

[Skip Navigation](#)



- [Subscribe](#)
- [Renew](#)
- [Give a Gift](#)
- [Digital Edition](#)

[The Atlantic Home](#)

Wednesday, October 24, 2012

SEARCH OUR SITE

Go

[Follow the Atlantic »](#)



- [Politics](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [International](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [National](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Magazine](#)
- [video](#)



Choose Category

Choose Month

Select Language ▼

[FAQ](#) Follow On: [Twitter](#) | [Google+](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Tumblr](#) subscribe by [RSS](#) or [Email](#)

The American West, 150 Years Ago

MAY 24, 2012 | [151](#)

312

[Recommend](#)

8.5k

[Tweet](#)

1,488

In the 1860s and 70s, photographer Timothy O'Sullivan created some of the best-known images in American History. After covering the U.S. Civil War, (many of his photos appear in this [earlier series](#)), O'Sullivan joined a number of expeditions organized by the federal government to help document the new frontiers in the American West. The teams were composed of soldiers, scientists, artists, and photographers, and tasked with discovering the best ways to take advantage of the region's untapped natural resources. O'Sullivan brought an amazing eye and work ethic, composing photographs that evoked the vastness of the West. He also documented the Native American population as well as the pioneers who were already altering the landscape. Above all, O'Sullivan captured -- for the first time on film -- the natural beauty of the American West in a way that would later influence Ansel Adams and thousands more photographers to come. [\[34 photos\]](#)

Use j/k keys or ←/→ to navigate

Choose: ☒ 1024px ☐ 1280px



A man sits in a wooden boat with a mast on the edge of the Colorado River in the Black Canyon, Mojave County, Arizona. At this time, photographer Timothy O'Sullivan was working as a military photographer, for Lt. George Montague Wheeler's U.S. Geographical Surveys West of the One Hundredth Meridian. Photo taken in 1871, from expedition camp 8, looking upstream. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) ■



2 Pah-Ute (Paiute) Indian group, near Cedar, Utah, in 1872.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) #




3 Twin buttes stand near Green River City, Wyoming, photographed in 1872.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 🖼️




4 Members of Clarence King's Fortieth Parallel Survey team, near Oreana, Nevada, in 1867.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



5 The Pyramid and Domes, a line of dome-shaped tufa rocks in Pyramid Lake, Nevada, seen in 1867.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 



6 Panoramic view of tents and a camp identified as "Camp Beauty", rock towers and canyon walls in Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Arizona. Tents and possibly a lean-to shelter stand on the canyon floor, near trees and talus. Photographed in 1873. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 



7 Old Mission Church, Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico. View from the plaza in 1873.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



8 Boat crew of the "Picture" at Diamond Creek. Photo shows photographer Timothy O'Sullivan, fourth from left, with fellow members of the Wheeler survey and Native Americans, following ascent of the Colorado River through the Black Canyon in 1871 (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



9

Browns Park, Colorado, 1872. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



10 Shoshone Falls, Snake River, Idaho. A view across top of the falls in 1874.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # ■



11 A man sits on a rocky shore beside the Colorado River in Iceberg Canyon, on the border of Mojave County, Arizona, and Clark County, Nevada in 1871. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 🖼️



12 Timothy O'Sullivan's darkroom wagon, pulled by four mules, entered the frame at the right side of the photograph, reached the center of the image, and turned around, heading back out of the frame. Footprints lead from the wagon toward the camera, revealing the photographer's path. Photo taken in 1867, in the Carson Sink, part of Nevada's Carson Desert. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 🖼️



13 The mining town of Gold Hill, just south of Virginia City, Nevada, in 1867.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



14 A wooden balanced incline used for gold mining, at the Illinois Mine in the Pahrnagat Mining District, Nevada in 1871. An ore car would ride on parallel tracks connected to a pulley wheel at the top of tracks.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) # 🖼️



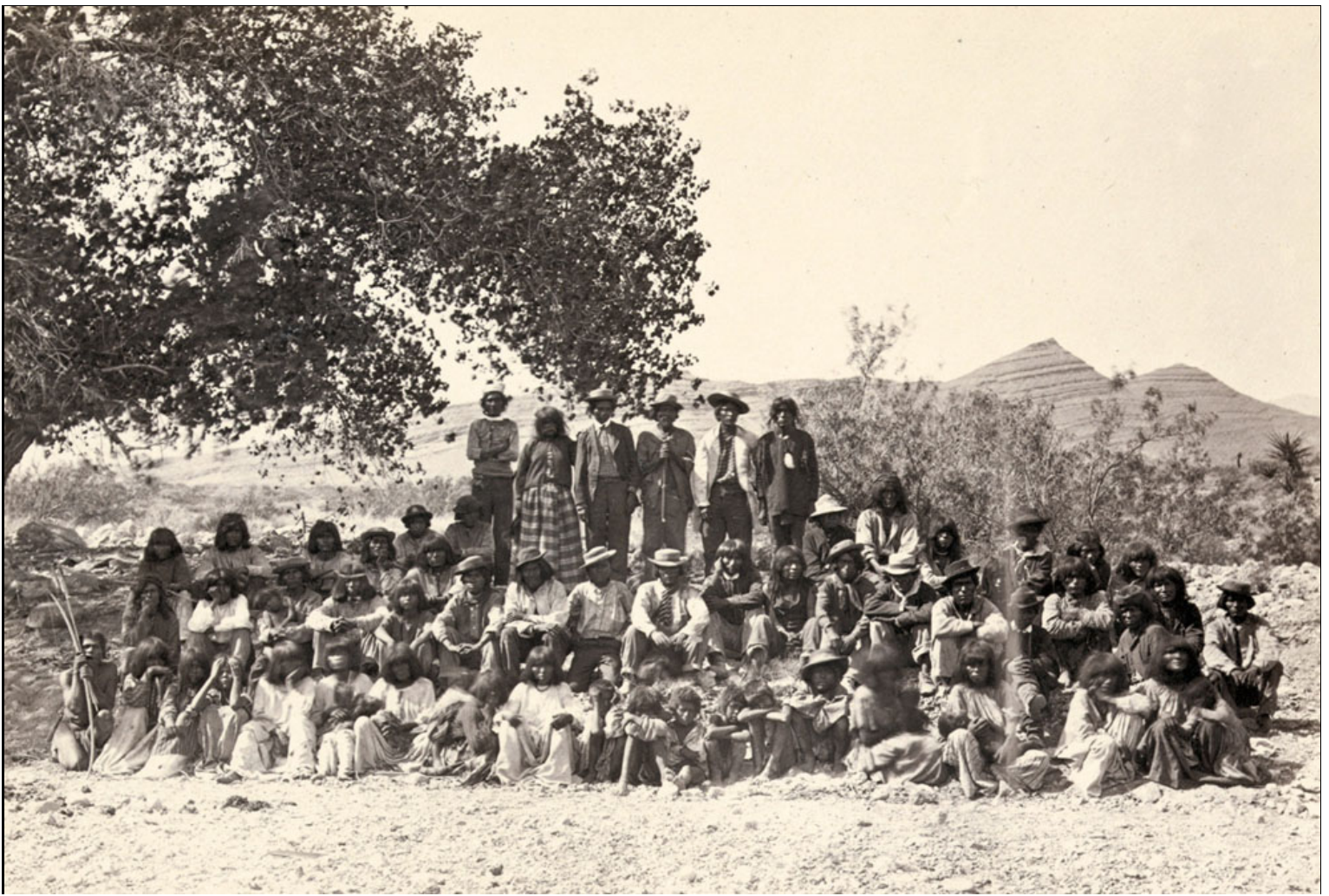
15 In 1867, O'Sullivan traveled to Virginia City, Nevada to document the activities at the Savage and the Gould and Curry mines on the Comstock Lode, the richest silver deposit in America. Working nine hundred feet underground, lit by an improvised flash -- a burning magnesium wire, O'Sullivan photographed the miners in tunnels, shafts, and lifts. (Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) # 📷



16 The head of Canyon de Chelly, looking past walls that rise some 1,200 feet above the canyon floor, in Arizona in 1873. (Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) # 



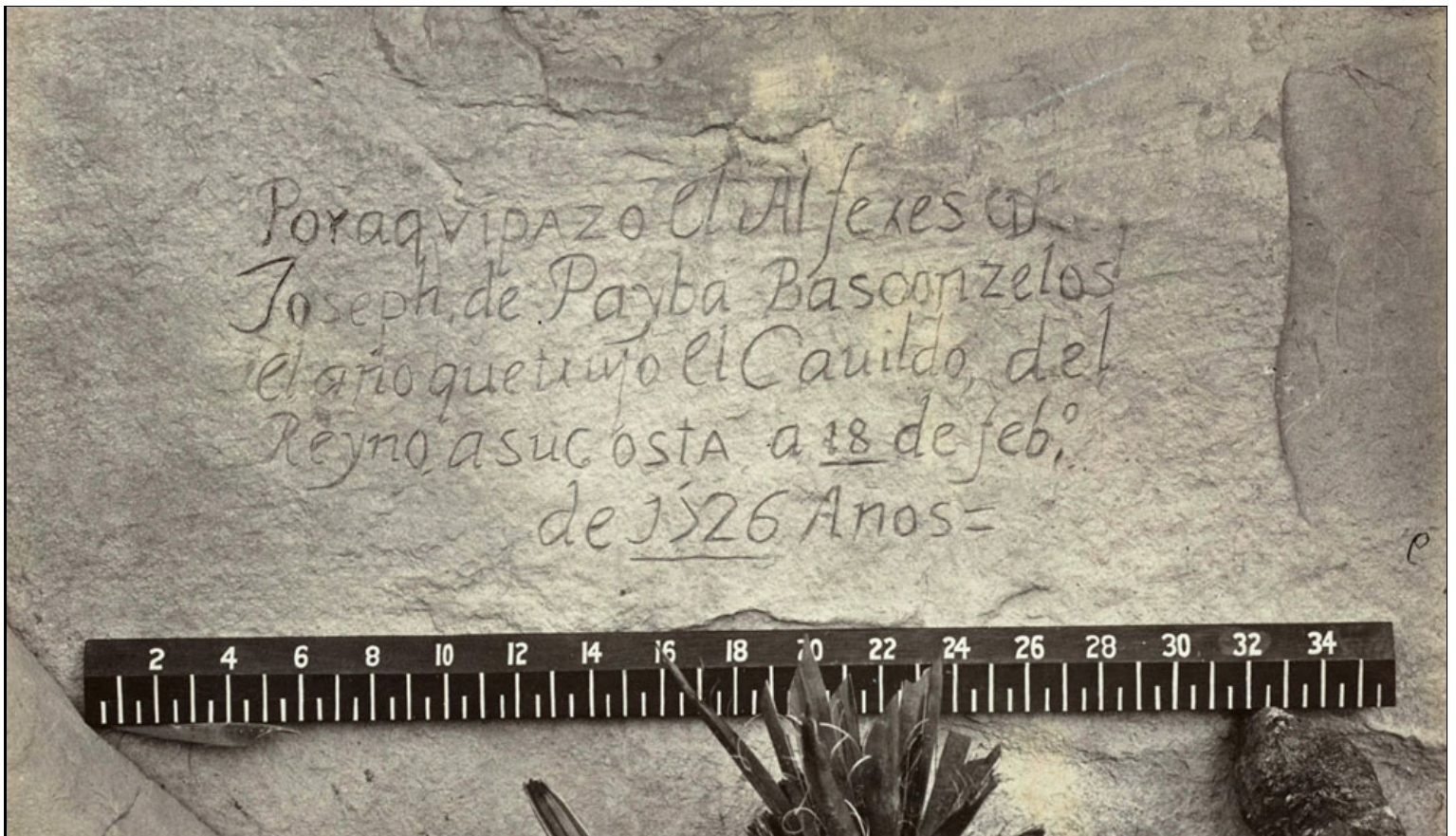
17 Headlands north of the Colorado River Plateau, 1872.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) # ■



18 Native American (Paiute) men, women and children sit or stand and pose in rows under a tree near probably Cottonwood Springs (Washoe County), Nevada, in 1875. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



19 The junction of Green and Yampah Canyons, in Utah, in 1872. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



20 Nearly 150 years ago, photographer O'Sullivan came across this evidence of a visitor to the West that preceded his own expedition by another 150 years -- A Spanish inscription from 1726. This close-up view of the inscription carved in the sandstone at Inscription Rock (El Morro National Monument), New Mexico reads, in English: "By this place passed Ensign Don Joseph de Payba Basconzelos, in the year in which he held the Council of the Kingdom at his expense, on the 18th of February, in the year 1726". (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



21 Aboriginal life among the Navajo Indians. Near old Fort Defiance, New Mexico, in 1873.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



22 The Canyon of Lodore, Colorado, in 1872. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 🖼️




23 View of the White House, Ancestral Pueblo Native American (Anasazi) ruins in Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, in 1873. The cliff dwellings were built by the Anasazi more than 500 years earlier. At bottom, men stand and pose on cliff dwellings in a niche and on ruins on the canyon floor. Climbing ropes connect the groups of men.



24 The "Nettie", an expedition boat on the Truckee River, western Nevada, in 1867.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) # ■



25 Man bathing in Pagosa Hot Spring, Colorado, in 1874.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) # 



26 A distant view of Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1873.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) # ■



27 Maiman, a Mojave Indian, guide and interpreter during a portion of the season in the Colorado country, in 1871.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



28 Alta City, Little Cottonwood, Utah, ca. 1873. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 🖼️



29 Cathedral Mesa, Colorado River, Arizona, 1871. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 



30 Big Cottonwood Canyon, Utah, in 1869. Note man and horse near the bridge at bottom right.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # ■



31 Rock formations in the Washakie Badlands, Wyoming, in 1872. A survey member stands at lower right for scale. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # ■



32 Oak Grove, White Mountains, Sierra Blanca, Arizona in 1873.
(Timothy O'Sullivan/National Archives and Records Administration) # 



33 Shoshone Falls, Idaho, in 1868. Shoshone Falls, near present-day Twin Falls, Idaho, is 212 feet high, and flows over a rim 1,000 feet wide. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷



34 The south side of Inscription Rock (now El Morro National Monument), in New Mexico in 1873. Note the small figure of a man standing at bottom center. The prominent feature stands near a small pool of water, and has been a resting place for travelers for centuries. Since at least the 17th century, natives, Europeans, and later American pioneers carved names and messages into the rock face as they paused. In 1906, a law was passed, prohibiting further carving. (Timothy O'Sullivan/Library of Congress) # 📷

Related links and information

[The life of Timothy H. O'Sullivan](#) - Tucson Weekly, March, 2003

[Timothy H. O'Sullivan's Photos](#) - at the Librabry of COngress

[Timothy H. O'Sullivan](#) - Wikipedia entry

Recommend

8.5k

Tweet

1,488

[Previous gallery](#) | [Next gallery](#) | [View All](#)

[Back to top](#)

Recent Entries



[Fall Is in the Air, Part II](#)



[Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2012](#)



[Scenes From 21st-Century China](#)

In Focus is updated with new photo stories nearly every day, checkout the [Archives](#).

Follow along on [Twitter](#), [Google+](#), [Facebook](#), or [Tumblr](#) — or subscribe to updates with [RSS](#) or [Email](#)

Join the Discussion

[Like](#) 1 person liked this.

Add New Comment

[Login](#)



Type your comment here.

Real-time updating is **paused**. ([Resume](#))

Showing 2 comments

Sort by newest first ▾



Smitty

Magnificent!

[1 month ago](#)

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Arthur Griffith

Spectacular images from a different time.

[1 month ago](#)

[Like](#) [Reply](#)

✉ [Subscribe by email](#)  [RSS](#)

[blog comments powered by DISQUS](#)

Just In

[Armin Rosen](#) 5:41 PM ET

[What Are the Odds That Israel Just Attacked Sudan?](#)

Voices

-  [Derek Thompson](#)

[The Dark Side of Facebook's Triumphant Day](#)

5:05 PM ET

-  [Ta-Nehisi Coates](#)

[Stuff Black People Who Like White People Like](#)

4:45 PM ET

-  [Alexis C. Madrigal](#)

[Does Higher Energy Consumption Cause Greater...](#)

12:40 PM ET

-  [James Fallows](#)

[Inside Foxconn #5: Food](#)

6:29 AM ET

-  [Robert Wright](#)

[Why Romney Is the War Candidate](#)

Oct 23, 2012

-  [Garance Franke-Ruta](#)

[The Best Lady GOTV Video of 2012, Starring Lena...](#)

Oct 23, 2012

-  [Jeffrey Goldberg](#)

[Did the 'Neocon Puppet Masters' Get Outflanked by...](#)

Oct 23, 2012

-  [Clive Crook](#)

[An Inconsequential Debate](#)

Oct 23, 2012

-  [Steve Clemons](#)

[VP Debate: Where Was the Gay-Marriage Question?](#)

Oct 12, 2012

On Newsstands Now

Subscribe and SAVE 59%
10 issues JUST \$2.45/COPY

FIRST NAME



James Bennet on campaign finance, James Parker on *50 Shades of Grey*, a special report on American schools, and more

- [Subscribe Help](#)
- [Faq](#)
- [Follow the Atlantic](#)
- [Masthead](#)
- [Store](#)
- [Merchandise](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Educational Program](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Site Map](#)
- [Terms & Conditions](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Press](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Special Reports](#)
- [Atlantic Scene](#)
- [Events](#)

Copyright © 2012 by The Atlantic Monthly Group. All Rights Reserved.
[CDN](#) powered by Edgecast Networks.