REALISM

- Linkages: Positivism—photography—ethnography
- the verisimilitude of photographs
- Camera: similar to an eye
- Realist readings of photographs: focus on the content
Criticisms of Early Ethno-Photographic Realism

- Obscure the context of photo production
- Manipulate the content of photo representation
- “showing the Native as he really is”
Evolutionism

1. Polygenesis

2. Monogenesis

Louis Agassiz
E. B. Tylor
Unilineal Evolution
Romantic Primitivism

Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952)
— 1896 to 1930
— 40,000 images of 80 Indian tribes
— photos of Indian leaders, rituals, costumes
— recorded songs and chants
— recorded histories, myths, demography, lifeways, biographies, ceremonies
— artistic, pictorial & impressionistic approach
Salvage Ethnography

Franz Boas (1858-1942)
—against evolutionism
—cultural relativism
—fieldwork
—“salvage”
—Pacific Northwest
Kwakiutl Indians: "The way the Hamaselal Dancer Dressed in winter dances. I send you this mask of wasp dancer I Bought from Denax'dox tribe." ca. 1920
Productions in Early Ethnographic Realism

Polygenetic Evolution → naked bodies, measurements

Unilineal Evolution → social situations; assimilation

Romantic Primitivism → facsimiles of the pre-colonial; staged authenticity

Salvage Ethnography → culture traits
Conclusions for Early Ethno-Photography

—contexts of early ethnographic photography
—ideological purposes
—renewed colonialism

Photographic practices did not take shape, and take place, in a social and cultural vacuum:

Pierre Bourdieu:

“the most trivial photograph expresses, apart from the explicit intentions of the photographer, the system of schemes of perception, thought and appreciation common to a whole group”

1. Colonialism
2. Scientific support for colonialist ideologies
3. Positivism
4. Power relations