



Identifying Colors and Ethnicity in Black and White Photography

To 1920, photographers used orthographic film which had limited tonal qualities. But between 1900 and 1920, photographers switched to panchromatic film which had improved resolution and grey-scale tonal qualities. The newer film captured more details that provided for easier identification of clothing designs, textures, materials, and construction techniques. Furthermore, when the photographic processes are known, colors and the origins of clothing become identifiable.

Note: "Clear" is a transparent color; all others are opaque.

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | Clear or white | Clear or white |
| Light grey | Medium blue or lavender | Medium blue |
| Medium grey | Light blue, medium blue, or yellow | Light blue, lavender, yellow, or red |
| Dark grey | Red | Red or green |
| Black | Green or navy blue | Navy blue |

References

- Dean, David. *Beading in the Native American Tradition*, Interweave Press, www.interweave.com, Loveland, Colorado, 2002, p. 22: Chart matches popular seed bead colors and techniques with several American Indian tribes.
- Holm, Bill. "Old Photos Might Not Lie, But They Fib a Lot about Color," *American Indian Art Magazine*, 10 (Autumn, 1985): 44-49.
- Holm, Bill. "Old Photographs, Sometimes You Just Can't Believe Your Eyes," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 51 (Summer, 2001): 30-35.

The charts that follow match color and ethnicity for these American Indian tribes: Arapaho and Dakota (Sioux; e.g. Brulé, Hunkpapa, Oglala, Sans Arc, Santee, Sisseton, Wahpeton, and Yankton), Siksika (Blackfeet), Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Kiowa, Nez Perce, Sac and Fox (Mesquakie), Ojibwa (Chippewa), and Yakima.

Arapaho and Dakota Indians (Sioux; e.g. Brulé, Hunkpapa, Oglala, Sans Arc, Santee, Sisseton, Wahpeton, and Yankton)

Popular colors are red, green, navy blue, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | White | White |
| Light grey | None | None |
| Medium grey | None | Red |
| Dark grey | Red | Red or green |
| Black | Green or navy blue | Navy blue |

Siksika Indians (Blackfeet)

Popular colors are red, green, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | White | White |
| Light grey | None | None |
| Medium grey | None | Red |
| Dark grey | Red | Red or green |
| Black | Green | None |

Cheyenne Indians

Popular colors are red, green, yellow, light blue, navy blue, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | White | White |
| Light grey | None | None |
| Medium grey | Light blue or yellow | Light blue, yellow, or red |
| Dark grey | Red | Red or green |
| Black | Green or navy blue | Navy blue |

Comanche Indians

Popular colors are brick red, yellow, green, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | White | White |
| Light grey | None | None |
| Medium grey | Yellow | Yellow or brick red |
| Dark grey | Brick red | Brick red or green |
| Black | Green | None |

Crow Indians

Popular colors are pink, yellow, light blue, lavender, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | White | White |
| Light grey | Lavender | Medium blue |
| Medium grey | Yellow or light blue | Pink, lavender, yellow, or light blue |
| Dark grey | Pink | None |
| Black | None | None |

Kiowa Indians

Popular colors are red, orange, yellow, turquoise blue, green, navy blue, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | White | White |
| Light grey | Turquoise blue | Turquoise blue |
| Medium grey | Yellow | Red, orange, or yellow |
| Dark grey | Red or orange | Red, orange, or green |
| Black | Green or navy blue | Navy blue |

Sac and Fox Indians (Mesquakie)

Popular colors are light blue, amber, pink, green, navy blue, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | White | White |
| Light grey | None | None |
| Medium grey | Light blue or amber | Light blue or amber |
| Dark grey | Pink | Pink or green |
| Black | Green or navy blue | Navy blue |

Nez Perce Indians

Popular colors are light blue, red, green, brown, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| White | White | White |
| Light grey | None | None |
| Medium grey | Light blue | Light blue |
| Dark grey | Red | Red or green |
| Black | Green or brown | Brown |

Ojibwa Indians (Chippewa)

Popular colors are red, transparent red, orange, transparent orange, green, transparent green, clear, and white. *Note: "Clear" is a transparent color; all others are opaque unless noted as transparent.*

| Tonal Scale | To 1920: Orthographic film | 1900 to 2000: Panchromatic film |
|--------------------|---|---|
| White | Clear or white | Clear or white |
| Light grey | None | None |
| Medium grey | None | Red, transparent red, orange, or transparent orange |
| Dark grey | Red, transparent red, orange, or transparent orange | Red, transparent red, orange, transparent orange, green, or transparent green |
| Black | Green or transparent green | None |

Yakima Indians

Popular colors are medium blue, red, orange, green, brown, and white. *Note: All colors are opaque.*

Tonal Scale

White
Light grey
Medium grey
Dark grey
Black

To 1920:

Orthographic film

White
Medium blue
Medium blue
Red or orange
Green or brown

1900 to 2000:

Panchromatic film

White
Medium blue
Red or orange
Red or green
Brown

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