



Edward Curtis recorded the life of North American Indians on film at the beginning of the twentieth century: A Kwakiutl wedding party arrives in a canoe with a carved and painted eagle figurehead.

After the arrival of the white man the fixed hierarchy was shaken, and potlatches became sharply competitive as the newly rich tried to wiggle their way up the social scale. Finally the most ambitious began to destroy valuable blankets before the eyes of their guests, and the final throes of conspicuous consumption came when

the giver of potlatches clubbed slaves to death and used the bodies as rollers to beach a visiting chief's canoe.

The white man eventually outlawed the potlatch. Modern revivals evoke some of the dances and ceremonies but little of the old splendor.

## The Return of the Mohawks

Some sixty-nine years ago most of the working men of the Caughnawaga Reserve were killed when a bridge collapsed into the St. Lawrence. The Mohawks, then as now, were high steel construction workers, and they were building the longest cantilever bridge in the world. In August 1907 inspectors found that some beams were twisting out of alignment, and work was stopped for a couple of weeks. It began again, and on August 29 thirty-six Mohawks were tying new beams into place from the "traveller"—the extended work platform—when the whole structure



gave way. They were all killed. Their sons grew older and took up the craft. Those sons and their grandsons have worked on most of the great buildings of New York City. One, Harold McComber, described the dangers of the job for a National Film Board documentary film called High Steel:

Each man on the raising gang has his own job to do. But the teamwork has got to be good with all that steel flying around. We call this shaking out iron—placing it where we'll connect it later. The bell man signals the derrick man twenty-five floors below. With only the bell signals to go by, he's got to move that steel around as pretty as you please. It's like landing a plane in a heavy fog. A good-sized beam can weigh up to eight tons, but it's got to hit the deck like a feather. Your life could depend on it. . . . Placing the corner columns isn't easy—you're the farthest from the derrick with a sheer drop on two sides but it's one of the first things you do before you start connecting. . . . I fell off one job in Baie Comeau, Quebec. It was about the month of October and it was very misty. A little before eight o'clock I went up on the top of this oval-