

High School History on “Westward Expansion” by Sohyun An

GA Social Studies Standards

SSUSH12 Evaluate how westward expansion impacted the Plains Indians and fulfilled Manifest Destiny.

Background Information

Diverse bands of Native peoples throughout the northwest and northern plains, including, most famously, Chief Joseph and his Nez Perce, were forcibly removed to live on the Colville Reservation in Washington. The photo below shows Wenatchi and Chelan women and children from the Colville Reservation in Okanogan, Washington in the early 1910s. They came to the towncenter on the day of a Fourth of July celebration.



Source: Frank S. Matsura, Photograph of Indian women and children at a Fourth of July Celebration in Okanogan, Washington in the early 1910s / Retrieved from [Okanogan County Historical Society](#).

Unlike the dominant narrative of west as the last frontier for white settlement and Indigenous peoples as “vanishing Indians,” this photo shows Indigenous survivance and resistance. In the photo, Native Americans are at the center whereas the white settlers are at the background. Native Americans look proud or defiant or both. Inside the frame, signs of Progress are everywhere: a vibrantly waving American flag, an electric lamp hanging over the entranceway, automobiles parked along the curb and, behind them, a telephone pole. This is Independence Day and the future is looking bright for America. Still, isn't it curious that all the white people are in the background, incidental to the scene, gathered on the porch of the hotel - that preeminent establishment for outsiders?

The photo was taken by Japanese immigrant photographer Frank S. Matsura (1873-1913). Matsura was born in Japan and immigrated to the US in 1901. After a brief stay in Seattle, he moved to Okanogan, Washington to work as a cook's helper and a laundryman at a local hotel in 1903. In his free time, he pursued his passion for photography and later opened a photography studio, which he operated until his death from tuberculosis in 1913 at the age of 39.



Okanogan was the ancestral homeland of many Indigenous nations who were forcibly displaced by President Ulysses Grant's executive orders for white settlement, agricultural development, railroads, and communications technologies. While most Okanogan's Indigenous Peoples including Okanogan, Colville, Chelan, Methow, and Wenatchi resided on the Colville Reservation, they routinely interacted with white settlers and migrant workers like Matsura, participating in the daily life of the local towns.

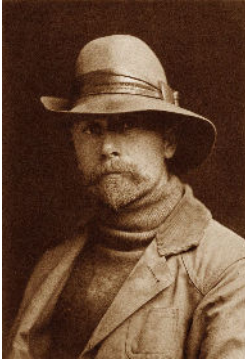
For the ten years he had in Okanogan, Matsura took more than 2,000 photos of the area's people and events. Indigenous Peoples invited him to photograph them in their homes in Colville Reservation and also traveled to his studio to get formal portraits. In these photos, signs of Indigenous survivance are everywhere, such as Indian cowboys, ranchers, and deputies as well as Indigenous women and children wearing traditional and western dresses and riding horses or wagons.



His photos such as those above are very different from photos of Indigenous Peoples taken by white photographers during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed, many white photographers and government officials saw and recorded the west as an empty land for white settlement and Indigenous People as a "vanishing race" who were "never modern" and "doomed to extinction."

Edward Curtis (1868–1952), for example, was a white photographer who traveled across the American West to photograph Indigenous Peoples. His photo project resulted in a twenty-volume series, *The North American Indian*, which was sponsored by then-President Theodore Roosevelt and financed by railroad

tycoon J.P. Morgan. Like many of his white contemporaries, Curtis believed Indigenous Peoples would inevitably be absorbed into white society, losing their “Indian” identities. He wanted to document them before they completely “vanished” and routinely used staging, costuming, or retouching the photos to fit his notion of the “real Indian.” In doing so, his photo project popularized the melancholic vision of the American West disappearing before the advance of industrialization and the Indigenous Peoples as tragic Indians fading into the past.



In contrast, Frank S. Matsura was an Asian immigrant photographer who lived and worked alongside Native Americans in the region. He also could not become a US citizen because only free white persons and immigrants with African nativity were allowed for naturalized citizenship until the 1950s. Therefore, Matsura might have held little investment in Manifest Destiny; instead he might have held affinity with Native Americans in anticolonial leanings.

Instructional Suggestions and Resources

1. Have students watch a short video clip from PBS, [Frontier Photographer Frank Matsura](#)
2. Have students read a short [biography of Matsura and examine his photos](#) from Washington State University Libraries
3. Have students read about [Edward Curtis and examine his photos](#) from Northwestern University Digital Library Collections.
4. Have students compare and contrast Matsura’s and Curtis’s visualization of Westward Expansion and Indigenous Peoples using questions such as in the graphic organizer attached.

Graphic Organizer: Photographing “Westward Expansion” through Different Gazes

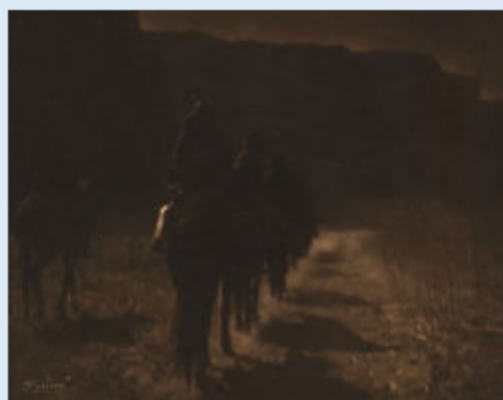
Photo Analysis Questions

1. Describe what you see.
2. How are Indigenous Peoples portrayed in the photo?
3. What messages do you think the photographer wanted to tell the photo viewers?
4. What messages do you think the Indigenous Peoples in the photo wanted to tell the photo viewers?
5. What does this photo make you wonder?

Frank Matsura’s Photo



Edward Curtis’s Photo



Write your answers to the five questions here.

Write your answers to the five questions.

Comparing & Contrasting Photos

- What similarities and differences do you see across these photos regarding representation of Indigenous Peoples?
- Why do you think Indigenous Peoples are represented in similar or different ways across these photos?
- What can you learn from examining these photos?