

Traditional Subjects: A 40-Year Photo Documentary

The Origin For more than forty years, photographer James Cook has created a documentary record of Native American life and culture across the United States. The project began at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1980. While the national narrative focused on poverty, Cook found instead a profound story of resilience, pride, and creativity. That experience reshaped his life's work.



Subiyay (Bruce Miller): Skokomish master carver and the last speaker of the Twana language, pictured in the first traditional longhouse built on the reservation in 110 years.



John Old Shield: An Oglala Lakota medicine man and boarding school survivor who lived to 101, serving as a fluent bridge to his people's ancestral healing traditions.



The Centennial Ride: Captured in 50°F below-zero temperatures, this 1990 image of the ride to Wounded Knee is now in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.

The Mission Expanding from the Plains to Native nations across the country, Cook has sought to document those sustaining traditions through art, language, ceremony, and activism. His theme, *Traditional Subjects*, reflects this ongoing effort to document cultural survival and renewal.

National Recognition Cook's photographs have been featured nationally, including in a PBS program on contemporary photographers and in solo museum exhibits. His 1990 image of the Centennial Ride to Wounded Knee is part of the permanent collection at the **Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian.**

A Note on Stewardship & Reciprocity: *Traditional Subjects* is a self-funded, lifelong archival project. While limited edition prints are occasionally made available to collectors to help offset the significant costs of travel, materials, and long-term preservation, the primary goal remains the creation of a historical record.

To honor the relationship between photographer and subject, every individual photographed receives high-quality archival prints for their family records and tribal archives.

"I don't pretend to know everything about the many Native American cultures and customs... I'll never truly understand most of it, but I'm interested and I'm learning. In spite of my ambitions, the images can't help but reflect my perceptions. I'll always be an outsider, but hopefully respectful and respected." - James Cook



Tesuque Pueblo Buffalo Dancers With tribal permission, this 1990 portrait of James Duran and Tun-te' Vigil preserves a sacred winter ceremony practiced at the 500-year-old pueblo to maintain world harmony.