

# Exhibition Review Article

## Assimilation and Difference: Two Recent Exhibitions of Archival Photographs

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“Where are the Children?” is on display at the National Archives of Canada from 18 June 2002 – 2 February 2003. There are plans to create both a travelling and an on-line version of this exhibition. “Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance” can be found at <<http://www.fortsteele.bc.ca/exhibits/kootenay/main/virt.asp>>

**RÉSUMÉ** L’auteure fait la critique, dans cet article, de deux expositions d’archives récentes qui explorent l’histoire des interactions culturelles telles qu’illustrées par le biais de documents photographiques. Elle explique comment les photographies d’archives sont utilisées tant pour instruire les visiteurs sur certains aspects critiques de la société canadienne et sur les événements du passé que pour encourager des discussions sur les différences culturelles. L’auteure considère la pertinence de telles expositions dans le cadre du dialogue qui a cours actuellement sur ces questions.

**ABSTRACT** In this article, the author examines two recent Canadian archival exhibitions that explore the history of cultural interactions as depicted in the photographic record. She discusses how archival photographs are used both to educate viewers about critical aspects of Canadian society and events from Canada’s past, and to encourage discussion of issues of cultural difference. The author considers the relevance of such exhibitions to present-day dialogues taking place on the same issues.

Recurrent in many recent exhibitions of archival photographs in Canadian institutions is the underlying theme that photography has historically been, and continues to be, a key force in capturing inter-cultural relations in our society. The following review deals with two such exhibitions currently on display. Both of these exhibitions explore how photography has shaped the ways in which various cultural groups have been perceived and treated within Canadian society. However, each exhibition has approached this theme in different ways. “Where are the Children?” is an exhibition of archival photographs currently on display at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa that focuses on one specific aspect of First Nations history in Canada – namely, the experience of Aboriginal children at residential schools throughout the nine-

teenth and twentieth centuries. This exhibition, curated by Jeff Thomas, explores the lasting impact of these experiences on Aboriginal families and communities with a specific emphasis on the attempt to assimilate First Nations children into Euro-Canadian society by way of residential schooling. Many of the photographs in this exhibition were taken by teachers and administrators of these schools in order to demonstrate that Aboriginal children were, indeed, becoming educated in the ways of Euro-Canadian society, while at the same time being distanced from their own communities and cultures.

“Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance” is an on-line Web exhibition put together by a curatorial team based out of the Fort Steele Heritage Town in the Kootenay region of British Columbia. This exhibition demonstrates the ways in which photography has historically been used as a means to both document and emphasize notions of difference between cultural groups in Western Canada. These images, in turn, often reinforced stereotypes and helped foster discriminatory attitudes towards those who did not conform to what was deemed acceptable by the dominant society.

Both of these exhibitions draw upon archival photographs in an attempt to revisit certain aspects of Canadian history. The role of the archives is significant here, as Ian Wilson, Canada’s National Archivist, points out: “archivists, as custodians of social memory, cannot be spectators, we take part in the creation of memory by the records we preserve. We are active participants.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Where are the Children?**

Jeff Thomas is an Ottawa-based independent curator and photographer who has been involved with several projects recontextualizing archival photographs of First Nations peoples taken by non-Native photographers in Canada. In 1996 he was part of the curatorial team for “Aboriginal Portraits from the National Archives of Canada.”<sup>2</sup> This exhibition drew upon the “wealth of photographic documentation on Canada’s Aboriginal peoples” in the collection of the National Archives of Canada and consisted of one hundred and forty photographs ranging from early daguerreotypes to contemporary photographic prints taken by First Nations photographers such as Shelley Niro and David Neel.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the images in this show, however, were taken by non-native photographers. The curators of this exhibition wanted to emphasize through its installation that “although the popular Indian photographs

1 “Governor General to Open Exhibition at the National Archives,” Government of Canada Press Release (Ottawa, 1 July 2002).

2 For more on this exhibition, see Susan Close, “Aboriginal Portraits from the National Archives of Canada,” *Archivaria* 42 (Fall 1996), pp. 148–150.

3 Edward Tompkins, “Aboriginal Portraits,” *Aboriginal Portraits from the National Archives of Canada* (promotional pamphlet) (Ottawa, 1996), p. 1.

were taken by non-native photographers for a non-native audience, this does not mean they are without importance for the Aboriginal community today.”<sup>4</sup> While the photographs in this exhibition revealed much about the prevailing attitudes of Euro-Canadian society towards First Nations peoples, one of the main curatorial aims of “Aboriginal Portraits” was to allow the photographs to be seen in a new light. As the curators explain, “this exhibition is designed to break down some of the common stereotypes surrounding Aboriginal society.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1999 Thomas curated “Emergence from the Shadow: First Peoples’ Photographic Perspectives” at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. This exhibition combined photographs of Aboriginal peoples taken in the early twentieth century by anthropologists from the Geological Survey of Canada with photo-based work by First Nations contemporary artists. Two major objectives were undertaken in this exhibition: the linking of past and present, and the use of images of Native peoples as a site of empowerment and exploration for contemporary First Nations audiences.<sup>6</sup>

Thomas continues the themes explored in these earlier exhibitions in his most recent curatorial effort entitled “Where are the Children?” which is currently on display at the National Archives of Canada. Over sixty images – prints drawn from a wide variety of public and church archival collections across the country – comprise this exhibition which is prominently displayed in one of the main galleries in the building which houses the National Library and Archives in downtown Ottawa.<sup>7</sup> This exhibition specifically focuses on the theme of Aboriginal children’s experiences at various church and government-run residential schools throughout Canada between the years 1892 and 1969. A significant portion of the First Nations population in Canada – an estimated twenty percent – attended residential schools throughout this time period.<sup>8</sup> It was common practice to photograph First Nations children at these schools, institutions where students would have been taught skills and attitudes deemed acceptable by the settler society. As Brock Silversides has

4 Ibid.

5 Jeff Thomas, “Luminance: Aboriginal Photographic Portraits,” *The Archivist* 112 (1996), pp. 11–12.

6 For more on this exhibition see J. Keri Cronin, “Changing Perspectives: Photography and First Nations Identity,” (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Queen’s University, 2000). An on-line version of this exhibition can be found at <<http://www.civilization.ca/aborig/jaillir/jailline.html>>.

7 The photographs in this exhibition were drawn from the following sources: Archives Deschâtelets, Archives of Ontario, Canadian Museum of Civilization, The Anglican Church of Canada (The General Synod Archives), Glenbow Archives, National Library of Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, The United Church of Canada, Victoria University Archives, and the private collection of the curator, Jeff Thomas.

8 Jeff Thomas, Text panels from “Where are the Children?” (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 18 June 2002 – 2 February 2003).

pointed out, “colonial society has always been concerned about documenting the progress of its trappings and ideas, especially when they are used to ‘civilize’ another culture.”<sup>9</sup> The images in “Where are the Children?” are good examples of the way this process played out in a Canadian context.

The exhibition opens with a provocative question that sets the tone for the rest of the installation. It simply asks: “Assimilation is a good thing?” Throughout the exhibition space, interspersed with photographs grouped in categories entitled “Leaving Home,” “Classroom Scenes,” and “Entering the Doorway to Civilization,” are excerpts from government documents and school curriculum which work in conjunction with the images to shed light on some of the complex aims and objectives of these institutions. For instance, an 1897 report from the Indian Commissioner at the time lauds the residential school system as

... one of the most ... important feature of the extensive system which is operating towards the civilization of our native races ... today the Dominion has ... at its command a system which provides for its Indian wards a practical course of industrial training, fitting for useful citizenship the youth of a people who one generation past were practically unrestrained savages.<sup>10</sup>

Photography was routinely used to demonstrate that Native peoples were being assimilated into white culture. Photographs were used as evidence – attesting to the perceived success of institutions such as residential schools which operated on the assumption that in order for Native peoples to survive, they would have to adapt to the ways of the settler society. Many photographs taken in this context are exhibited in this installation. Often, the resulting photographs had the effect of making First Nations peoples appear “less Native” in the eyes of Europeans and Euro-Canadians and thus served as fuel for the myth that Aboriginal peoples in Canada were a “vanishing race.”<sup>11</sup>

A particularly poignant example of this practice shown in “Where are the Children?” are the “before” and “after” photographs of a young Aboriginal boy named Thomas Moore. The first image, which we are to assume was

9 Brock Silversides, *The Face Pullers: Photographing Native Canadians, 1871–1938* (Saskatoon, 1994), p. 99.

10 *Sessional Papers*, Report by A.E. Forget, Indian Commissioner, vol. XXXI, no. 11, 1897; quoted in Thomas, Text panels from “Where are the Children?”

11 For discussion of this aspect of photographs of First Nations peoples, see Alfred L. Bush and Lee Clark Mitchell, *The Photograph and the American Indian* (Princeton, 1994); Theresa Harlan, “A Curator’s Perspective: Native Photographers Creating a Visual Native History,” *Exposure* (Fall 1993), pp. 12–22; and Peter Gold, “Returning Photographs to the Indians,” *Studies in Visual Communication* 9 (Summer 1983), pp. 2–14. Gail Valaskakis’s article, “Parallel Voices: Indians and Others, Narratives of Cultural Struggle,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 18 (Summer 1993), pp. 283–296, points out that this is a continuing problem, one that resurfaces in land claims, treaty negotiations, and fishing disputes in present-day Canada.

taken upon Moore's arrival at school, depicts the young boy in distinctly non-Western clothing. The beadwork and embroidery on his garments coupled with his long hair woven into braids would no doubt have signified his position as an outsider in need of education and reform to those who were administering the school system. The second picture shows a distinct transformation in young Moore's physical appearance. His hair has been cut, he is wearing the regulation suit issued by the school and he is posed in a manner reminiscent of many European portraits of aristocrats and dignitaries – one hand casually on his waist, the other draped over a low wall as he gazes confidently at the camera. The distinct difference between these two images served a specific function – they were included in an 1897 report to the Department of Indian Affairs to demonstrate the success of the Regina Industrial School in “civilizing” their students.

For many who attended these schools, it was a painful and frightening experience. While this is an underlying theme of the exhibition it is not overtly stated or reinforced through the inclusion of personal memoirs or other means of individual recollection. Instead, Thomas has installed the exhibition in a manner which allows viewers to bring their own experiences to bear in the viewing of these images. The one exception to this is found in the section entitled “Remembering The Children Who Never Returned Home.” In this portion of the exhibition we are told the tragic tale of students such as Mollie, a young Métis girl, who died during a cholera outbreak at the Carcross Indian Residential School in 1907. As Thomas notes, “controversy has been a part of the residential school system since the early twentieth century because of the number of Aboriginal children who died while attending the schools.”<sup>12</sup>

Thomas points out the importance of revisiting these difficult experiences as a means of not only encouraging dialogue and healing for those whose lives were directly affected by these institutions but also to offer a more complete sense of understanding of the residential school experience. Thomas laments the fact that information about this chapter in Canadian history is often lacking and points out that much of what our society learns about residential schools comes to us through “short sound bites” surrounding lawsuits and scandals on the nightly news. As this exhibition acknowledges, quite often many Aboriginal peoples whose ancestors attended these schools do not know the complete story.

Aboriginal youth want to know about the experiences of their parents and grandparents, the stories that have not been told. It is hoped that this exhibition of photographs will bring healing and restore balance in Aboriginal communities by encouraging children to ask, and parents to answer, important questions about their family histories.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, Text panels from “Where are the Children?”

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

As Georges Erasmus, the president of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation states, “this chain of silence must be broken.... The history of residential schools must be documented. For healing to take place, the story must be told.”<sup>14</sup> The main curatorial aim of this exhibition is to serve as a starting point for discussion. Thomas sees photography as playing a key role in this process. “Photographs,” he points out, “can raise the initial questions, those that we often have difficulty putting into words. It is only through dialogue that healing can begin.”<sup>15</sup>

Historically, photographs of Aboriginal children attending residential schools in Canada were used as a means to both justify the need for and to celebrate the perceived success of the residential school system from the point of view of its Euro-Canadian administrators. It is significant that these very same photographs often have quite a different meaning for Aboriginal families today. In this context, Thomas specifically acknowledges the role of family photo albums in retelling the stories of those involved in the residential school system. While the conditions under which these images were made have not changed, and in many cases the painful memories still exist, these images are often being reclaimed by people whose lives, or whose ancestors' lives, were represented in them. While most of the photographs in this exhibition were drawn from institutional collections, Thomas has included a section discussing the value of family photo albums in revisiting history. He cites a personal example of this that occurred when he visited a friend and her family in Saskatchewan during his research for “Where are the Children?” Thomas describes the process of dialogue that ensued when they began exploring old family photographs:

As part of my curatorial research, I visited my friend, Lori Blondeau, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Lori introduced me to her mother, Leona Blondeau (née Bird), and her grandmother Virginia Bird (née Cyr), both of whom attended residential schools. We sat around Virginia's kitchen table, on the Gordon Reserve, and Lori and I asked questions about their experiences at residential school. Virginia brought out her photo albums and began telling stories, as did Leona, about their family histories ... It was then that I realized how important family photographs can be in stimulating discussion with family elders.<sup>16</sup>

14 “Governor General to Open Exhibition.” The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was formed in 1998 and its primary mandate is to “fund projects which address the legacy, including the intergenerational impacts, of sexual and physical abuse suffered by Aboriginal people in Canada's Indian residential school system.” The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *The Healing Has Begun: An Operational Update from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation* (Ottawa, 2002), p. 1.

15 Thomas, Text panels from “Where are the Children?”

16 Thomas, Text panels from “Where are the Children?”

This process of discovery through the revisitation of old photographs is something Thomas hopes visitors to “Where are the Children?” will also have the opportunity to experience.

The last section of the exhibition is entitled “Contemporary Role Models” and features portraits taken by Jeff Thomas of such high-profile aboriginal figures as Judge Alfred Scow, who is lauded as “the first Aboriginal to be called to the bar in British Columbia,” and Douglas Cardinal, an architect who is perhaps best known for his work on the Canadian Museum of Civilization.<sup>17</sup> Thomas sees this section of portraits as significant because it demonstrates that “the survivors of the residential school experience are powerful symbols that a future does exist for Aboriginal people, dismissing the 19<sup>th</sup> century myth of the vanishing Indian.”<sup>18</sup> This link between past and present is particularly effective in solidifying Thomas’s commitment to “building a bridge between the historical images of Aboriginal people found in the library and the archive and the present day Aboriginal world experienced by its inhabitants.”<sup>19</sup>

This exhibition received the support of both the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Aboriginal Healing Charitable Association, and indeed a sense of healing coupled with a forum for discussion and openness for contemporary Aboriginal audiences were the driving forces behind Thomas’s vision for this exhibition. This is reinforced by the inclusion of resource material on the subject of residential schools as well as information on programs and services for Aboriginal peoples provided by associations like those involved with the show. This material, which includes a comprehensive bibliography of sources dealing with the subject of residential schools in Canada, a publication by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and a computer set up so visitors can access Web sites dealing with some of the topics covered in this show, is found at the exit of the exhibition space and as such encourages visitors to the show to continue the exploration of these themes outside the gallery walls.

### **Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance**

“Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance” is an on-line exhibition that addresses the ways in which various ethnic groups have been victims of discrimination and injustice throughout Canadian history. This exhibition centres on the Kootenay region of British Columbia, but in no way are the curators suggesting that the problems of prejudice and intolerance

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Carol Payne and Jeffrey Thomas, “Aboriginal Interventions into the Photographic Archives: A Dialogue Between Carol Payne and Jeffrey Thomas,” *Visual Resources* 18, no. 2 (2002), pp. 110–111.

were confined to the area under consideration. Rather, they hope that this case study will encourage those who view it to rethink assumptions, ideas, and histories in whatever locale they call home.

The archival photographs in this exhibition are supplemented with an artefact exhibit and textual documents, as well as teacher and student resources intended as a starting point for further dialogue surrounding the many complex subjects raised by the re-presentation of this material. "Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance" was developed in 2000 as a companion to the exhibition "Don't Let the Sun Set on Your Face" which was exhibited at the Fort Steele Heritage Town in British Columbia. Derryll White, Curator for the Southern Interior Region for the Province of British Columbia Heritage Properties, was involved with this project and underscores the importance of museum exhibitions taking on issues and topics of significance to the society in which they are located. "We undertook the exhibit because of rising racial tensions in the Kootenays" says White, "we thought it was part of the mandate of museums to comment on social conditions."<sup>20</sup>

The histories of three cultural groups – Italians, Chinese, and English – in the Kootenay region of British Columbia were explored in the first phase of this project. In 2001, a second component entitled "The Back Streets of Kootenay" was developed. This section added the experiences of the Ktunaxa Nation as well as the Jewish and Sikh populations in the region to the discussion of attitudes of intolerance.

Similar to Jeff Thomas's work, one of the main goals of this project is to link the past and the present. The curatorial team for this project argues: "One of the most disturbing facts about these materials is that, although a hundred years may have passed, the basis of prejudice and intolerance has not changed. The hatred for races different from the norm has simply shifted to a new set of immigrants."<sup>21</sup> It is the hope of the organizers that this project and others like it will go a long ways to "facilitate change in the basic attitudes Canadians hold toward those different from themselves and to build bridges to a more positive future for all."<sup>22</sup>

The fact that this exhibition makes use of Internet technology is significant, as this not only has ensured a lasting resource but also has allowed people living outside of the Kootenay region to experience this exhibition.<sup>23</sup> Internet exhibitions are an increasingly common way for curators to move out of the

20 Derryll White, personal correspondence with author (25 October 2002).

21 "Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance" Web site: <<http://www.fortsteele.bc.ca/exhibits/kootenay/main/virt.asp>> (URL last consulted 26 October 2002).

22 Ibid.

23 This exhibition is on a permanent Web site that can be accessed at the following URL: <<http://www.fortsteele.bc.ca/exhibits/kootenay/main/virt.asp>>.



realm of conventional museum space. In fact, many argue that on-line media and new technologies can be used to democratize the museum experience because exhibitions in cyber-galleries “get away from the reified concepts of authenticity, aura and originality which have been, until recently, the basis for the museum’s claim to knowledge.”<sup>24</sup> In his famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin argued that photography was instrumental in breaking down the aura of originality that surrounded a work of art.<sup>25</sup> In much the same way, the technology of the Internet has facilitated a means to break down the aura of authority that has traditionally been associated with museums.<sup>26</sup> As with many technological developments in history, however, it is important to note that within the realm of computer technology, there exists an inherent level of class bias based on economic and social factors. While Internet exhibitions do allow a significantly larger number of people to “visit” the material, we must recall that they often exclude members of society who do not have the economic, technical, or educational means to access the Internet.

An in-depth comparison of the experiences of several cultural groups in the Kootenay region makes this exhibition particularly rich. Instances of prejudices against Italian, Sikh, and Chinese immigrants and intolerance towards the First Nations peoples who originally inhabited the area throughout history are addressed in this project. The sections of the exhibition dealing with the experiences of those who came to the Kootenay region from Italy and China are especially detailed and offer a vast amount of material about the history of these cultural groups in Canada. The combination of photographs and textual documents gives a real sense of some of the many hardships faced by newcomers to this country. For instance, in the section dealing with the history of Chinese immigrants in Canada, the photographs depicting men working in railway or mining camps are supplemented with government documents addressing the so-called “Chinese Problem,” including examples of head tax certificates, and a translation of an open letter written by Chinese men who had come to Canada, an impassioned plea warning their fellow countrymen not to follow in their footsteps. “In a word, the Chinese here are like meat on a chop-block which is at the mercy of the chopper,” the 1913 circular proclaims, “we hope all our people in China are sensible enough to understand what dis-

24 Andrea Witcomb, “The End of the Mausoleum: Museums in the Age of Electronic Communication,” paper delivered at “Museums and the Web 1997,” Los Angeles, 16–19 March 1997; quoted in Isabelle Rieusset-Lemarié, “Web Museums and Memory in the Age of Digital Multimedia Networks (Extensions of Walter Benjamin’s Insights),” paper delivered at “Museums and the Web 2000,” Minneapolis, 16–19 April 2000, <[www.archimuse.com](http://www.archimuse.com)>.

25 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris (eds.), *Art in Modern Culture* (London, 1992), pp. 297–307.

26 For a discussion of the role of technology in democratizing the viewing of art, see John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1972), pp. 7–34.

tresses we are in ... and give up the idea of coming to this country.”<sup>27</sup> Photographs depicting the physically grueling labour that these men endured are displayed with reports from such high profile figures as Sir John A. Macdonald stating that the Chinese living in Canada were “foreigners ... and ought not to have a vote.”<sup>28</sup> These records go a long way in depicting for twenty-first century audiences the harsh realities faced by many who came to this country in search of prosperity and a better future.

An element I found at first surprising, but upon reflection, entirely appropriate, was the inclusion of a discussion surrounding a specific segment of British immigrants to Canada who were also on the receiving end of discriminatory attitudes and practices. These were the Remittance Men – a group of British citizens who began arriving in Canada in droves, starting in the 1880s. The British tradition of land ownership among the aristocracy in the late nineteenth century dictated that all of a family’s assets and land be passed to the oldest son. Often subsequent sons born into these families faced problems as a result of this practice. As the text from the on-line exhibition points out, “the second sons of such families often led purposeless lives, many of them not knowing what to do for a living. Some of these sons were uncontrollable young men who were an embarrassment to their families.”<sup>29</sup> In many cases, these sons were sent to live in various parts of the British Empire. They received a living allowance from their families (hence the term “Remittance Men”) in order to “keep the men away from Britain where it was thought he’d (sic) cause problems for his family.”<sup>30</sup>

These men were often enticed to come to Canada by promises of a land in which they could enjoy recreational pursuits and an aristocratic lifestyle similar to what they had experienced in Britain. The reality of life in this country, however, was often very different than they had anticipated. British Remittance Men had been raised and educated as part of the aristocracy, and many of the skills and pursuits they had excelled at in their youth were unsuitable for life in Canada in the late nineteenth century. As the curators of this exhibition point out, “many did not know how to farm or clear land, so they appeared to be foolish. Because the Remittance Men did not take part in Canadian society, many Canadians disliked them. The Remittance Men were mocked and jokes circulated about the foolish behavior of these marginalized individuals.”<sup>31</sup>

The stories, archival documents, and artifacts presented in this exhibition

27 National Archives of Canada, Immigration Branch, RG 76, vol. 121, File 23635, Part 3, Translation of a Chinese circular issued by the Chinese Board of Trade Guild in Vancouver, 1913.

28 “Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance” Web site.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

demonstrate that great differences of wealth and stature existed between the various cultural groups considered in this project. For instance, the artifacts associated with the British Remittance Men include such items as a cricket bat and ball, dance cards, a Kodak camera, and a pocket watch indicating that this particular group enjoyed much more leisure and relative wealth than was experienced by other immigrants arriving in Canada during the same time period. Objects from the Fort Steele Heritage Town's collection that came from Italian immigrants in the region, in contrast, include such working implements as a miner's cap and lamp, a metal lunch kit, and a picture book entitled "The Mining Camps of British Columbia."

The role of the photograph in portraying difference has been effectively underscored in this exhibition. While the majority of the images were taken in Canada by photographers based in this country, the tradition of using the camera to demonstrate difference has a long history which must be considered in this context. From the early days of photography, European travelers to Africa, Asia, and the Americas began to take pictures of the land and its inhabitants. The photograph was immensely popular because of its relative affordability and perceived veracity; true-to-life pictures of far-off lands could now be collected by most everyone in Western society. The camera lent views of distant people and places a "new authenticity" that, in comparison, previous visual traditions could not offer.<sup>32</sup>

There was a sense of immediacy and truthfulness which informed the way these images were often read. The photograph's attachment to a real world referent fueled beliefs in the camera's ability to present accurate and factual representations of the world in front of its lens. Of course, this veracity was an illusion that was fed by belief in the inherent accuracy of the mechanical workings of the photographic process. In actuality, the scenes the camera recorded were every bit as constructed as a drawing or an engraving. As Joan Schwartz has argued, photographs taken of distant locales and their inhabitants "were sites – defined by Western needs, beliefs and expectations – where distant facts were transformed into Western fictions."<sup>33</sup>

The images in "Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance" can be seen as an extension of this practice. The majority of the photographs selected for this exhibition were taken in the early years of the twentieth century and repeatedly focus on aspects of the lives of the cultural groups under consideration that would seem unusual to mainstream Canadian society at that time. For instance, images of Ktunaxa peoples dressed in distinctly non-European clothing or photographs of Sikh funeral rituals served to underscore the position of these cultures as the exotic "Other" of Euro-Can-

32 Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1997), p. 60.

33 Joan Schwartz, "The Geography Lesson: Photographs and the Construction of Imaginative Geographies," *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (January 1996), p. 30.

dian society. Regrettably, little information is given about the conditions under which these photographs were taken – we are not told who the photographer was, and, perhaps more importantly, the context in which these images would have been seen and circulated. Knowing this would go a long way in completing the story of historic prejudices and stereotypes in the region.

While both of the exhibitions discussed have taken a different approach to using archival material, they achieve similar goals. Both effectively demonstrate aspects of inter-cultural relations throughout Canada's history, as well as link aspects of the past with the present. This is significant, for as the curatorial team for "Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance" points out,

It is not enough to be shocked or appalled at these incidents from our collective past. It is only when we take these lessons from the past and use them to inform our everyday lives and those of the people around us, that we take a step in correcting the wrongs done so long ago.<sup>34</sup>

By revisiting archival photographs and documents from a variety of collections the curators of these two exhibitions have added another layer of complexity to Canada's history. By questioning accepted narratives and forcing viewers to reconsider what they know about Canada's collective past, these two exhibitions have opened the door to further dialogue about many of the complex issues still facing our society today.

34 "Kootenay: An Exploration of Historic Prejudice and Intolerance" Web site.