

High School History on “Westward Expansion”

GA Social Studies Standards

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

Have you heard about Frank S. Matura? He was a Japanese immigrant photographer who lived in Okanogan, Washington in the early 1900s and recorded daily lives of white settlers and Indigenous Peoples of the town.



Unlike Edward Curtis’s photos, which showed the west as the last frontier for white settlement and Indigenous peoples as “vanishing Indians” (see 1st image below), Frank Matura’s photo showed Indigenous survivance and resistance (see 2nd image below).



Edward Curtis (1868–1952) 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, Matura was Asian immigrant photographers who lived and worked alongside Indigenous Peoples and recorded them in real time and space. In his photos, Indigenous peoples are far from vanishing, neither never modern nor doomed to extinction; instead, they are engaged in daily activities that could be considered both traditional and modern but all Indigenous; they also assert their presence, power, place, and political nationhood. In doing so, Matura’s photos captured Indigenous survivance, which, according to Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor and Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, is more than mere resistance, more than merely responding to colonialism, but instead engaging in processes of redefinition, adaptability, fluidity, or creativity.



Such a different visualization possibly stems from the positionalities of Matsura as an Asian immigrant who was racialized by the dominant white society as unassimilable perpetual foreigners and legally excluded to become American citizens. With this positionality, Matsura might have held little investment in furthering settler colonialism; instead, they probably had an affinity with Indigenous Peoples.

By analyzing and juxtaposing Matsura's photos of Indigenous Peoples with those of Curtis's, students can identify and discuss how Indigenous Peoples, Westward Expansion, and Manifest Destiny might be visualized in starkly different ways based on who's behind the camera.

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Do you want to include more stories of Asian America into your lessons? Check out this fabulous book, *Teaching Asian America in Elementary Classrooms* by Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, Sohyun An, & Ester June Kim.

Complete Article and Lesson Plan



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Photo credit:

(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. PBS Learning Media
2. Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries. (Mon May 03 2021).
The Vanishing Race - Navaho
3. OKANOGAN INDIANS. OKANOGAN, WN. FRANK MATSURA PHOTO
Matsura, Frank S.
Okanogan County Historical Society

