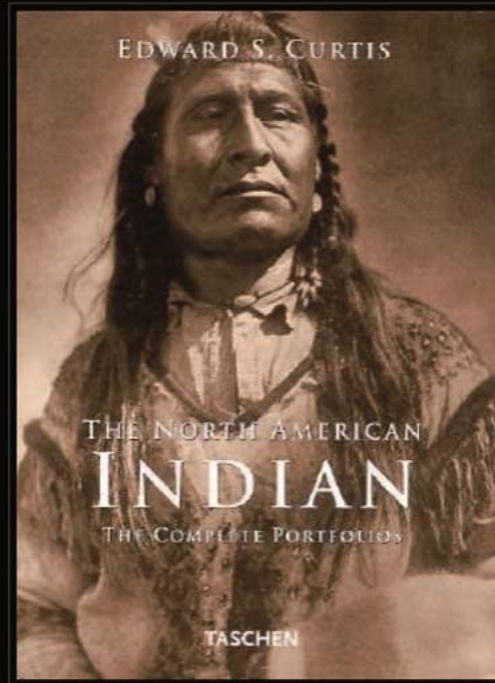


Gazes from the lost

A book review of Taschen's photo book on the lost Indian cultures of North America

By Howard G. Fass

Photos by: Edward S. Curtis



Recently I purchased this photo book by Taschen. This is a marvelous collection of late-nineteenth century photos of North American first-nation's peoples "Indians" take by the period photographer Edward S. Curtis.

Beyond the initial curiosity and fickle history... Beyond the scenes of a lost world of cultures now completely erased by modernity and genocide are the eyes of those who stare back from the portraits at the living.

These are people who now long dead and unremembered by anyone still alive call out to us. It's a lonely wide pensive stare, full of distrust, fear; as if to say that I too was once alive amongst the living. I too once had a homeland. I too once daydreamed and ran in the open meadows under a bright sun. I too once felt the earth and had a spirit that was as free as the wind that blew through my hair. Now we are the lost, part of a stolen memory from a stolen people who were victims of genocide.

Silent eyes forever frozen in their blank stare. It's a cautionary stare which because it comes from the other worlds on the wings of lost gods and prayers can not physically make or do anything to the living in a physical way. Yet it judges us from some higher ground.

Why did my people and way of life have to be erased? For what greater ultimate goal?

Has humanity learned anything since these stares were first captured on sepia tea-stained toned film? As Tibetans in their own homeland come to face the same cultural genocide is the world today any better? From the vast expanses of cultural genocide in Europe to the killing fields at S21 in Southeast Asia and more in the Twentieth Century we are far from any world that is better. In fact it's probably much worse.

It is often said that history repeats itself. And so by saying do we become disarmed and not culpable for the result like blank automatons?

If these stares from the lost say anything beyond sorrow, its to warn us to act and do something for the good while the power of breath still remains inside. We are the force that makes history happen. There is no inevitability other than the results of our own actions. Our actions, big or small make the history not the other way around.

Please remember when you vote or buy something, that no matter how small, your actions make a difference. Peoples and cultures in Tibet, Taiwan, China and elsewhere are being erased. In some future generation will they too look back from tea-stained photos of the lost at the living asking did you care and do something while there was still time?

Support human rights and freedom every step of the way.

