***Breaking the Frame:   
Ways of Reading Native Photography***

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**TYPE –** Throughout the semester, students are introduced to images and histories that challenge their perceptions of Native photography and art history.

**MOTIVATION –** In society, it is commonplace to encounter images of Native Americans. We see them as sports mascots, sepia ghosts of the past, and/or riding off into the horizon. Even our history books tell very little of the true story behind the survival of Native Peoples and paint them as either savages or as people eager to please the Great White Savior. In my work, I am motivated to critically engage with the art, the history, and the context of the piece. So much of contemporary Native American photography is activist; it behooves our students, both Native and non-Native, to read the images as a means of intellectual growth.

**Indian Education For All—**As a course on Native American photography (and photographers), the content is exclusively about Native American artists (except where non-Native art is used in the juxtaposition). We examine the voices and impulses of the artists through interviews, articles, and different forms of media. There is also a substantial amount of Native American history taught during the course, as a means of providing the context or impetus of such works, as many students are lacking in the fundamentals of Native American history.

**MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES–** I use the internet, web searches, blogs, video/YouTube, and online zines. I also consult art magazines, exhibition catalogs, and other art historical writings.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES/TARGETED OUTCOMES –** By the end of the semester students should be able to point to several outcomes, including but not limited to:

* Developed critical thinking skills
* Awareness of Native American photography as a vibrant form of activism
* Understanding of Native American’s historical past and contemporary issues
* Amplified global awareness of issues facing all Indigenous Peoples
* Ability to see themselves as part of a society that is larger than their own communities
* Discuss how the issues represented in the art might relate to their own lives and lived experiences as Native People
* Find empowerment in the ability to ask provocative questions and make intellectual inquiry about the images

**ACTIVITY SEQUENCE**

**Firstly:** Instructor selectively chooses images based on several factors, to include:

* Thematic direction of the semester
  + You can use photography that scrutinizes differing activist stances: environmental, mascots, homelessness, addiction, traditionalism
  + Historical issues
  + Culture and tradition

**Secondly:** Students are introduced to artists, pertinent contextual (historical) information, and asked to do outside reading.

**Thirdly:** As a group, they are asked to engage with the readings, expected to have a conversation about the content and context of image, and to examine the artist’s intent.

**Fourthly:** Students are expected write a formal analysis and a reaction paper on the art and artists. They should examine the decisions that were made in the creation of the art, including any omissions. They will engage with the historical content and derive any connections that can be made to contemporary issues.

**Finally:** In a final paper, students will compare and contrast the images, intent, and aesthetic decisions by the various artists.

**Grading System:** Grading is based upon the layout of the semester, i.e., how many artists are to be examined, or how many sections to the syllabus. There is a component for weekly thoughtful class participation and discussion that demonstrates their engagement with the lectures and assigned written material. The quality of their written work (formal analysis and reaction paper) will be taken into account. This component includes their analytical work, intellectual input, and understanding of how this relates to the position of Native Peoples, both historically and in contemporary society. A key component of the grading will focus on how well the student can discuss the use of perspective in art BY and FROM Native peoples rather than ABOUT Native peoples.