two text volumes of *The North American Indian*, and these complement the Library's complete set of the work.

These annotated proofs—or, more accurately, the first, second, and third revises of signatures of the volume, collected and bound together—are printed on relatively inferior paper and are in a very fragile state. The first volume is virtually complete, and the second volume, though it must have been quite severely damaged by damp at some point, contains more than half of its original content.⁷ The history of these bound proof copies after their initial printing as part of the production process for *The North American Indian* and up to their acquisition by Princeton is, in itself, somewhat surprising: they were held by the public library of Hoboken, New Jersey, and—given the issue slip pasted into volume 1, designating it as a “14 DAY BOOK” for which “TWO CENTS WILL BE CHARGED FOR EACH DAY IT IS KEPT BEYOND THAT TIME”—must have been checked out as if they were regular books rather than annotated proof. Eventually, they were sold or discarded, but finally rescued by a Princeton librarian.⁸ Both include annotation by a key early figure in the project, William Wellington Phillips (1880–1936), and in a variety of ways they supply information about and insight into the making of what Theodore

2003), 1. This text provides a succinct account of the project and includes brief biographies of Hodge, Myers, Upshaw, and other employees.

⁷Key parts missing from volume 2, which treats a variety of the hunter-gatherer peoples of Arizona and the Southwest borderlands of California, Arizona, and Sonora, are half of the Introduction, whole sections dealing with the Papago and the Qáhatika, both text and plates, and quite a few other significant images. Also, several images were bound in at an incorrect point.

⁸I know of no other sets of proof for *The North American Indian*. I would like to thank Alfred L. Bush and Gretchen M. Oberfranc of the Princeton University Library for bringing these proofs to my attention and for supplying information about them. Hereafter, to distinguish them from the published volumes of *The North American Indian*, they will be cited as *NAI*, P1, and *NAI*, P2.

Roosevelt—who also contributed a foreword to *The North American Indian*—termed “a real asset in American achievement.”⁹

It is known that Phillips—Curtis’s cousin through the photographer’s 1892 marriage to Clara Phillips—had worked part-time at Curtis’s Seattle studio. After his graduation from the University of Washington in 1904, he became a clerical assistant to Curtis in the field and gradually turned himself into a neophyte ethnologist. In fact, he left some fascinating memoirs of his time with the project, including an account of fieldwork among the White Mountain Apaches of Arizona, one of the tribes discussed in volume 1 of the series.¹⁰ It is also known that Phillips—who identifies himself as “WWP” in a handwritten note at the beginning of the proofs for volume 2—was responsible for seeing some of the early volumes of *The North American Indian* through the press. The nature of such a task—for which he would typically journey to Boston—is made much clearer by the annotations to the two Princeton proofs.¹¹ An examination of them quickly reveals that their main purpose was not the correction of text, but the proper identification and placement of the illustrations. Therefore, the following commentary considers first their visual aspect, then their verbal significance.

Right at the beginning of the proofs for volume 1, the gravure titled “The Pool—Apache”—an atmospheric image of a powerfully built Apache man standing by, and reflected in, the still pool of a river—has a handwritten annotation: “From copyright photograph 1906 by E.S. Curtis.” Also added, though not identified as such, is the negative number, in this case “x1887,” and the picture is firmly positioned, in blue ink, as “Frontispiece.” The image also has another number (in this instance 3045-4), which seems to be its identification as a photogravure and was probably supplied by the Gravure-Etching

⁹ Roosevelt’s foreword is reprinted in Curtis, *The North American Indian: The Complete Portfolios* (Cologne: Taschen, 1997), 32, and in Gidley, *Curtis and the North American Indian*, 45–46. The quotation is from a letter, Roosevelt to Curtis, February 27, 1910, quoted in Gidley, 41.

¹⁰ For biographical material on Phillips, see Gidley, ed., *Curtis and the North American Indian Project*, 36; this book reprints several of Phillips’s memoirs, including “The Gods Forbid,” on the Apaches (36–44).

¹¹ Phillips met Harriet Caroline Sias, the woman who would become his wife, in Boston. The handwritten note, addressed to Hodge, reads: “Will send you duplicate along with complete front folio soon. Have been in N.Y. Hence some delay” (*NAI*, P2, unnumbered first page).

Company of Boston, the firm that—with the more famous company John Andrew of Boston—did the photo-engraving work for *The North American Indian*.¹² Some of this annotation would in fact be printed in the published version of the book.

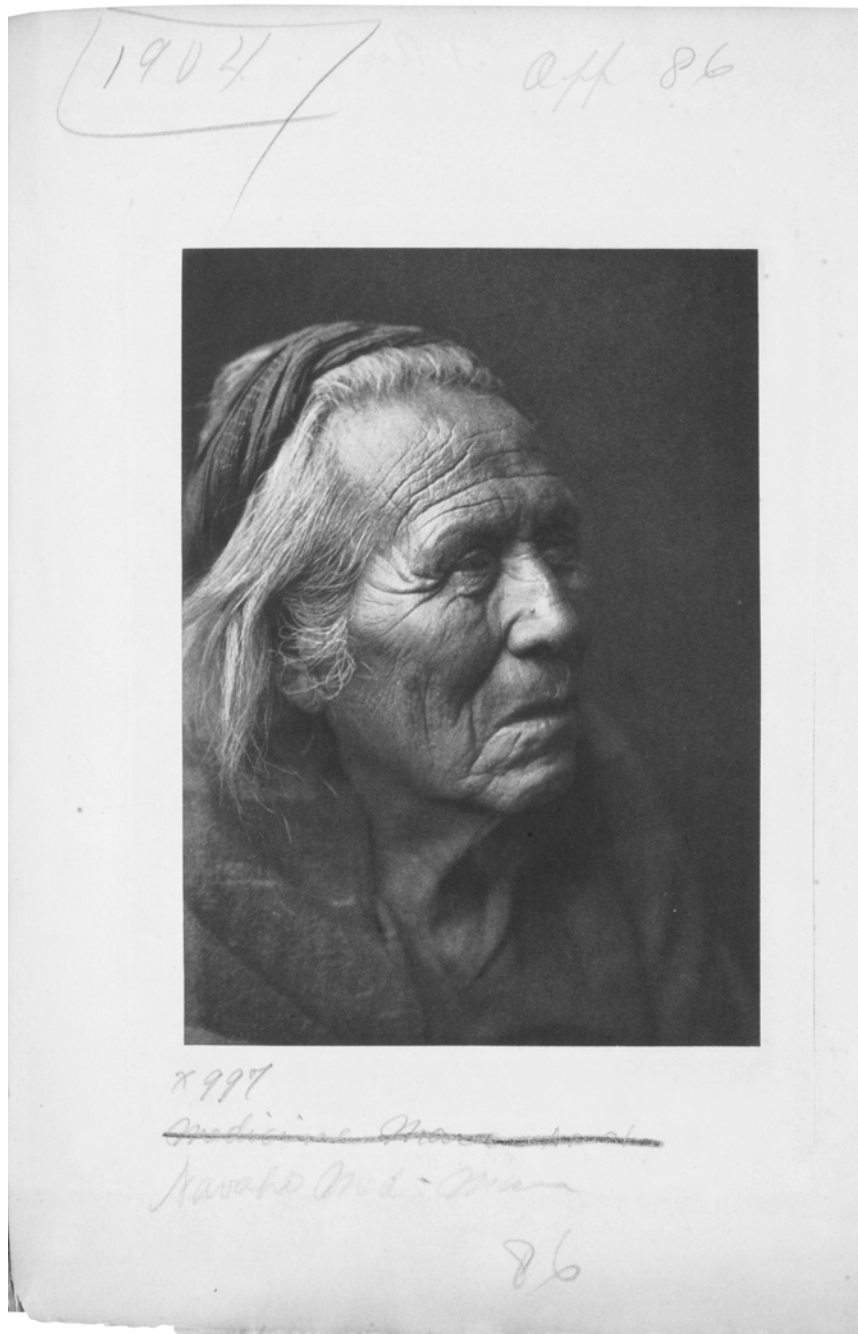
Thus, each image has a copyright notice and a date. In some cases, the date is the same as the publication year of the volume concerned (1907 for the first volume); but several of the photographs had already been published in magazine articles or had been sent earlier to the copyright office for registration. It was Phillips's job to see that each image was given the correct—often already assigned—copyright date. (It should be remembered that this date was not always anywhere near the time at which the image was actually made; it is, precisely, the copyright date.¹³)

The negative number, however—unless actually handwritten onto the image itself at an earlier point—was not printed in the published volumes. Clearly, it was noted at this proof stage to make certain that the image to be printed corresponded exactly with the negative file. Curtis's negative file is the record that the photographer and his associates made closest in time to the actual creation of the images. In the case of volume 1, the proof shows that a serious mis-identification of tribal affiliation was avoided for one image: Phillips crossed out the title offered, "Medicine Man—Apache," and wrote in the correct title, "Navaho Medicine Man" (1904; fig. 1), together with its negative number (x997).¹⁴ Similarly, the placement notes—such as the one

¹²Unlike the prestigious John Andrew, which was given printed credit for the gravure work for volumes 1–11 (the Suffolk Engineering and Electrotyping Co. received it for the later volumes), the Gravure-Etching Company is nowhere granted credit in *The North American Indian*, but the company name is printed on the verso of several of the proof photogravures in these revises, including "Primitive Apache Home" (1903; *NAI*, P1, 18).

¹³For more on the dating of Curtis's photographs, see Gidley, "Ways of Seeing the Curtis Project on the Plains," in Martha H. Kennedy et al., *The Plains Indian Photographs of Edward S. Curtis* (Lincoln, Neb., and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 39–66, esp. 41–43. Some of the plates in the proof versions—"Navaho Still Life" (1907), for example (*NAI*, P1, 84)—already have a copyright designation and date, presumably because the gravure had been used previously, perhaps to publicize the impending publication of *The North American Indian*. In each case, the date supplied in this article indicates the time of the original making of the image, when known, or the usually designated time when not.

¹⁴*NAI*, P1, opp. 86. The photocopied E. S. Curtis Studio negative file—a rich source of identifications and dates—is in Special Collections, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.



1. "Navaho Medicine Man" (1904), photogravure in Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian*, revised proof of volume 1, opposite 86. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Purchase, J. Monroe Thorington '15 Fund.

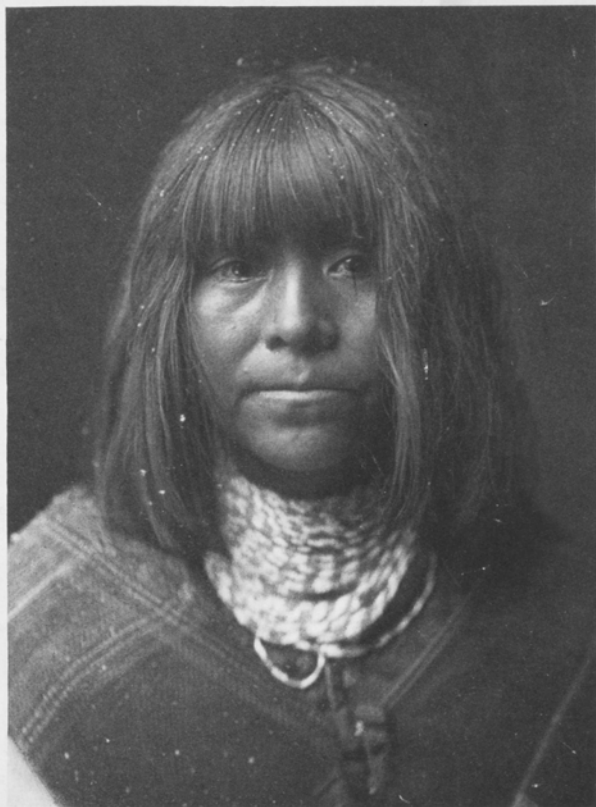
that positions the masked Apache ceremonial figure “Nayenezgani” (1904) with the words “opposite x”—were obviously acted on by the printers, but were not printed in the published version. The same is true of the gravure numbers, which must also have been supplied to ensure precise correspondence between the image printed as a gravure with the image as originally supplied in photographic form.

This pattern of annotation of the illustrations is followed throughout the proofs for volumes 1 and 2, although volume 2 is marked by minor variations: the titles of plates appear as typed labels, and negative numbers are no longer provided. On occasion in both volumes, however, the pattern is broken by additional comments or instructions. The image titled “Mescal camp—Apache” (1904), for example, carries the instruction “flat tint” above pencil lines hatched in to represent the sky. At the bottom of page 29 of volume 1 the printers have asked, “Please supply plate for p.30”; the printed request is then crossed out in pencil by Phillips, who, presumably, provided the duotone plate we find here in this proof of “Sacred Buckskin—Apache” (1906). It carries an instruction to the binders: “Blackwell. This plate is colored”—and this rare representation of the pantheon of Apache deities was indeed rendered in color in the published volume. This late change led, in turn, to minor corrections—of references to colors, misspellings, and orthography—in the accompanying “Explanation of Plate” that follows.¹⁵

Curtis was not an exponent of what has come to be known as “straight” photography. Like most of his peers in the dominant pictorialist movement in the early twentieth century, he quite often manipulated images, or would allow or expect associates to do so, whether at the developing and printing stage or when engraved as photogravures. One of the plates in the proofs of the second volume—the soft-focus portrait of Ta’támichě, a woman of the Walapai people who lived along the rim of the Grand Canyon—is particularly interesting. In the proof version we see, if faintly, tiny flakes of snow suspended in her hair and caught on her clothes (fig. 2)—and this is not surprising. The famous image “Author’s Camp—Walapai-land” (1907), which depicts a snowbound tent, shows that it *was* snowing during the project’s field trip to Walapai country. But to the proof copy of this

¹⁵ *NAI*, P1, 29–31. Similar instructions are given for other plates intended for rendition in color, such as P1, 78 and 118.

1907



3089-35

Ta'thámichě - Walapai

92

Perfect plate. (Cut out the snow)

Phillips

2. "Ta'thámichě—Walapai" (1907), photogravure in Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian*, revised proof of volume 2, opposite 92. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Purchase, J. Monroe Thorington '15 Fund.

portrait of Ta'thámichě, Phillips added the instruction: "Perfect plate. (Cut out the snow) Phillips." The version in the published volume shows that the printer complied.¹⁶

Given the extra information that this proof version of a gravure image grants, it is a pity that similar enlightenment is not supplied by the opportunity to examine the proof version of "A Drink in the Desert—Navaho" (1904; fig. 3), one of the most severely and obviously manipulated images in the whole of *The North American Indian*. As figure 3 shows, in this depiction of a pony slaking its thirst, the horse's tail and hind legs are not photographically rendered but almost completely hand-drawn. In the published version, its negative number (x1024-04) has been removed, but that is all. The existence of the proof suggests, therefore, that all of the manipulation had already occurred, at the negative stage—but we cannot be absolutely certain.

Given that the primary purpose of these revises was the correct placement of properly identified plates, it is not surprising that textual emendations are relatively few, mostly minor, and not particularly revealing. Typically, if we take volume 1 as characteristic, subtitles were added (for example, "Creation Myth" under "Mythology") or amended ("Medicine and Medicine Men" rather than "Apache Medicine Practices"); letters printed off the baseline were marked for raising or lowering; errors in running titles were spotted; occasionally, minor improvements to phrasing were suggested; and the only extended note Phillips made was to instruct the printers to capitalize all parts of clan names ("Red Rocks," for instance, not "Red rocks").¹⁷

Interestingly, some of the changes Phillips made, such as his corrections to the orthography of Apache and Navaho words, did not survive into the printed version of the text, presumably because his suggestions were overruled by Hodge. Similarly, the final published text includes several rephrasings not signaled by Phillips, which can be attributed to Hodge.¹⁸ The same is true of the second volume. For

¹⁶ *NAI*, P2, opp. 92; the doctored image appears at the same point in the published volume.

¹⁷ These typical changes are, in order, *NAI*, P1, 23, 35, 76 and 84, 70–80, *passim*, and 132.

¹⁸ The orthographic suggestions occur throughout *NAI*, P1. A typical Hodge amendment is the shortening of the final words of a sentence that ends "the young woman will be strong and active throughout her life, beloved by her offspring, who will always follow and be faithful to her" (47) to, simply, "who will always obey her."



3. "A Drink in the Desert—Navaho" (1904), photogravure in Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian*, revised proof of volume 1, opposite 70. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Purchase, J. Monroe Thorington '15 Fund.

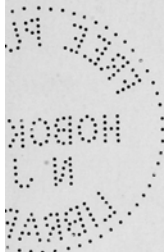
example, the proofs show that Phillips retitled the first subsection on the Pima as “Home and General Customs” to make it consistent with the phrasing in the table of contents, whereas in the published version the subtitle—on both contents page and at the head of the subsection itself—becomes “Tribal Characteristics.”

The proofs do offer one important textual revelation. Clearly, the first and second volumes were originally planned for joint or nearly joint publication, because uncorrected on the title page of volume 2 is the legend, “First and second volumes published in the year nineteen hundred and seven,” when in fact volume 2 appeared a year later, in 1908, and was printed with its correct publication date. Also, the copyright page of the proof copy of volume 2 has an “Outline of the Curtis Publication of The North American Indian” (fig. 4). Obviously, this outline was deleted and has never before been published. It reveals quite a lot about just how unrealistic were the Curtis team’s expectations about their progress. In particular, the aim to publish three volumes per year was achieved only twice: in 1911, when volumes 5 through 8 appeared, and in 1926, when volumes 15 through 17 came out. Certainly, the ambition to complete the whole project “within seven years” was, as it transpired, wildly optimistic.

On the other hand, these revises reveal just how fast such a lengthy, complex work could be guided through the press. For volume 1, the marked “first,” “second,” or, sometimes, “third” revises of each signature carry various dates, from “Oct. 23, 1907” to “Dec. 6, 1907” for such front matter as the list of illustrations. Hence it is almost astounding that even one leather-bound copy could be produced within the year, in time for the book to be registered as a 1907 publication. The progress of volume 2—with first revises dated every few days throughout December 1907, until December 23, and with that of the index dated “Jan. 15, 1908”—was perhaps even more impressive. At the same time, and more important, the previously unpublished “Outline”—which chimes well with contemporary advertisements for *The North American Indian* in general circulation—reminds us of the grandeur of purpose, the monumental scale, and the extraordinary scope of both the promised volumes and the project to produce them.¹⁹

¹⁹“Telling History by Photographs,” an anonymous article in *The Craftsman* for March 1906 (partially reproduced in Gidley, *Curtis and the North American Indian*, 75–76), a variety of prospectuses issued by the North American Indian project itself, and boosting articles, such as Edmond S. Meany’s “Hunting Indians with a Camera,”

Copyright



OUTLINE OF THE CURTIS PUBLICATION OF
**THE NORTH AMERICAN
INDIAN**

THE publication will consist of twenty volumes of text, and bound with the text of these twenty volumes will be fifteen hundred of the small pictures, each one of the fifteen hundred being a full-page photogravure. Several of the photogravures in each volume will be hand-colored plates of ceremonial subjects.

The book in size will be a page $9\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$; 350, or more, pages in each volume. The best quality imported hand-made paper will be used; one selected particularly for its lasting qualities.

As a supplement to the twenty volumes there will be twenty portfolios, each containing thirty-six of the large pictures, 12×16 , or in the complete set there will be seven hundred and twenty large pictures and fifteen hundred of the small, making a grand total of twenty-two hundred and twenty, these all to be of the very best photogravure work. Every care will be taken to make the book as good as can be made.

Mr. Frederick Webb Hodge, of the Smithsonian Institution, and Editor of the "American Anthropologist," is the Editor of the work. President Theodore Roosevelt has written the Foreword.

It is published in parts, each part being complete in itself, treating of certain tribes. It is proposed in the complete work to take up all tribes, both in picture and in text, of our North American Indians which are yet in a primitive condition, picturing every phase of their life. Parts will be delivered as completed, the plan being to publish an average of three a year and final deliveries made on completed work within seven years.

4. This publication outline for *The North American Indian* never appeared in the volumes. Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian*, revised proof of volume 2, iv. Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Purchase, J. Monroe Thorington '15 Fund.

Needless to say, heroic as the project was, it had other, and more significant, features. As we have observed—in the quotation from Grinnell and elsewhere—the project tended to exaggerate the “primitive” otherness of its subjects, and in general it typified rather than stood above the fraught and complex history of “white” endeavors to represent Native life. The camera—which cannot ultimately be separated from other forms of visual representation (or, as we have witnessed in the case of *The North American Indian*, verbal representation)—has created its own history in Indian country. *The Indian and the Photograph* (1994), by Alfred L. Bush and Lee Clark Mitchell, which in turn was based on a groundbreaking symposium, an illuminating exhibition, and, in the case of Bush, a lifetime of contemplation of photographs of Native American people, literally—or, rather, graphically—*showed* some of the complexities of this past, and ongoing, interaction.²⁰

Undoubtedly, within this many-stranded story, the lines leading to and from the Curtis project, itself entangled in ambiguities—many of them compounded by the project’s word element—are among the knottiest and the hardest to unravel. They lead to such wider issues already much discussed—and touched upon here—as the influence of patronage, the demands of pictorialist composition, and, of course, ethnographic verisimilitude. Complicated as these issues are, still others arise: the extent to which *The North American Indian* simply (if such a term is adequate) reflected national attitudes or actually inflected them; the prevalence of the idea of Indians as a “vanishing race” or as a people somehow above and beyond dynamic historical change; the question of whether—and, if so, to what degree—those who sat for Curtis, such as Ta’támichě, had any agency in their own representation; and the measure to which present-day native photographers, such as Larry McNeil (Tlingit) or Pamela Shields (Blackfoot), who

World’s Work 15 (March 1908), 10004–11, resonate with the same sentiments and, even, similar phrasing.

²⁰ Alfred L. Bush and Lee Clark Mitchell, *The Indian and the Photograph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); this book contains a valuable bibliography of writings on the interaction. See also Lucy R. Lippard, ed., *Partial Recall* (New York: New Press, 1992), and Jane Alison, ed., *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography* (London: Booth-Clibborn for the Barbican Art Gallery, 1998), both of which incorporate indigenous views of the interaction. Bush contributed a perceptive entry on “Photography of and by Indians” to the *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 477–80.

have incorporated and played with Curtis's imagery, manage to get out from under him precisely by creating *through* revision.²¹ But these are matters beyond the scope of this essay on some aspects of the production and printing of *The North American Indian*.

²¹ Some of these issues are treated in the following recent studies: Gerald Vizenor, "Edward S. Curtis: Pictorialist and Ethnographic Adventurist" (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awarg8/ienhtml/essay3.html#4>); Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1890–1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); and Mick Gidley, "Photography by Native Americans: Creation and Revision," in *Representing Realities: American Literature, Art and Culture*, ed. Beverley Maeder (Tübingen: Günter Narr, 2004), 108–27.