

Zamir, Shamoon. *The Gift of the Face: Portraiture and Time in Edward S. Curtis's The North American Indian*. University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 1-282, Notes, Bibliography, and Index 283-316, 319-334.

http://www.uncpress.unc.edu/browse/book_detail?title_id=3515

Weaver, Jace. *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000-1927*. University of North Carolina Press, 2014. vii-xiv, 1-278, Notes and Index 279-340, no Works Cited.

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In this era of ever-shrinking library budgets, not to mention individual purchasing power, both *The Gift of the Face* and *The Red Atlantic* deserve to find a home in an institution's library shelves, albeit for different reasons. The former asks that the reader take another, fuller, look at the images and words that make up Edward S. Curtis' multi-volume *The North American Indian*. The latter that the reader sees, perhaps for the first time, the role the natives of the Americas played in the making of the modern world.

Zamir's text asks that, contra those scholars who see in Curtis's images instances of the "imposition of colonialist stereotypes" (179), we read the photographs as rich in, again to quote Zamir, "the activity of a knowing self-fashioning" (179) on the part of Curtis's native subjects. Zamir is quick to note that he does not want to dismiss as incorrect the claims already made by earlier readings of Curtis and his work; rather, he wants to "insist on Curtis's insensitivity" as part of the study's effort to reveal Edward Curtis as a "man inextricably entangled within the reigning beliefs and attitudes toward race and culture of his own time *and yet* a man simultaneously capable of remarkable artistic and scholarly achievement. This contradiction runs through the whole of *The North American Indian*" (188 emphasis added).

Zamir asks that we take particular note of Curtis's decision to use copperplate photogravures in *The North American Indian*, arguing the decision indicates that Curtis was situating his work in the tradition of pictorialism rather than "realist or straight photography" (24). For Zamir, this serves as ground for Curtis's artistic composition of shots and manipulation of image in the developing and printing process. An attention to composition, manipulation, and "the language of pictorialist discourse" (35) in turn help the reader see the artistic achievement of Curtis' work. Portraits, which Zamir notes early on account for roughly forty-four percent of the nearly quarter million images in *The North American Indian*, are read as instances of co-authorship between Curtis and the Native subject and moments of Native agency and intentionality. Zamir would have us read the images as moments of Native self-expression and self-representation.

Zamir offers close readings of a number of Curtis's images. He would, as have others before him, have the reader think of the clock that is removed from "In a Piegan Lodge." He asks that we pay attention to safety pins in "New Chest—Piegan" and "Tsawatenok Girl" and to the machine manufactured blanket in "The Blanket Maker—Navaho." He would have us think hard about the composition of many Curtis images. These close readings call to us, demanding our attention and engagement, as do, Zamir argues, the images themselves. For me, the close

readings are at once the strength and the weakness of *The Gift of the Face*. All too often I find myself not seeing what Zamir both is seeing and asking us to see when it comes to the body language and faces in the portraits. Where he sees in “A Medicine Pipe” the “self-possession and confidence of the face” (51) of Philip Flat Tail, for instance, I see weariness and resignation; I do not see the “evident, if theatrical, sense of dignity and pride” (180) in “Upshaw—Apsaroke” that he sees. These two examples are not meant to undo the work being done by *The Gift of the Face* and its close readings, mind you, but to sound a note of caution. It bears noting that recent studies by Lisa Barrett and others have called into question the universality of facial expression and thus underscored the difficulty in reading the face. With very nearly its last word *The Gift of the Face* sounds this difficulty and, I think, lights on the necessary limits of its readings: “It is only if we work through Curtis’s images as argument-making pictures that they bring us to the enigma that is the gift of the face” (280).

The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000-1927 is devoted, Jace Weaver writes, to restoring “Indians and Inuit to the Atlantic world and [to] demonstrat[ing] their centrality to that world, a position equally important to, if not more than, the Africans of [Paul] Gilroy’s black Atlantic” (x-xi). Early and late Weaver stresses that the Red Atlantic is, in part, the story of how Natives “contend[ed] with modernity” (xii), their “encounter and struggle with, and adaptation to,” it (205). To cite one example, it offers the life and work of Mohawk performer and poet E. Pauline Johnson not merely as “pandering to white expectations” (210) but of articulating a “commitment . . . to a growing sense of unity among all North American Native nations as they struggled with the colonialist modernity of the turn of the twentieth century” (212). In short, and here there is a connection with *The Gift of the Face*, *The Red Atlantic* wants us to look again at Atlantic studies in order to see the role played by indigenes, all too often either erased or marginalized and without agency by works in the field.

On the one hand, *The Red Atlantic* is nothing new: Weaver notes in his Preface that “It is not my intent in defining the Red Atlantic to catalog and discuss every known Native from the Americas who traveled to one or another colonial metropole—sometimes multiple metropolises. This work has been done by various other scholars” (x). In its scope and emphasis, however, in its richness, the text serves as a valuable resource for students new to Native Studies and both to those teaching surveys of Atlantic history, Introduction to American Studies, or Introduction to Native American Studies. On the other hand, in addition to introducing the reader to voices and figures familiar to Native Studies scholars, *The Red Atlantic* asks us to look again at figures such as Johnson, Anishinaabe writer and clergyman Peter Jones, and Mohegan minister Samson Occom and the texts they produced.

What Weaver notes is the case with Paula Gunn Allen’s biography of Pocahontas, or rather Matoaka, is equally the case with his *The Red Atlantic*: they are labors devoted to recovering indigenous identity. These labors are necessary. These labors bear fruit. The structural fluidity of the work, as figures appear in multiple sections, should not put off the reader as it tacitly remarks the presence of natives in multiple arenas and at multiple times across the course of the Red Atlantic. Nor should the text’s conversational tone, which I take it serves to invite the reader into the necessary discussion of the role natives played in the shaping of the modern world.

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