



# Horace Poolaw, Photographer of American Indian Modernity

*Laura E. Smith*

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Laura E. Smith unravels the compelling life story of Kiowa photographer Horace Poolaw (1906–84), one of the first professional Native American photographers. Born on the Kiowa reservation in Anadarko, Oklahoma, Poolaw bought his first camera at the age of fifteen and began taking photos of family, friends, and noted leaders in the Kiowa community, also capturing successive years of powwows and pageants at various fairs, expositions, and other events. Though Poolaw earned some income as a professional photographer, he farmed, raised livestock, and took other jobs to help fund his passion for documenting his community.

Smith examines the cultural and artistic significance of Poolaw's life in professional photography from 1925 to 1945 in light of European and modernist discourses on photography, portraiture, the function of art, Native American identity, and American Indian religious and political activism. Rather than through the lens of Native peoples' inevitable extinction or within a discourse of artistic modernism, Smith evaluates Poolaw's photography within art history and Native American history, simultaneously questioning the category of "fine artist" in relation to the creative lives of Native peoples.

A tour de force of art and cultural history, *Horace Poolaw, Photographer of American Indian Modernity* illuminates the life of one of Native America's most gifted, organic artists and documentarians and challenges readers to reevaluate the seamlessness between the creative arts and everyday life through its depiction of one man's lifelong dedication to art and community.

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