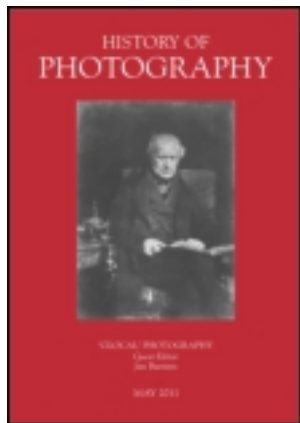


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Frank H. Goodyear III

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An Early Photograph of Shoshone Falls: Uncovering a Network of Communities in 1870s Idaho

Frank H. Goodyear III

A little known nineteenth-century photograph of three men at Shoshone Falls provides insights into photography's role in mediating the public's understanding of the American West and in concealing/revealing the diverse populations and complex network of interconnected relationships that existed in southern Idaho during the 1870s.

Keywords: *Landscape photography, Shoshone Falls, Timothy O'Sullivan (ca. 1840–82), Charles Roscoe Savage (1832–1909), William Henry Jackson (1843–1942), 1870s Idaho*

Uncovering the history and significance of this photograph has not been a solitary endeavour. Many people have provided important assistance and critical insights. First, I would like to thank Larry J. West, the collector who presented this photograph to the National Portrait Gallery in 2007 within a larger collection of nineteenth-century photographs. His generosity is much appreciated. Maya E. Foo, a research assistant in the Department of Photographs from 2008 to 2010, played a critical role in researching the history and photographic representation of Shoshone Falls; her contributions were invaluable. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Philip Brookman, François Brunet, Todd Gustavson, Peter Hales, Ronald James, Toby Jurovics, Alex Nemerov, Eric Paddock, Martha Sandweiss, Ann Shumard, William Stapp and Glenn Willumson, each of whom lent their expertise to this project.

1 – About William Henry Jackson, in addition to his memoirs *Time Exposure: The Autobiography of William Henry Jackson*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons 1940, see: Beaumont Newhall and Diana Edkins, *William H. Jackson*, Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan 1974; and Peter B. Hales, *William Henry Jackson and the Transformation of the American Landscape*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1988.

Regarding the photograph of three men standing on a rock outcropping before Shoshone Falls in southern Idaho (figure 1) – now in the collection of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery (NPG) – evidence does not exist to establish the identities of either the three men or the photographer. Clues in the image lead to the speculation that the figure on the left is William Henry Jackson, arguably the most well-travelled and prolific photographer in the nineteenth-century American West. Jackson appears in other photographs from this period in a similar hat, and records indicate that he travelled with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) for several seasons with a large-format camera and a stereograph camera similar to the two in the foreground of this image. Yet, questions about this attribution abound and prohibit at this time a conclusive attribution. While the two other men in the photograph wear distinctive outfits, their identities are equally mysterious. The man in the middle wears a Civil War-era Hardee hat and military trousers; the man on the right a cavalry shell jacket and a Zouave-style head scarf. As military authorities often accompanied government-sponsored expeditions, including the Surveys of which Jackson was a part, their presence suggests that the photograph was perhaps a product of this type of trip.¹

The men's clothes, the absence of any signs of tourism and formal characteristics of the photograph all point to the image having been made prior to 1880. By this date at least three photographers had visited Shoshone Falls and successfully captured views of the site. They included, in order of appearance, Salt Lake City photographer Charles Roscoe Savage (December 1867, June 1868 and July 1874), John Junk, a local photographer with a studio in nearby Silver City, Idaho (June 1868), and Timothy O'Sullivan, the now-renowned photographer of the US Army Corps of Engineers (September–October 1868 and November 1874). Two unattributed early photographs of Shoshone Falls in a collection compiled by San Francisco photographer Eadweard Muybridge suggest that there might have been other photographers who ventured there. Regarding Jackson, his first documented trip was in 1883. Although



Figure 1. Unidentified photographer, *Three Men at Shoshone Falls*, ca. 1870–80. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Larry J. West.

an earlier visit may have occurred, lack of evidence prevents the attribution of the image in question to Jackson or others.²

During this period there was at least one additional individual who figures in the history of the photographic representation of Shoshone Falls. Edward Colmache, a French-born army medical doctor stationed at nearby Camp Winthrop, supplied a photograph of the Falls to the Parisian weekly journal *L'Illustration*. This image was engraved and published with an accompanying article by Richard Cortambert, a leading French geographer, on 17 April 1869. Cortambert had not visited the Falls but worked from a variety of sources in writing his essay. Colmache, however, had made the trip and had supplied the previous year his own essay about the Falls to the French monthly *La Revue Britannique*. Having acquired a noteworthy photograph, he sent this image to be published. While the resulting engraving figures the Falls from a similar vantage point, few clues exist that might connect it with the NPG's photograph.³

Given the lack of an obvious attribution, is such a compelling photograph rendered mute? While it would be fascinating to unearth the story behind this photograph's creation, not knowing the identity of these figures or the photographer does not strip the historic importance from this image. Not knowing, in fact, potentially liberates the image, opening up lines of inquiry that might otherwise be limited because of the availability of specific historic details. Indeed, when seen more broadly in the context of the visual culture of the nineteenth-century West, this photograph permits one the opportunity to consider anew photography's importance in mediating the public's understanding of Shoshone Falls and the West more generally. As significantly, research on this image has also revealed insights into the diverse populations and the complex network of interconnected relationships that existed in southern Idaho and throughout the West during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Although the heroic posture of the group suggests that these three men might have been among the first to reach Shoshone Falls, they were in fact relative late-comers to the site. Their portrait might signal one message, but when considered in the historic context of the surrounding region, they were one group among many that lived, settled, or ventured through this area.

Shoshone Falls is described repeatedly in nineteenth-century government survey reports, travel writings, and later tourist guidebooks as an extraordinarily remote site, and in many ways it was. Located on the Snake River roughly 225 miles northwest of

2 – About Savage's travels to Shoshone Falls, see 'Returned', *Salt Lake Daily Telegraph* (5 December 1867), 1; 'The Niagara of the West', *Deseret News* (18 December 1867), 1; 'The Pleasure Party', *Idaho Statesman* (11 June 1868), 1; 'The Niagara of the West', *Harper's Weekly* (17 April 1869), 244 and 248; and 'Shoshone Falls', *Deseret News* (8 July 1874), 1. About Junk, see 'The Pleasure Party', 1; and 'The Great Shoshone Falls of Idaho', *Idaho Statesman* (30 June 1868), 2. About O'Sullivan, see Toby Jurovics, *Framing the West: The Survey Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2010. About Muybridge, see Philip Brookman (ed.), *Helios: Eadweard Muybridge in a Time of Change*, Gottingen: Steidl 2010; and 'Photographs of Yosemite, San Francisco, Oregon, Peru, and Other Locations', Collection of 153 photographs assembled by Muybridge and formerly bound in two albums, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. About Jackson's travels to the Falls, see 'Shoshone Falls', *Salt Lake Tribune* (3 January 1884), 13. 3 – Richard Cortambert, 'La Cataracte de Shoshone', *L'Illustration* (17 April 1869), 247–8; and Edward Colmache, 'Les Cataractes de Shoshone', *La Revue Britannique* (August 1868), 502–6. On Colmache's death in 1876, see 'Sudden Death of Dr. Colmache', *Owyhee Avalanche* (27 May 1876), 3.

- 4 – About the ‘discovery’ of Shoshone Falls, see George Gibbs, ‘The Great Shoshone Falls’, *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin* (17 July 1863), 1; ‘Return of the Expedition to Fort Boise’, *Salt Lake City Union Vedette* (15 August 1864), 1; Oscar J. Goldrick, ‘The Niagara of the West – A World’s Wonder – The Great Shoshone Falls’, *Salt Lake City Union Vedette* (31 May 1866), 1; ‘Snake River Cataracts’, *Owyhee Avalanche* (16 June 1866), 1; George Catlin, *Last Rambles Amongst the Indians of the Rocky Mountains and the Andes*, New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1867, 168–74; Clarence King, ‘The Falls of the Shoshone’, *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, 5:4 (October 1870), 380; and *The March of the Mounted Riflemen*, ed. Raymond W. Settle, Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Co. 1940, 183–6.
- 5 – John M. Murphy, ‘The Waterfalls of the Northwest’, *Appleton’s Journal*, 2:1 (January 1877), 3; and King, ‘The Falls of the Shoshone’, 380–1.
- 6 – ‘The Niagara of the West’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 244.

- 7 – King, ‘The Falls of the Shoshone’, 381.

- 8 – George Gibbs, ‘The Great Shoshone Falls’, *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* (17 July 1863), 1.

Salt Lake City, it went unnoticed by a number of early explorers in southern Idaho, including John C. Fremont, whose 1843 expedition to Oregon missed it by several miles. When it was finally encountered by Euro-American travellers several years later, no fewer than three different groups claimed to have ‘discovered’ it.⁴ The introduction of a stage line between Salt Lake City and The Dalles, Oregon, in 1864 made getting there somewhat easier. Likewise, the construction of Camp Winthrop in southwest Idaho two years later provided additional military security along this route and the more immediate region. Yet, even with these additions and the passage of treaties with the at-times hostile Bannock and Shoshone tribes, travellers continued to characterise the area surrounding the Falls as a forbidding world-apart: a place ‘as desolate as one could imagine’, wrote one early visitor. Similarly, Clarence King, the US Army Corps of Engineers geologist who led an expedition to Shoshone Falls in 1868, described the approach to the site as a tedious travail. ‘The monotony of sage-desert was overpowering. We would have given anything for a good outlook, but for three days [. . .] we were forced to amuse ourselves by chasing occasional antelopes’.⁵

Despite this emptiness, the Falls themselves rarely disappointed. Most nineteenth-century visitors were awed by their encounter with the cataract and the wide canyon through which the Snake River ran. As a writer for *Harper’s Weekly* opined, its ‘savage grandeur and wild sublimity [. . .] are almost indescribable’.⁶ After Shoshone Falls was measured and found to be thirty-six feet taller than Niagara Falls, comparisons with that famous waterfall soon became popular. Like pilgrims at a sacred site, early visitors spent much time moving about the land abutting the Falls to gain new perspectives from which to view the rushing waters. To King and others, however, the arduous travel to reach this destination and the desolate topography contributed to the Falls a sense of eeriness and an unknowable quality that often overshadowed its beauty. As King remarked:

Dead barrenness is the whole sentiment of the scene. The mere suggestion of trees clinging here and there along the walls serves rather to heighten than relieve the forbidding gloom of the place. Nor does the flashing whiteness, where the river tears itself among the rocky islands, or rolls in spray down the cliff, brighten the aspect. In contrast with its brilliancy, the rocks seem darker and more wild.⁷

Having not yet been transformed into a known tourist icon, Shoshone Falls was more than a tall waterfall. To many early non-native visitors, reaching it and experiencing its sublime beauty represented an achievement that served to set one apart.

The NPG’s photograph conveys some of the tension described by King. The sheer horizontality of the surrounding landscape and the steep verticality of the canyon cliffs suggest both the ‘monotony’ of the area and the unapproachable nature of the cataract itself. Standing at a distance high above the Falls, these figures present themselves as proud discoverers. Of note, the cataract itself is only partially visible and serves merely as a backdrop in this image. By being represented at the site and situating two cameras in the image’s foreground – a full-plate Lewis-style camera at the centre and a smaller stereograph camera on the right – the three men showcase their accomplishment and their role in bringing the Falls to a larger public. The presence of three cameras at the scene – two on the ground and the third recording the scene – speaks to the importance of securing photographs during their trip. For these men, it was not enough simply to reach the Falls. Bringing home photographs was also vital, for such images made visible their achievement and their role in opening up this territory. This concern for pictures was conveyed in one of the earliest newspaper descriptions of Shoshone Falls. In an article published in 1863, prior to the visit of the first artist or photographer, George Gibbs, who had travelled there fourteen years earlier, appealed for the ‘insertion of this note’ in the hope ‘that some good draughtsman or photographer may procure a good view of this remarkable scene’. Only then would the wider world fully appreciate its ‘discovery’.⁸

Other early photographers pictured the Falls with a similar concern for recording their presence. Accompanying King’s 1868 visit, Timothy O’Sullivan created a

series of views that emphasised the Falls' wondrous nature and his party's role in documenting the site. Seeing the Falls was for him and others a type of revelation. As one member later exclaimed:

there is in the entire region of the falls such wildness of beauty that a feeling pervades the mind almost unconsciously that you are, if not the *first* white man who has ever trod that trail, certainly one of the very few who have ventured so far.⁹

At Shoshone Falls and elsewhere during his survey work in the West, O'Sullivan sought to create images that conveyed this sentiment and that foreground their work in the field.

To achieve this result, O'Sullivan often chose to include a single individual within the larger view. Although five members of King's party ventured to the Falls in 1868 – together with a military escort that numbered eleven soldiers – rarely did O'Sullivan picture more than a single person.¹⁰ This individual sometimes acted as a surrogate for the viewer of the image, a practice readily evident in 'Shoshone Falls, Idaho', where a solitary figure with his back to the camera peers out across the vast landscape, enacting the experience of seeing the site for the first time (figure 2). The inclusion of this man – possibly John Henry Hill, a painter who accompanied the group – transforms the nature of the photograph. Rather than serving to re-interpret the scene, as the work of his travelling companion would have done, O'Sullivan's photograph emphasises instead the experience of looking at and contemplating the subject before him. Consistent with King's goals, it highlights the human encounter with this little-known territory. When O'Sullivan returned to the Falls six years later, ostensibly to photograph the scene again, his images continued to showcase this same type of engagement. As he demonstrated throughout his work for King and later for George Wheeler's USGS expedition, O'Sullivan understood that his role was to both document new lands and publicise the larger enterprise of which he was a part.¹¹

Creating such narratives within specific compositions was a common practice for many nineteenth-century landscape photographers and owed as much to studio conventions of the period as it did to the practices of artists working in other mediums. Indeed, many photographers who worked in the West during this period began their photographic careers as studio portraitists, and a majority maintained an active portrait trade during and after their work beyond the studio. As a marketable product, portraits were the lifeblood of many photographers. While some eschewed the studio in preference for work outdoors – O'Sullivan included – their experience

9 – John Samson, 'Photographs from the High Rockies', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 39:232 (September 1869), 475.

10 – Samuel Franklin Emmons, a member of the King Survey, recorded in his diary on 16 September 1868 that 'King, Sullivan, [John Henry] Hill, Lou [Lewis Bayless], and the Serg't, with 11 men and the army wagon got off a little before noon'. Emmons did not accompany them, as this journey to Shoshone Falls represented a picture-making side-trip for King and his party. 1868 Diary, Container 1, Samuel Franklin Emmons Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

11 – That he did so with such individuality speaks to O'Sullivan's independent vision, most probably informed by his recent experience photographing the Civil War. On O'Sullivan, see Jurovics, *Framing the West*; Robin Kelsey, *Archive Style: Photographs and Illustrations for US Surveys, 1850–1890*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2007; and Joel Snyder, *American Frontiers: The Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan, 1867–1874*, New York: Aperture 1981.

Figure 2. Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *Shoshone Falls, Idaho*, 1868. Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Prints & Photographs Division.



Figure 3. William Henry Jackson, *Shoshone Falls, Eagle Rock Above the Falls*, ca. 1883. Denver Public Library, Western History Collection.



with studio portraiture informed their landscape or documentary work. In particular, the tendency of nineteenth-century portraitists to contextualise their subject within a knowable setting – through the use of a painted backdrop and/or the incorporation of a symbolic object in an image's foreground – shaped the approach adopted by many to subjects beyond the studio. Evident in many images, including the NPG's, photographers working outdoors continued to contextualise their subjects, yet in this effort they replaced the false backdrops and props with an actual landscape and working tools. In doing so, the landscape becomes a setting before which a pseudo-theatrical drama is performed.

Like O'Sullivan, other photographers who visited the Falls in the years after its 'discovery' also tended to emphasise this human interaction and to employ similar compositional strategies. In William Henry Jackson's 'Shoshone Falls, Eagle Rock Above the Falls', probably taken in 1883, the photographer incorporates a figure to serve a nearly-identical function as the figure in O'Sullivan's view (figure 3). Seated on a rock outcropping on the bank of the river directly above the Falls, this unidentified individual looks out in silent reverie at the watery precipice. Unlike O'Sullivan, whose primary audience was scientists and government officials, Jackson created views during this period that were meant principally for tourists in the West and would-be travellers. Whether published in the pages of a popular periodical or sold at his studio in Denver, such views commemorated or encouraged travel to places such as Shoshone Falls. Of course, not all the photographs taken at the Falls by O'Sullivan, Jackson, and Charles Roscoe Savage included specific individuals. Yet, even when a figure was not visible, the photographer was always there. Roaming about the site looking for new perspectives from which to picture it, these photographers emphasised a human engagement with the site.

Despite the many similarities, what sets the NPG's image apart from other photographs of Shoshone Falls from this period is the number and prominence of the men featured in it. Because of this difference and the fact that nothing is known about other photographs that might have been taken on this occasion or the specific circumstances related to its creation, the image is much like an orphan. Indeed, it is unclear what actually preceded or followed this photographic moment. The narrative that it does construct, however, showcases a group encounter with the Falls. Lined up prominently in the foreground, each wearing his distinct outfit, these figures take centre-stage in the photograph. The Falls is an important element of the narrative, but the cataract itself is only barely visible. Most photographs from this vantage point – looking north from the south rim of the canyon – show the waterfall in its entirety. In this case it is largely obstructed. Although other photographs were probably created, this image represents a distinct collaboration between the

photographer and the men who joined him there. Pictured together, they celebrate their party's success and their individual prowess. In doing so, they assume a certain ownership of this place.

Martha Sandweiss has persuasively argued that photographs of the West from this period speak more about America's future than its past or present. They act to marginalise those native communities that were already there and not only anticipate but encourage the enterprise of western expansion. In photographs of Shoshone Falls and other regional subjects, the West becomes a place without a history, a spot to begin again, and a site for national healing in the aftermath of the Civil War.¹² As a writer for *Harper's Weekly* exclaimed in an introduction to a description of the Falls in 1869:

The Great West is still to a considerable extent unexplored; and its beauties and sublime scenery, now comparatively unknown, will in a few years attract the attention of thousands of sight-seers, tourists, and earth-wanderers, who, tired at the oft-looked-at scenery of Italy and Switzerland, will seek the wonderful and sublime in nature now hidden in the Rocky Mountains.¹³

This sentiment was shared by western boosters who saw unfettered opportunities associated with not only its natural wonders, but also its natural resources. Images such as the NPG's photograph participate in this expansionist programme.

Of course, photography was not the sole medium for constructing the West's identity anew. Popular prints, paintings, and various forms of literary expression also played an important role in establishing ideas about this place. Before 1880 Shoshone Falls attracted the attention of at least three artists, two of whom actually visited the site (John Henry Hill in September and October 1868, and Gilbert Munger in the autumn of 1872) and one who created a series of works based on photographs by O'Sullivan (Thomas Moran).¹⁴ While a painter or a print-maker could render the Falls in dramatic colour and in a larger format, their images tended to convey the same overall impression. Again and again, those who pictured the Falls figured it as a marvellous, yet desolate wonder. Rare was the occasion when an individual was incorporated into the views of these artists. With few exceptions, travel writers who ventured there likewise, communicated a similar message. In this regard, the Falls was understood like many recently 'discovered' landmarks in the West, including, famously, Yosemite and Yellowstone.

Considered as a group, these different representations tended to de-populate western lands and to de-emphasise the complex network of individuals, communities, corporations, and government agencies that increasingly intersected during this period. In addition, by fixating on sites such as Shoshone Falls, these narratives largely ignored both the West's growing urban centres and the expansive territory in which many lived or passed through. Early Euro-American accounts of southern Idaho depicted the region as largely uninhabitable and regarded the Falls as some type of geographical aberration. In many accounts it was the only thing associated with southern Idaho worth mentioning. In 1880, describing the region of Idaho where the Falls were located, the surveyor William Chandler remarked: 'there is a large volcanic plateau near the centre of the southern half of the Territory, inaccessible and unexplored, destitute of soil or vegetation'.¹⁵ The notion that southern Idaho was inhospitable to settlers and unremarkable for tourists – save Shoshone Falls – was a frequent comment by guidebook writers.

Yet, judging by the many different individuals and groups who lived, settled, or travelled there during the second half of the nineteenth century, Shoshone Falls and southern Idaho more generally became a dynamic crossroads. In listing those associated with this place, consider the following populations: first, there were various bands of Shoshone and Bannock tribes-people, perhaps as many as five thousand in the immediate region in 1860. Semi-nomadic, these communities depended upon the Snake River and were known to fish for salmon in the stretch directly below the Falls.¹⁶ During the first half of the nineteenth century an initial wave of non-native travellers crossed through the region. Control of these lands and

12 – Martha Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2002.

13 – 'The Niagara of the West', *Harper's Weekly*, 244.

14 – About John Henry Hill, see Linda Ferber and William Gerdtts, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites*, New York: Schocken Books 1985, 166. About Gilbert Munger, see Michael Schroeder and J. Gray Sweeney, *Gilbert Munger: Quest for Distinction*, Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press 2003, 34–77. About Thomas Moran, see Nancy Anderson, *Thomas Moran*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1997, 162–3 and 167–9; and Linda Hults, 'Thomas Moran's "Shoshone Falls": A Western Niagara', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 3:1 (Winter 1989), 89–102.

15 – *The Great West: Its Attractions and Resources*, ed. Ferdinand V. Hayden, Bloomington, IL: Charles R. Brodix 1880, 279.

16 – This number declined markedly in the years after the beginning of non-native settlement. According to an 1878 Census, taken a few months before the outbreak of the Bannock War, the number of Shoshone-Bannock had declined to 1705; see John W. Heaton, *The Shoshone-Bannocks: Culture & Commerce at Fort Hall, 1870–1940*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas 2005, 58–9. See also Brigham Madsen, *The Bannock of Idaho*, Moscow: University of Idaho Press 1996.

the fur trade in the Northwest interested both British and American leaders, and in 1834 Fort Hall and Fort Boise were established in southern Idaho to provide protection and to supply an increasing number of military soldiers in the region. In the aftermath of the United States' acquisition of this land from Great Britain in 1846, the first permanent American settlements began appearing in Idaho. Significant Mormon communities grew up as well in the late 1850s, as leader Brigham Young sought to enlarge the Mormon's presence beyond Salt Lake City. The discovery of gold in Boise Basin in 1862 accelerated the pace of settlement and commercial development, and by 1870 more than twenty thousand non-natives lived in Idaho Territory.¹⁷ The seasonal population was often significantly higher. Of this number, roughly one-quarter were Chinese immigrants, most of whom worked in the mining industry. Relatively late to the scene were the government surveyors and eastern scientists, who began to map and study all elements of the region in the aftermath of the Civil War. Finally, there were an ever-growing number of tourists, journalists, and artists from the East, the West, and in several cases Europe, many of whom entered this region with the express purpose of seeing Shoshone Falls.¹⁸

During the period before 1880, these various groups struggled to maintain peace. At times they accommodated one another or at least held the other at a distance. As travel writers sometimes noted, however, movement by non-natives through this region was often plagued by disturbances, including highway banditry and attacks by tribal groups. Not infrequently these conflicts resulted in more than simply heightened tension, but in violence and in several instances pitched battles. The so-called Bear River Massacre in 1863, in which a unit of California Volunteers raided and killed approximately 250 Shoshone in southeast Idaho, was one example of repeated American efforts to gain greater authority over regional affairs. Although a series of treaties with the Shoshone and Bannock in the aftermath of Bear River established a new level of accord, dissension continued to characterise relations between these different populations. The outbreak of the Bannock War in May 1878 in the area surrounding Fort Hall suggests that important issues remained unresolved.¹⁹

Despite these ongoing troubles and intermittent conflicts between Mormon and non-Mormon settlers, the rise of tourism at Shoshone Falls grew, although somewhat sporadically at first. In the wake of the 1868 visit by a group led by Idaho territorial governor David W. Ballard, a participant wrote optimistically about tourism's potential there:

Much can and will be done to make the Shoshone attractive to tourists as a place of summer resort. The day is not far distant when the shrill whistle of the iron horse will be heard to mingle with the thunder of our falls. Sweet will such music be to the ears of Idahoans.²⁰

However, without a local rail line and because of the continuing troubles in the area, a tourist infrastructure was relatively slow to develop. In the fall of 1875, Charles S. Walgamott, a farmer from Iowa, established a squatter's claim on the land abutting the Falls and began to fence it in order to prepare the site for future tourist operations. By 1879 he had constructed a small hotel and developed a daily stage line to shuttle visitors from the main overland road to the Falls. Yet, a year later visitors still commented that it was a 'mystery as unaccountable as it is strange' that 'so much wild beauty should rest in such obscurity'.²¹ By 1883 Walgamott had sold out to a 'syndicate of capitalists', including Montana Senator William A. Clark, who intended to replace the hotel with a far grander establishment and to place a recreational steamship on the river.²² Although their plans to transform the site into the 'Niagara of the West' were slow to develop, they had by the late 1880s – in part because of the completion in 1884 of the Oregon Short Line railroad across southern Idaho – made it a regular destination for recreational travellers.

One of the most compelling elements of the NPG's image is the manner in which the three men line up beside each other. What is it that they look out at? What

17 – Hayden, *The Great West*, 291.

18 – About Idaho history in the nineteenth century, see Carlos A. Schwantes, *In Mountain Shadows: A History of Idaho*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1991, 13–160; and Leonard J. Arrington, *History of Idaho*, 2 vols, Moscow: University of Idaho Press 1994.

19 – Heaton, *The Shoshone-Bannocks*, 39–53. See also George F. Brimlow, *The Bannock Indian War of 1878*, Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers 1938.

20 – 'The Great Shoshone Falls of Idaho', 2.

21 – Robert Briggs, 'A Trip to Shoshone Falls', *The Californian*, 2:10 (October 1880), 353.

22 – 'Buying Land at Shoshone Falls', *New York Times* (8 September 1883), 8. See also Charles S. Walgamott, *Six Decades Back*, Moscow: University of Idaho Press 1990.

prompted them to assume this position, and what might this ordering reveal about their identities and/or their larger project? During this period within the genre of western landscape photography, individuals and groups appear with some frequency. The inclusion of these figures was rarely a coincidence, as they usually served a specific function. Often, as in O'Sullivan's 'Shoshone Falls, Snake River, Idaho, Full Lateral View – on Upper Level', taken during his 1874 visit, figures served to provide a sense of scale in relation to some other element in the photograph; however, just as often, a figure or group of figures could also serve to heroise the larger enterprise of which they are a part (figure 4). As Robin Kelsey's recent study of O'Sullivan demonstrates, O'Sullivan was successful for his ability to translate the land into a measurable mark, while at the same time transforming the viewer into a vicarious participant in the process of mapping the West. This ability to appeal simultaneously to science and to fantasy made O'Sullivan a valuable asset to government survey leaders, who used his images for various reasons, including to help secure continued federal funding.²³

23 – Kelsey, *Archive Style*, 75–141.

Unlike most photographs of Shoshone Falls from this period, the NPG's photograph was probably a private image not meant for wide distribution – given its small size ($3\frac{1}{2} \times 5$ inches, most probably a trimmed-down half-plate), the lack of any identifying inscriptions on the mount, and the fact that no other copies of the image (photographic or engraved) seem to exist. Regardless of how limited its circulation was, it functioned like other photographs to mark these figures' presence at the Falls and to formalise their relationship with the place. The impulse of many western photographers was not simply to document these 'new' lands, but to assist in establishing some type of claim on them. Even when photographers created views in which figures are physically small relative to the larger scene or altogether absent from a landscape, the images continue to underscore how Americans were populating the West. As such, this line-up serves to assert a connection between these individuals and the place itself.

In many respects this photograph recalls images made during the recent Civil War. Group portraits of military figures were common during that conflict. As George N. Barnard's photograph of William T. Sherman and his staff demonstrates, such images commemorated their joint actions – in this case, their decisive campaign against Atlanta in 1864 (figure 5). Gathered around a cannon – some leaning on it – this line-up also affirmed their authority over this place. Such portraits from the Civil War are not only a visual precedent for the NPG's photograph, but they also act as a



Figure 4. Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *Shoshone Falls, Snake River, Idaho, Full Lateral View – On Upper Level*, 1874. Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Prints & Photographs Division.

Figure 5. George N. Barnard, *Rebel Fortification, Atlanta Ga., 1864*. Special Collections, United States Military Academy.



type of ghost at this site. Dressed partially in military outfits, the three individuals before Shoshone Falls enact a conquest of the western wilderness in a manner that recalls earlier military campaigns. As opposed to the horrific Civil War, however, these men seem to complete their victory without bloodshed. For them, the West has become a dream-like space where romance, innocence, and the Union itself are reborn.

At the same time, these three men also prefigure the western tourist. With the war completed and the West in the process of being settled, the commercial enterprise of tourism is now permitted to thrive. Through their efforts and the work of the explorers who preceded them, this transformation of the landscape unfolds. In this and other photographs, this process appears both inevitable and benign and serves as a template for the broader development of the West as a whole. Lining up before Shoshone Falls, these travellers both claim this place and prepare it for its incorporation into the larger nation and its economy.²⁴

Yet, surveyors and tourists were not the only groups who valued the Falls or who populated southern Idaho during the latter half of the nineteenth century. As noted earlier, the region became a crossroads for various native and non-native communities. This heterogeneity is not readily evident in the visual iconography of Shoshone Falls, but it does reveal itself in other forms of photography from the period. Often the same photographers who were depicting such landmarks were also using their cameras towards different ends and with different populations. And often the line-up was understood as a compositional format that fulfilled their goals. Andrew J. Russell's stereograph of five Shoshone men in southern Idaho shares a pictorial similarity with the NPG's photograph (figure 6). Posing these figures in the middle ground before a tipi, Russell foregrounds a representative group of Shoshone men. Meant for commercial sale to American audiences, this image suggests the continuing presence of native communities in the West and invites a number of questions pertaining to their current status. Are these men peaceful and accepting of life on their newly-designated reservation – in this case at the nearby Fort Hall Reservation – or are they part of a hostile band associated with the earlier skirmishes at Bear River and elsewhere? That tension animates this group and helps to make such an image marketable to popular audiences.

William Henry Jackson's image of a group of Shoshone and Bannock at Fort Hall – taken in the summer of 1872 while Jackson was en route to Yellowstone with

24 – On the role of landscape photography in the colonisation of western lands, see Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*; and Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2005, 43–79.



Figure 6. Andrew J. Russell, *Five Shoshone men*, ca. 1869. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

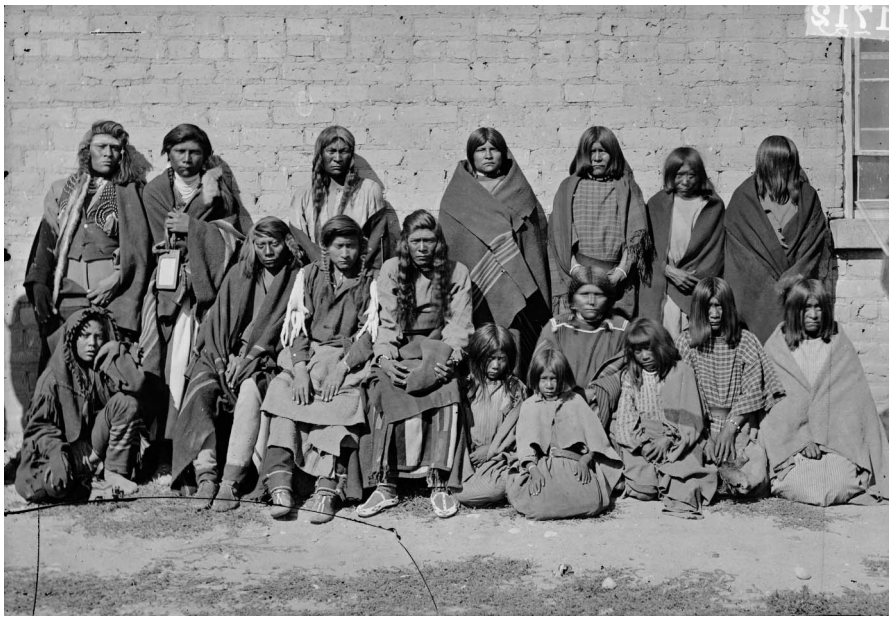


Figure 7. William Henry Jackson, *Shoshone and Bannock at Fort Hall, Idaho*, 1872. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Ferdinand Hayden and his USGS Survey – also features a type of line-up (figure 7). As opposed to the group in Russell’s photograph, in this case Jackson records a group of adults and children who seem to have committed themselves to a reservation future. Posed against the wall of an agency building, this group represents a population very unlike the men of the Hayden Survey, who were at the time off to map the newly-designated national park. Little is known about the occasion when this photograph was taken; however, owing to the difficult changes that the Shoshone and Bannock were confronting at this historic moment, it is likely that they wielded little authority over the proceedings. The standing figure at the far right – whose long hair entirely covers the subject’s face – seems to epitomise the larger group’s desire to resist the objectifying gaze of the dominant culture and to disappear from their current predicament. Within the larger government archive in which Jackson’s photographs were destined, however, this image served to illustrate a different point: namely, that the process of transition and acculturation for the native peoples of southern Idaho was underway.

As several scholars have noted, however, not all photographs of native peoples from this period were the product of a one-sided exchange. While a distinct power imbalance often existed, native figures did sometimes see these photographic moments as opportunities to fulfil their own ends. Photographs could serve to formalise a relationship between two groups and made visually evident that native

25 – On the agency of marginalised individuals in photographic portraiture, see Susan Bernardin, et al., *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880–1940*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2003; Frank H. Goodyear, *Red Cloud: Photographs of a Lakota Chief*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2003; Anna Pegler-Gordon, *In Sight of America: Photography and the Development of US Immigration Policy*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2009.

26 – Merle Wells, *Gold Camps & Silver Cities: Nineteenth-Century Mining in Central and Southern Idaho*, Moscow: University of Idaho Press 2002, 114–16. See also Ronald James, *Ruins of a World: Chinese Gold Mining at the Mon-Tung Site in the Snake River Canyon*, Idaho: Bureau of Land Management 1995.

27 – [‘Roustabout’], ‘The Great Snake River Valley’, *Idaho Avalanche* (18 November 1876), 1. The ‘hamlet’ of Springtown and its Chinese inhabitants are also referenced in John Murphy’s 1877 essay about the Falls. Murphy, ‘The Waterfalls of the Northwest’, 3.

28 – On the photographic representation of the Chinese in the West, see Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2001.

peoples remained a vital presence in the larger future of the West. While natives and non-natives might appear together in a photograph taken on a ceremonial occasion in Washington, DC or elsewhere, such moments of coming-together were few and far between in the visual culture of the Rocky Mountain West.²⁵

Yet, in southern Idaho, exchanges between different ethnic and social groups were more common than once thought. Although social patterns often worked to keep these disparate communities separate, the historic record reveals that a wider set of interrelationships existed during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The example of the Chinese is perhaps telling. Numbering more than five thousand by 1870, the Chinese in Idaho did indeed endure widespread discrimination and social segregation. At the same time, however, they maintained relatively open – albeit often one-sided – lines of communication with others in the territory. In 1869 gold was discovered at a site three hundred yards upriver from Shoshone Falls, and Euro-American and Chinese miners soon flocked to the area. Although efforts were made to exclude the Chinese, they remained and many settled in a community just below the Falls that came to be known as Springtown.²⁶ A visitor to the Falls remarked on these interactions in 1876:

There was considerable mining done here with rockers four, five, and six years ago, that paid well, but now the mines pay only two of three dollars per day and are worked by Chinese, with whom, Mr. Stricker [an area resident] is carrying on a snug little trade, in furnishing them with supplies; taking in exchange the dust they collect from the bars along the river.²⁷

In the visual culture of the West, however, the Chinese are largely invisible. When they do appear – most notably in San Francisco’s Chinatown or on the rare occasion in a photograph depicting them mining – they are figured as a marginal community (figure 8).²⁸ Lined up at a sluice in the middle distance, these four unidentified workers appear in William Henry Jackson’s photograph as ghost-like apparitions. In the visual or literary iconography of Shoshone Falls, however, they – like the Shoshone and Bannock – are missing. Photographs such as the NPG’s group portrait and others like it serve to erase that presence. While the name Shoshone is used to identify the waterfall, little else regarding the native presence and nothing about these larger historic interactions remain.

In conclusion, what this anonymous photograph reveals is that photographers in the nineteenth-century West – the great majority of whom were Euro-American – used this new visual technology as a tool not only to better understand these lands and the peoples who lived there, but also to assert their own vision for them. Although photography presented the promise of accuracy in transcribing a view or a portrait, the resulting images were never straightforward accounts. Coincident with scientific exploration, such photographs supported the larger effort to gain control of

Figure 8. William Henry Jackson, *Sluicing*, ca. 1878. Denver Public Library, Western History Collection.



the West and to marginalise the presence of others. Southern Idaho supported many different populations, but although this particular photographer brought along on this excursion no fewer than three cameras, he ultimately found only himself reflected in the landscape.

In the scholarship pertaining to photography and the visual culture of the nineteenth-century West, what I believe merits further attention is a fuller accounting of the great diversity of peoples in the West and a broader understanding of the complex networks that defined this region. What the larger historical context surrounding Shoshone Falls reveals is a dynamic interplay between and amongst various populations. This photograph privileges existing assumptions about western expansion – both in the nineteenth century and today – asserting America's sense of belonging and supporting the ideology of manifest destiny. When contextualised more fully, however, we come to understand that these three men represent only one line-up of many who made up the nineteenth-century West.