Dan Seed ([00:00](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/S6s7FIHHZma_RzfsvvcvvmIjIdRCjX9o1oLXJMg80wFULMyuQznurX8AWbygStRJ5F50Lv0Y6-Kc0TZP6kuKnAbQd-Q?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=0.33)):

Hello and welcome to Big Ideas, a podcast from Texas State University. I'm your host, Dan Seed from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. This month we're joined by Dr. David Coleman, the director of the Wittliff Collections here on campus. Most people are familiar with the Lonesome Dove Archive, the music archive, but maybe its most outwardly visible collection is that of Edward Curtis, whose photographs from his monumental publication, the North American Indian, adorning the walls of the gallery. Dr. Coleman is here to discuss this amazing collection. It's astounding how vast this is and discuss some of the controversy surrounding Curtis's photos. Dr. Coleman, thank you so much for being here.

David Coleman ([00:38](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/AzC832n8tXI_bGz6ydw9HAgbZN_mQIQh9ZKUbiZwPNpqDl8sKkhdsbsKtdFAbU1MimtX6eJfrrgOrrnM8KVBB5Uxexw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=38.58)):

My pleasure. Good to see you.

Dan Seed ([00:40](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/CK83mYxidAmXfaYv1FltgQ0BpjFNbg3uyDli2r4kfSjsbYK_X2GaM0GaPW15f4IvFWxSyTqhZH6v7zKh-UrgRFyJqP0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=40.35)):

And so you've been the director of the Wittliff Collections for a dozen years now. What fascinates you about doing this kind of work?

David Coleman ([00:47](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/3akErgmye3IGFw-UbmDkkGkYxr-UpBntqRP19iXvXhV5vE-4aMFrkaQ7DWMnPv0QcdmmZL5cXZw12CN-FrlK5r5KCgg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=47.34)):

Wow, that is a great question. I did come in 2011 and it's an amazing place because we explored the culture, the creative culture as we say, of this region, and we feel that people who know more, a little bit more about where they come from will lead a richer life. And there is just, as we all know, an endless ability for people who live in this area to create photography, music, writing about this region. And we just love to celebrate it, show it off to the students and to the general public, and maybe show them something they hadn't seen before or listen to a song they hadn't quite heard before. So it's endless fun.

Dan Seed ([01:38](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/4FyQcHTng5H-wby-eM72dn2Bi6MK67CcDPYiNEcPJUrkx_e-6hZBGQF1d4nJ7EpxocZVJxW_NwR9OAbRSJh8qXTjAGE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=98.91)):

And for you, you've done this work around the country in your career, and you kind of touched on it a little bit in your answer there, but what does make the Wittliff Collections unique in your view? Having been to archives and other places like this? What makes it unique?

David Coleman ([01:55](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/9hbErNv2wlBLN_sUv-9XGwZD0m1aduLQwXVAGKvkN7l24BH7V2piXfnkjvvIxwtRnCkMSombwWEv0skV6wEl-hJmUn4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=115.35)):

And that's really why I came to the Wittliff Collections and to Texas State, was that real unique focus we have on this plot of ground, I guess you could say on this region and the culture that comes from it. There are many, many fine repositories and archives and collections from museums to archives. There aren't many that really focus on their local area. For us, we mean when we say that it's really talking about the whole Southwest region,

Dan Seed ([02:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/KxI8tUe-2fOGSPgMSm8r9s-z2z7AhyghQDbFqRynBvF8YnHC2gNbN12itf4rFuhLwhTbt0zkO7P20l3r_RSq3sVB1TE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=151.17)):

Huge region, huge.

David Coleman ([02:34](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/OC_2N8ZlRLaUefaT4Hz2UCD0qyj2mHEPlT2LsAYNGZJoAe_WUXmMS986C0lMZO74WkQ_ofrRSx9gs0MJVvSa2kFFcRQ?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=154.26)):

And we expanded to Mexico, especially in terms of the photography because we feel there may be a border political border, but culturally and certainly in terms of how people make images, there's a lot of ebb and flow just within this region. So I was really captivated by the idea that you could really just focus on a few different media in a particular region. And as we know, artists love to talk with other artists. Visual artists love to talk with writers, musicians love to talk with visual art. There is a certain synergy that creatives get when they talk with each other. And when you focus on one particular, I guess, geographic idea, they're often dealing with themes that are very common for that area. And then their work may respond to other elements of other works they've seen or other historical acts they know. We can talk about Lonesome Dove forever, and Larry McMurtry was trying to write an anti-Western, I guess you could say, and it ends up being one of the more archetypal westerns of all time.

David Coleman ([03:50](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/0RLw0aNoLmzDAsN1ckuvkREffHf0qDF9X7T_-Rbat1Gxj9TT11gClfymnYKKXVLD8Qn2OZwp4Pb4rZF9l6Ts-gP1P0w?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=230.92)):

So he's dealing with these historical elements, but he's also dealing with kind of the creativity of this area. And sometimes those myths are kind of too strong to overcome. So anyway, you'll get me started. I can go on for hours about the rich cultural heritage that we have here.

Dan Seed ([04:10](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/24QS8MicogaxkLRom62m7K681RznBSrQLA8kJ2hUSJs_lhM7adVwCMxVJnhMWoMLk4fswLgNXFcvZUaSLbmY1wkQ2vg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=250.15)):

And as I mentioned at the start of the show, you're here with us to talk about the Edward Curtis collection from his work, the North American Indian, which is a Magnus opus of cultural understanding or cultural showcase. And art, as you just touched on it, is an astounding undertaking. Curtis took 40,000 photos between 1907 and 1930, ultimately 2,234 or so of those were published across 20 bound volumes, which is again, mind blowing in our modern digital age to think of these in book form. So let's start here with this. For our audience that may not be familiar, who was Edward Curtis?

David Coleman ([04:48](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/6Egdz5NSgXc6X52mYZdYnGrBbeob8rCVEU0xuOsMfn5g0kJwn7Elora5W1eguFoYVHmq2i6f1yTnKWF2K6DRDFiJc-w?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=288.1)):

So Edward Curtis, I may end up quoting Lonesome Dove here and there. Edward Curtis was a man with a vision, and he is someone who was a young photographer, portrait studio photographer in Seattle, Washington. And through a series of closely timed events right at the beginning of the 20th century, 1890s, he was exposed to people of wealth, people of power, and he also got this vision of documenting the North American Indian project. And it happened kind of drips and drab over time for him, and then ended up being this amazing idea of trying to, in his mind, document what was a culture that was quickly dying away.

Dan Seed ([05:41](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/lvz6CDz59qtFXgkWEyE4EA3eF-bwOx1rEQ5nnbhEmK2ZNf5tQzHRdR8ccHtnIwMGoq7VHmQ6B6DmUHMJPVNURDqKEbE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=341.71)):

And part of this, right, it comes from funding from some rather well-known rich individuals at the turn of the 20th century as well. He's got to have that backing to produce the work,

David Coleman ([05:53](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/amlZFiJLC5ZtwFE_seCDMz1awymvGu-OMMKKIucdYDj26-vzmoh3QlbDQ0v6RCzTCX0OX5sNdxnze7yPE1LaE1zWYFw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=353.32)):

Right? So he wins a photo contest that entered, and it allowed him to go to Teddy Roosevelt's estate and photograph his children and also meet tr, which was of course important. They strike it up. I think we certainly see Curtis as this very charismatic kind of guy. And Teddy Roosevelt offers to write him a letter of introduction. Curtis then takes that and goes to visit JP Morgan, the financier, who basically rescued the country from bankruptcy not too long before that in New York and convinces Morgan. And then Morgan kind of convinces him as well, to shape this project in a certain way that you reference these volumes and produce this massive project that would appeal to a high-end book collector as well as to universities.

Dan Seed ([06:49](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/60W07sZrFYWXV7ABLdXk12qOL17mQzfZ9Zpm0MTNgReHmqH1eFCXHIr61OhMQkZPlma6KU8bHqMCmCGHux4yRhOArIo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=409.91)):

And this project is unique in that it straddles that line between, we'll say the 19th century and before and the early days of the 20th century. Was there this kind of reasoning or impetus at that time to get out there and document this culture at a time when things are rapidly shifting from the era of the planes and the pioneers to a more modern consumption of the North American native culture?

David Coleman ([07:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/IvtX4JgkCrQdAf_rGW7e0YO9OgVyXeQfPW3kA60ntxyBkd8JoayXc-bbSGFDQxStUWknKoaaDWDUIKPx_UPwRqmL_74?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=439.13)):

The American Indian at that time was very much in the popular imagination at this point. They had been relegated to living on reservations. They had decreased from a population that may have been between, I don't know, seven and 10 million to about a quarter million by the beginning of the century. There were wild West shows. There was a very strong effort from the government and society to put the Native American in the rearview mirror and to close the frontier and to look back on a culture. And there were a lot of, well-meaning humanitarians as well, that advocated that the only way that the Native Americans would be able to really survive would be to assimilate the white culture.

David Coleman ([08:14](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/E_h0B6tR2utmsuEoUE9qllflBMHfByf6PqLrdBA9BMq1vNTUCofxSgKCYyk03wVNiqF4Ses5HeCWaiWWaKTY3l1jEns?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=494.48)):

And to give up their language, to give up their culture, to give up their music, to give up their story, all of that. And in a sense, to adopt Western culture. And that would be the only way they would be able to survive, I guess. And so this was very much debated in the newspapers of the day and the magazines of the day, and what Curtis was able to do in trying to do, he wasn't unique in doing this, but he had this vision to do it on such a scale that was kind of an ethnography through the photographs, which we know best, but also through documenting their songs, their stories, et cetera. And I mean, he thought the treatment that they were receiving was terrible. It's a complex time and all these kinds of very important issues are very complex, and he kind of is looking back nostalgically, but also in a weird way kind of advocating for their survival and advocating for their really, their honor and their cementing a record of their culture as significant and important.

Dan Seed ([09:28](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/q4mkRcDBvoGQpKzM_sTfBaa0_W53CJJLoIfPaSjyAwPsJGm_XNLazB02ryrtd3RX2NttzVmAZC5krGQ1FZDBcT-l_xQ?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=568.08)):

Yeah, I was going to say, Curtis strikes me from reading about him and seeing his work as almost a romantic looking back on a time and wishing like, man, I wish I had been there, been born 30 years earlier, that he's kind of a man, not of his time in a sense, in that way. So you're as intimately familiar with his photos as anyone, but let's talk about what exactly resides at the Whitt lift collections and how did this collection make its way here?

David Coleman ([09:56](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/nvtcY44msLdC84RI7TIx-dsOAwb9E0Z8UCiRPQSkmyWmL0zE_xaEIax2xHZQqIveAYlbqwjFmTIKsYLY3uYfIXyv798?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=596.34)):

Okay, so when Curtis approached Morgan, Curtis wanted to produce about a hundred sets of these 20 volume publications, bound volumes, and then portfolios. What Morgan convinced him to do was to try to do a run of 500 of them instead of 100. They ended up being bought. He didn't sell out the whole edition, I guess you would say, but a lot of private people in a lot of universities and libraries and public libraries did purchase them over time. And so it was actually a fairly recent thing for us to acquire this set of volumes of the North American Indian. It was actually purchased with funds donated by Bill and Sally Wittliff. I think Bill had a real attraction to Curtis as this grand visionary and also just Bill loved photography and loved portraits especially that were powerful and Curtis certainly fits that bill. So Bill and Sally, in the years that I was talking with them when I got here, they felt that that was something we should really try to acquire. And then through the good graces of fate and a lot of determination, we were finally able to acquire a set.

Dan Seed ([11:09](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/iFJ8wASYdD1gWwS4TlzrmTwvq2sEP0dQ2vRyC7CvZntu3z4QZbvDBpd3KYPScTZaRfFWkeizo5-YgEdr8AS-M1Vtin4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=669.21)):

And you mentioned the photos and how powerful they are, and for anybody that hasn't been to the collections to see them, I encourage you to do that. So it's difficult on audio to talk about images, but are there any images that stand out to you for their subject material, their aesthetic photos that if you were taking someone to the Whitt lift collections for the first time, that you would say, we have to see this one.

David Coleman ([11:35](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/NAlkL0FaAAi0nQ6d6_LwkwmP1zwmApGXp59NQjDhhttt4eR4moyoT0lczf02wib4conU7xtjx_jD65Die_bbT7iOPoc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=695.1)):

I'm going to go in a different direction, which is I think you've got to see the self-portrait of Curtis because I think you get so much of the character of the man through his facial hair, his hat. There's a lot of character in that shot, and we actually commissioned a bronze portrait from a Philadelphia sculptor, kind of modeled on that. You can get a lot through that. But Curtis's images, and we rotate them out from time to time, so it's especially difficult to talk about one image. You never know when someone's going to come in and see something else. But what I think Curtis was able to do that was especially powerful with the medium of photography was capture an exact likeness of someone to really show you what someone looked like, but also kind of put the viewer in a timeless mode where you're looking at this person with great honor and great nobility or sometimes just great humility or humbleness, and you get such power from someone who, and some of them are looking directly into the camera, others may not be, but you get such, I think profound respect is a word I use a lot when talking about Curtis's images.

([13:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/0Xz-p9UnBmX_LfFBPzvHAWJ36d2DRIRIvDW8vo8MsZrKDOpCuNvpgpFzHMRci3QbibPp1N21ovyYxy_Baejm9dEeFEk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=783.64)):

Now he got off some Tom Foolery that we can talk about a little bit too, but in all one of the, I think it's up now, and I tend to leave this one shot up, so I don't know, it helps launch the project. He did a portrait of a woman named Princess Angeline, who was the youngest daughter of Chief Seattle course. He was based in Seattle. The city had tried to kind of move her to a reservation and she refused. She was making a terrible, barely able to survive on doing laundry for people, I think doing some clamming. And he kind wraps her up where you see this face and this amazing portrait of a woman whose face has clearly been exposed to the sun a great deal. It's kind of this leathery face, and you could make that look comical. You could make it look ghoulish. The photographer can do a lot with a face with lighting. He simultaneously shows you exactly, I mean, you really feel you are sitting there looking at her or standing there looking at her, but also giving this character and respect and nobility of her lineage and that she's an important person and should be respected as much as anyone you run across on the street.

Dan Seed ([14:24](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/A9EBxmk8HKP291B0pTG7dmXLdokkCY3RDP5NMVYlY2TbyL8X55TS-dHRHmDPyiBc6PxsuzoKaRt1IG0WH-YZixUZ8y0?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=864.82)):

What strikes me about the images and the way that you're talking about them, and from what I've seen about them or seen of them being up there, is the images don't have the kind of imperfections that we typically see in pre film or early film photos. There's almost a modern clarity to them. Do you find that, and how does that technique help make this collection resonate more than a century or close to a century? In the case of his later images since they were made, because these people lived so long ago, but it feels like they're with us because Curtis was such a skilled photographer.

David Coleman ([15:01](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/uAhxMO4r5g2tXEHybCxR0DcX6EY7QnCnkwANwBNfFrE5JggiAdVh5g1H60oOag7ZpVPYaqJp_WYvgDJ3QqgLSseFenI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=901.82)):

It's no accident that he had such success when that's his background, his studio portraiture. So he's kind of able to create the conditions of a permanent studio with him in the field, as we say, when he's visiting these reservations and he's very carefully controlling the light. I think what, thinking about other photographs, the American Indian at the time, I mean he's really filling, this is going to get a little technical, but he's filling the picture frame with someone's face often or their chest and head.

Dan Seed ([15:38](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/f6NddHiEYeuvmiGRs-h1yVt5VfWO5g-WU9T8tdS4d0fOQKQirmTOpbHnPX870KKOdQp6c6HGmQcxLOj4KcDwiym8jD4?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=938.27)):

It's traditional for the audience. It's traditional kind of framing what you would see nowadays in a television interview where it's chest up head fills the frame. Think of a movie closeup almost in a photograph.

David Coleman ([15:53](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/aLjKpX1JUERGSAYA1cjungmiAfDVOJriT5sKQifwV1tPSRzpbEqk9VwlhnOPN6AdBFfbV13cNkxVGYeP_U1CepoYz_s?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=953.33)):

Yeah, they are very close up. And most of the collectible cards and photographs and people, there was, as I said before, there's so much nostalgia in the US at this time already about the American Indian that eventually that nostalgia itself kind of dies out at the end of Curtis's project. But you don't have, there are photographs taken with a curiosity, and Curtis is not approaching this with curiosity or trying to delight someone and be a collectible kind of photograph. He's not in there for that purpose. He's in there to create a document that will last forever. I mean, that kind of is part, in part with someone with this kind of a vision and this kind of a project, it's kind of a crazy thing to think that you would spend 30 years of your life photographing individuals that may or may not want their picture taken and with this grand cause. Right. So that monumental project I think really filters in into these monumental portraits.

Dan Seed ([16:57](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/oI36cgyn5xUjSecIxXyuw4BqbPzMyg2hzb961CQswobAq-l2VNG8fcUsXOhg3PcPLkCHNijU9b9BAwpt8lTy889ZWXM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1017.8)):

And again, we're joined by Dr. David Coleman, the director of the Wittliff Collections. And earlier I touched on this, you touched on it as well, this idea of some Tom Foolery in Curtis' photos. Curtis mainly used a now largely forgotten photographic technique called dry plate negatives. And it's from those glass negatives where the controversy surrounding his photos really comes from. What we see in the published photos isn't exactly what Curtis saw or photographed, and in some cases, what we see isn't exactly how his native subjects lived at that time. That's correct. Right,

David Coleman ([17:32](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/x1vHfVAcJRfx1EqvrI_QIkHS3jODeVUK-Uj7LVpNzafQV46Dloh_hmRfpStWGmS7ekdbpH9LrU_BYI3mGRDjWtmX9CE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1052.33)):

For sure. I think, and it's interesting, I think I can keep it pretty brief. Curtis finishes this project. He's not doing well in 1930 when this project ends. He's able to publish the last two volumes working mostly in Oklahoma at that time, and he's destitute. He's gone through a terrible divorce and lost all the rights to his images, and he's largely forgotten as an image maker. And then in the early 1980s, so we're jumping way forward, the photography as a market in collectibles starts to really pick up in the seventies and people start to look at Curtis's photos with new eyes and really appreciate on one hand, but then also look at it with a little critical eye for his work and what he's doing. And we can kind of talk about some of those things. There's kind of the negative side and then there's the, well, maybe not so negative side as well. Everyone was living on a reservation at that point. He does have them, as far as we know, do some recreations and set up scenes of going on a war party kind of thing where people were wearing traditional clothing or ceremonial clothing or clothing that their grandparents had worn. I think the vast majority of that clothing and the artifacts they wear and or whatever are appropriate for the nation that they were a part of. There have been people who had definitely noticed at that time in the eighties that sometimes a certain trinket or artifact might kind of go from one tribe to the other when he was publishing them. And that was inappropriate for him to do. Sometimes he would just kind of throw a blanket over them and that would be a plus in a certain way because it really focused the viewer's attention on the face. But that blanket kind of goes from tribe to tribe or nation to nation as well. He also does some what's called retouching, and right with the dry plate, you can basically ink out, it's a Photoshop principle where you basically ink out some artifacts that may not be convenient, like a western culture, Western things like a clock.

Dan Seed ([19:56](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/LdjUl3owPUGikyFG6zNRjuMVZXN1J4EwH7xsIo0cZdfcVy2JqlER2TEocITA3B04Y2aJOkbtO2R1bhYJWzlGwUVQmOU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1196.58)):

I was going to say the clock one is one of the more famous examples,

David Coleman ([20:00](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/MWaG9uOSSzoosaTbV65HqJAVGwDbNbOsG3VsKv4bIzPMQ-F5KSxELz6e_BGko9PgJb538XZ-jIU3uVjOK87VeJgyELI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1200.84)):

And I mean that's one image out of the 2,230, whatever that got published. And so anyway, he gets very controversial treatment in the early eighties. And then as people start to look more and reflect more, he is photographing some people wearing button shirts so he doesn't completely get rid of western evidence of western culture a little bit more accurate. Currently. I have a photograph of Wichita named Henry. He's wearing glasses and it's like, well, he's not doing it uniformly across the board. And it's complex, it's complicated. And I think Curtis was a complicated guy. I think in general, he was trying to honor the heritage that the person sitting in front of him would be thinking about. But when they were living on reservations, I think they often had trunks of clothing of their ceremonial clothing that was passed down to them from their parents or grandparents.

([21:04](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/dYXiaN-Pefx8gJ6N7M0a4p6cFiloJNGzExFcteJkJMWPD2Rhl0VnVs4Jqsti3DWxXUhNBDwKtEBxW3uXFIAxgkh5m9c?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1264.03)):

And so they would put that on. We think that Curtis did that with willing subjects who were willing to sit for him, have their portrait taken. But so many things it ends up, the more you look kind of realize that the one version of how you interpret him is not necessarily going to hold forth. And I should add certainly that a lot of native cultures now really love Curtis photographs. One, because it's the only record of their ancestor, right? Mean, and they're typically beautiful portraits and very respectfully done. I come back to that word respect again. And I think a lot of Native Americans who's either, whether it was their nation or some others that were being photographed by Curtis, I think they respect his attitude in general. There's a lot of writing in these books on top of the photography, and he is not shy with editorializing a little bit about the way the government has treated these people. So you need the fuller picture to get a better appreciation of where he's coming from.

Dan Seed ([22:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/rdQPr--GpcfPfgwfT9_VPLRkz9GM9U9MFaJTir4YFx7gVNFlr1A4eJgAbn6SK1vqHipP9Yyz4bbrevHq9M4uJJjzflc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1336.99)):

Sure. And that's always the challenge too, is that you've got the visuals and people are drawn to visuals, not necessarily maybe the entire collection. So it's hard to put that stuff into context. I think one of the points that you brought up about the photos, the fact is, like you said, the photos are very dignified, but that's also one of the controversies that follows Curtis, is that he's setting up these photos, like you said, let's go out on the war path and let's be out here. When in reality that wasn't their reality at that time, which is one of the shortcomings that for somebody that's editorializing in the written portion of it, this seems like a missed opportunity to truly show what life was like at that time, rather than hearkening back to 30 or 40 or 50 or a hundred years ago.

David Coleman ([23:04](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/8tPLHZOz-va4QxZ_L3TnoiMYbXbMXJAohCLpPjD6LRU-hUEq46GrZt5T2B5gjzPx9lGel4ALd5Ke51RLaa32Bqt2YuM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1384.63)):

Yeah, I think he struggled with that. The images from the last two volumes, especially the one that I've referenced a little bit before with in Oklahoma, they're not as grand, they're not as beautiful. He is by the 1920s, probably mid twenties or late twenties, when he is photographing those, that's a big difference in time between 1900 or 1906 when he's just starting out. And so the living conditions have deteriorated, and he's a little bit more real in those. But I think it's always fair to, at least on one level, judge an artist for what their intent was and did they succeed in that intent. And you can certainly talk about whether the value system that person had at that time is appropriate to today's value system or does it match up fully.

Dan Seed ([23:56](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/A2Zxkj7vG5MvOXucTognWgPC9PHxp-AHTmmpztNh8V2ujj9ow6vSYUjfLoSF1oyMcV5Sc_MBzdZslD7GKQzzuiLG9aA?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1436.48)):

Always difficult.

David Coleman ([23:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/4iEB8ljRpKrPRAFEYfrMsH1VJgkpCUs05jxrh1L5gLBaYlknCx_8vym4oVuoBNKEddLFXR5IpN31Ry-kKvStRBb-R1E?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1439.21)):

Are there elements that made sense then and still make sense now, or not? I think ultimately, yeah. Right. I mean, there's the cliche of the noble savage, and that's done largely because trying to put the past behind you and be done with maybe some not so pleasant details in terms of the government's approach to assimilating the Native American culture into Western culture, I certainly don't think Curtis was, he was not on a documentary project. He was not trying to document this is the way they're living now.

([24:34](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/4STsCF08aD6m3BHkiNTTtJq15WtX1eEx4Iuw6WsqXdWMhE-GZzFOQz3IRh2hlF5vx8lWsgw9ckgG1mlUPKoDnnv0eso?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1474.34)):

He'd never certainly would've gotten funding from JP Morgan on a project like that, but he was, and he was not the only person to be thinking about this. It was very much part of the time to be thinking about this culture is disappearing, and that's a shame. And so let's document for future generations what that looked like. And yes, it was a bit of a recreation, and we should always own up to that. And in the space that we have to exhibit it, it's wonderful to walk people through that gallery. You have a lot of people who come in and say like, oh, Curtis, these are amazing portraits. And oh my God, very nostalgic. And then you have people coming through going, that jerk Curtis, he was really lying. All these are lies. And it's like, yeah, let's talk about all these images and kind of work through that.

Dan Seed ([25:33](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/j0nZ4rLOLQWJkWXJdCCNDVws7S8RnyIaXemfuvb7ry_SYqWJgM-ciEqGi5j-EozZW4GqakibzccgsjJZyjzBeOdlgbQ?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1533.95)):

Yeah. One thing that I was thinking about it is complex history is complex. And so for you as a historian, as an archivist, when you look at a collection and what he did and how he went about it, does it in your view any way change the impact of his work, of the historical value of his work, even though some of it is a little fudged nowadays, we're throwing everything out. It's like, well, that doesn't fit our modern narrative, get rid of it. Is there still historical value in his work in the sense of the photos based off of what he may or may not have done?

David Coleman ([26:10](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/pcWBbnMENS9_Hn2JogCkawPY2MO93049mhzGrXNW5OEA9mZde8LR7WAvt51Go0aMXXUTZXPhqTQnQdPnqGlJodgURFg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1570.34)):

The disclaimer I should offer at this point is that I'm not an anthropologist, and I'm not an ethnographer. He came at it with support from the Smithsonian and who, he got to edit the volumes. He wrote the volumes, but then he had someone from the Smithsonian edit them. He was not accepted by the field that basically became anthropology at Columbia University. He was not accepted by academia, and it actually kind of hurt his sales with universities, but he was an amateur historian or an amateur ethnographer. And the academia sometimes has problems with that because you're not approaching the subject with the discipline you should,

([27:02](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/tbZmcJnv0qNAwcQKPZd8m6PODtQaS9OjpJu3saGk50CI0mwzLU-TYfQIkR-0AmTLOcvB79R_De-NYL4JSSQ1p3Eyyqg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1622.04)):

And that's totally legit. That's a totally legit critique of what Curtis is doing. But that doesn't mean that a lot of the data he's collecting or a lot of the stories he's collecting or a lot of the songs, he's literally recording that they have no value. I mean, I think there's a lot of value in there. And then these portraits, they have that documentary aspect of all photography, but then they also have, they go the extra mile in terms of style and stylistic that I think still appeals to us today. Whether you love Curtis or hate Curtis, you can't deny that they're amazing and powerful and very direct images.

Dan Seed ([27:47](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/wsGW40PaQrjETXGZnotsUIH4_TxpeIgohfb4JZ2_gm_ADBblon2DGMFrlGfuBAfOmIfFt4vQYkDp1R_Hv2V5IL5o9JY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1667.65)):

They most certainly are. As I said, they stand out, they jump off the paper. To you as a modern viewer looking at this, it's, they're very stunning photos. And as you mentioned, his whole body of work is impressive and stunning and documentarian in that kind of way. And so lastly, because we are hard up against it here, in what ways does the Edward Curtis collection enhance the purpose of the Witcliff collections, and how would not having this impact the overall quality?

David Coleman ([28:21](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/CQUUM7_qNeXn3Xy1VsOTMMCet3S9sGrt7pbUvhkpJ1YuJl1OpzEkCo20cm0EVocIdcZRvfni-Y6U6Umjq9odtEc-tik?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1701.03)):

Well, of course, photography is a key part of what we do and what we collect at the Witcliff. And I think where I'll go with that question is I love that we can have this kind of permanent display of his work. We rotate the images, but Curtis will be with us for a long time because it really is a great entry point for students to think about photography, to think about what that truth is or how manipulated it is. And of course, issues around one race, creating art about another race, that's an endlessly rich topic to think about and talk about and that we can inspire students to love or hate, but discuss it is really where I get really excited when I see people walking through that gallery.

Dan Seed ([29:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/qkiUZp5S4T1V3XmyECxRBYNEqrNOzwlaR2crCJAw8k-b4pUrVPF0lsl3OID8xSj6TPE7tb-0SJNUgCvtvYAEGD1BXVI?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1758.21)):

I think that's a wonderful point, and I think that discussion is needed in all of these kind of areas with regard to history. And I think you're living the mission, which is wonderful to hear and to hear you say. So Dr. David Coleman, thank you for spending time with us. We could go hours on Edward Curtis, we could go hours on everything else that you guys have over there. It's endlessly fascinating. Thank you for being here.

David Coleman ([29:39](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/jffp2mfFVL7eXiLe7Tp6GOnepcmRB0N5bU5qHJPp2HxoQv1kpRuXGQ6altKDCk34ZacTmHxmIZ94dJ8OKg1-7zpA9zg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1779.84)):

You're very welcome. My pleasure

Dan Seed ([29:41](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/KOC7YrupeImzlZLu9dalJh7eSeLmlLoTpY4GwBP56SDHKBV4Ly756Eb6IA5ukLtrpJxwOyehmvbbCxrz5LOigQnzXBk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1781.37)):

And thank you all for the pleasure of your time in downloading this episode. We'll be back next month, and until then, stay well and stay informed.