Oregon Historical Quarterly

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SPECIAL ISSUE
White Supremacy & Resistance
IN THIS ISSUE

Violence on Tribal Peoples of the Oregon Coast; Settler Sovereignty Formation in Oregon; White Egalitarianism and the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act; George Williams’s Anti-Slavery Letter; Abolitionists in Oregon; Labor and White Right; Liberty Ships and Jim Crow Shipyards; Struggle to Admit African Americans into ILWU, Local 8; Nativism to White Power; The Murder of Mulugeta Seraw

THIS PROGRAM, from the St. Rose Church Men’s Club’s ninth annual minstrel show, is an example of how racism and White supremacy can take many forms that are accepted in mainstream society. As detailed in the program, participants dressed in blackface and performed skits for audiences in Portland, Oregon. Programs in the OHS Research Library collection indicate the church performed minstrel shows from the 1940s until at least 1950. During that time, the church moved the show from a single performance at Grant High School to two performances at Civic Auditorium.

ON THE COVER: On May 26, 2017, White supremacist Jeremy Christian verbally attacked two young women, one wearing a hijab, on a light-rail train in Portland, Oregon. Three men intervened, and Christian killed Ricky Best and Taliesin Namkai-Meche, while severely injuring Micah Fletcher. In the days following the attack, a powerful, tangible response from the community developed at the Hollywood MAX station — a memorial to the victims that included chalk messages, photographs, candles, and flowers. Jackie Labrecque, then a reporter for KATU News, took this photograph at dawn after someone wrote, in pink chalk, Taliesin Namkai-Meche’s final words: “Please tell everyone on this train I love them.” The memorial, a response to tragedy, also provided hope through a resounding denouncement of hate. Photograph courtesy of Jackie Labrecque.
WHITE SUPREMACY & RESISTANCE

guest editors
Darrell Millner and Carmen P. Thompson

dedicated to Ricky Best, Micah Fletcher, and Taliesin Namkai-Meche

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Note from the Editors

by Carmen P. Thompson

THE PRIMARY GOAL of this issue is to help readers understand White supremacy — what it means, what it has meant, and how it has presented itself in Oregon history. White supremacy is not just the Klu Klux Klan donning robes or burning crosses, but it can be. It is not just an individual act of racial discrimination, although it can be that, too. White supremacy is a collective set of codes, spoken and unspoken, explicit and implied, that society enforces through its institutions, governments, and legal structures in order to keep those deemed as White on top and every other racial group below them — with specific emphasis, in the United States, on keeping Black people at the bottom.

White supremacy is a system by which American society was initially, and continues to be, organized. Social organizing systems are imperceptible. They make a certain way of doing things seem fundamental, thereby normalizing that practice. Historical methodologies that trace change, continuities, turning points, and flash points are important tools that historians use to make sense of historical phenomena that otherwise are difficult to articulate. The authors of the articles and essays in this special issue make use of these methods to understand Oregon’s history of White supremacy, its manifestation in everyday life, and the ways people have resisted it.

This historical investigation was prompted by current events. On May 26, 2017, a White man verbally attacked two young women, one wearing a hijab, on the light-rail system in Portland, Oregon. Three men intervened, and the attacker killed Ricky Best and Taliesin Namkai-Meche, while severely injuring Micah Fletcher. Shortly thereafter, the Oregon Historical Quarterly’s (OHQ) Editorial Advisory Board gathered for its semiannual meeting, where board member Dr. Carmen Thompson suggested that, as a scholarly publication housed in the state’s historical society, OHQ could offer a complex, contextualized investigation of the history of White supremacy in our state. All agreed that the effort would be worthwhile. The ensuing work engaged dozens of scholars and community leaders and resulted from collaborative decision-making among the journal’s editorial staff and guest editors, Thompson and Dr. Darrell Millner. Over a dozen authors drew on lifetimes
of scholarship and spent over a year writing, revising, and responding to editorial suggestions, fact-checking questions, and layout drafts.

This special issue is not neutral on the subject of White supremacy. It does not put blame onto readers who are labeled as “White,” but it is meant as a call to self-reflection. Millner, in one of our editorial meetings, put it best when he said: “We are not responsible for the past, but we are responsible for our relationship to the past.” We challenge all readers to look both inward and outward at the legacies and vestiges of what racial labeling has meant, and continues to mean, for people who are not White and for those who are.

History, as revealed in this issue, demonstrates that White supremacy is subtle. It is historical, it is organic, and it is alive and well in the twenty-first century. In America, being White has long been the standard, the norm, the universal image and framework through which the nation’s institutions have been conceptualized.

Conversely, those who are not White know and sense that the perspectives of Whites are the standard. In the same way, someone with a disability knows that the world is designed around people with a certain ability, or women know that our society offers greater opportunity for people who are labeled as male, or someone who is not heterosexual knows that heterosexuality is assumed. It is the same way with White skin and supremacy in America. With this in mind, the editors and staff of this special issue of OHQ ask you, as you partake of this scholarship on Oregon’s White supremacist history, to keep an open mind.

Expectation and Exclusion

An Introduction to Whiteness, White Supremacy, and Resistance in Oregon History

CARMEN P. THOMPSON

WHEN DR. DARRELL MILLNER AND I offered to be guest editors for this special issue of the Oregon Historical Quarterly (OHQ), we did so understanding the immense importance of its main focus, the history of White supremacy and resistance in Oregon. As an African American woman, I have wondered since childhood why society has subjected Black people to centuries of enslavement, Jim Crow racism, and other inhumane treatment and why the American social order ranks Whites highest and Blacks lowest. Those questions have driven my scholarly work, culminating in my book in progress, The Making of American Whiteness. I would like to welcome you to this special issue of OHQ by introducing you to the concept of Whiteness.

Initially created by White people of privilege and advantage, Whiteness is an expectation (sometimes an unconscious expectation) that the government will maintain laws and policies generally benefiting White people. That system, which has been effectuated through all institutions that govern American society, is White supremacy — the hierarchical ordering of human beings based on phenotypic, or physical, attributes that we call "race." But the ongoing, daily expectations of privilege are Whiteness. On a day-to-day level, the system of White supremacy repeatedly has provided advantages to White people, as demonstrated by the articles in this special issue. The system thereby encourages those of European ancestry to internalize their top-ranking — that is, to embody White supremacy — and that embodiment of expectation, conscious or otherwise, is Whiteness.

The system of White supremacy is prone to shifts in expression and intensity with demographic, economic, social, and political change across time and space. Oregon, a state with one of the Whitest cities in America, offers the perfect history through which to examine the structures of White supremacy. The articles in this special issue provide examples of White supremacy and resistance in the state's past, beginning a conversation...
This 1901 sketch, originally published in Harper's Weekly, depicts the first enslaved Africans arriving in Virginia in 1619. European establishment of North American colonies established a system of White supremacy and an ideology of “American Whiteness.”

about a complex and often contradictory history. As a collection, this special issue also helps make visible Whiteness, which I believe is the most vexing problem in the United States of America.

Scholars have explored the concept of Whiteness through the field of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), which is interdisciplinary and interracial at its core, is grounded in the disciplines of history and ethnic studies, and traverses a wide variety of traditional fields and subfields, from literature to landscape architecture. Since the later part of the twentieth century, students and faculty at college campuses around the world, as well as individuals, activists, and community groups interested in CWS, have used its methods to critique societies and systems of knowledge, investigating what it means and has meant to be White. Their work has explored, and critiqued, how and why some people came to adopt what W.E.B Dubois called “personal whiteness,” and it has exposed a racialized system that,
overall, has been detrimental to the masses — what James Baldwin called “the lie of whiteness.” My work argues that European establishment of early North American colonies — processes that included conquest, genocide, land theft, enslavement, and forced cultural change — created the ideology I identify as “American Whiteness.” American Whiteness inextricably links the enslavement of African people to the European colonization of Indigenous lands in North America.

Whiteness originated outside North America, through European colonization efforts in West Africa during the fifteenth-century build-up to the transatlantic slave trade. At that time, there was no formal name for White supremacy, or even for race. Instead, European leaders defined their Whiteness by using oppositional terms. They employed heathen and uncivilized, when referring to Africans, as opposed to Christian and civilized, when referring to themselves. Thus, when European government leaders, church officials, and explorers expressed their reasoning for expansion to the Americas, they used terms such as planting, possessing, and subduing, all within the context of colonization and enslavement. These expressions, justifying Europeans’ expectation of rule over other people’s bodies and lands, can all be seen as early forms of Whiteness and, by extension, White supremacy.

The international system of slavery fueled colonists’ understanding of their own Whiteness, in opposition to both African and Native peoples, long before leaders began referring to themselves as White. A 1612 exchange between Virginia officials, for example, expressed their worry about European settlers marrying Native women but did not employ the term White, instead referring to those women as “savages” and to the men as “Englishmen.” Similarly, the twenty-three West African people listed in Virginia’s 1624 census had the word “Negro” before or after their names, while a list of sixteen European servants documented in the same census were recorded simply using their full names, without any racial designation.

The American form of Whiteness is historical and organic, deriving from English settlers’ knowledge and interpretation of the principles of colonialism and expansionism (the bedrock and drivers of the international system of slavery), which they used to justify the original acts of colonization that made way for the United States of America. The longstanding ubiquity of Whiteness makes it difficult to recognize and articulate, especially for White people in America, who live in a society that has connected social, economic, and political benefits to being White. Aiding in that perception, however, is the vast and complex scholarship on race, racism, and Whiteness — to which this special issue contributes.
EDMUND MORGAN’S 1975 text *American Slavery, American Freedom* argued that Whiteness, and related racism, slowly began to rise during the mid to late seventeenth century, within the dichotomy between free and enslaved labor that itself grew from the rapidly increased European participation in the transatlantic slave trade. Historical theories on racism and Whiteness have generally reflected Morgan’s argument. Other historians have theorized that American racism originated outside North America. Historian George Fredrickson’s *Racism: A Short History*, for example, dates the emergence of Whiteness and racism to the Age of Enlightenment, when European nations (soon to be followed by the United States) madly scrambled for control of Africa and parts of Asia.

Marxist scholars have understood Whiteness through the experiences of the White working class and its responses to labor exploitation in the British colonies. Theodore Allen’s 1975 *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: Invention of the White Race*, for example, argued that the upper class of seventeenth-century Virginia deliberately constructed Whiteness to circumvent the uniting of poor Whites with free and enslaved Africans against ruling-class interests. Whiteness for Allen, then, was a social system designed to curb populism and placate the frustrations of property-less Whites by creating for them a class between propertied Whites and both free and enslaved Africans. By exploring American Whiteness only since European settlement in North America, I believe Allen misses that Whiteness actually predates the British Empire and originated with fifteenth-century European colonization efforts in West Africa.

Allen’s influence is seen in Alexander Saxton’s 1990 *Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in 19th Century America* and in David Roediger’s 1991 *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, which both place the rise of Whiteness within European class tensions and strivings in North America during the nineteenth century. Both of these texts fail to recognize that it was not the frustrations among lower- and working-class European men that drove White workers to accept Whiteness but, rather, the expectation of privilege and advantage. To be clear, during the nineteenth century, those workers’ frustrations were by products of the exploitation inherent in a then-centuries-old colonization system that enlisted desperate White males to be the poorly compensated shock-troops for European colonial projects. The expectation of advantage — that is, of the conferring of Whiteness and its attendant benefits, such as property ownership and political rights — was the reward for exploitation. It is in ignoring this standing *quid pro quo* that, I argue, Marxist analysis of Whiteness remains weak.
Scholars of the Black Radical Tradition have argued that racism predates European colonization of North America. This was the position Cedric Robinson took in his ground breaking 1983 book, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, in which he argues that capitalism emerged from the already racist culture of Europe. Black Marxism, then, locates the international system of slavery, which had existed since the fifteenth century, as not only central to the capitalist development of Western civilizations but also as part and parcel of the labor exploitation strategies that went into the colonization of the Americas. For Robinson, “capitalist world systems” of oppression such as the transatlantic slave trade have had a profound effect in the making of the western world, particularly the United States, and by extension, in the making of racism and Whiteness.

Recent theories on American racism have tended to focus on explaining race rather than Whiteness. Ibram X. Kendi does this in his 2016 book *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. He superbly explains the history of race in America since colonization but fails to explain White supremacy and to explicitly name Whiteness as central to American racist ideas. Similarly, Crystal Fleming argues in her 2018 book, *How to be Less Stupid About Race: On Racism, White Supremacy, and the Racial Divide*, that White supremacy and Whiteness are new phenomena, thereby failing to acknowledge that White supremacist ideas were used to establish the colonies that became the United States and form the cornerstone to all conversations about American racism. In contrast, colonial Virginia scholar Ethan Schmidt, in his 2014 *The Divided Dominion: Social Conflict and Indian Hatred in Early Virginia*, argues that Whiteness embodied the settlement grammar of colonial churches and was embedded in the ideals of individual and collective freedoms and, later, notions of national sovereignty.

Whiteness, I maintain, is neither a construction that explains the economic self-interest of differing classes of White people over non-Whites nor a North American phenomenon, but instead has its genesis in each European nation’s initial decision to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Just as American Whiteness was born within a particular context, structures of White supremacy are prone to shifts in expression and intensity with demographic, economic, social, and political changes across time and space. White supremacy was systematized and expanded geographically in America and around the world — including in Oregon — in order to promote the maintenance of Whiteness, leading the way to centuries of enslavement, colonization, imperialism, globalization, wars, revolutions, and today’s racial inequalities and disparities. Its toll continues to be felt today. The articles in this special issue are dedicated to exploring the manifestation of this
THIS 1934 SCULPTURE, titled “Covered Wagon,” is located just outside the Oregon State Capitol’s main entrance. Designed by Leo Friedlander, the sculpture depicts a pioneer family in front of a covered wagon and is inscribed with the following: “Valiant Men Have Thrust Our Frontier to the Setting Sun.” That “thrust” implies claims to Native land and is an exemplar of Whiteness, as shown in the articles of this special issue.

reality in Oregon. They address subjects from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries, emphasizing connections to national and global trends and events as well as identifying aspects of White supremacy and resistance that are particular to Oregon.

THESE WORKS connect two core characteristics of Whiteness that are present in Oregon’s White supremacist history — expectation and exclusion. Expectation and exclusion are shown in these articles to be a mix of White racial sensibilities about the right to land, citizenship, and jobs and the government’s protection of White people’s claims on these important areas of life. Katrine Barber and Kenneth Coleman use the concept of settler colonialism to illustrate how Euro-American migrants to Oregon adapted and adopted expectation and exclusion in their sense of entitlement to Native lands and other natural resources. Expectation and exclusion were manifest in the decisions of some 400,000 White people to migrate along the Oregon
Trail to claim “free” land, made possible through White people’s expert manipulation of legislative apparatus to dispossess Indigenous peoples and to exclude free and enslaved Black people from Oregon Country.

David Lewis and Thomas Connolly’s piece looks specifically at the violence inherent in settler colonialism, including the irony that the freedom of self-determination that White immigrants to the Oregon territory so desired was tied to the theft of the same freedoms from Native people. With their use of violence as an analytical framework for understanding Oregon Whiteness, Lewis and Connolly offer a cogent example of what Cheryl Harris calls the “entangled relationship between race and property.” Moreover, the framework of violence confirms what is exemplified in Barber’s and Coleman’s work — that there was both actualized and imagined White supremacy in settler colonialism and in the requisite justification for killing and removal of Native peoples from their sovereign lands. Together, all three of these works provide an excellent counter-narrative to the swashbuckling, pioneering caricature of the White settler while also demonstrating how a core characteristic of American Whiteness — the proprietary claim to other people’s land and resources — manifested itself as a White racial identity during the Euro-American settlement of the Oregon Country.

There is clear consensus among the authors that state, local, and federal governments and their supporting institutions were knowing and willing co-conspirators in the proliferation of White supremacy in Oregon, as they were in the nation at large. This is shown in the explanations of settler colonialism and also in Philip Thoennes and Jack Landau’s analysis of an 1857 letter Chief Justice of the Oregon Territorial Supreme Court George H. Williams penned to the editors of the Oregon Statesman days before he was to participate as a delegate in the Constitutional debate over slavery that ultimately would shape Oregon statehood. Thoennes and Landau’s introduction, and the primary source itself, link an Oregon leader’s beliefs about White supremacy to that of a national leader, both articulating an impermeable distinction between Blacks and Whites in particular and among other racialized groups more generally.

Yet, it would be a mistake to allow the slavery/anti-slavery rhetoric to distract our attention from a critical analysis of White supremacy in Oregon. As Jim Labbe explores in his article on abolitionists, the debate simply for or against slavery’s appropriateness for Oregon linked stances that were both mutually exclusive and interconnected to government legitimization of a “set of assumptions that accompan(ied) the status of being White.” As Williams’s letter demonstrates, being anti-slavery did not mean being pro-Black or having sympathy to the Black condition or Black people. The document illustrates the form and shape of Whiteness expressed through the racial hegemony...
of Black enslavement and subjugation in Oregon and the nation, ideas that prefigure contemporary notions of White supremacy and White nationalism that are explored in Shane Burley and Alexander Ross’s essay.

Burley and Ross locate the modernization of Whiteness in Oregon between the two world wars, when ideologies of White supremacy and anti-government rhetoric were formalized through the building of several small but influential political organizations, connected to Ku Klux Klan, militia, and paramilitary leaders, whose members spanned every strata of society, including police and government officials. The consequences of centuries of White supremacy that were and are so much a part of Oregon history and of the nation’s also are explored in Elden Rosenthal’s memoir of the civil trial of Tom Metzger, of the White Aryan Resistance, for instigating the 1988 murder of Mulugeta Seraw in Portland. For Rosenthal, acts of violence such as Seraw’s murder and the 2017 senseless murders on the Portland MAX (which in many ways became the catalyst for this special issue) represent “a continuum of violence” in Oregon that began during Euro-American settlement and has been refined at various flashpoints ever since.

This collection shows the fault lines in the tenuous relationship between White citizens and government control. Johanna Ogden’s essay on the 1910 St. John’s riots, which were directed at Indian immigrant laborers, demonstrates those fault lines existed at places where White leaders advocated against vigilante violence and where the Indian laborers demanded first legal action in Oregon and, later, freedom from British colonizers in their homeland. Sandy Polishuk’s and John Linder’s essays show the fault lines also emerged where proprietary claims to union jobs met seismic shifts of social change, instigated by Black-led organizing. The social landscapes surrounding such fault lines provide remarkable spotlights onto Oregon Whiteness, which becomes visible through the backlash that is released when the region’s scales of justice seemed to portend hope for racial equality.

Having observed White backlash at key moments of social change in American history — such as what occurred in the aftermath of the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Constitutional amendments that resulted in increased Black power and with the Civil Rights activism and legislation of the 1960s, which each gave rise to the formation of the Ku Klux Klan and the modern radical-right movement — the authors in this issue astutely use resistance as a second, sometimes ironic, framework. It can be seen in White people’s resistance to racial equality and in the ongoing resistance to White supremacy by people of color. Studying resistance helps tease out the entangled relationship between Oregon White peoples’ expectations of advantage and the government’s role in legitimating those expectations. Exemplary of resistance as an often-overlooked framework for revealing American
Whiteness are Polishuk’s and Linder’s articles on African Americans’ long and intense campaigns for admittance into Portland labor unions from the 1940s into the 1960s, Lewis and Connolly’s examples of Native people resisting the encroachment of White people on their lands, and Labbe’s exploration of Black abolitionism at the time of Oregon statehood.

White supremacy continues to play an important role in the reproduction of racism. But the inequalities from racism can be combated with mutual cooperation, as in Labbe’s essay documenting White abolitionists in Oregon, Polishuk’s essay highlighting individual White people taking unpopular antiracist stances, and Odgen’s showing government officials who were moved to indict and prosecute (although not convict) White city leaders for their roles in the 1910 St. Johns Riot.

Each article in this collection is introduced with a brief note by the guest editors, articulating how it sheds light on Oregon’s history of White supremacy. Between each article are examples of daily expressions of Whiteness that have helped sustain White supremacy. Readers may find echoes of that imagery and language in what they encounter today.

It is our hope that this issue reflects a freshness of thought and spirit that will inspire all readers to find ways to end the adoption and proliferation of Whiteness and to bring the conversation of White supremacy out from under the sheets and robes and into the twenty-first century, using the study of Oregon’s racial history as the catalyst for change.

NOTES

Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2012), 24. I coined the term “American Whiteness” to refer to this development and to its connections to the subsequent structures foundational to, in, and of what would become the United States of America. See my book in progress, The Making of American Whiteness, for a full exploration of the origins of Whiteness.


8. Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9, 31–59. Morrison’s reading of Whiteness indicates that it became defined by its opposite, Blackness. My analysis of seventeenth-century Virginia indicates that lower-class Whites defined themselves in opposition to Blacks because of impermanence of their (Whites’) bondage, and in doing so, sought to align themselves with elite Whites by using enslavement as a means to justify their higher social position.

9. Report on Angola drawn from the letters of Father Gouveia and Paula Dias de Novais, BNL, FG, MS 8123, cited in Ruela Pombo, Angola Menina (Lisbon, 1944); and Gomes Eannes de Azurara, “Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea,” (1453). The first English translation of this work was by Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestage, printed for the Hakluyt Society in two volumes, the first in 1896. See also William Waller Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, II: 283 (English translation at page 99).


11. Regarding the opposition language European leaders used to differentiate themselves from Native peoples, see Correspondence taken from James City records, V: 2589, folio 61.


15. Robin Blackburn, The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800 (New York: Verso, 1997), 10-18, 33. I define the international system of slavery as the technologies of oppression and enslavement used by Europeans in the transatlantic slave trade. Among them were six key elements that overlap in various ways with other systems of domination, such as colonialism and imperialism. The six key elements discussed in my dissertation as they relate to Virginia’s growth and development include: religious intolerance and persecution, territorial expansion, colonial settlement, arrogant imposition on colonial and Indigenous peoples, theological justification for enslavement, and racial exclusion. An aspect of this analysis was informed by the work of Robin Blackburn.


18. Ibid., 1713.


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White American Violence on Tribal Peoples on the Oregon Coast

OREGON VOICES

by David G. Lewis and Thomas J. Connolly

Traditional narratives of nineteenth-century western movement of White people across North America often present the West as an empty space waiting to be filled with an energetic, advancing vanguard of civilization. Arriving migrants were not filling an unoccupied demographic void; they were displacing and replacing complex, settled societies that had resided there for thousands of years. The newcomers self-defined their culture and institutions as superior to those practiced by the Indigenous populations, asserting that this presumed superiority granted them a supreme right to govern and control this now-contested space. The resident populations were unconvinced and vigorously opposed Whites' claims to supremacy. Ultimately, the coercive power of violence was the decisive factor in the ascendency of Whites in the West.

DURING THE PAST five centuries, Native peoples of the North American continent have lost nearly all of their landholdings to peoples of European descent. The acts required for taking those lands rested on the denial that tribal people were humans, deserving of human rights, and that violent actions were wrong when perpetrated on “savage” Indians. The relevant body of law, commonly referred to as the Doctrine of Discovery, is rooted in the Papal bull of 1493, which directed “barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith.” The U.S. Supreme court upheld fundamental elements of this doctrine in 1823.¹

Long before Europeans and Americans brought new laws and customs to what would become Oregon, Native peoples of the valley and coastal regions controlled access to their natural resources on their lands through property rights and access rules. Specific families often owned assets such as fishing sites or managed gathering places, while hunting grounds might be shared with the broader community. Such rules contributed to their effectiveness as prolific traders who were savvy
IN 1851, Capt. William Tichenor claimed land in the territory of the Kwatami tunne, the Sixes River band of the Tututni peoples, which would become Port Orford, Oregon. On arrival, Tichenor and hired men mounted a cannon on a large shore rock, later named Battle Rock, that resulted in a standoff and many Native deaths. This 1856 sketch, published in Harper’s Weekly, depicts a scene from the battle.

about commerce. The Tualatin people of the northern Willamette Valley (relatives of Santiam author David Lewis), for example, traded with the Clackamas Chinook for salmon at Willamette Falls, but were not permitted to fish with dip nets. One guilty of trespass or theft from a neighbor might face fatal retribution.²

Settlers who began to arrive in the late 1830s and into the decades that followed routinely ignored tribal laws and policies. Over time, fur traders, settlers, miners, entrepreneurs, and military agents engaged in repeated and often shocking acts of violence against Native people. Those acts of physical injury, murder, and trauma provide insight into how White supremacy was institutionalized in Oregon. Bearing witness to this violence is crucial to understanding how those foundations of Oregon White supremacy looked and felt to Native people.

During the fur trade era, the Oregon Country was primarily under the influence of the British Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). The company’s large trapping parties effectively bypassed engaging with their Native hosts, from whose lands they harvested furs and game “without permission or apology.”³ Trappers disregarded traditional ownership protocols and, when challenged, countered with a strategy of “massive retaliation” or “generalized vengeance homicide.”⁴ The lesson that harming HBC employees could mean the death of multiple innocents firmly established
subsequent relationships between Indians and Whites. From the Whites’ view, those relationships enforced economic and political superiority, but from the Natives’ perspective, the relationships established an enduring mistrust.

One example, analyzed by scholar R. Scott Byram, illustrates this reality. In 1832, Alsea hunters killed two HBC trappers who were in Alsea territory and trapping for furs without Alsea consent. The Chief Factor of the local HBC outpost at Fort Vancouver, John McLoughlin, instructed his employee, Michel Laframboise, to lead a retaliatory expedition. Laframboise was to deliver the threat that, if the Indians would not identify and kill the perpetrators, the HBC “would come back and Kill every one of the tribe that came in our way and would not stop till we had killed every one of them.” The retaliatory party attacked an innocent Yaquina village, and, according to a narrative by Coquelle Thompson, “They shot down man, woman, and child as they ran naked from the houses. Not one escaped. That is why only Yaqwina [Yaquina] John and few others of the Yaquina people survived. [The fur trappers] killed many people in revenge for two of a different tribe.” According to HBC records, the party killed six Indians; an account of the incident reported by Corporal Royal Bensell, however, claimed the “Sixes” (possibly Yaquina) “lost some 400 warriors.” Certainly, both accounts exaggerate the real circumstances to serve their own interests, but as Byram emphasized, in the oral history of the Yaquina, this incident — “in initial, wide-scale breakdown of principles of justice regarding international relations” — was effectively the end of the Yaquina people as a nation.

In 1851, an American schooner arrived at a remote natural coastal port in the territory of the Kwatami tunne, the Sixes River band of the Tututni peoples, which would come to be known as Port Orford. American businessman Capt. William Tichenor had the goal of beginning a new American port town to service the gold fields of southern Oregon, and he secured a donation land claim in the Kwatami lands without having first discussed his desires with the Tribe. Such claims were technically illegal under U.S. land law, as the Tribes had neither negotiated treaties nor sold their land to the United States.

Tichenor had hired men from Portland and took on firearms at Astoria, and on arrival at his land claim, they mounted a ship’s cannon on top of a large shore rock, called by the local Athapaskan speakers Ma-na-xe oe and later renamed Battle Rock. They encountered stiff opposition from the Kwatami people who occupied the area, supplemented by a canoe arriving from the direction of Rogue River and bringing the number of Indians to “at least one hundred.” Tichenor’s men responded to the Kwatami’s first attack with small arms fire and cannon shots, killing twelve or thirteen Natives with the cannon’s first firing. Following the battle, “We counted seventeen dead Indians,” according to an account by party leader J.M. Kirkpatrick, who later learned “from an Indian at the mouth of the Umpqua that there were twenty killed and fifteen wounded.” After fourteen days of this standoff, Tichenor’s men escaped north.
When Tichenor returned from San Francisco, he found his men gone and signs of a great battle. He again went south to San Francisco and returned on July 14 with some sixty-five men, who he employed to establish a firmly fortified beachhead and to claim Port Orford for his town. The men who escaped battle eventually reached settlements in the north, and on hearing their story, the command at Fort Vancouver sent a military detachment to punish the Tribes and to build a fort, Fort Orford, to ensure the safety of the Americans in the region. More deaths followed, including many due to punishments handed out by the military detachment on neighboring Tribes. Tichenor, supported by the U.S. military, created the first southern coastal port on the Oregon coast, on unceded Kwatami lands, on September 14, 1851. It served as the center of colonization and Indian administration for the southern Oregon coast for many years thereafter.

Editorials in regional newspapers debated the treatment of Native people, with some regularly calling for the extermination of the Tribes, who they referred to as if they were a scourge on the region needing to be eliminated. An editorial in the Salem-based Oregon Statesman, on July 8, 1851, for example, stated, “Permission has been asked, we learn, of the Governor [of Oregon], to march into their [Rogue River] country and slay the savages wherever they can be found.” The Oregon City Oregon Spectator editorialized on September 2, 1853, that:

The Indians are revengeful, though they seem bent upon plunder more than the shedding of blood; but the whites are highly exasperated, and are determined, they say, to exterminate the race. . . .

A general disposition appears to pervade the minds of the whites to kill all the Indians they come across. The extinction of the entire race in that region is the most unanimous sentiment.

These sentiments promoted the genocide of Native peoples. The rhetoric was reinforced by the depredations
laws and policies of California and Oregon, which allowed for the reimbursement of expenses from such attacks, and by federal Indian Bureau of Indian Affairs policy, which provided Americans, but not Indians, reimbursements for war losses.\textsuperscript{16}

Beginning in the fall of 1853, entrepreneur Augustus F. Miller made money by building a port town at the mouth of the Chetco River to serve southwest Oregon miners with a store, hotel, and his own ferry service. He planned to establish that town in the midst of two Chetco villages at the estuary. At the Chetco River village called Chit, the Tolowa-speaking Athapaskans were already offering ferry services to American miners and travelers.\textsuperscript{17} Miller ordered the Chetco people to stop offering White people ferry rides across the river, but they did not comply — despite his numerous threats. In February 1854, Miller hired experienced Indian fighters from California to destroy the two Native towns. Early one morning, Miller’s mercenaries fired into the plank houses, killing an estimated twenty-three natives.\textsuperscript{18}

In May 1854, Joel Palmer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon, traveled to southwestern Oregon, to Crescent City, California, and then north to the Chetco River to investigate the Chetco massacre, which he documented in his September 11, 1854, report:

\begin {quote}
\textit {morning at daylight the party, consisting of eight or nine men, well armed, attacked the village, and as the Indians came from their lodges they were shot dead by these monsters. The women and children were permitted to escape.}
\end {quote}

\textsuperscript{19} Josiah Parrish, the Indian sub-Agent of the Port Orford District, had reported on the massacre to Palmer on July 20, 1854:

\textit {On my arrival at Chetco on the fifth of June last I was creditably informed that the massacre of six Indians, three of which men shot and three burned to death in their houses, and the burning of forty-two Indian houses (which composed these villages), that one Augustus F. Miller was the chief instigator in the bloody tragedy. . . . [Miller] sent to Crescent City and raised a party of desperate Indian killers. . . . and then one morning about daylight when they were all quiet, asleep in their houses, they were attacked by this party, who shot three of their men killing, them dead on the spot, then set their houses on fire over their heads and burned three of them alive, and wounded others.\textsuperscript{20}}

The surviving Chetco people escaped, hiding in the Coast Range and on a river island to protect themselves from further attacks. Palmer sent a Native boy to persuade them to return to their villages, and sent presents, but he had no success in getting them to return or speak with him.\textsuperscript{21}

The legal system newly imposed on the region offered no justice in the face of this violence. Acting on Palmer’s orders, Parrish arrested Miller and had him placed “into the hands of the mili-
tary at Port Orford." The Justice of the Peace, however, soon released Miller, which led Parrish to conclude: "here allow me to express an opinion that Miller nor no other man can be convicted of any crime against the Indians however murderous and criminal." Palmer described the events:

Miller was subsequently arrested and placed in the custody of the military at Port Orford; but on his examination before a justice of the peace was set at large on the ground of justification and want of sufficient testimony to commit.

The details of a similar occurrence at Coquille have been laid before you in a copy of the report of Special Agent F.M. Smith, of the circumstantial truthfulness of which I am fully satisfied.

These narratives will give you some idea of the state of affairs in the mining districts on this coast. Arrests are evidently useless, as no act of a white man against an Indian, however atrocious, can be followed by a conviction.

Palmer’s frustration reflected the overall lack of justice for Native peoples in the Oregon court system. White people could commit crimes, murders, rapes, and genocide on Native peoples and would not be held accountable. Many Native people, for decades afterward, continued to hide in the coastal forests to protect themselves from White Americans.

The attack on the two Chetko villages followed another that had taken place recently, just twenty-two miles to the south, on the Tolowa peoples of the Smith River, in California. Tolowa people, including “Pyuwa of Enchwo [a Tolowa village], who lived to be a very old man; one of very few adult male survivors,” provided a first-person account:

People were gathered for Needash, after the fall harvest, at the center of the world at Yontocket. Indians from all over gathered to celebrate creation and give thanks to the creator. On the third night of the ten night dance, whites came into the village in the early morning hours. They torched the redwood plank houses, and as the Indians attempted to escape through the round holes in the houses, the militia killed them. This village existed as the largest native settlement consisting of over thirty houses. The whites would cut off the heads of the Indians and through them into the fire. They lined their horses on the slough and as the Indians sought refuge, they were gunned down. . . . The center of the world, Yontocket, burned for days and that’s how the place received the name “Burnt Ranch.” Roughly five hundred Indians died in this massacre.

The Yontocket, or Burnt Ranch, massacre was just one in a series of such attacks that occurred nearly every year along the northern California coast, from 1853 into the 1860s. Thousands of coastal Native people were killed or removed to reservations, making room for White settlers and freeing up the land for new American coastal port settlements, such as Crescent City, Brookings, and Port Orford. The pattern of first attacking and pacifying tribal villages, followed by forcing the removal of the survivors, was true to both the northern California and southern Oregon coasts.

In 1857, Oregon Indian Superintendent James Nesmith ordered John F. Miller, Indian Agent at the Grand Ronde Agency, to begin hiring Special Indian Agents, to hunt down encampments of Natives hiding in the Coast Range to force their removal north to the reservation. White settlers sent letters to
Indian agents, demanding the removal of remaining coastal bands. One petition, sent to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon City, was from seventeen “residents at and near the Mouth of Rogue River” who requested the removal of the Chetcos, declaring:

the route from this point to Crescent City cannot be passed in safety in consequence of numbers of Indians being suffered to remain in the vicinity of Whaleshead and Chetcoe. . . .

We do not come before you as suppliants but demand as a right to ask you to adopt and execute such measures as will ensure peace and security to us for the future and throw around us the shield our Country Cheerfully guarantees to all “American Citizens.”

These “Citizens” saw themselves as the righteous occupants of the land, and those who had occupied the land for untold generations, and whose lands were sanctified by the remains of countless ancestors, as outlaws and threats to the manifest destiny of “Americans.”

The original project of removing the Chetcos began in the fall of 1856 and was largely completed by June 1858. Between January 3 and February 15, 1858, Lt. Lorenzo Lorain of Fort Umpqua, Capt. William Tichenor, and a small detached command of men began to escort the remaining Chetcos north. They collected about 150 Indians. Once past the Rogue River, all of the soldiers left the column, and with fewer men to escort them, a number of Natives attempted escape. Acting on a tip from some of the Native women, Tichenor laid a trap for the Native men and ordered his men to shoot if they tried to escape again, which they did.

Following the incident, Major John B. Scott of Fort Umpqua reported:

the Indian men in the party — say 15 in number — tried several times to effect an escape . . . and return to their old haunts; and he was convinced from the report of some of the squaws, that at a certain place on the route, they would make another attempt; and that in consequence, he so disposed of the men in his employ, that when the point was reached, they fell upon these Indians, killing fourteen of them, and wounding the two boys — one Indian man, a squaw & some few children escaped.

Through his continued service, Tichenor appears to never have been held accountable for his actions. In fact, First Lt. George P. Ihrie, stationed at Fort Umpqua, wrote to James Nesmith, praising Tichenor, on June 19, 1858. “It affords me much gratification and pleasure to bear testimony to the efficient and ceaseless and judicious efforts of Mr. Wm. Tichenor of Port Orford, O.T., in securing and safely conducting to the Grand Round Reservation the families of several bands of Indians, the Warriors of which, two years ago, were in open hostilities to the whites, and the unpunished perpetrators of numerous murders and depredations.”

By July 26, 1858, Tichenor and his men were back at work collecting Indians from the south coast, this time Pistol River Indians.

The intent in the removal of the coastal tribes was to make the Oregon Territory a place for White Americans, and that is the story of the settlement of the Oregon Territory. Tribal rights, sovereignty, and previous occupation by tribes and bands were simply not
IN A SEPTEMBER 11, 1854, annual report, Joel Palmer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon, relayed details about a Chetco village massacre. The instigator, White entrepreneur Augustus F. Miller, was arrested but released soon after, leading Palmer to conclude: “Arrests are evidently useless, as no act of a white man against an Indian, however atrocious, can be followed by a conviction.”

considered relevant by opportunistic settlers, gold miners, and businessmen. The deciding factor in determination of land tenure or the administration of justice was whether one was a White person — a true “American Citizen” — or not.

Some representatives of the United States were well aware of the dichotomy of rights in the territory. Correspondence of two of the Indian Superintendents of Oregon, James W. Nesmith and Joel Palmer, documents their recognition of the need for government protection of Native people from White settlers. Writing to the Commission of Indian Affairs in 1857, Nesmith pleaded:

As the lands of the [Indians] are entirely occupied by the whites, their means of obtaining a living are greatly curtailed.

The wants of those “untutored wards of the Government” should be supplied, and their rights protected, unless the Government has determined that they should be doomed to extermination at the hands of the whites.33
In 1856, Palmer wrote the following to Governor of the Oregon Territory George Law Curry:

*You are not ignorant of the feeling... which, in many districts looked to the system of extermination as the only available policy to be pursued by the Government... a history of the settlement and occupancy by whites, of Southern Oregon and Northern California would be a history of wrong against the red man; and the cunning, the violation of faith, the treachery and savage brutality said to be the characteristics of that people, have been practiced towards them to a degree almost inconceivable, by the reckless portion of whites who have cursed that land, with their presence the past six years.*

Nesmith and Palmer reflected the higher ideals present in American policy, but the betrayals of good faith were relentless. Throughout western Oregon, White Americans established land claims well before any land cessions were negotiated. Treaties negotiated with Clatsop and northern Tillamook bands in 1851, and with coastal tribes in 1855, were never ratified by Congress or honored by the U.S. government.

The violence brought to bear on Indian peoples persisted in the written word. The telling of events leading to the eruption of the Rogue River War serves as an example. In October 1855, a band of “white settlers and miners from Jacksonville” (self-described “exterminators”) attacked a Takelma encampment on Little Butte Creek near Table Rock, killing dozens (estimates range from 28 to 106). This was a final atrocity for many Indians, who retaliated with violence, killing 15 to 27 Whites the following day. As Charles Wilkinson writes: "It is unnerving the extent to which the majority society, even with the perspective of time, conceived of Indians as completely apart from the Oregon populace — apart, it seems, even from the human race... Even Frances Fuller Victor, one of the finest nineteenth-century western historians, writing in 1894, called October 9 'altogether the bloodiest day the valley had ever seen'," completely dismissing the far greater number of Indian people murdered the previous day. Such historical bias compounded the effects of violence on tribal people.

Oregon’s Tribal peoples hold a significant amount of disaffection regarding their long-term mistreatment at the hands of the federal and state governments and by those Americans who took whatever they wanted and tried to exterminate the Tribes. Tribal members, historians, and others have worked to document and share the long and complex histories of treaties, reservations, boarding schools, federal termination policy, and a variety of other methods of attempting to erase, or assimilate, Native people, and of the ways Native people have survived and thrived, despite those efforts. During the 1970s and 1980s, Congress passed a series of acts that guaranteed significant rights to Native peoples. Laws such as the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (AIRFA) (42 U.S.C. § 1996), the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA) (Public Law 95–608, 92 Stat. 3069), and Indian Education Act of 1972, (Public Law No. 92-318, 86 Stat. 235) began to secure rights for tribal peoples. Under the U.S. national policy of self-determination (Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975,
Public Law 93-638), Tribes are now able to advocate for their rights and have begun the process of recovering from over two-hundred years of colonization by the United States.

The recovery is still young, and an honest Oregon Native history of the past century and a half remains largely untold. The recovery of that history and the context of colonization, of which White supremacy was a large part, is important to the process of recovery and healing efforts by Native peoples.

NOTES


10. Orvil Dodge, ed., *The Heroes of Battle Rock or The Miner’s Reward*, 1–2. See also Bert Webber and Margie Webber, *Battle Rock: The Hero’s Story: A True Account—Oregon Coast Indian Attack* (Webb Research Group, 1992), 27; and A.G. Walling, *History of Southern Oregon, Comprising Jackson, Josephine, Douglas, Curry and Coos Counties* (Portland, Ore., 1884). This place-name spelling is transcribed from J.P. Harrington Papers, 1943, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, roll 26, frames 384–85; George Wasson, Jr., a Coquille descendant, referenced to J.P. Harrington the place *Ma’na’xhay-Thet*, which means, “ply canoe back and forth-rock,” when gathering mussels there. The word is probably *manaxe*, and Harrington’s linguistic transcription is probably *má•ná•x.e θè•* (David Lewis’s personal communication with Patricia Whereat Phillips, 2019). The Athapaskan tribal name is *Ma-na-œe*. The name Kwatami has also been written as *Quotomah* or *Quah-to-mah*. See also David G. Lewis, “Ethnohistory of Battlerock: Preparation for the National Register Nomination,” Coquille Tribe in-house report, 2017.


15. *Oregon Statesman*, editorial, July 8, 1851. The editorial is critical of an Oregon Spectator (Oregon City) editorial that is itself critical of unsuccessful miners who were fomenting war and extermination of the Tribes as a means of gaining pay for their time. It was common for the newspapers of the time to criticize one another.

16. See federal records of Indian Depredations claims in Records of the Oregon Superintendency, National Archives Records Administration [hereafter NARA], RG 75, M2; Records of the Oregon Superintendency, NARA, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824–1880, RG75 M234. The records of depredations claims extend from 1856 into the 1870s with additional claims from descendants happening into the twentieth century. There is no record that Tribes could make similar claims. For Oregon volunteer militia war claims and federal claims see Frances Fuller Victor, *The Early Indian Wars of Oregon* (Salem: F.C. Baker, State Printer, 1894), 271–320.


19. Ibid.


22. Parrish, “Report of the Chetco Umpqua.” According to Oregon’s Organic Acts, section 700, if a person was of unsound mind, or unable to give testimony to the satisfaction of the
court, they could be discounted as a witness. Because most Indians in this period could not speak English, with few translators available, at individual judge’s discretion, the court could discount the Native witnesses. Matthew P. Deady, *The Organic and Other general laws of Oregon, together with the national Constitution and other public acts and statutes of the United States, 1845–1864* (Portland: H.L. Pittock, Oregon State Printer, 1866), 324.


25. Annette Louise Reed, “Neeyu Nn’ee min’ Ngheeyihl Naach’aaghitlhni: Lhla’t’i Deeni Tr’vmdan’ Natlhsri: Rooted in the Land of Our Ancestors, We are Strong: a Tolowa History” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999), 59–61. Reed compiled this Native account of the violence from primary sources. See also David Lewis, “The Most Persistent Attempt to Exterminate the Tribes, Beginning with the Yontocket Massacre 1853,” https://wp.me/p2ENjV-Z9 (accessed November 14, 2019).


27. James Nesmith to John F. Miller, August 3, 1857, Records of the Oregon Superintendency, NARA, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824–1880, RG75 M2, Roll 6.


30. Scott to Machall, June 17, 1858, NARA, RG 75, M2, Roll 16.


33. J.W. Nesmith, Salem, Oregon, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C., September 1, 1857, page 10, Records of the Oregon Superintendency, NARA, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824–1880, RG75 M234, Roll 610.

34. Joel Palmer to Gov. George L. Curry, August 8, 1856, p. 4–5, Records of the Oregon Superintendency, NARA, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824–1880, RG 75, M234, Roll 609.


37. Wilkinson, *The People are Dancing Again*, 120.
1924

**ON MAY 24, 1924**, the *Southern Oregon Spokesman* published this editorial titled “Let's Keep Grants Pass A White Man’s Town.” In the opening paragraph, the writer asserts that “Grants Pass has always been a white man's town” and later goes on to rail against “encroachments” of non-White people, stating plainly, “NIGGER WE DON’T WANT YOU HERE.”

In this year, a White Grant’s Pass family attempted to employ three Black servants in their household, as was the current fashion in the East and South. That employment enraged the local White community and sparked this editorial. Harkening to the preferred racial policies of the pioneer generation, these Grants Pass residents opposed any Black presence for essentially the same reasons as the pioneers — the attempt to eliminate any Black competition for jobs and economic advancement.

While Black populations in larger cities such as Portland had grown by 1924, smaller and more rural Oregon towns sought only homogenous, White populations. One method to achieve that outcome was through the adoption of “sundown” policies, under which all Blacks were required to be out of town by the time the sun went down. While such policies did not have the weight of “official laws,” those found in violation could expect consequences ranging from harassment or brutality by the police to assault by local, private citizens.

Finally, the editorial makes clear that the ultimate resolution of this issue will be a resort to violence if necessary — the underlying premise of all White supremacist policies.
Let’s Keep Grants Pass A White Man’s Town

Grants Pass, always has been a white man’s town, and there is no reason why it shouldn’t continue to be a white man’s town. The fact that we here in this wonderful Rogue River Valley, have brought the best of the white race here and such population will bring the cream of the white race here in the future.

The attitude of the people of this peaceful, law abiding community toward the encroachments of the black, brown or red races of the land, or the world for that matter, is ‘NIGGER WE DON’T WANT YOU HERE — AND WE WON’T HAVE YOU HERE — YOU HAD BETTER ROLL UP YOUR BED AND RIDE — THIS IS TO BE A WHITE MAN’S COUNTRY, YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER.

If there are any jobs to hand out in this country, the white men or white women are easy to get the jobs, this thing of bringing niggers in here to take jobs as cobbers, or maid or laborers or in fact any job that may be open here is an infringement on the rights of the white people who have taken pride in this their ideal community.

Those who must have niggers for help had best move to where niggers are wanted for we are dead sure the nigger is not wanted here, and he is not going to be allowed to stay, whether his numbers are three or three hundred.

As soon as one nigger is allowed to stay in these parts, this community ceases to be a white man’s country, and in as much as it doesn’t take very long for a family of niggers to increase into a “buck town” of large population, the coming of men nigger is the beginning of future trouble.

Who wants Grants Pass to be the scene of a race riot?

Who wants to see property values slump in Josephine county?

Who wants to see the hard work of years pass into the hands of a designing black race who don’t belong in Oregon and who will only cause trouble if they try to come here.

It is to be hoped that the man or woman who brought these niggers here will see fit, at once, to get rid of them, not after while, but right now.

There are rumors of threats, that might become realities if these niggers are allowed to stay any longer than it will take them to be loaded up and shipped back to Alabama, where the nigger will be at home and he will hibernate in his native heat.

Foreigners of any kind are not wanted in this community, and it will be to the best interests of any and all foreigners to give Grants Pass and southern Oregon a wide berth.

Grants Pass can boast of a community that is made up of peaceful white people who are striving to live, love and have their being at peace with the world, under the sway that God has laid down for man to enjoy.

Yet it is written, “if it be possible, as much as is within you, live peaceably with all men.” And in as much as it is impossible for the whites and blacks to live peaceably together, it is wise that the white people of this community should rise in protest at the attempt of any one to bring in here foreigners or niggers who not only will take jobs that rightfully belong to white people, regardless of what jobs are, for niggers and niggers will lower the standard of our community morals, as has been done in those mongrelized communities where the color line is not drawn.

There is only one way to keep Grants Pass white, and that is — keep it white.
“We were at our journey’s end”

Settler Sovereignty Formation in Oregon

KATRINE BARBER

For too long, Oregon history has been captive to the mid-nineteenth-century’s rambling wagon trains. Settler stories of motivations, hardships, and achievements, preserved in diaries, letters, and memoirs, are compelling and deserving of the attention lavished on them. But more is necessary. Oregon’s Euro-Americans were intimately tied to national and international events that saw the rise of White, European colonial expansion into the colored word. Alongside that expansion was the development of a framework of domination, justified by claims of superiority and destiny, that conflated the ability to control with the right to do so. Placing Oregon history in this larger geopolitical context allows a more coherent understanding of what made Oregon what it became, and what that history has to do with the Oregon of today.

WHEN TWENTY-SEVEN-YEAR-OLD Esther Bell Hanna caught sight of the Columbia River in early September 1852, she “almost felt that we were at our journey’s end.” “Little did I think in my school days as I traced out this river,” she wrote in her leather-bound journal, “that ever should I stand upon its shores or drink of its clear waters! But so it is! Here I am after months of toil and fatigue, permitted to see this noble and far-famed river!” In just a few weeks, Hanna would complete a six-month journey from her home state of Pennsylvania to Oregon City (“that long looked for place”). A mere hour before heading west, Bell (as she preferred to be called) married Joseph Anderson Hanna, a Presbyterian minister. After two weeks of steamboat travel (“How monotonous! The same dull routine day after day”), she and her husband organized a train of eighty people in twenty teams for the overland journey. Their traveling companions were like them — Scotch-Irish Presbyterians intent on establishing “a colony on the Pacific with a view of organizing churches, schools and seminaries of learning” in the new U.S. territory of Oregon. On arrival the couple took up a donation land claim
a few miles south of present-day Corvallis and established one of several Presbyterian congregations in the area within a year. Joseph preached in communities throughout Oregon and Washington, while Bell competed in the Benton County Agricultural Society Fair and raised the two surviving of their four children. After Bell’s death in 1878, her daughter Harriet remembered her as “slight and dainty” but with a “will equalled [sic] that of a man.”

When Bell Hanna documented the experience of seeing in real life a river she had once drawn as a schoolgirl, she looked out over a landscape that contained relationships both legible and illegible to her. Indigenous people — defined by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang as “those who have creation stories, not colonization stories” — gathering to barter food with the strangers, tule-covered longhouses, switchbacks of trails in the distant foothills, and dugout canoes on the river’s banks all visibly embodied what Sinixt scholar Laurie Arnold calls the Indigenous Columbia Plateau. But the kin relationships that connected individuals and their families to far-flung fishing or berrying loca-
tions, the Indigenous interventions that encouraged growth of roots and other foods, the protocols, ceremonies, and stories that guided human relationships with non-human kin, and the petroglyphs and pictographs that recounted the creation of the rivers and mountains all remained largely illegible to foreigners. The “place-based ethics . . . based on principles of reciprocity and mutual obligation” that political theorist Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene First Nation) cites as the foundation of Indigenous resistance to colonization largely went unnoticed by settlers like the Hannas. And yet, the Hannas must have known they were entering — and overtaking — a homeland.

The Hannas traveled among 60,000 overlanders headed for Oregon and California in the year 1852 alone. Between 1840 and 1860, more than 250,000 mostly White Americans migrated across the Oregon Trail to what is now the American West Coast. For decades, their stories — documented in diaries, letters home, and trail guides, and later recounted in novels, poetry, film, museum exhibits, and pioneer organizations — epitomized Oregon history and provided an optimistic and unifying national narrative that countered narratives of the Civil War’s bloody conflict of the same period. Individual pioneers might have been “slight and dainty,” but collectively, they were the building blocks of an indomitable national narrative that married “earth hunger” with a doctrine of land improvement that entitled American settlers to take the plow to Indigenous homelands and that justified the removal and massacre of Native people as necessary to territorial expansion.
That national narrative was already taking form in congressional debates about American expansion and in the nation’s newspapers as Hanna moved West. It would become formalized in academic study just four decades after she arrived in the Willamette Valley. In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner identified westward expansion and overland migration as the basis for an exceptional American history, arguing that from these experiences American national identity, forged in a folk democracy, emerged. Turner spoke before the ninth annual meeting of the American Historical Association, held in conjunction with the Chicago World’s Fair on a July evening during an unusually dry summer. He began by reflecting on an 1890 bulletin of the Superintendent of the Census that declared for the first time that “there can hardly be said to be a frontier line.” This was alarming news, he told his audience, because “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.” Turner’s paper, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” provided a compelling organizing narrative that placed Pacific Slope states such as Oregon, remote as it was from the centers of American financial and political power, at the center of American identity.

But Oregon migration stories were not exceptional. Oregon was part of a transformational period of mass migration, nation building, worldwide economic boom and bust, and establishment of a color line that reshaped the nineteenth-century globe, the outcomes of which reverberate around the world.
New Zealand historian James Belich couples “spasmodic but explosive [population] growth” in the American West with that of the “British West,” during an equally expansive period of multi-strand encroachment into what is now Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and multiple points in Africa. Between 1815 and 1924, approximately 19 million British and Irish, 5 million Germans, and 12 million Americans migrated to create new permanent settlements in such diverse and far-flung places as South Africa, Canada, Brazil, Australia, and the American West. They were joined by 50 million Chinese and 30 million East Indians, most of whom governments categorized as temporary laborers and denied rights to permanent settlement. “Exceptionalist American explanations of this truly massive growth,” Belich posits, “must founder on one fact: it was emulated in the British West at much the same time, at much the same rate, and in much the same way.” When placed in a global history of mass migration, resettlement, and patterns of settler colonialism, Oregon’s stories join millions of others during the nineteenth century’s “rise of the Anglo world.”

While distinct sites of settler colonialism developed in particular ways, they shared common characteristics: settler land hunger, extinguishment of Indigenous land rights (and people through physical violence as well as cultures through assimilation), and importation of immigrant laborers who were excluded from citizenship rights and expelled during periods when their labor was not critical. The ongoing resistance to these structures by Indigenous people, by “temporary” laborers who made their homes permanently in settler societies, and by some settlers and their descendants has also been an ineradicable characteristic of settler colonialism.

Geographers Anne Bonds and Joshua Inwoods link “White supremacy” to settler colonialism to call “attention to the brutality and dehumanization of racial exploitation and domination that emerges from settler colonial societies.” Many readers may be more familiar with the use of the term “White supremacy” to identify radical White nationalist fringe groups. Critical race theorists and other scholars use the term more expansively. In 1997, Frances Lee Ansley defined White supremacy as

a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.

In this usage, the term “White supremacy” does not denote individualized racist actions but rather identifies “the presumed superiority of White racial identities, however problematically defined, in support of the cultural, politi-
cal, and economic domination of non-White groups.” While the racist actions of individuals or small groups are important to monitor and have real implications, especially for people of color, they occur within systems that are biased toward Whites. Individual racist actions can be countered and halted even while the system of White supremacy remains in place. Indeed, White supremacy normalizes the primacy of Whiteness so that discriminatory actions can be difficult to identify.

White supremacy operates beyond the bounds of settler colonial structures but, especially in the United States, also plays out within the context of territorial expansion and settler colonialism. “In addition to benefitting from dispossession,” anthropologist Patrick Wolfe explains, “white settlers also benefit from race, the two colonial privileges being fused and mutually compounding in social life.” The development of anti-Blackness in support of the enslavement of Africans and their descendants and the dispossession of Indigenous people from their lands characterize American race relations. Settler colonialism rationalized the strategies waged against Indigenous people: genocidal violence, removal, theft, and forced assimilation. White supremacy justified the enslavement of African people and buoyed “the afterlife of slavery”: mass incarceration, for example, as well as the denial of access to education, jobs, the vote, and the generational wealth that many White Americans have taken for granted. “American settlers,” according to sociologist Evelyn Glenn, “attached their identity to the land itself, to the mythologized common experience of settlement, and often to the shared goal of self-governance.”

But not all people residing on American soil or even all Americans were welcomed into that common experience. In Oregon, measures sanctioned by federal and state administrations (wars, Black Exclusion Act, Alien Land Act, reservation policy, redlining) and unofficial (harassment and violence, sundown customs, predatory mortgages) disadvantaged Indigenous people, some American citizens, and some immigrants. Those same measures, as well as affirmative land policies such as donation land acts, created a “landscape of promise” for others. Race-inflected advantages and disadvantages have persisted through generations, leading Navajo/Warm Springs/Wasco/Yakama poet Elizabeth Woody to describe Oregon as “an Eden where Eden was not needed” and writer Elizabeth McLagan to title her history of Oregon’s African Americans A Peculiar Paradise.

**SETTLER COLONIALISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY IN OREGON HISTORY**

Peter Puget, Royal lieutenant assigned to the Vancouver Expedition (1791–1795), described the people he met in the inlet that now carries his name as
“low and ill made, with broad faces and small eyes.” Puget identified their foreheads as “deformed or out of shape comparatively speaking with those of Europeans.” Phenotypical descriptions such as Puget’s were commonplace and helped to build a corpus of “knowledge” about Native people. The published journals of Puget and his ilk widely circulated ideas about the differences between Europeans and Indians, instructing readers how to understand them. American and European scientists used such “data” to craft stages of human development and used evolutionary concepts to describe hierarchical, global human variability. The Northwest’s Native people collected their own data on newcomers, and Indigenous leaders rejigged displays of authority and diplomatic protocols as they opened their extensive economic networks to foreigners. As American and European explorers charted the shorelines of the Pacific Northwest, they collected navigational information as well as information that would aid trade with the Indigenous people they encountered. Along the way, they married new observations with ideas about race and human difference that they brought with them.

White supremacy developed concurrently with colonial empires in a “symbiotic relationship,” much as anti-Blackness accompanied the rise of African enslavement. By the dawn of the 1800s, sixteenth-century debates about human difference that hinged on alterable religious beliefs (“heathen” or “Christian”) hardened into “facts” of biological difference. The “data” collected through exploration and conquest during the Age of Enlightenment (1720–1820), with its emphasis on scientific observation, empiricism, classification, and “universal laws of cultural development,” provided scientific integrity to constructions of racial superiority, inferiority, and White supremacy that were already in progress.

Colonialists relied on those emergent theories, which emphasized biological differences and hierarchies, to justify genocide, land grabs, and the commodification of human beings. Sociologist Steve Garner argues that the “grammar and vocabulary” of racialized difference were “developed to their most definitive — and globalized — form in the European and North American colonial settings.” He describes racialization as a “colonial technology” comparable to innovations in ship building and navigation technologies, the rise of literacy and print culture, and the invention of increasingly deadly weaponry.

Voyageurs trekked to the region in search of resources, primarily furs, to trade elsewhere to benefit the companies that employed them and their nations of origin. In doing so, they founded the first non-Indigenous outposts in what would eventually become Oregon. The Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), established by English Royal Charter, and American John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company brought classic exploitation colonialism
to the region. Because they were not intended as permanent settlements, fur trading posts remained relatively small; the HBC encouraged retiring employees to leave rather than settle the area. Fort employees remained few in number compared with Indigenous populations, who retained control over most of the region’s resources and — importantly — land. Moreover, employees relied on the cooperation of Indigenous people to extract resources. They married Native women to tap into local knowledge and labor and to create the kinship ties necessary in the Indigenous economy, contributed to creole languages and learned Native languages, and adopted Indigenous cultural customs. By the 1840s, such economic engagements based in cultural adaptation were overwhelmed in Oregon by land hunger and state building.

If classic colonialism was resource-oriented and circular (colonists lived in the region temporarily to oversee the extraction of natural resources, ultimately returning to their countries of origin), settler colonialism was a one-way journey motivated by land acquisition that required dispossession and its justification. The 1843 arrival of as many as 1,000 American settlers guided by

**This 1857** illustration from Josiah Nott and George Giddon’s *Types of Mankind* features the pseudo-science of race biology. Such studies provided a scientific gloss to racist hierarchies and promoted White supremacy. This particular illustration charts how different “races” descend from types of animals and are therefore different species.
THIS MURAL, painted by Barry Faulkner, appears behind the desk of the Speaker of the House at the Oregon State Capitol. It depicts the formation of the Oregon Provisional Government at Champoeg in 1843 and illustrates sociologist Evelyn Glenn’s contention that key to American settler identity was the “shared goal of self-governance.”

missionary Marcus Whitman from Fort Hall into Cayuse Territory signaled the advent of settler colonialism in Oregon Country. Other early watershed events include the Oregon Treaty of 1846, which ended the joint American-
British occupation of the Oregon Country and through which Britain abandoned its fur-trading operations and withdrew its land claims below the forty-ninth parallel, and the passage of the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act (DLCA) in 1850, the legal process for settler land acquisition in Oregon Territory. All marked the end of the fur trade period and the incoming rush of land-hungry Americans.

Epidemics and violence shattered Indigenous communities and created a demographic revolution in the region. Exogenous diseases, such as measles, malaria, and small pox, had devastated Indigenous communities in Oregon beginning in the mid 1770s, causing great trauma and disrupting well-honed political and social systems. After particularly deadly epidemics in the early 1830s, little more than a decade before the first waves of American migration, tribes and bands, particularly those in western Oregon, had diminished capacity to resist the incursions of foreigners. “In some respects,” historian John Findlay argues, “disease paved the way for the arrival of settlers” who “seized upon the apparent depopulation of the native Northwest as an excuse or justification for their own occupation of the land.” Between 1840 and 1860, a smattering of farms and buildings in the Willamette Valley grew to platted communities in what Kenneth Coleman calls a “settler invasion.” Toward the end of his life, Peter Burnett, 1843 immigrant and signatory to Oregon’s first racial exclusion law in 1844, remembered that “We came . . . to take and settle the country exclusively for ourselves.” Indigenous people “saw annihilation before them,” as

\[\text{every succeeding fall they found the white population about doubled, and our settlements continually extending and rapidly encroaching more and more upon their pasture and camas grounds. They saw that we fenced in the best lands, excluding their horses from the grass, and our hogs ate up their camas.} \]

Willamette Valley settlers “went anywhere we pleased, settled down without any treaty or consultation with the Indians, and occupied our claims without their consent and without compensation.”

Settlers alienated Indigenous people from their lands through ordinary acts of fencing and plowing fields that historian Julius Wilm describes as “below the threshold of actual violence” as well as through disorganized terror and calculated war. Political scientist Glen Coulthard explains that, in whatever form it took, such violence threatened not only Indigenous populations and resources but also the very integrity of “an [Indigenous] ontological framework” of “interdependent relations covering the land and animals, past and future generations, as well as other people and communities.” Native people defended their worlds through resistance, accommodation, and avoidance. Settler-perpetrated rape, murder, and alienation of territory
instigated retaliatory violence, drawing forth the killing capabilities of volunteer militias and the authority of the U.S. military along the southern coast and the lava fields of the California-Oregon border, in the Wallowa Valley, and on the Columbia Plateau for three decades following the initial waves of White settlement, making entrenchment possible.

Many overlanders came west hoping to secure land — financial independence for themselves and an inheritance for their children — and to avoid the racial and religious conflicts of the states, to make anew social and political communities that reflected but also improved on their old homes. As Lorenzo Veracini explains, unlike migrants who arrive to “a political order that is already constituted. . . . Settlers are founders of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them.” The settler political order is one based on dispossession and exclusion both. Joseph Hanna’s published call, recruiting members to a Presbyterian colony, claimed that “there was and perhaps will never be again so favorable an opportunity for the formation of a Christian community, possessing without admixture all the advantages that ever can be secured in this world of sin by a purely religious organization of homogenous elements.” “Homogenous elements” identified two needs: a company of overlanders whose values were alike (i.e., keeping the Sabbath on the overland journey) and the establishment of a community of settlers who were similar politically,
Barber, “We were at our journey’s end” 393

_393_ Barber, “We were at our journey’s end

Barber, “We were at our journey’s end

culturally, and religiously — this despite the community’s eventual establishment within the territory of the Mary’s River (Champinefu) Band of the Kalapuya Indians and their forced removal to the Grand Ronde Reservation.

Hanna had felt a profound loneliness while traveling the Oregon Trail, where the going was often physically and mentally difficult. And yet, she did not dwell on whether she, her husband, and others in their company had the right to invade the others’ homelands. As the company pushed through Shoshone territory on the last day of July 1852, she “started on foot the sun burning hot in many places the sand was ankle deep, and almost scorching, my feet were nearly blistered, I gave out once got into the carriage, and rested a little then got out and went on, Mr H walked and drove all afternoon.” Despite these difficulties, “I was not cast down or discouraged. I felt that the same kind hand that had brought us safely thus far would still go with us and protect us, so that I was calm and even cheerful amidst base trials, and discouragements.” Migrants such as the Hannas, and many historians who followed on their heels, cast their journeys as destiny, obscuring their reliance on vigilante and state-sanctioned violence and on globally circulated ideas of racial hierarchies as they moved into already occupied lands.

MEMBERS OF THE HUDSON FAMILY, renowned basket makers, are pictured here in an undated photograph taken by Indian agent Andrew Kershaw. In 1856, the federal government removed thousands of Native people from their traditional lands and relocated them to the Siletz and Grand Ronde reservations. The Hudsons were likely part of that forced resettlement, and their descendants have continuously lived in Grand Ronde. Pictured from left to right are John Hudson, Mattie Hudson, Gertrude Hudson, Marie Hudson, Martha Sands, and Pearl Hudson.
THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PIONEERS, THE PROMISE OF INDIGENOUS ERASURE

The Americanization of early Oregon reflects the patterns of settler colonialism systems worldwide: White settlement and racist policies that produced settler sovereignty. Historian Natalia Molina coined the term “racial scripts” to describe how racialized ideas and material outcomes generated by them develop and persist across time, place, and racialized groups. Critical to her work is the relational construction of racial identities. Scott Lauria Mor
gensen develops this idea by describing settlers and Native people as “co-
constitutive,” meaning that settler identity formed in opposition to indigeneity while settlers reduced the diverse peoples of places such as Oregon into a single, racialized category of “Indian.” Put another way, if land ownership is reserved for White citizens, settlers must be “White,” and the impossibility of Native Americans (or free African Americans or members of other racial minority groups) settling Oregon’s Willamette Valley is self-evident. “Racial scripts” narrated White supremacy and laid the groundwork for establishment of the color line in Oregon: the legitimacy of White settlement, the impossibility of African American or other pioneers of color to the state, the promise of Indigenous erasure, and what Iyko Day calls the “settler colonial inhospitality” to non-White immigrants. These scripts hardened racial boundaries that had been in flux in the polyglot cultural environment of the fur trade. Their importance lies not just in how individual groups of people were racialized and faced discrimination but also in how, collectively, racial scripts created a system of White supremacy.

On arrival, settlers used the procedures of folk democracy to institute a provisional government and craft terms for land claims (established at a generous 320 acres per claimant), which became the basis for the Oregon DLCA passed by Congress in 1850. Because settlers “used race, as opposed to national origin or religion . . . to determine which previous inhabitants would be included and which would be excluded,” former HBC employees could integrate into the emerging American society, despite many being Catholic and French Canadian, while most Indigenous people could not. Settlers restricted federal land claims to Whites and mixed raced people whose fathers were White, creating “an affirmative action plan for Anglo-
American settlers.” They also passed legislation that excluded African Americans from the region. Approximately 3 million African Americans counted in the 1850 census were enslaved and therefore could not join in the migration west of their own accord. Exclusion laws, passed in 1844 and 1849 and included in Oregon’s 1857 constitution, were meant to ensure that free African Americans were equally restricted. Oregon’s exclusion acts were more threat than actuality, because Whites seldom used them
to harass the African Americans who lived in the state. Through excluding African Americans from both state and federal land grants, however, White settlers declared African American pioneers an impossibility and reserved the state’s land and resources for themselves. Historian Darrell Millner powerfully states, “in subsequent generations, the profits, power, and political influence that flowed from near exclusive White landownership were manifested in the construction of a racially stratified society in which a white ascendancy was assured and non-white marginalization was profound.”52

The Oregon DLCA secured private property rights for Oregon’s White settlers before the region’s Native people had ceded their lands. Congress ratified treaties negotiated with the people of the Columbia River Plateau three weeks after it declared Oregon the thirty-third state, a timeline based on what Roberta Conner (Cayuse, Umatilla, Nez Perce) calls “clouded title” for individual settlers and the nation both.53 It is a timeline that “reflected deeply embedded settler assumptions about settlement, namely that the land would ultimately be theirs . . . the Oregon Donation Land Act symbolically and literally erased Native land-ownership and tenure.”54 Settlers placed stock in the process of assimilation, championed extermination and forced removal, or held out hope for the providential “vanishing” of Native people. All paths led to the same destination: their own resettlement of Indigenous lands.

IN THIS DRAFT of Section 31 of the Bill of Rights in the 1857 Oregon Constitution, framers outlined property rights of non-citizens. After some debate, delegates moved to modify “foreigners” with the word “White,” reassuring inhospitality to non-White immigrants. Oregon voters repealed this article in 1970.
Reservation policy was driven by a desire to claim Indigenous lands, but many who advocated for it also saw the system as potentially transformational for Indian people who, through the adoption of Christianity, agriculture, and education, could shed their indigeneity, eventually leave the reservation, and integrate into White society. That settlers imagined the promise of assimilation as a promise for Native people — the promise of civilization, citizenship rights, and property rights — lays bare the connection between that erasure and White supremacy. Treaty negotiations would not mark an appropriation of millions of acres of land but the beginning of improved lives — lives more like those of White people — for Indian people. But the promise was most importantly one for settlers themselves: the voluntary assimilation of Native people into American society could justify the legalized theft of Indigenous lands.

As White Oregonians excluded African American laborers and restricted Native Americans’ access to the labor market by segregating them on reservations, they turned to immigrant labor, another central component of settler colonialism throughout the world. Temporary immigrant laborers were denied naturalization and citizenship rights and expelled during
periods when their labor was not critical. After rejecting the use of enslaved labor as well as the settlement of free African Americans, White Oregonians turned to employing Chinese and Japanese laborers in the state’s forests and fields, canneries, and emerging cities. They “represented an alien labor force that mixed with Indigenous land to transform it into white property and capital.”

Chinese arrived concurrently with White American settlers, but were excluded from the designations of “pioneer” or “settler” by custom and through legal measures, which denied them citizenship rights and subjected them to discriminatory laws that constricted their economic choices and limited their rights to property. White settlers crafted policies to ensure that Asian settlers would be classified as sojourners and temporary contract laborers. Asian immigrant laborers built the state’s infrastructure and contributed to its economy without even the minimal safeguards afforded to the period’s White, citizen laborers. During times of economic hardship and lacking the protections of American citizenship, they faced exclusion, expulsion, and other forms of direct and indirect violence.

Chinese immigration to Oregon began by 1850 and peaked during the mid 1870s. Alarmed at the specter of possible mass migration of Chinese immigrants, during the 1857 Oregon constitutional convention, William Watkins submitted an amendment to the provision regarding African American exclusion to include Chinese. In the ensuing debate, delegates wondered if they should not be more expansive in excluding non-Whites from Oregon’s borders. In addition to Chinese immigrants, Hawaiians and even Indigenous people came under discussion for exclusion or removal.

Frederick Waymire spoke in defense of Chinese immigrants because “they make good washers, good cooks, and good servants.” The delegates approved a constitution that permitted Chinese people being within the state but prohibited them from owning real estate.

Over the next several decades, Americans in Oregon and elsewhere debated the role of Chinese immigrants, alternately demanding either their undervalued labor or their exclusion to protect White laborers. During 1870 debates about modifying the 1790 Naturalization Law, lawmakers decided to continue to restrict naturalization to Whites, a precursor to anti-immigration legislation that specifically targeted Chinese immigrants. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, passed during a period of White terrorism directed at Chinese people across the West, heralded a racially restrictive American immigration policy for the next eighty years. When the number of Chinese immigrants already in the United States did not decrease but instead remained constant after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act,
politicians from western states returned to the drawing board in 1892 and passed the Geary Act. The new legislation required that Chinese laborers register with the federal government or face deportation or a year of hard labor. Oregon Sen. Binger Hermann supported the act that, according to historian Kelly Lytle Hernández, “resulted in the invention of immigration detention,” as immigrants awaited deportation. Hermann declared that “it is high time our gateways should be double locked and barred against the Mongolian.” Proving Natalia Molina’s point that “once attitudes, practices, customs, policies, and laws are directed at one group, they are more readily available and hence easily applied to other groups,” similar debates flared up later in regard to Japanese and Mexican immigration.

Although voting rights for White males in the United States were largely uncoupled from property ownership by 1856, citizenship status, voting rights, and property rights tracked closely with one another for every other racial group even into the twentieth century (see table on following spread). In 1923, Oregon passed legislation that prohibited immigrants who could not become naturalized citizens from owning property, eliminating the possibility of Japanese or Chinese immigrants from owning land in the state. During this same period, state politicians lobbied the federal government to revise the Fourteenth Amendment to eliminate birthright citizenship. Not until 1952, under the McCarran-Walter Act, did the nation finally open paths to naturalized citizenship for immigrants designated as non-White. For African Americans, citizens under the Fourteenth Amendment, tools — restrictive covenants and racist banking practices to name two — would prevent them from developing the generational wealth through home ownership that, by the mid twentieth century, White Americans could aspire to and take for granted.

UNSETTLING WHITE SUPREMACY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM IN OREGON

In her landmark 1987 book The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West, Patricia Nelson Limerick offers a corrective to Turner’s thesis, which ended the frontier period with the 1890 census and placed the experiences of settlers like the Hannas as central to westward expansion and the American experience. Limerick argued that the change in era from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries did not mark a distinct divide between “frontier” and “civilization” but that conquest was present through its legacies in the contemporary American West. The lens of settler colonialism revise her thesis further in at least one important way: to strike “legacies” as a concept lest it suggest that we are merely stuck with the
residue of an earlier generation’s conquest. In Wolfe’s words, “invasion is a structure not an event.”

Settler colonialism, with its “organizing grammar of race,” took on different forms of land hunger and displacement in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For Oregon’s Native Americans, new forms included, but were not limited to, the mid-twentieth-century federal policy of termination, which severed the nation-to-nation relationship between the federal government and sixty-one of Oregon’s tribes and bands, more than in any other state. Termination acts liquidated tribal land wealth, proving that White settler desires for Indigenous lands did not end in the nineteenth century. This forced assimilation project — which stripped tribal nations of their federal status, their lands, and the educational, health, and other services promised in treaties — left destitution in its wake. A concurrent policy of voluntary relocation incentivized what we might now call “self-removal” by encouraging working-aged Indigenous men and women to leave their reservations and resettle in cities. In the same period, dam building on the Columbia River
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship Status</th>
<th>Voting Rights</th>
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</table>
| **Indigenous Women** | Become U.S. citizens under provisions of Indian Citizenship Act, 1924 (national)  
Can lose tribal status if married to non-tribal man. |
| After 1924 in theory. Oregon adopts literacy test in 1924. |
| **Indigenous Men** | Become U.S. citizens under provisions of Indian Citizenship Act, 1924 (national) |
| After 1924 in theory. Oregon adopts literacy test in 1924. |
| **People of Mixed Race** | Often depended upon the ability of individuals to pass as White. In 1855 Oregon denied mixed-race men citizenship status. |
| Often depended upon the ability of individuals to pass as White and time of birth (see notes). |
| **African American Men and Women** | Under the provisions of the 14th Amendment, which Oregon ratified in 1866, rescinded in 1868 and re-ratified in 1973. |
| For men, under the provisions of the 15th Amendment, which Oregon refused to ratify until 1959. After 1912 in Oregon, for women. |
| **Former Mexican Nationals** | Yes, under the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848 (national). |
| Yes, but barriers abound. |
| **Chinese Men and Women** | Although the Magnuson Act in 1943 opens naturalization for some, most cannot be naturalized until 1952. Children are citizens under the 14th Amendment. |
| No, for immigrants until after 1952. Yes, for those born in U.S. or naturalized after 1943. |
| **Japanese Men and Women** | Cannot be naturalized until 1952. Children are citizens under the 14th Amendment. |
| No, for immigrants until after 1952. Yes, for those born in U.S. |
| **Men Categorized as White** | Yes. White immigrants could naturalize under the provisions of the 1790 Naturalization Act. |
| Yes. Fully enfranchised after 1856 (no property ownership obligation although head taxes remained in some states). |
| **Women Categorized as White** | Yes, but could lose citizenship status if married to a non-citizen. |
| After 1912 in Oregon. |

*This table, compiled by the author, documents citizenship status, voting rights, and property rights for various groups of people during the twentieth century in Oregon.*
### PROPERTY RIGHTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, under the provisions of the Dawes General Allotment Act, 1887 (national) but as “trust” lands, held at least initially by federal government.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not under Oregon Donation Land Claim Act. Yes, under the provisions of the Dawes General Allotment Act, 1887 (national) but as “trust” lands, held at least initially by federal government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes for men, under Donation Land Claim Act, if father is White and the mother is Indigenous. Mixed race women often found that they were not able to defend their property rights in Oregon’s courts when they were widowed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not under Donation Land Act or the Oregon State constitution, whose restrictions were overturned by the 14th Amendment. However, restrictions continued into the twentieth century with, for example, redlining and racial restrictions in property titles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but barriers abound and many lose their landholdings dating back before the Mexican-American War.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, until Oregon passage of Alien Land Law in 1923, denying immigrants who could not be naturalized property rights. American-born children could own land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, under the provisions of the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act, which was revised in 1853 to give married women property rights.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### DATES OF SIGNIFICANCE

1790: Naturalization Act restricts citizenship to "any alien, being a free white person."

1862: Oregon adopts law to prevent African Americans and Whites from lawfully marrying; expanded in 1866 to include Chinese, Hawaiians, and Native Americans. Repealed in Oregon in 1951, nationally, by Supreme Court ruling on *Loving v. Virginia*, in 1967.

1870: Congress opens naturalized citizenship to people of African descent but continues to exclude Native Americans and Asian immigrants from citizenship through naturalization.


1898: Filipinos became U.S. nationals under the Treaty of Paris following the Spanish-American War, and therefore not subject to exclusion.

1917: Asiatic Barred Zone Act bans immigration from numerous nations, including most Asian nations (not Japan), and India.

1922: The Cable Act terminated citizenship for American women who married foreigners ineligible for citizenship or lived outside of the United States for two years. Prior to this time, American women could lose their citizenship status if they married non-naturalized immigrants. Overturned in 1931.

1924: Immigration Act of 1924 bans immigration by people ineligible for citizenship.

1952: McCarran-Walter Act repeals remnants of previous naturalization acts so that immigrants declared non-White could become naturalized citizens.
inundated Indigenous fishing areas and village sites that had been in use for tens of thousands of years, leading to decades of struggle to maintain treaty-protected fishing rights. Moreover, economic and environmental policies chipped away at Indigenous autonomy by depleting the state’s traditional Indigenous food sources and opening resources to commercial harvests. All of these alienated Indigenous people from their lands every bit as much as nineteenth-century policies.

Portland’s African American community significantly expanded as war industries attracted workers to the area from across the country during the mid twentieth century. By 1945, the African American population in the city had increased by 1,000 percent to 23,000 people. But local elites, such as Portland Mayor Earl Riley and members of the Portland Board of Realtors, were intent that the growth be temporary. After the war they moved to dismantle wartime housing and limited the ability of African American newcomers to find suitable housing elsewhere. Despite the efforts of organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League, Portland’s postwar Black population dropped to 11,000 people by 1957. Twenty-first-century forms of exclusion and displacement included the disaster of the Vanport flood in 1948 (at least partially human-made) as well as urban renewal projects that made way for construction of the Interstate freeway, development of the Memorial Coliseum, and an expansion of Legacy Emanuel Hospital that was significantly reduced after the displacement of a neighborhood. African Americans and other marginalized racial groups continued to face restrictions to property acquisition through racial covenants, banking’s exclusionary lending practices, and terrorism directed at them by their White neighbors. Linkages like this led Millner to claim that “issues of race and the status and circumstances of black life in Oregon are central to understanding the history of the state, and perhaps its future as well.”

Gentrification in North and Northeast Portland during the twenty-first century has led to “market-rate” multi-unit developments that have increased the value of surrounding existing homes, leading to renters and middle- and low-income homeowners being “priced out” of their own neighborhoods. These trends affect all Portlanders but none more so than the city’s African Americans, who earn the city’s lowest median income and are most likely to be renters (only 30 percent were homeowners in 2016). In 2015, the number of African Americans in the city who lacked any housing jumped by 48 percent, and while they made up only 7 percent of the city’s population, they comprised 25 percent of its homeless population. Just as in the period after World War II, those who can relocate are doing so. Between 2012 and 2014,
the city of Portland annually lost approximately 800 African American residents who left for other states. In contrast, other fast-growing, similarly sized cities saw an annual net increase of African American residents during this same period. Historic deed restrictions, racist lending practices, and gentrification affect African American communities nationwide, but because of the state’s remarkable history of exclusion, Portland has come to stand for the long reach of discriminatory housing practices. That more African Americans select to leave Portland than to move to the city reflects a long history of White supremacy in the state.

And yet ongoing resistance to White supremacy is also an ineradicable characteristic of settler colonialism. That racial boundaries were and are messy and contested in Oregon points to the importance of resilience and resistance and suggests possibilities for change. Examples abound, and some appear in the chart at the end of this article. Two discussed below demonstrate the necessary unwinding of White settler conventions regarding the impossibility of African American pioneers and the erasure of the state’s Indigenous people.

AN AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN, a pensioner of less than $2,000 a year, stands on his porch in Albina with the freeway in the background. Well before the gentrification of the twenty-first century, Portland’s Black property owners faced displacement from public and private developments such as the Memorial Coliseum, the Legacy Emanuel Hospital expansion, and other urban renewal projects.
Salem’s 1927 promotional material celebrated the Oregon’s capitol city as “the most All-American city in the United States. No foreign element, no Mexicans, 30 negroes, and there hasn’t been an Indian living in the city for 35 years.” Salem, therefore, seems an unlikely headquarters for one of the state’s premier African American heritage organizations, Oregon Black Pioneers (OBP). OBP is no stranger to heading off stereotypes with evidence-based historical counter-narrative: its very name flouts the idea that African Americans were not some of the state’s earliest settlers. In addition to its exhibits and public presentations, a 2011 book, Perseverance: A History of African Americans in Oregon’s Marion and Polk Counties, repopulates the nineteenth century Willamette Valley with biographies of individuals — enslaved and free — who resided there, including Ed, of whom little information survives. Ed was a thirty-five-year-old enslaved man from Missouri when he arrived in Oregon in 1853, the year after the Hannas.

African Americans who struggled for generations to gain a foothold of private property as a form of security and potential wealth were “ambiguous settlers,” according to Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence. They have “been involved in some form of settlement process” in their pursuit of western land but were also marginal to the national project of expansion and often excluded from settlement’s ambitions. This leads to a contradiction in which “Black struggles for freedom have required (and continue to require) ongoing colonization of Indigenous land,” which “normalizes relations of colonialism,” while simultaneously upending who embodies the “settler” or “pioneer.” As people of African descent claimed the lands of Native people, they highlighted this contradiction of “stolen people on stolen land.”

Just a few miles from where the Hannas took up a land claim, planners on the Grand Ronde Reservation have re-inscribed indigeneity into the landscape by designating street names in Chinuk Wawa and English. Ethnic Studies scholar Natchee Blu Barnd, who has examined the use of signage to create Native spaces, writes “in Grand Ronde, names that might elsewhere be seen as obscure or neutral stand within this geography as empowered and potentially empowering assertions of Native presence, tribal sovereignty, and cultural resilience.” The 1954 Western Oregon Indian Termination Act terminated the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Reservation, whose members fought for twenty-nine years to regain federal status under the 1983 Grand Ronde Restoration Act. Historical studies celebrate the hard-won reversals of termination policy by tribal activists with titles such as Standing Tall and The People Are Dancing Again. Today, the nearly 11,000-acre reservation boasts a health clinic, a government complex, elder housing, a language immersion program for its youngest members, and a museum with a state-of-the-art and culturally sensitive collections management program. Spirit Mountain Casino (est. 1995)
In 2018, the Oregon Historical Society hosted “Racing to Change, Oregon’s Civil Rights Years,” an exhibit curated by Oregon Black Pioneers (OBP). The exhibit examined the repression and violence African Americans experienced that led to the Civil Rights Movement. A view of the exhibit is shown here.

and the Spirit Mountain Lodge (est. 1998) are the largest employers in Polk County. Through strategies such as Indigenous place-names, tribal nations can signal what Barnd calls “Indigenous continuations.” Historian Susan Wade calls this kind of work “unmapping American Empire.”

The framework of settler colonialism illuminates the connections between the resettlement of what is now the state of Oregon and the practices of exclusion and displacement that are predicated on White supremacy. It allows us to see the relational structures of racial differences between, among, and across groups, and how they shift over time. It also highlights the difference between civil rights — inclusion into a citizenry with all the rights and responsibilities that that entails — and decolonization, which rests on no less than the full restoration of lands to Indigenous people. To grapple with the foundations, legacies, and persistent characteristics of settler colonialism and its twin — White supremacy — is to grapple with the inequities that shape Oregon’s history, present, and future in ways both symbolic and material.
## Settler Colonialism in Oregon History and Resistance to It

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Settler Colonialism</th>
<th>Examples in Oregon</th>
<th>Oregon Resistance to Settler Colonialism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land-hungry settlers came to stay permanently.</td>
<td>Oregon Donation Land Claim Act established a system of racialized exclusion.</td>
<td>Plateau Indian War, Modoc War, and other battles of resistance waged to maintain Indigenous land holdings. Other strategies of confrontation, accommodation, and evasion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement required the “elimination” or erasure of Indigenous people through displacement, genocide and disease, and assimilation.</td>
<td>Removals of Indians in the nineteenth century and the implementation of termination policy in the twentieth century.</td>
<td>Persistence of Indigenous nationhood among federally recognized and non-recognized tribes alike.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporation into a centralized government that tracks property and people.</td>
<td>The development of birth and death certificates, replacing Indigenous naming practices.</td>
<td>Reinscribing Indigenous place names, marrying and divorcing without state sanction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement required the “elimination” or erasure of Indigenous people through displacement, genocide and disease, and assimilation.</td>
<td>Depression-era murals at the capitol building, stereotypes of Chinese workers and Native people in Pendleton Round-Up's Happy Canyon Indian Pageant and Wild West Show, uncritical celebrations of pioneer history.</td>
<td>Rapper Amine's “There Are Black People in Portland” billboards, Walidah Imarisha's “Why Aren't There More Black People in Oregon” lecture series, a special issue of the OHQ on White supremacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlers and their children obscured/erased the violent history of settlement.</td>
<td>Non-Native business that use Indigenous words or place names without permission, use of Native tribal names for street signs in places where Indigenous people are absent.</td>
<td>Indigenously produced place-name atlases.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indigenous resistance to “elimination” in all its forms is an essential part of settler colonization. Resistance includes salmon and lamprey eel harvests, the persistence of ceremonial practices, and the tribal museums that tells the histories of the tribes and bands as indelibly Oregon history.
SETTLER COLONIAL STATES around the world share characteristics, which are listed in the table to the left, along with specific examples of such characteristics from what is now the state of Oregon. One common characteristic is ongoing resistance to settler colonialism by Indigenous people, non-White groups, and settler descendants through a variety of measures as indicated in the third column. Characteristics of settler colonialism are summarized from Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s “Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Construction,” Sociology of Race and Ethnicity (2015).

NOTES


5. Laurie Arnold, personal communication with the author, April 28, 2018.


13. Belich, Replenishing the Earth, 82–84.

14. Chinese and Indian migration numbers are for the years between 1846 and 1940.


26. Ibid.


31. Ibid.


34. Although it has precedents in the 1920s and 30s, Lorenzo Veracini traces the develop-

35. See also, in this issue, Kenneth Coleman, “‘We’ll All Start Even’: White Egalitarianism and The Oregon Donation Land Claim,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120:4 (Winter 2019): 414–437.


40. Wilm, *Settlers as Conquerors*, 218.

41. Coulthard, “Place Against Empire,” 79, 82.


44. Hard to figure out the citation. Perhaps an article by Hanna published September 18, 1851, quoted in Hanna Journal, p. 3.

45. Ibid., 32.


50. Jetté, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races*, 196, 211; Coleman, *Dangerous Subjects*, 143. In recognition of the mixed families of the fur trade, the provisional government made allowances to vote, serve in office, and make land claims for men whose fathers were White. Those allowances lasted for just a few years. Under Oregon Territorial law, mixed race men lost voting rights and could not become citizens.

51. Darrell Millner makes this point in “Blacks in Oregon,” *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/blacks_in_oregon/#XFQmUIhKgUJ (accessed June 1, 2019).

52. Ibid.

53. The U.S. Senate ratified the Umatilla Treaty on March 8, 1859. Cliff Trafzer, “Native


62. Asian immigrants took advantage of loopholes in the law by putting property in the names of their American-born children or collaborating with Whites who would hold title for them.

63. For a discussion of efforts in Oregon and California to modify the 14th amendment as a way to deny the children of Asian immigrants citizenship, see Cherstin M. Lyon, *Prisons and Patriots: Japanese American Wartime Citizenship, Civil Disobedience, and Historical Memory* (Temple University Press, 2011).

64. Richard Rothstein estimates that nationally African American families hold less than 10 percent of household wealth (defined as “assets minus liabilities”) as their White counterparts. He writes, “not all of this enormous difference is attributable to the government’s racial housing policy, but a good portion of it certainly is.” Rothstein, *The Color Of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 184–85.

65. Patricia Limerick addresses what she sees as the challenges of “settler colonialism” as a historical framework in “Comments on Settler Colonialism and the American West,” *Journal of the West* 56:4 (Fall 2017): 90–96.


67. Ibid, 387.


Barber, “We were at our journey’s end.”

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74. Cornelius Swart titled his 2017 documentary film that traces the effects of gentrification on Portland’s African American community in North and Northeast Portland “Priced Out.”


78. Ibid.


81. Ibid, 38–9.


83. Ibid, 120.

84. Ibid, 125.

85. Natchee Blu Barnd, Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2017), 24. Barnd also examines the use of Indigenous names on street signs as a way to create “white space” and notes that the practice gained popularity after WWII in communities that tend to be suburban and overwhelmingly White.


1902–1914

TWO NEWSPAPER CLIPS from the early twentieth century demonstrate how White supremacy — the belief in a superior, White race — was perpetuated through forced assimilation of Indigenous communities. The 1902 editorial below describes Native people as “peculiar, distinct, separate semi-barbarous people” who could only be saved by being “absorbed [sic] by the nation.” The 1914 image and rhyme on the right reinforce those beliefs, describing how “Little Red,” only became American when he was forced to give up his “Injun” name.

By the turn of the twentieth century, White people firmly controlled social, political, economic, educational, and cultural levers of Oregon life. Native populations had been removed to reservations, yet their culture survived. Many “progressive” Whites set out to do with education what had not been done with guns and plows — to transform and absorb Indigenous people, whether they wanted to or not, into the “superior” White culture and erase their “inferior” languages, practices, and traditions.

While practitioners of White supremacy believed it possible to make an Indian into an American, but as the editorial describes, they still did not believe such a transformation was possible for Blacks.

By General T. J. Morgan.

Will education save the remnant of American Indians? Yes, as men and women; not as tribes. The Indians as a peculiar, distinct, separate semi-barbarous people are doomed to disappear. Indianism is an anachronism and must pass away.

Education is the only hope of the red men and women; it offers them salvation. Those who accept it will be saved as American citizens. Those who refuse it will perish.

What I mean by this is that it is inevitable that the Indians, like all other elements in our national life, must become absorbed by the nation and lose their distinctive racial peculiarities, the one exception to this probably being the negro.

It is impossible that the Indians should maintain their tribal organizations with separate governments, being a sort of nation within a nation, and have their own peculiar civilization; it is both undesirable and impossible.

Education is the means of bringing the individual Indians into such relationship with our national life that they will desire the same things which the white people desire. They will adopt our ideals or individual hope, cease to think and feel like Indians and feel and think only as American citizens.
A REAL JULY 4
AMERICAN

Little Red, the Indian boy,
Went to town one day.
All the folks were celebrating
July Fourth—hurray!

Little Red picked up Old Glory;
Held it straight and true.
They took his Injun name away.
Now he's Little Red, White,
Blue!
“We’ll All Start Even”

White Egalitarianism and the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act

KENNETH R. COLEMAN

In Oregon, as in other parts of the world, theories of White superiority did not guarantee that Whites would reign at the top of a racially satisfied world order. That objective could only be achieved when those theories were married to a machinery of implementation. In America during the nineteenth century, the key to that eventuality was a social-political system that tied economic and political power to land ownership. Both the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 and the 1857 Oregon Constitution provision barring Blacks from owning real estate guaranteed that Whites would enjoy a government-granted advantage over non-Whites in the pursuit of wealth, power, and privilege in the pioneer generation and each generation that followed.

In 1843, many of the Anglo-American farm families who immigrated to the Oregon Country were animated by hopes of generous federal land grants. During the 1830s, federal legislators had begun proposing bills that donated homesteads to (presumably armed) settlers as an inducement to transform and protect the western frontier for the United States. In Oregon, which was not a part of the United States at the time, colonists claimed large tracts of land without official surveys and relied on a newly created provisional government to legitimize those claims. When Oregon became an organized U.S. territory in 1848, Oregon politicians successfully lobbied the federal government to pass the 1850 Donation Land Claim Act (DLCA), the most generous land distribution bill in U.S. history, legally confirming the settlers’ original claims and granting future settlers an unprecedented 320 acres for White males or “half-breed” Indian males and 640 acres for married couples. Such local and national legislation would have a major impact on economic development in Oregon and influence future national land-distribution legislation.
Racist structures became ingrained in the resettlement of Oregon, culminating in the U.S. Congress’s passing of the DCLA. Oregon’s settler colonists repeatedly invoked a Jacksonian vision of egalitarianism rooted in White supremacy to justify their actions, including entering a region where Euro-Americans were the minority and — without U.S. sanction — creating a government that reserved citizenship for White males. They used that government not only to validate and protect their own land claims, but also to ban the immigration of anyone of African ancestry. The DLCA was the only federal land-distribution act in U.S. history that specifically limited land grants by race, essentially creating an affirmative action program for White people. Perhaps most decisively, the issuance of free land resulted in a massive economic head start for White cultivators and initiated a long-standing pattern in which access to real estate became an instrument of White supremacy and social control. This result would have immeasurable consequences for social inequality in Oregon, as emerging markets in privatized land were major engines of economic prosperity in the nineteenth-century United States and beyond.

The lobbying efforts of Oregon’s early political leaders were so successful that Congress allowed the region’s Anglo-American settlers to seize Indigenous homelands without Tribes’ having ceded their lands through treaties with the federal government — a violation of U.S. law. The 1787 Northwest Ordinance was an expansionist document that provided a plan for incorporating the Old Northwest into the United States, but it stipulated that
the “utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians. Their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent.”

The U.S Constitution recognized Indian tribes as the legal equivalent of sovereign nations with whom negotiations could occur only on a federal level, a concept affirmed in the 1848 Act to Establish the Territorial Government of Oregon. By the early 1840s, the federal government had established a three-step process to extinguish “Indian title.” The U.S. Senate would first appoint a treaty commission to negotiate with individual tribes. Once Congress had ratified those negotiated treaties, a formal survey would measure and transform land into delineated boxes on a map. Those boxes would form a public domain that the federal government could sell or donate.

Oregon’s early Anglo-American settlers and their political representatives, however, successfully pressured Congress to flip this formula on its head, disregarding tribal rights to lands now occupied by squatters. Moreover, the DCLA, an exclusionary document steeped in White supremacy, treated Oregon’s Indigenous inhabitants as an undifferentiated race or ethnic group rather than as members of distinct, sovereign communities.

White supremacy is the racist notion that people of European ancestry are biologically superior to people of non-European ancestry and therefore are entitled to rule over those non-Europeans. It is based on the concept of race, which holds that nature separated human beings into supposedly legible groupings. Race is an ideology, which Barbara J. Fields defines as “the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day.”

Race has no basis in biology. It is a social formation that arose from specific historical circumstances. In the American colonies, White supremacy served to legitimate the existence of an economic system — chattel slavery — that contradicted the emerging enlightenment ideologies of natural rights and liberty, including the insistence that all men were created equal. In 1894, historian Lyon Gardiner Tyler attributed colonial America’s “democratic spirit” to the fact that “negro slavery made race, and not class, the distinction in social life.”

Racism also justified the removal of Indigenous communities and the seizure of their land. Race, like any ideology, requires reinforcement and reproduction through daily rituals. By the Age of Jackson, the repetition of rituals of dominance and submission associated with slavery and Indian removal made the connection between skin color and caste assume the appearance of objective truth for many Americans, resulting in Whites’ commonplace perceptions that those of African ancestry were servile by nature and that Indigenous communities were unworthy to occupy their own lands.

Racism was a major factor in how the Oregon Country initially came to be considered part of the United States. Prior to the Oregon Treaty of 1846, in
which Great Britain ceded claim to its Pacific Northwest possessions below the forty-ninth parallel, the United States and Great Britain coexisted in an awkward state of joint occupation. In 1792, both nations claimed sovereignty over Oregon according to the Doctrine of Discovery, a legal formation in which European nations — and later the United States — claimed possession of Indigenous land based on the dubious notion of “discovery.” American Robert Gray and British George Vancouver had each claimed discovery of the Columbia River region in 1792, when they arrived at the mouth of the river on separate sailing expeditions. The absurdity of both claims is illustrated by the fact that the lower Columbia region was one of the most densely populated places in North America at the time. Colonizers often made a distinction, however, between occupied Indian land (such as village sites) and unoccupied land. Such “unoccupied” land often included essential horticultural, hunting, and gathering grounds. This erasure enabled squatters — settlers occupying lands without legal title — to envision themselves as the rightful owners of land already held and used in common, privatizing that land before it was officially part of the U.S. public domain.

For the participants of the first major Oregon Trail migration of 1843, no proposed legislation was more influential than the series of bills that Missouri Democratic Senator Lewis F. Linn promoted from 1837 until his death in 1843. Linn, along with fellow Missouri Democratic Senator Thomas Hart Benton, was the most prominent Oregon booster in Congress. By 1839, Linn called for granting an unprecedented 640 acres of free land to each White male over the age of eighteen who made the arduous overland trek to Oregon. When members of Congress balked at the mammoth size of the grants, Linn justified them as rewards for those emigrants willing to risk the costly trip to Oregon. After years of congressional indifference to Linn’s bills, his final

MISSOURI SENATOR Lewis F. Linn championed a series of bills in Congress that offered free Oregon land to lure potential settlers. Linn’s 1843 bill provided inspiration for the first major wagon train migration of that same year.
iteration narrowly passed the Senate in February 1843, only to be defeated in the House. Several lawmakers cited fears that the bill would jeopardize relations with Great Britain by violating the joint occupation agreement in the Anglo-American Convention of 1818.18

Linn’s failed bills had specific White supremacist implications, most of which were later reproduced in the DLCA. First, Linn limited claimants to White males. He argued for those proposed claimants in an 1843 speech, in which he cited the common nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific notion that
descendants of the Anglo-Saxon tribes of Europe were racially predisposed
to spread democracy and freedom: “They but obeyed the instinct of our
peculiar race — that invincible longing for liberty and space which impels
those of Anglo-Saxon descent.”9 Like the DLCA, the earlier bills contained
no provisions for extinguishing Indian title to Oregon lands prior to Anglo-
American resettlement and included only the federal appointment of Indian
agents to “superintend the interests of the United States.” Linn’s bills also
called for military installations presumably to protect settlers from the region’s
independent Indigenous communities.20 Linn argued that Oregon’s Natives
acted in league with the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), the British joint-stock
company that had been a de facto governing body in the region since 1821.21
The 1839 version of the bill openly called for the raising of a settler infantry
“for the purpose of overawing and keeping in check various Indian tribes, or
any foreign forces, who may be in said Territory.”22

In the spring of 1843, as the House dithered on Linn’s bill, hundreds of
overland emigrants assembled in Independence, Missouri, to attempt the
two-thousand-mile journey to the Oregon Country. The wagon train comprised
predominately Anglo-Protestant farm families from the Old Northwest and
the Border States.23 Although word soon reached Independence that Linn’s
efforts had failed, most decided to risk the trip anyway. One such emigrant was
the initial leader of the 1843 wagon train, Missourian Peter H. Burnett. Burnett
believed the bill would ultimately pass and estimated that his extended fam-
ily would net 1,600 acres of free land.24 Another prominent emigrant, Jesse
Applegate, advised his brother to beat the rush: “If you are going to Orregon
[sic] by all means go this spring for if Linn’s Bill pass next year every man and
every man’s neighbors and friends will move in that direction.”25

In the spring of 1843, as the overlanders traveled west, a relatively small
group of male residents of Oregon — comprising mostly American colonists,
Methodist missionaries and laymen, and a handful of retired French-Canadian
fur industry workers — scrambled to create an American-style government
in anticipation of the population increase.26 On July 5, the provisional
government adopted its Organic Laws, based on laws of Iowa Territory, as
Linn recommended, and preserving most of the contours of Linn’s 1843 bill,
including 640-acre land grants to settlers. The centerpiece of the Organic
Laws was the land law, designed to create a system to record and protect
land claims without official surveys. Instead, claimants were merely asked
to “designate the extent of his claim by natural boundaries, or by marks at
the corners and upon the lines of said claim.”27 In 1845, the provisional gov-
ernment established a land office that had no capacity to formally survey
land.28 As John Suval has argued, the provisional government essentially
operated as a claim club, a private-order association of squatters estab-
lished as a means to seize land and then pressure the federal government to honor those claims. According to Ilia Murtazashvili, “claim clubs, rather than spontaneously arising norms or an all-powerful state, were the most important initial source of private property institutions as individuals fanned out across the nation’s vast lands during the nineteenth century.”

The framers of the provisional government and its later members drew strict racial boundaries to create and preserve a White, male social order. They limited suffrage to every free, male descendent of a White man. This feature granted citizenship to the sons of Euro-American fur industry workers who had married Indigenous women, but it also disenfranchised the majority of people residing in Oregon at the time. In 1844, the provisional government’s legislative committee passed a law declaring that “when any free negro or mulatto shall have come to Oregon, he or she . . . shall remove from and leave the country.” Those Black women or men who refused to leave within the allotted period would be subject to flogging. Burnett, who wrote the law, framed it as an act to prevent slavery. This was an obvious misnomer, however, because the provisional government had already banned slavery from Oregon in 1843.

There was nothing particularly unique about Oregon’s Black exclusion law. Similar laws restricting free Black people from residing in states, territories, or localities could be found in virtually every region of the United States, including most of the places from which many overlanders emigrated. Even the call for flogging, which some contemporary Oregon residents found distasteful, had historical precedent. At least one organizing company of the Oregon Trail migration banned Black and “Mulatto” emigrants from traveling with them. Oregon’s anti-Black law was unusual, however, considering that very few Black people lived in the region and there was little sign of imminent Black immigration. Burnett conflated race with class when he argued that banning Black immigration would preserve agrarian egalitarianism in Oregon: “The object is to keep clear of this most troublesome class of population. . . . we wish to avoid most of these great evils that have so much afflicted the United States and other countries.” Applegate offered a more succinct explanation for the law: “Many of those people hated slavery, but a much larger number of them hated free negroes worse even than slaves.”

During the mid-nineteenth century, Black exclusion and anti-slavery were often complementary. The redistribution of public land (almost always taken from sovereign Indian groups by the federal government) to cultivators had become one of the cornerstones of the anti-slavery, free labor ideology (the notion that the free labor of farmers, entrepreneurs, and artisans was economi-
Politically, the majority of Oregon settlers were anti-slavery supporters of the Democratic Party — they embraced White egalitarianism and were opposed to a hierarchical social order ruled by political, economic, or intellectual elites. They looked to Oregon as a place where cultivators could escape rising class distinctions. Thurston wrote of Oregon: “Aristocracy finds there a poor dwelling-place, and a republican equality is the presiding genius of the land.” They opposed the extension of slavery beyond the South on self-interested economic, rather than moral, grounds — settlers did not want to compete with landowners who utilized enslaved labor.

Robert Wilson Morrison, who arrived in Oregon with the 1844 migration, invoked the antislavery, free labor ideology when he declared, “I’m going to Oregon, where there’ll be no slaves, and we’ll all start even.”

Northern advocates of the “free labor” ideology were often White supremacists who believed the presence of any Black people — enslaved or free — would introduce a servile underclass, undercutting White laborers.

Oregon politicians knew the racially inscribed claim club they had created would fail if it did not enter into a formal relationship with the U.S. government. The first step occurred on June 15, 1846, when the United States signed the Oregon Treaty with Great Britain and took full possession of the region south of the forty-ninth parallel. Although the provisional government continued to operate, Oregon was now an unorganized territory with no legal protection of land claims. In the fall of 1847, provisional governor George Abernethy sent his government’s supreme judge, J. Quinn Thornton, to Washington, D.C., to urge Congress to recognize Oregon land titles as compensation for settlers’ sacrifice in claiming Oregon for the United States. Thornton’s petition failed to make an impression in the nation’s capital, where lawmakers were distracted by the Mexican-American War and by fierce debates over the
extension of slavery to the western territories. On August 14, 1848, Oregon finally became an organized U.S. territory, consisting of the future states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho as well the sections of Montana and Wyoming west of the Rocky Mountains. But to the chagrin of Oregon political leaders, Congress dissolved the provisional government without confirming the legality of settlers’ claims. The territorial act reproduced the provisional government’s limitation of citizenship to adult White males, but it also required the federal government to enter into treaties with local Tribes before settlers could claim any Indian land.\(^{42}\)

The territorial act also allowed Oregon voters to send one non-voting delegate to represent them in Congress. The man they chose, Democrat Samuel R. Thurston, did more than anyone to bend federal policy to favor Anglo-Americans at the expense of non-White residents — then or in the future.\(^{43}\) Oregon’s Anglo-American settlers, whom the territorial act now deemed squatters, had more ambitious plans for Thurston — they hoped he would secure legal backing for their land claims. Thurston’s project was informed by his own White supremacist views. Like most Oregonians, Thurston’s anti-slavery stance was consistent with anti-Black Jacksonian egalitarianism: “I am ashamed that there is one man in Oregon who would if he could curse Oregon by the introduction of a servile race whose presence would at once blast the very heart of our prosperity — free white labor.”\(^{44}\) Thurston fervently endorsed the 1849 Black exclusion law passed by Oregon’s territorial legislature, framing it as a “question of life and death to us in Oregon.”\(^{45}\) He also assured his constituents that he would convince Congress to extinguish Indian title to Oregon lands and entirely remove Indigenous communities from the region: “we shall get rid of
the Indians in the course of next summer . . . settlement will be thrown open to the immigrant, and thus the first and prerequisite step will have been taken preparatory to the final disposition of the soil.” In late 1849, Thurston made the long journey to Washington, D.C., to fulfill his promises.

Before he could secure settlers’ property rights, Thurston first needed to convince Congress to extinguish Indian title to all Oregon lands west of the Cascades and to remove any Indigenous communities residing therein. In 1849, the territorial legislature had sent a memorial to Congress pleading for Indian removal on both racial and humanitarian grounds: “The moral and civil interests of the white race, equally with the claims of humanity, require the removal of [Indians] to some place where . . . their condition may be improved.” Thurston’s main obstacle was the 1848 Act to Establish the Territorial Government of Oregon itself, which stated “that nothing in this act contained shall be construed to impair the rights of person or property now pertaining to the Indians in said Territory, so long as such rights shall remain unextinguished by treaty between the United States and such Indians.” In January 1850, Thurston convinced lawmakers to introduce his bill to extinguish Indian titles in Oregon and establish federal Indian agents and agencies. On June 5, 1850, President Zachary Taylor signed Thurston’s “Indian bill” into law, enabling the nomination of Oregon’s first superintendent of Indian Affairs, Anson Dart. Dart was charged with negotiating with Indigenous groups to void their claims to their lands.

Settlers now could lay claims without any Oregon Tribes actually having ceded their land through a negotiated settlement. This abandonment of federal policy would have dire consequences for the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. The value of tribal lands expropriated by settlers can never be adequately assessed. Both the U.S. Constitution and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 — on which both the 1843 Organic Laws and the 1848 Oregon territorial act were based — established tribal sovereignty as U.S. law. In practice, Thurston’s land bill turned that formation on its head. Settlers received massive grants of land held by legally recognized sovereign nations — a clear violation of federal law. Even if settlers had wanted to purchase land from local Indigenous individuals, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Johnson v. M’Intosh (1823), had banned such practices. Thurston’s land bill ignored legal precedent by completely dismissing any concept of tribal sovereignty. Its only mention of the word Indians is in reference to the legitimacy of “half-breed” Indians’ claiming land.

While promoting his Indian bill, Thurston put the finishing touches on his crowning achievement — the DLCA. Referred to the House’s Public Land committee on April 22, 1850, Thurston’s bill was familiar to anyone acquainted with the land law of Oregon’s provisional government. The bill called for a
320-acre land grant to each White male or “American half-breed” who had resided in the territory prior to December 1, 1850, and for an additional 320-acre grant to spouses. The inclusion of Indigenous men with White fathers likely reflects the political influence of Euro-American settlers — former fur traders and trappers — who had married Indigenous women in Oregon. Such men, many of whom had helped create the provisional government, did not want their heirs denied land claims.\(^54\) White males who arrived in the territory after 1850 but before December 1, 1853 (later extended by amendment to 1855), could claim 160 acres; if they had wives, they would receive an additional 160 acres. To discourage land speculators, the bill required claimants to cultivate the land for a minimum of four years before the land office would confirm their claims. The bill also required the appointment of a surveyor general and Oregon’s first official land survey.\(^55\)

Thurston’s wife Elizabeth later hailed the DLCA as an advance in gender relations: “This surely was a woman’s Rights Bill.”\(^56\) Her assessment was based on the grants to claimants’ wives, although individual or single women were exempt. An 1853 amendment to the law honored the claims of widows whose husbands had died during or after the arduous journey to Oregon.\(^57\) Richard H. Chused, a legal scholar, has argued that the DLCA, as federal legislation, is unusual in this regard; he contends this feature was due, in part, to “the perceived need to attract women to a distant territory.”\(^58\) Chused, however, failed to recognize the racial implications of this feature. There was no shortage of women in Oregon relative to anywhere else in the West — but there was a perceived shortage of White women. And because only women married to White men (or Native men with White fathers) could qualify, the DLCA would encourage the ethnic homogenization of the region and further marginalize non-White women. The increasing number of White women in Oregon also allowed promoters of racial exclusion to exploit fears that non-Whites in the region posed a sexual threat to the wives and daughters of Anglo-American settlers.\(^59\) Thurston’s bill did present a loophole in which non-White wives of White husbands could theoretically possess their own land in the event of their husband’s deaths, and in the 1854 case \textit{Vandolf v. Otis}, the territorial Supreme Court recognized an Indigenous woman’s property rights due to her marriage to a White man.\(^60\)

On May 28, 1850, members of Congress began debating the DLCA. Almost immediately, the topic of race arose. Thurston insisted that he inserted the exclusionary aspects of the bill to prevent HBC employees, whom he insisted were aligned with British interests, to claim land. Thurston claimed he would support giving land to any White foreign cultivator, “provided he likes our Government well enough to become a citizen.” But he objected to the racial implication of any amendment that would strip away racial and citizenship
requirements: “It would give land to every servant of the Hudson's Bay Company, including some hundreds of Canakers, or Sandwich Islanders, who are a race of men as black as your negroes of the South, and a race, too, that we do not desire to settle in Oregon.”\textsuperscript{65} Thurston was referring to the Pacific Islanders who had lived and worked around Fort Vancouver since the 1820s.\textsuperscript{62} By likening Pacific Islanders to Black people based on skin tone, Thurston revealed typical nineteenth-century racialism in which superficial phenotypic attributes were supposed to carry deep significance. Thurston claimed he did not necessarily have Black people in mind, because the territory had already banned Black immigration in 1849. He added, “I am obedient to the wish of my constituents, and hence am opposed to donations to negroes of any grade.”\textsuperscript{63}

Thurston, perhaps sensing that prejudice alone would not convince legislators to exclude non-White land claimants, raised the stakes by exploiting fears of race mixing. He insisted that “the Canakers and negroes, if allowed to come there, will commingle with our Indians, a mixed race will ensue, and the result will be wars and bloodshed in Oregon.”\textsuperscript{64} Thurston echoed the language of the 1849 territorial Black exclusion law: “Whereas situated as the people of Oregon are, in the midst of an Indian population, it would be highly dangerous to allow free negroes and mulattoes to reside in the Territory, or to intermix with the Indians, instilling into their minds feelings of hostility against the white race.”\textsuperscript{66} While local Natives did not need Black people to inform them that the growing presence of Anglo-American settlers was problematic, the recent Second Seminole War may have inspired such sentiments. That costly war, in which Seminole fighters joined forces with runaway slaves and their mixed-race descendants (sometimes known

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}
\caption{WILLIAM KAULEHELEHE, pictured with his wife Mary Kaai, was among the many Hawaiians employed by the HBC at Fort Vancouver. Kaulehelehe was recruited in 1845 to minister to Kanaka (Pacific Islander) laborers.}
\end{figure}
as Black Seminoles) to resist forced removal by the U.S. Army, lasted over six years.\textsuperscript{56} In 1849, Oregon residents were also still reeling from the 1847 Whitman Incident and ensuing Cayuse War, although neither involved Black people.\textsuperscript{67} The only recorded incident of Black-Native collaboration in Oregon involved James D. Saules, a Black mariner who allegedly incited a group of Clackamas men to assault a White settler.\textsuperscript{68}

Thurston failed to convince at least two Whig congressmen, New York’s William A. Sackett and Ohio’s Joshua R. Giddings. During House debates, Sackett decried any legislation that “discriminates in regard to color” and told Thurston that Oregon’s territorial statutes should have no bearing on a national land distribution bill.\textsuperscript{69} Sackett countered the prevailing notion that skin color equated with citizenship, strongly implying that he considered non-White Americans as “a portion of the citizens of this country.”\textsuperscript{70} Giddings had similar reservations over Thurston’s bill, arguing that the federal government owed Black Americans redress because it “brought them by violence and wrong from their native country.”\textsuperscript{71} He then castigated Thurston for crafting a bill that would grant free land to native-born White members of Tammany Hall–affiliated street gangs “while Frederick Douglas [sic], a man of high moral worth, of great intellectual power, of unrivalled eloquence . . . is to be excluded, rudely driven from that region.”\textsuperscript{72} Ohio Democrat David K. Carter rose to Thurston’s defense, theorizing that southern slave-owners would see Oregon as a safety valve to unload “their worthless, worn out, and decrepit slaves.”\textsuperscript{73} Carter then employed the familiar tactic of connecting democracy with Anglo-Saxon heritage: “If this continent is destined to be the home of free democracy and the legitimate inheritance of the Anglo-Saxon blood — the only relief is obtained, by a total separation of domicile between the two races.”\textsuperscript{74}

Thurston ultimately carried the day. The House held two separate votes regarding the question of who would qualify for land grants, voting 69 to 51 to insert the word “white” into the bill and 77 to 38 to insert the words “American half-breeds included.”\textsuperscript{75} The DLCA eventually passed both the House and Senate with minor adjustments, and President Millard Fillmore signed the bill on September 27, 1850. Despite the reluctance of some southern lawmakers to encourage the growth of a free territory and other lawmakers’ questions about why Congress should single out Oregon for special treatment, Thurston and the Oregon political interests he represented ultimately received everything they wanted. Congress confirmed their generous claims without a formal survey and established racial exclusion in Oregon as federal law.\textsuperscript{76} The bill’s success was probably due to the fact that Whigs and Democrats had accepted that granting public lands to settlers was a popular issue with voters of both parties.\textsuperscript{77} This notion, however, grew much more controversial with the
introduction of the Compromise of 1850 and with the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, the latter of which ignited a sectional controversy over the extension of slavery to the West and put a temporary pause on Manifest Destiny.

The DLCA influenced later land-distribution legislation, most notably the 1862 Homestead Act. Like the Homestead Act, the DLCA stipulated that the federal government would make land grants directly to settlers, rather than through the territorial government. To prevent speculation, the Homestead Act, like the DLCA, required that settlers take an oath to live on and cultivate the land and, then, prove to two witnesses that they had met requirements for residency and cultivation.78 Notably, however, the Homestead Act promised settlers only 160 acres (320 for married couples) and dispensed with any racial requirements, although some lawmakers had tried to add racial exclusion to earlier iterations of the bill.79 Unlike the DCLA, the act also enabled single or widowed women to apply for homesteads. The Homestead Act excluded non-citizens, which included non-White immigrants and most Indigenous peoples.80 This stipulation would have also prevented Black Americans from claiming land, as the 1857 Dred Scott decision declared them non-citizens. In 1862, however, Attorney General Edward Bates partially overturned the Dred Scott decision by declaring free Blacks as citizens. At the end of the Civil War, the vast majority of Black Americans lived in the South, and few had the means or inclination to claim western homesteads.81 Instead, freed people in the South pushed for the redistribution of land confiscated from slaveholders to formerly enslaved people. Despite some
early successes, southern planters retained enough influence in the federal government to crush that land-reform movement.  

The DLCA had a profound impact on Oregon demographics and economic development. Anglo-American settlers and a handful of Natives with White fathers received 7,317 land certificates, privatizing over 2.5 million acres of Oregon land. An 1854 amendment extended the act to the newly created Washington Territory, where settlers claimed an additional 300,000 acres. When the bill expired in 1855, Oregon's total recorded population had mushroomed from 13,000 to 52,000. Yet, the bill stunted economic growth in Oregon, as the issuance of enormous land grants led to a diffused and isolated agrarian population with little access to larger markets. The act also discouraged urban migrants from relocating to Oregon, since the DLCA excluded towns and cities from its coverage. In an autobiographical novel, Abigail Scott Duniway — whose family immigrated to Oregon in 1852 — had a character lament this effect: “If Uncle Sam had given us no more than [160 acres], we would all be better off in five years in the way of schools, society, and improvement.” In addition, historians Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats argue that the DLCA exacerbated economic inequality in Oregon, since earlier settlers could not only claim the most productive farm land, but they were also entitled to grants twice the size of later claimants.

Thurston’s proposed policy to remove the Indigenous tribes of western Oregon to the area east of the Cascades mountain range — an obvious example of ethnic cleansing — was not initiated until 1851, when the Willamette Valley Treaty Commissioners drafted a total of six treaties with bands of the Molala and Kalapuya. To the consternation of Congress, the negotiators failed to convince any Tribes to leave their homelands. Later that same year, Anson Dart, the newly appointed Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs, negotiated thirteen additional treaties with western Oregon Tribes, who agreed to cede over six million acres but again resisted removal to eastern Oregon. The Senate refused to ratify any of the nineteen treaties, most likely because the Tribes would remain in western Oregon on reservations that sometimes overlapped with preexisting donation land claims. By the time news reached Oregon that the Senate had failed to ratify the treaties, many tribal members were already in the process of being forced off their lands by ongoing settler encroachment on village locations, hunting and gathering grounds, horticultural sites, and fisheries.

In 1853, Congress authorized the creation of Washington Territory from northern Oregon (including modern-day Idaho and parts of western Montana) and, amid increasing violence as settlers and miners trespassed on tribal lands, appointed Washington Governor Isaac Stevens and Joel Palmer, Dart’s successor as Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs, to negotiate treaties.
with the Indigenous communities living within Washington and Oregon. By 1859, the Senate had ratified most of the treaties Stevens and Palmer had drafted (both combined and individually) with Tribes in Washington and southern, western, and eastern Oregon. Historian Francis Paul Prucha has described much of this process as more imposition than negotiation, noting “there was little indication [in the treaties] that two sovereign equals were negotiating.” In exchange for ceding the vast majority of their ancestral lands to the federal government acting as proxy for White settlers, Pacific Northwest Tribes were promised military protection, hunting and fishing rights, annuity payments, and agricultural and industrial education.

There is evidence that the effects of the DLCA may have rendered racial exclusion laws superfluous in the minds of many Oregon politicians. In 1854, a clerical error resulted in the accidental repeal of the 1849 Black exclusion law. The legislature rushed to pass a replacement, with one house member invoking a Jacksonian interpretation of the Declaration of Independence as “a declaration of the equality of free citizenship for white men.” Yet, surprisingly, the legislature resoundingly voted down replacement bills in 1855 and 1856. One reason lawmakers cited was that Black exclusion was unnecessary because most Black migrants, without the lure of free land, would prefer the urban attractions of bustling California over agrarian, isolated Oregon. Oregon Democratic politician Delazon Smith, himself an outspoken racist, voted against the 1855 Black exclusion bill on these grounds. Other lawmakers argued that the Black exclusion bill would discourage commercial opportunities in an overwhelmingly agrarian territory, because it required captains of ships entering Oregon to post $500 bonds for each Black mariner on board.

Despite their efforts and flowery rhetoric, Oregon politicians and lawmakers did not create an agricultural paradise devoid of class distinctions. This project, if ever seriously considered, was probably dead on arrival when early settlers claimed the most marketable land in the region. The land grants they secured from the federal government, furthermore, were easily privatized, commodified, or stripped of marketable resources and abandoned. By 1900, most claims had been sold or mortgaged rather than bequeathed to descendants. With the forced removal of Indigenous communities in western and southern Oregon, the federal government made additional land available to settlers. Like elsewhere in the United States, however, many would-be yeomen instead became tenants or wage laborers on commercial farms.

By using real estate as a tool of racial exclusion, Oregon’s early political leaders initiated a pattern that continued well into the twentieth century. The 1859 Oregon State Constitution, in addition to confirming White male suffrage and reintroducing Black exclusion, banned Black and Chinese people from owning real estate. In 1868, Oregon’s state legislature rescinded its initial
THIS MAP, published in the second volume of the Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1896–1897, documents Native land within present-day Oregon boundaries that was ceded to the U.S. government between 1853 and 1865. The numbered areas on the map correspond to a “Schedule of Indian Land Cessations” with information on the land location, treaties, and statutes associated with the land taking, and information on the Tribes who occupied the land.
NATIVE LAND CEDED, YEAR

312: Rogue River Indians (extends into California), 1853
313: Umpqua (Cow Creek Band), 1853
344: Umpqua and Calapooia, 1854
343: Chasta, Sco-ton, Grave Creek, 1854
352: Calapooia and Confederated Bands of Willamette Valley, 1855
366 & 441: Nez Perce, 1855, 1863 (reservation 442 in Idaho)
362: Walla-walla, Cayuse, and Umatilla, 1855
369: Confederated Tribes of Middle Oregon, 1855
397: Coast Tribes of Oregon, 1855 (treaties never ratified but land ceded)
401: Molalla, 1855
444: Shoshoni (Western bands), 1863
462: Klamath and Modok, Yahooskin band of Snake Indians, 1864
474: Snake (Woll-pah-pe), 1865
479: Coast Tribes of Oregon, 1865 (originally set aside as reservation)

RESERVATION LAND, YEAR

363: Walla-walla, Cayuse, Umatilla, 1855
370: Confederated Tribes of Middle Oregon, 1855
407: Confederated Bands of Willamette Valley
463: Klamath and Modok, Yahooskin band of Snake Indians, 1864
578, 579, 479: Coast Tribes of Oregon, 1855
ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which established birthright citizenship and equal protection under the law regardless of race, and refused to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, which established universal male suffrage. Even as the successful passage of these amendments superseded the most blatantly exclusionary legislation, banks and real estate companies later engaged in redlining, creating real estate covenants that segregated non-White homebuyers and renters to the least desirable neighborhoods. Such tactics have widened the racial wealth gap in Oregon, as segregation has meant disinvestment, ill-funded schools, and a lack of remunerative employment. Victims of such policies include Oregon’s Indigenous population, who were increasingly urbanized as a result of the 1954 Western Oregon Termination Act and the Indian Relocation Act of 1956. Recent efforts to invest in historically neglected Portland neighborhoods have favored profit-minded private interests over the communities themselves, resulting in gentrification while doing little to combat segregation. Any serious attempt to challenge White supremacy in Oregon must engage with the economic legacy of institutionalized racism limiting access to real estate and, as such, wealth and social power.

NOTES


4. I borrowed this idea from Ira Katznelson, although he used it to discuss the uneven distribution of benefits during the New Deal and post–World War II period. Ira Katznelson, When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America (W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), x–xx.

5. Oregon Territory Commissioner to Collect the Laws and Archives of Oregon and La


12. Prior to the Oregon Treaty of 1846, the Oregon Country, or what the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) referred to as the Columbia District, comprised part of the future Canadian province of British Columbia, the entire states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, and parts of Montana and Wyoming.


20. Linn, Speech of Mr. Linn, of Missouri, in Reply to Mr. McDuffie, on the Oregon Bill, 15.

21. In [the] Senate of the United States, June 6, 1838. Submitted and Ordered to Be Printed; Mr. Linn Submitted the Following Report: (To Accompany Senate Bill No. 206); the Select Committee, to Which Was Referred a Bill to Authorize the President of the United States to Occupy the Oregon Territory, Submit to the Consideration of the Senate the Following Report (Washington, D.C.: Blair & Rives, 1838), 10.


27. William Henry Gray, A History of Oregon, 1792–1849: Drawn from Personal Ob-

servation and Authentic Information (Portland: Harris & Holman, 1870), 357, 359.


33. As part of an 1788 law, Massachusetts forbade any “African or Negroe [sic], other than a subject of the Emperor of Morocco, or a citizen of some one of the United States” from remaining in the commonwealth for more than two months. If the accused refused to leave the commonwealth, “he or she shall be whipped not exceeding ten stripes, and ordered to depart out of this Commonwealth within ten days.” Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Massachusetts: Wright & Potter Printing Company, 1893), 626.


35. Elizabeth McLagan and Oregon Black History Project, A Peculiar Paradise: A History of Blacks in Oregon, 1778–1940 (Portland: The Geogrian Press Company, 1980), 29. John Minto, who traveled with Burnett to Oregon, later insisted that Burnett’s law was to prevent fugitive slaves from seeking refuge in a free territory. Minto invoked racial stereotypes about the sexual rapaciousness of enslaved Black
men to explain this position: “Burnett in his law...represented the just fears of girhood and womanhood of slaves fleeing for life and liberty.” John Minto, “Antecedents of the Oregon Pioneers and the Light These Throw on Their Motives,” Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society 5:1 (March 1904): 45.


42. “Statutes at Large, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Chapter 177,” August 14, 1848, 323.

43. Provisional Governor Abernethy, who had feuded with former HBC Chief Factor John McLoughlin over competing claims to an island near Oregon City, handpicked the young lawyer as a candidate to represent American property interests. In exchange for his endorsement, Abernethy hoped Thurston would convince Congress to void McLoughlin’s claim. Dorothy Nafus Morrison, Outpost: John McLoughlin & the Far Northwest (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1999), 455–58.


48. As a territorial delegate, Samuel R. Thurston was forbidden from presenting bills directly to Congress himself. Samuel R. Thurston and George H. Himes, Diary of Samuel Royal Thurston, Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society 15:3 (September 1914): 172, 175.


50. For a discussion of the impact of the DCLA on treaty negotiations, see Van Laere, Fine Words & Promises, 27–35. See also Whaley, Oregon and the Collapse of Ilahee, 182–84.

51. Miller, Native America, 51–53.


54. In his biography of Peter H. Burnett, a member of the provisional government’s legislative committee, R. Gregory Nokes suggests that Burnett may have had some influence on granting land to men with White fathers and

Coleman, “We’ll All Start at Even” 435
indigenous mothers. R. Gregory Nokes, The Troubled Life of Peter Burnett: Oregon Pioneer and First Governor of California (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2018), 64.


59. Historian Margaret D. Jacobs has written about the crucial role of White women in settler colonial projects: “Further, through their bodies White women would literally reproduce the settler population necessary to establishing dominance over the invaded territory.” In her work on the settler colonization of British Columbia, historian Adele Perry described a settler colony as “a reproductive regime dependent on the presence of settler women who literally reproduce the colony. Immigration must therefore provide more than non-Aboriginal bodies. Ideally, it must provide the right kind of bodies, those suited to building a white settler colony.” Margaret D. Jacobs, White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 129; Adele Perry, “Hardy Backwoodsmen, Wholesome Women, and Steady Families: Immigration and the Construction of a White Society in Colonial British Columbia, 1849–1871,” Histoire Sociale/Social History, 33:66 (November 2000): 345.


64. Ibid.

65. Statutes of a General Nature Passed by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Oregon: At the Second Session, Begun and Held at Oregon City, December 2, 1850, 181.


70. Ibid., for quote. William Sackett also seemed to counter the established U.S. Naturalization Law of 1802, which restricted citizenship to “free white” males.

71. Ibid, 1090.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid, 1092.

74. Ibid, 1092–93.
75. The term “American half breed” was understood to refer to men with White fathers and Indigenous mothers. Ibid., 1093.

76. The final version of the act limited homesteads to those who arrived by 1853 rather than 1855, but this alteration had little impact on pre-1850 Oregon settlers. This was later extended to 1855 in an amendment.

77. See the work of John Suval for a discussion of how Whig opinion evolved on the subject of free lands to cultivators. Suval, “The Nomadic Race to Which I Belong,” 310–11.


80. The United States did not grant citizenship to indigenous people until the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act. The 1790 Naturalization Act restricted citizenship to “any alien, being a free white person” who had lived in the United States for over two years.


85. Ibid., 78, 89.


89. Van Laere, *Fine Words & Promises, 32.*


91. These included treaties with the Rogue River Indians, the Cow Creek band of Umpquas, the Molola, and various Kalapuyan bands. Van Laere, *Fine Words & Promises, 166–67.*

92. See the work of M. Susan Van Laere for a discussion of the disastrous impact of unratified treaties on the tribes of the southern and coastal Oregon. Van Laere, *Fine Words & Promises.*


94. Ibid.


96. Ibid., 84–85.

97. According to T.W. Davenport, who investigated the fate of Marion County DLCA claims in 1903, 66 percent of claims had fallen out of possession, while another 15 percent were mortgaged. T.W. Davenport, “An Object Lesson in Paternalism,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 41 (March 1903): 50–51.


1949

**THIS MARKETING LETTER** from the Lake Oswego Development Company invites a potential buyer to view a tract of land in Lake Oswego, a suburb of Portland, Oregon. Advertising the district as “The Way to Live,” the company also assures that “the property is definitely restricted to the white race,” requiring an in-person meeting to accept the offer — presumably to ensure only Whites purchased property.

As demonstrated in this letter, suburban development following World War II was part of a trend to keep races separated and to reinforce a White-controlled racial hierarchy born out of Jim Crow laws of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That separation has been a key to the creation and continuation of White supremacy through land ownership.

In its ability to affect the destiny and daily lives of non-White targets, White supremacy can be seemingly invincible. But because it is founded on false, irrational, illogical, and unsupportable assumptions, it is also vulnerable, weak, and ultimately indefensible when exposed to the light of truth, rationality, and honest, close examination. The most effective antidote to ignorance and fear is cross-racial, personal, interactive knowledge of the unfamiliar.
Dear Mr. Langerman:

April 7, 1949

We are pleased to inform you that you have been selected to receive one of our advertising tracts situated in the Lake Oswego district, Portland's beautiful suburban residential area, for a total cost to you of only $65.00, payable $30.00 down and $10.00 per month.

The above charge for the tract covers the entire transaction including Title Insurance and Warranty Deed. You are not required to build, purchase additional property, nor pay any back taxes.

In order to receive this property, it will be necessary for both husband and wife (if married) to come to our office on or before seven days from the above date. At that time one of our representatives will show you the tract to which you are entitled.

It is understood that you are not in any way obligated to accept this offer unless you are thoroughly satisfied after inspecting it.

OUR OFFICE, LOCATED A FEW DOORS SOUTH OF THE THEATRE ON LAKE OSWEGO, WILL BE OPEN DAILY (EXCEPT FRIDAY) FROM 10:00 A.M. UNTIL 5:00 P.M. ON SUNDAYS, HOLIDAYS AND AFTER 5:00 P.M. PROPERTY WILL BE SHOWN BY APPOINTMENT ONLY. WE FEEL YOU WILL FIND IT WORTHWHILE TO INVESTIGATE THIS OFFER.

Very cordially yours,

THE LAKE OSWEGO DEVELOPMENT CO.

ADD: 10 Advertising Manager

P.S. Be sure and bring this letter with you for identification and come prepared to make the above cash payment, should you decide to accept the offer, as we cannot hold it open for you after inspection. Property definitely restricted to the white race.

Boating  Swimming  Fishing  Golf  Tennis  Gardens
The Colored Brother’s Few Defenders

Oregon Abolitionists and their Followers

JIM M. LABBE

The issue of slavery in the United States is more complicated than traditional narratives of the “good guys” who opposed slavery and “bad guys” who practiced it. Racial policies enacted during the mid-nineteenth century reveal that most Oregonians were both anti-slavery and anti-Black — most, but not all. In Oregon, a minority of Whites opposed slavery on moral, religious, and ethical grounds and fought for its abolition. Even within abolitionist groups, some still could find no room for notions of actual equality between the races, but some could. Some were also willing to make great personal sacrifices and face harsh reprisals for their beliefs. These stories must be also told before a true rendering of the slavery controversy in Oregon and the nation can be revealed.

ON THE MORNING of June 27, 1855, the first political anti-slavery gathering in the Oregon Territory, the Oregon Free Soil Convention, commenced in Albany with over forty men and an unknown number of women and children present. The convention’s resolutions, unanimously adopted, struck a distinctly moral tone, denouncing all Congressional legislation since the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act as “unjust and anti-republican, oppressive and cruel” and railing against “aggressions of the slave power” that “by some artful ruse” might precipitate slavery upon Oregon and “any territory on the Pacific coast.” In declaring that “the question of slavery . . . can never be compromised or settled but by the overthrow of an institution so utterly opposed to every principle of political as well as of all moral and religious right,” the Oregon Free Soil Convention went further than the national Free Soil Party, established in 1848, in its rejection of slavery. The delegates planned to enlist everyone with the moral courage to favor the anti-slavery cause, to meet again in October to craft a platform, and to share the convention proceedings with territorial newspapers. They concluded with one
final resolve: “That the ladies who have favored us with their presence, be requested to receive the thanks of this meeting for the manifestation they have thus made in favor of HUMAN LIBERTY.”

The emergence and growth of the American abolitionist movement between 1830 and the Civil War closely paralleled the overland migration to Oregon. Most historians of the antebellum period agree that after 1830, abolitionists demanded an immediate and complete end to slavery (“immediatism”), asserted opposition in moral terms, and believed that racial prejudice lay at the root of America’s social ills. Abolitionists consistently sought to advance African Americans’ “inalienable rights” as citizens of the United States as part of what historian Manisha Sinha describes as a broader “principled battle against racially restrictive notions of democracy.” The distinction between abolitionism and broader anti-slavery politics became muddled as more abolitionists entered politics and anti-slavery arguments emphasized the general threat of slavery to American freedom and the republic. But as Sinha notes, for abolitionists, the movement always remained firstly “the slave’s cause.” In Oregon, White supremacy dominated anti-slavery politics, with many opponents of slavery accepting or even advocating for its continuance or expan-
sion elsewhere, as long as Oregon was preserved for the White race.\textsuperscript{4} Other anti-slavery men in Oregon, like many Northerners, came to morally condemn slavery and support its nationwide demise but either could not fathom or remained ambivalent about the prospect of a multi-racial democracy in the United States.\textsuperscript{5} Still, others may have considered it a political liability to the anti-slavery cause. \textsuperscript{6} Abolitionists and their ideas about greater racial equality, however, were never entirely missing from anti-slavery politics, even in Oregon, whose historians have almost entirely overlooked them or only mentioned them in passing. Oregon’s Democratic politicians, however, put considerable effort into assailing the abolitionists in their midst during the 1850s.\textsuperscript{7}

Asahel Bush, editor of the \textit{Oregon Statesman} and leader of the powerful “Salem Clique” of prominent Democratic partisans, responded to the Free Soil Convention in his characteristic invective style. “A collection of old grannies held an abolition meeting in Albany,” he reported, declaring that these “nigger struck \textit{dames}” had the audacity to expect the \textit{Statesman} “to publish their stale fanaticism” and to ask “us to fill our columns with a batch of Fred Douglasisms, which the sensible men who do patronize and sustain the paper don’t wish to see.” He dismissed the participants’ naive moralism and added his frequent warning that “if anything could make the people of Oregon desire slavery, it would be the agitation of the subject by such fanatics as these.”\textsuperscript{8} A week later, in a column entitled “Abolitionism,” another powerful Democratic partisan and seasoned anti-abolitionist, Delazon Smith, piled on with similarly gendered and racist defamations and a dismissal of the convention participants.\textsuperscript{9} Although small in number, the Free Soil Convention attendees had clearly struck a nerve.

In the political debates leading up to statehood, Democratic partisans and editors across the territory branded their political opponents as “abolitionists” or “black republicans” for their alleged “nigger-worshipping” and support for “negro equality.” Democrats applied these labels indiscriminately both to discredit and divide their opponents and to avoid conflict over slavery within their own party. Consequently, few individuals they targeted fit the label of “abolitionist” as historians have come to understand it.\textsuperscript{10}

As the Civil War approached, most Oregon politicians came to deride real abolitionists as fanatics because it was politically expedient and because abolitionists advocated some degree of civil, political, or even social equality for African Americans — sentiments that directly challenged White supremacy.\textsuperscript{11} Slandering abolitionists and their support for greater racial equality became a popular tactic for uniting constituencies around the question of slavery. Bush, who quietly disfavored slavery in Oregon but rightly feared it would divide his party, labeled his opponents the “Negro equality movement,” leading most of them to disavow abolitionism and base their opposition to slavery on its sup-
posed degradation of White labor. Hence, in March 1857, editor W.L. Adams of the Oregon Argus newspaper denounced Democrats as “black democracy... founded on ‘niggerism’,” and declared that “the Republicans are in favor of preserving new Territories sacred to free labor, out of love for the teeming millions of poor white laborers.” The Republican Party was therefore “the only white man’s party there is.”12 George Williams’s notorious “Free State Letter” (published in full elsewhere in this issue) represents the culmination and distillation of “white man’s” anti-slavery in Oregon. Williams amplified anti-Black prejudice, dismissed abolitionists as fanatics, and fortified assumptions about the purity of the White race and its exclusive claims to the region. Such sentiments prevailed in 1857, when a large majority of White male voters adopted a state constitution that rejected slavery, excluded free Blacks, and denied suffrage and other civil rights to all but White males.13

But beyond the rhetoric of the most visible and powerful elites and the vast majority of White male voters who gave their consent can be found genuine abolitionists who resisted Oregon’s White supremacist founding. White and Black, male and female, the overlooked stories of Oregon abolitionists elucidate an important part of our past, revealing how White supremacy functions to suppress or marginalize dissent and the circumstances that foster resistance. They include the remarkable story of Black abolitionists Abner H. and Sydna E.R.D. Francis, who directly collaborated with prominent Eastern abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, opposed racist schemes to resettle free Blacks in Africa, and championed Black civil rights in New Jersey and New York — all before moving to Portland in 1851 and operating a successful businesses until the early 1860s. Their lives and activism — spanning the East and West coasts of the United States as well as Canada — have yet to receive a full historical account but highlight the uniquely repressive political...
environment in Oregon as well as a rare moment of interracial opposition to Black exclusion. In Oregon’s White abolitionists, the focus of this essay, we see a similar pattern of interracial experience and collaboration. They were individuals who had directly witnessed slavery or its effects and assisted in the struggle for Black freedom and equality before coming west. Even in far off Oregon, the abolitionist movement emerged from interracial experiences and relationships driven by the struggle of Black people.

Bush and Smith accurately branded some of the Free Soil Convention participants as abolitionists — moralistic advocates and agents of the immediate emancipation and racial equality. Among them were two young farmers, both recent arrivals from southeast Indiana and related by marriage: Henry Hamilton Hicklin and William Taylor Baxter.

**HENRY H. HICKLIN** was born in San Jacinto, Jennings County, Indiana, in 1825. He arrived in Oregon with his extended family in 1851, after his father John L. Hicklin and his uncle James Hicklin had made an 1849 reconnaissance trip. In most ways, the Hicklins typified the White, non-slaveholding farmers who settled Oregon in droves. They made the overland trip in a group of families, including the Baxters, Denneys, and Stotts, linked by marriage and from the same neighborhood of southeast Indiana. They all benefited from the 1850 Oregon Donation Land Claim Act, through which the federal government gifted White males (or sons of White males) and their spouses to up to 640 acres of Native peoples’ lands. They filed claims and signed the required affidavits to secure farms clustered along Fanno Creek and the Lower Tualatin River in Washington County.

This is the land of the Tualatin band of Kalapuya, who persisted despite encroaching settlers and devastating European diseases. The Tualatin Band of Kalapuya ceded their lands in the Tualatin Valley to the U.S. Government and agreed to their relocation to a reservation as part of the Willamette Valley Treaty, ratified by Congress in March 1855. Today, the Kalapuya people exercise their sovereign rights as members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. The Hicklins and their kinsmen, in settling on lands taken from Native people and denied to African Americans and other non-Whites, exercised the privilege of being White men within American settler-colonial society. Nevertheless, their religious background and life experiences led them to oppose key aspects of the prevailing White supremacy.

The Hicklin, Denney, Baxter, and Stott families were among the early Euro-American settlers of Jennings and Jefferson counties of southeast Indiana, located just north of the Ohio River and the border of the Upper South. This region became what historian Mark Furnish describes as an “anti-slavery environ, a place where antislavery sentiment and racial tolerance were significant enough that abolitionists Black and White had the
requisite social space to engage in activities that directly attacked slavery and racial discrimination.” Most of these families had forefathers who served in the American Revolutionary War and had migrated from the Upper South to escape slavery. Almost all anti-formalist evangelicals, Baptists or Methodists, they tended to believe, as Furnish notes, “that human actions not words, deeds not intentions, were the substance of both religion and life.”

The families became key leaders among the region’s White Christian abolitionists. As they would along Fanno Creek a generation later, the Hicklins and Stotts clustered their farms near the confluence of Big and Little Graham creeks, just east of San Jacinto and only sixteen miles north of the Kentucky border, at what became known as the “Hicklin Settlement.” It is difficult to know exactly when, but probably at least by the early 1840s, the Hicklins, Baxters, Stotts, Denneys, and other White Christian abolitionists began collaborating

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**DR. JOHN L. HICKLIN AND HIS SPOUSE, MARTHA THORN HICKLIN,** emigrated to Washington County, Oregon, from Jennings County, Indiana, between 1849 and 1851 with their two sons and five daughters. They were part of a larger group of interrelated families — all evangelical abolitionists — involved in a local abolitionist society and church whose members actively assisted fugitive slaves, resisted Indiana’s discriminatory Black laws, and participated in the abolitionist-led Liberty Party. In Oregon, John and his eldest son Henry H. Hicklin organized their family and neighbors in opposition to the Oregon State Constitution, slavery, and Black exclusion during the 1857 constitutional referendum.
directly with the free Black community in Madison, Indiana, just to the south to assist fugitive slaves escaping northward. The Hicklin Settlement became a “stop” on the so-called Underground Railroad (UGRR), the loose network of trusted relationships that assisted fugitives fleeing slavery. The Baxters operated another station to the southeast in Jefferson County, Indiana. The risks of such “practical abolitionism,” especially for Black people, meant that such interracial collaboration emerged only after repeated contact fostered trusted relationships and reputations.

The free Black communities in Jefferson County were likely instrumental in catalyzing and sustaining UGRR operations after their arrival in significant numbers after 1830. By 1845, the network was firmly established. The Hicklins, the Baxters, and their neighbors almost certainly collaborated with leading Black abolitionists and UGRR operators living in Madison, including William Anderson, Elijah Anderson, and George DeBaptiste. Relationships with such men probably helped Henry’s uncle, Rev. Thomas Hicklin, develop the reputation for thwarting slave hunters and securing safe passage of every fugitive slave in his quarter.

During their early years and young adulthood, Henry H. Hicklin, William T. Baxter, and their siblings would have had multiple opportunities to interact with Whites and Blacks actively assisting fugitive slaves’ flight to freedom.

Henry’s youngest uncle, Lewis Hicklin, was a Methodist circuit rider who traveled across Indiana, preaching abolitionism and organizing anti-slavery societies. Lewis attended the American Anti-Slavery Society annual conference in 1840. The Philanthropist, an Ohio abolitionist newspaper, reported John L. Lewis, and Thomas Hicklin’s participation in the organization of the Indiana State Anti-Slavery Society in 1838, which Thomas attended later that year. In 1839 Lewis and Thomas Hicklin helped found the Neil’s Creek WILLIAM TAYLOR BAXTER, pictured here in an undated photograph, and his brother-in-law, Henry H. Hicklin, were among the few known abolitionists who attended the Oregon Free Soil Convention in 1855, shortly after emigrating from Indiana. Baxter’s family was active in southeast Indiana’s interracial underground railroad in the 1840s. His father, James Baxter, was a co-founder of the biracial Eleutherian College in 1848.
Anti-Slavery Society (NCASS) in a schoolhouse just nine miles southwest of San Jacinto. The NCASS recorded its proceedings over seven years (1839–1845) in a minute book that documents the values and sensibility of White abolitionist communities in the region. It also recounts numerous occasions of the Hicklins’ chairing meetings, lecturing, leading prayers, or serving as appointed liaisons to other anti-slavery societies.

The NCASS constitution began by declaring that its purpose “shall be the entire abolition of Slavery in the United States.” While acknowledging the U.S. Constitution did not prohibit slavery, the society aimed “to convince all our fellow-citizens by arguments addressed to their understanding and consciences, that slave-holding is a heinous sin in the sight of God, and that the duty, safety and best interests of all concerned requires its immediate abandonment without expatriation.” This was immediate emancipation by means of moral suasion, which had emerged as the primary tactic of the second wave of abolitionism during the late 1820s. Prompted by a surge in slave revolts and the organization of more cohesive and outspoken communities of Northern free Blacks, immediatist abolitionism coalesced amidst the religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening. Christian abolitionists awoke to slavery as the nation’s mortal sin and racial prejudice its primary social ill. Moral suasion relied on preaching, petitions, mass mailings, or direct personal appeals to bring about slavery’s immediate end.

The NCASS minutes also include scattered mentions of anti-abolitionist mobs, censure of anti-slavery petitions or the abolitionist press, fugitive slave legislation, and Indiana’s Black laws restricting the freedom and education of African Americans. Such challenges and defeats eventually prompted the NCASS to become more active in politics, endeavoring “in a Constitutional way, to influence Congress to put end to the domestic slave trade, to abolish slavery in all those portions of our common country which come under its control,” and to work against slavery’s “entire subversion of all human rights” and for “the Declaration of Independence of our beloved country.” The NCASS’s minutes recorded their resolutions for “the cause of universal liberty” and racial equality. The NCASS declared its legislative agenda of enacting laws to “protect equally the rights of all classes of our citizens irrespective of color so that our Liberties may be firmly established in the Constitution and the laws of the land.” The NCASS also expressed its intent to combat prejudice and improve the social wellbeing of Blacks through several resolutions supporting “their intellectual, moral and religious improvement, and by removing public prejudice.” Jefferson and Jennings county abolitionists would eventually operationalize this goal with the 1848 founding of the Eleutherian College under the leadership of Rev. Thomas Craven. William T. Baxter’s father, James Baxter, was
among the White abolitionist co-founders. The college defied Indiana Black exclusion laws and prevailing racial prejudices by teaching both White and Black students. Eleutherian College became one of the few experiments in biracial coeducation prior to the Civil War.\(^{32}\)

In 1844, as the abolitionist-led Liberty Party mobilized its second presidential campaign, NCASS threw its support behind the party, including the candidacy of James Hicklin, Henry’s eldest uncle, who ran unsuccessfully for the Indiana General Assembly.\(^{33}\) His candidacy raised the ire of neighbors less sympathetic or hostile to abolitionism. In January 1845, the Graham Baptist Church expelled James Hicklin “for aiding to convey slaves from their Masters.” At least ten other Hicklins and Stotts, including Henry, his unnamed sisters (likely Susan and Margaret), mother Martha, and father John L., immediately left the church.\(^{34}\) Between 1847 and 1850, much of this same group joined other local abolitionists in the Neil’s Creek Antislavery Baptist Church (NCABC), which had formed in 1845 after the NCASS disbanded.\(^{35}\) The NCABC carried forward the NCASS egalitarian principles and led directly to the formation of Eleutherian College.\(^{36}\)

**THE INTERRACIAL UGRR**, the NCASS, the Liberty Party, the NCABC, and Eleutherian College were antecedent influences on the brothers who participated in the 1855 Oregon Free Soil Party Convention. Like his father and uncles, Henry Hicklin became active in local civil service, mobilized his kinsmen and neighbors in local elections, and represented abolitionists in the early organization of the Oregon Republican Party. Along Fanno Creek and the Lower Tualatin River, the abolitionist families joined those of Wilson M. Tigard of Arkansas, Augustus Fanno of Maine, and the McKays and Tuckers, two intermarried families also from southeast Indiana. The new neighbors became political associates and leaders of a distinct voting bloc who resisted partisan conformity, the White supremacist Constitution, slavery, and the exclusion of free Blacks from the newly forming state of Oregon.\(^{37}\)

Their political resistance is recorded in poll books associated with the *viva voce* voting system established by the Democratic-controlled Territorial Legislature in 1854, largely under the leadership of Delazon Smith. Used in many states during the nineteenth century, *viva voce* voting required voters to cast their ballot vocally in public. In Oregon, precinct clerks recorded in poll books individuals’ names and votes. Controversial from the start, *viva voce* applied community and partisan pressure to voters by exposing their loyalties and allowing party leaders to potentially withhold patronage if voters waivered from party dictates. In the mid 1850s, the primary challenge to the Oregon Democratic Party’s increasingly fragile political monopoly initially came from the secretive, nativist Know-Nothing or American Party. The American Party
grew to national stature by capitalizing on anxieties associated with the mid-century increase in European immigration. With the support of W.L. Adams, *Oregon Argus* newspaper editor, the party became particularly strong in Oregon. For Democrats, *viva voce* helped expose its sympathizers. Bush called the passage of the 1854 *viva voce* voting bill a “Know-Nothing Antidote.” But in a political community of White males acculturated to White supremacy and manifest destiny, *viva voce* voting during the 1857 constitutional referendum served to enforce not only partisan but also racial loyalties.

The surviving *viva voce* poll books reveal individual voting behavior as well as distinct voting blocs. In their detailed 1995 political history of Washington County, historians Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats use the poll books to document the strength and persistence of the county’s Know-Nothing/American Party that became a dominant constituency of the Republican Party by 1859. But their analysis also revealed the distinct abolitionist faction that opposed both the xenophobic American Party and the pro-slavery Democrats. In the June 1855 general election, not long after the Free Soil Convention, a group of Hicklins, Stotts, and Denneys, joined by Tigard, boycotted the Democratic and American party candidates for state offices and voted only for the less-partisan local offices. In the 1856 election, roughly the same individuals again defied the two major parties, this time by running as a group of independent candidates for territorial and local offices.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s 1857 *Dred Scott* decision stoked northern fears of “national slavery” and brought new urgency to the cause for Oregon statehood and to the organization of a viable anti-slavery party. Abolitionists were particularly outraged over the denial of Black rights in the United States. In October 1856, Henry H. Hicklin, William T. Baxter, and Thomas H. Denney joined several of their Fanno Creek neighbors in organizing the Washington County Republican
Party; Henry Hicklin served as secretary. Hicklin and Thomas S. Kendall, also an Oregon Free Soil Convention participant, were among a few abolitionists who participated in organizing the Oregon Territory Republican Party at a February 1857 gathering in Albany. Kendall grew up in Xenia, Ohio, a center of Black and White religious abolitionism. His family had emigrated from the upper South as part of a group of anti-slavery “Seceders,” an independent sect of Scottish Presbyterianism known for actively excluding slaveholders from their congregations and denouncing racial discrimination. In the summer of
1840, five years before coming to Oregon, Kendall volunteered to deliver his church’s abolitionist message to congregations in South Carolina, where he eventually faced a violent anti-abolitionist mob and narrowly escaped with his life.\(^4^4\) Hicklin and Kendall both served on the platform drafting committee of the Free State Republican Convention, which delivered language that championed “the principles of the Declaration of Independence” and condemned slavery as “evil in its effects and consequences.”\(^4^5\)

Beginning in 1854, the electorate repeatedly rejected proposals for a constitutional convention, but in June 1857, roughly 82 percent voted in support. The Hicklins and many of their neighbors voted in opposition of the convention.\(^4^6\) The following August, the Democrat-dominated convention delivered an infamously White supremacist proposal to voters in November

THE BUTTE PRECINCT POLL BOOK from the November 1857 constitutional referendum documents the total votes on the proposed constitution and separate provisions related to slavery and allowing “free negroes” to settle in Oregon. Signatures of abolitionists John L. Hicklin and his son Henry H. Hicklin appear on the document. John served as a judge, and Henry was a precinct clerk.
The proposed constitution explicitly granted rights and privileges to Whites, denied suffrage to any “Negro, Chinaman, or Mulatto,” denied Chinese people property rights, and included separate component referendums on slavery and excluding “free negros.” The latter component, when accepted by voters, denied Blacks not residing in the state at the time the right to settle in Oregon, to access the courts, to make contracts, and to hold property.  

The document, which drew heavily from the Indiana Constitution, gave the Washington County abolitionists every reason to openly resist. The values that informed the men’s dissenting votes stemmed from their direct contact with the institution of slavery and with the struggle of free Blacks and fugitive slaves, in which some had directly participated. James M. Stott wrote a letter to the abolitionist National Era newspaper in Washington, D.C., explaining the struggle in Oregon: “I find many good Anti-Slavery men who fear we will be beaten; but I do not think there is much danger. If we should, there is enough real grit here to give them trouble; and we will keep them hot, cost what it may.” On Election Day, November 9, 1857, Henry served as clerk and his father John L. as judge in the Butte Precinct; they recorded fourteen votes (30 percent cast) opposing the constitution and slavery and supporting “Free negros.” These voters included the Hicklins, Denneys, Tuckers, and McKays as well as Fanno, Tigard, and several others. Counting their neighbors in adjacent Beaver Dam and Cedar Creek precincts, these voters cast 16 percent of the votes in the county’s three eastern-most precincts. The other available poll books for Washington County indicate that the potential “abolitionist vote” — no on the Constitution, no on slavery, and no on exclusion of free Blacks — constituted roughly 13 percent of votes cast countywide.

The thirteen remaining, available poll books from all or portions of Clatsop, Columbia, Washington, Wasco, and Polk counties record the individual votes of 5.5 percent of the estimated 10,523 statewide electorate in November 1857. While not a random statewide sample, the poll books record these voters’ specific sequence of votes that, in aggregate, reveal broad voting blocs including evidence of potential abolitionist voters beyond Washington County.

We know that the actual statewide abolitionist vote was less than the 10.2 percent suggested by the summary of available poll books shown in the table on the previous page. First, a disproportional number of these poll book votes (62 percent) are from Washington, Clatsop, and Columbia counties, which tended to vote against the constitution and against the exclusion of free Blacks at higher rates than did voters statewide. More voters in these three counties opposed the constitution (47.5 percent) and slavery (84.2 percent) and supported free Blacks (18.6 percent) than voters statewide (73.6 percent, 30.4 percent, and 10.3 percent, respectively). More
### 1857 Oregon Constitutional Referendum

**Summary of Voting Blocs from Available Precinct Poll Books**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting Bloc</th>
<th>Total Poll Book Votes (581 Votes)</th>
<th>Percent of Total Poll Book Votes</th>
<th>Percent Vote from Available Precinct Poll Books</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Washington County (194 votes)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clatsop County (72 votes)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Columbia County (96 votes)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Polk County (73 Votes)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wasco County (144 votes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential “Abolitionist”</td>
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<td>12.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No on constitution</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Anti-slavery Anti-Black</td>
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<td>58.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes on constitution</td>
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<td>67.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No on “Free Negroes”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>65.8%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstained on Slavery Question</td>
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<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>1.4%</td>
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**PUBLIC: This Table, compiled by the author from poll books for elections, which are held at the Oregon State Archives and Oregon Historical Society, summarizes voting blocs from available precincts. Those precincts include: Butte, Beaver Dam, Cedar Creek, Dairy Creek, and South Tualatin in Washington County; Astoria (partial) and Clatsop in Clatsop County; Union, Rainier, Oak Point, and Scappoose in Columbia County; Douglas in Polk County; and Wasco County’s only county wide precinct, which included all portions of the Territory east of the Cascades. Sources available in note 49.**

Importantly, we cannot assume that all those who cast the potential “abolitionist vote” shared the sentiments of abolitionists. Certainly, many did not. Washington County Constitutional Convention delegate Levi Andersen, for example, was a former Know-Nothing who became a Republican and voted with his abolitionist neighbors, but he likely would have recoiled at
being identified as one. Baptist merchant Josiah Failing arrived from New York with his family in 1851 and briefly served as Portland mayor in 1853 and 1854. He also cast the abolitionist vote but, according to a biographer, was not “an abolitionist in the sense of laying violent hands upon an institution, recognized by the Constitution of the United States.”

Many anti-Democrats opposed the proposed constitution due to Oregon’s small population, concerns over taxation, or the Democrats’ domination of the convention. Some voted for “Free Negros” in alignment with Northern “free labor” ideology and commercial interests in maintaining the labor supply for marine trade and urban development, especially in Portland and on the lower Columbia River. Most anti-slavery voters were indifferent or even averse to the moral arguments about the plight of Blacks, enslaved or free. *Oregonian* editor Thomas Dryer spoke for many of these voters when he announced, “While we oppose slavery, we deny being an abolitionist in the modern sense. We claim to be a ‘free white man over the age of 21 years,’ and therefore entitled by the constitution of our country, to all the rights and privileges of freemen.”

Nevertheless, first-hand observers alluded to a separate and distinct abolitionist vote within the electorate. In recounting the dominant Know-Nothing and Whig factions of the nascent Republican Party, Timothy W. Davenport specifically recalled that there were also “many members of the Freesoil, abolition and temperance parties, who could not be rallied under any declaration in opposition to their principles, but might vote in opposition to the Democracy.” Even as Bush rhetorically applied the “abolitionist” label to most of his anti-Democrat opponents, he observed that the moralistic anti-slavery voters whom he associated with the “negro-monomaniacs” amounted to no more than 500 voters in Oregon. Using available poll books to conservatively estimate the potential abolitionist vote against the constitution, slavery, and Black exclusion suggests that Bush’s approximation may have been close to the mark.

At the national level, the Oregon Constitution remained controversial among abolitionists, even after voters proposed to enter the Union as a free state. As historian Eric Foner notes, debate over the Oregon Constitution was the only point before the Civil War when the rights of free Blacks became “the subject of prolonged discussion in Congress.” The abolitionist wing of the Republican Party explicitly rejected Oregon statehood because of the constitution’s severe racism. Senator Henry Wilson (MA) called it “unconstitutional, inhumane, and unchristian.” Representative Nehemiah Abbot (ME) declared: “You may have to go back to the earliest monuments of the human race . . . you may search the journals of barbarians and pirates . . . and you will find nothing that is more infamous and inhuman than the Negro section of the Oregon Constitution.” Evidence indicates that the Washington
County abolitionists were not the only Oregonians who agreed. County precinct abstracts reveal the geographic variability obscured by aggregate statewide election returns. Combined with additional information, they point to pockets of abolitionist resistance. The Sandy precinct, encompassing much of east Multnomah County, for example, was one of several outlier precincts in the 1857 referendum. That precinct’s thirty-four voters registered strong opposition to the constitution (44.8 percent) and slavery (94.1 percent), and unusually high support for “Free Negros” (32.4 percent), at least in comparison to statewide returns (30.4 percent, 73.6 percent, and 10.3 percent, respectively). The Sandy precinct was the home of Henry Hicklin’s cousin Felix G. Hicklin, James M. Stott (Felix’s father-in-law), and their wives, Sarah J. Stott Hicklin and Elizabeth Denney Stott. At least until 1858, Samuel R. Baxter (the brother of William T. Baxter) also lived and owned land in the precinct. All these individuals and their families had the same connection to abolitionist agitation in southeast Indiana’s Jennings and Jefferson counties before coming west with their Washington County relatives.

Across the state, there were almost two-dozen other outlier precincts where the votes against the constitution, against slavery, and in favor of free Blacks were higher than the statewide returns. One of the more extreme outliers was in notoriously pro-slavery southern Oregon. The seventeen voters in Jackson County’s “Mansinita” precinct, near modern-day Central Point, voted 85 percent against the constitution, 100 percent against slavery, and 40 percent against Black exclusion. Such outlier precincts tended to be smaller, suggesting the strong influence of a few individuals. Bourke and DeBats examined whether multiple social and cultural factors (such as occupation, wealth, age, marital status, religion, and region of origin) could explain voting behavior and party affiliation in Washington County during the late 1850s and...
found that those factors explained little. Instead, spatially related “neighborhood contagion effects” associated with proximal family connections and local personal relationships best explained individual and group behavior. While abolitionist voters and their followers were always in the minority, the power of the local, community-based politics that the Democrats tried to strengthen through policies such as *viva voce* voting could cut both ways. Abolitionists likely leveraged relationships, reputations, and private peer pressure in opposing slavery and Oregon’s “infamous and inhumane” constitution.60

But abolitionists such as John Beeson (1803–1889) mostly stood alone in their particularly iconoclastic challenge to Oregon’s White supremacy. He, his wife Anna Welborn Beeson, and their son Welborn settled near Talent, Oregon, in the outlier Eden precinct in 1853. Originally from Lincolnshire, England, and arriving in New York in 1830, Beeson was radicalized in the abolitionist cause in La Salle, Illinois, where he moved in 1834. He participated in the UGRR and the Liberty Party before moving to southern Oregon. In 1855, he ran unsuccessfully for the Territorial Legislature as a Republican opposing slavery and supporting the rights of both Blacks and Native people. Beeson had defended the Takelma, Shasta, and other Athabaskan-speaking people in the Rogue Valley who faced attempted genocide during the Rogue River Indian War (1855-1856). Exposing White atrocities and injustices quickly isolated Beeson from even sympathetic neighbors. Ostracism and physical threats forced him to leave his family behind and flee the state in 1856. Beeson returned to New York City, where he continued speaking and writing about the dispossession of Native people by Whites. His 1857 treatise, *A Plea for the Indians, with Facts and Features from the Late War in Oregon*, was published and widely read, especially in abolitionist circles, and it boosted his national reputation as a humanitarian defender of Native peoples.61

The available precinct poll books point directly to other individuals who were either abolitionists or sympathetic to the cause. Here, we find possible evidence of women influencing the votes of their husbands and brothers. In small Rainer precinct located in Columbia County, for example, James C. Gilbreath from Arkansas cast the potential abolitionist vote, but his younger brother John E. Gilbreath did not. Many things could explain this difference, but James’s 1849 marriage to Sarah Ann Tigard, Wilson M. Tigard’s younger sister, before coming west from Arkansas may have influenced his vote. In Washington County’s Beaver Dam (Beaverton) precinct, George Cooke also cast the abolitionist vote, alongside Thomas H. Denney, Thomas Tucker, and several others. Born in New York in 1829, Cooke was the third son of English immigrants Horatio and Anna Cooke who moved their family to Chicago in 1839. Cooke arrived in Oregon and settled in eastern Washington County in 1852, about the same time as his abolitionist neighbors. His older sister was
Mary Anna Cooke Thompson, an abolitionist, leading woman suffragist, and Oregon’s first female physician. Thompson did not come to Oregon until just after the Civil War, but beginning in the 1840s while the entire family was still in Illinois, she became active in efforts to aid fugitive slaves and combat racial prejudice, and according to a biographer, “prominent abolitionists were honored guests in her Illinois home.”

The degree to which historians have come to understand women’s instrumental role in the abolitionist movement make these relationships all the more significant. Black and White women — including leaders such as Phillis Wheatley, the Grimke sisters, Sojourner Truth, and Maria Weston Chapman — were not only among the leading minds of abolitionism but were also its most energetic and numerous agitators and petitioners. We see only the contours of such influence in antebellum Oregon. Apart from their participation in the 1846 founding of the NCABC in Jennings County, we have no evidence of abolitionist agitation, overt or covert, on the part of the four Hicklin sisters (Susan, Margaret, Lucy, and Martha A.), their mother Martha Thorn Hicklin, or their two aunts and cousins who settled in Clackamas and Multnomah counties. Nevertheless, at least some of them may have been among the unnamed women honored at the 1855 Oregon Free Soil Convention for their devotion to “Human Liberty.”

Some of the most active abolitionists did not remain in Oregon. As national events hurled the country toward war over slavery, Henry Hicklin decided his energies were best spent elsewhere. Sometime in 1859 he returned to Indiana. The 1860 Census listed him living back in Jefferson County, in the household of Rev. Thomas Craven, the leading founder of Eleutherian College. Like many abolitionists, Henry lost faith in the peaceful extinction of slavery in the United States. On September 16, 1861, in Lewisville, Indiana, he mustered into the Union Army’s 36th Regiment of the Indiana Infantry. Having given up a relatively secure and comfortable life as an Oregon farmer, he went to fight in some of the bloodiest
battles of the Civil War. These included the 1863 Battle of Chickamauga that resulted in some 34,000 casualties and where Henry himself was captured. He was later exchanged, survived the war, and returned to Indiana. In 1868 he secured a land claim in Greenwood County, Kansas, under the Homestead Act’s special provisions for Union soldiers. There he married, eventually had two sons, and remained active in local politics and civil service until he died suddenly in 1873 at age forty-seven. There is no evidence Henry Hamilton Hicklin ever returned to Oregon.

The political marginalization of abolitionists during Oregon’s founding partially explains their loss to historical memory. So does the fact that there were simply so few. Timothy W. Davenport also had abolitionist roots and engaged in the early organization of Oregon’s Republican Party. In recounting disputes over slavery and Black exclusion in Oregon some forty-five years after, he observed that, “even among those actively engaged in extending the free-state cause, the inalienable rights of the negro were seldom mentioned. The colored brother had few defenders.” We know far more about those who tried to establish and secure Oregon for Whites in the ante-bellum period than we do about those few who resisted. For that reason, their stories have special significance.

Understanding the experiences of these marginal voices can help answer persistent historical questions regarding the social profile of nineteenth-century abolitionists and their followers, especially those in the American West. Their stories illustrate the primary impulse behind nineteenth-century abolitionism and the circumstances that engender solidarity and dissent in the face of systems of oppression. Oregon’s abolitionist history supports an experiential interpretation of abolitionism: that the growth and spread of the movement is best explained not as an impulse of capitalist reformers or socially anxious religious zealots.

**REV. THOMAS SIMPSON KENDALL** came from a family of “Seceders,” a radical sect of Scottish Presbyterians known for opposing slavery and racial discrimination during the antebellum period. In 1840, in South Carolina, an anti-abolitionist mob assaulted him, and he barely escaped alive. After relocating to Oregon during the late 1840s, he became active in antislavery politics and was among the few abolitionists involved in the 1855 Free Soil Convention and early organization of the Oregon Republican Party.
but simply as a human response to the horrors of chattel slavery and the severe racism of nineteenth-century America. As historian James Huston observes, the nineteenth century abolitionist movement emerged from the first generation of Northerners who did not grow up in a slave society but who nevertheless experienced slavery or its effects, directly or indirectly, in or near the South, and from the struggle of free Blacks and fugitive slaves to gain and expand their freedom in the North. Hence, the experiential interpretation inexorably recognizes Black people and their actions as essential drivers of abolitionism.

We see this in the stories of Oregon abolitionists and their followers explored here. Slavery and the struggle of Black people were not abstractions for the Hicklins, the Baxters, and their neighbors and kin, or for individuals such as Thomas S. Kendall, John Bee-son, and Mary Anna Cooke Thompson. They had all witnessed the peculiar institution or its effects firsthand, and many had developed direct personal relationships with African Americans, both fugitive and free. These relationships and experiences, combined with their culturally and religiously inherited sense of justice, helped stir these men and women into action.

Among the intended legacies of Oregon’s White supremacist founding — of the public policies’ attempting to exclude Black people and to annihilate, dispossess, and marginalize Native peoples and other people of color — is the segregation of people by racial identity. This segregation has helped sustain the persistent escapist myth that Oregon and the Pacific Northwest was and could remain aloof from the nation’s history of slavery and racism. It has severed or limited the interracial relationships and experiences so important to mounting and sustaining resistance. In the process, it has also disconnected Oregonians from people in their history who did not just

MARY ANNA COOKE THOMPSON, abolitionist, woman suffragist, and Oregon’s first female physician, did not arrive in Oregon until after the Civil War. Poll books, however, indicate that her younger brother, George Cooke, joined his abolitionist neighbors in Washington County’s Beaver Dam precinct in opposing the Constitution, slavery, and Black exclusion during the 1857 constitutional referendum.
pontificate but took direct action to resist White supremacy. Oregonians of every generation have faced consequential choices about racial exclusion or inclusion within their social and political milieu. Hence, better understanding these voices of dissent in Oregon’s past can enlighten and inspire the related choices and actions we face today.

NOTES


8. Oregon Statesman, July 14, 1855. Gendered and racist attacks on abolitionists were common in the mid-nineteenth century, see Sinha, The Slaves Cause, 278.


10. Weekly Oregon Statesman, September 9, 1856, p. 2; April 29, 1856, p. 2; March 16, 1858, p.
11. In this essay I consider “white supremacy” to be a racial doctrine that assumes the superiority of a distinct “White race” and posits that people of the White race should rule over other races or justifiably exploit the labor or land of non-Whites. I use the term “Black exclusion” in the context of nineteenth-century Oregon to mean the outlawing of Blacks from settling and the excluding of them from equal civil and political rights.


15. The driving force of black people, enslaved and free, in the interracial abolitionist movement is a central theme in Manisha Sinha’s recent history of abolitionism, The Slave’s Cause, 1–3, 299–338, 381–460.


duty and privilege to advocate the cause of the oppressed,” it is not clear if any of the attendees were Black. *Minute Book of the Neil’s Creek Anti-Slavery Society*, 1839–1845, transcribed from the original document at the Indiana State Library, (Reproduced by the History Center, Jefferson County Historical Society, Madison, Ind., n.d.)


30. *Minute Book of the Neil’s Creek Anti-Slavery Society*, January 5, 1839, and January 26, 1839.

31. *Minute Book of the Neil’s Creek Anti-Slavery Society*, June 15, 1839, February undated, 1840, and September 15, 1841. The list of founding NCASS members included both men and women but subsequent minutes only list the men.


34. Minutes of the Graham Baptist Church, January 1845, received by email on February 6, 2019, from Sheila Kell genealogy and local history librarian at the Jennings County Library,
Indiana, and transcribed from microfilm of the original in the holdings of the Jennings County Public Library (microfilmed in 1976 by the Indiana State Library).


39. Bourke and DeBats, Washington County, 286–87; Poll Books for Elections, Washington County for Butte and Beaver Dam, June 1855 and June 1856 elections, Oregon State Archives, Salem, Oregon. Contrary to the account by Bourke and DeBats, no votes by Baxter or Fanno were recorded in Butte poll books for this election, but Wilson Tigard joined the boycott of major candidates.


41. Weekly Oregonian, November 29, 1856, p. 2.

42. Weekly Oregonian, February 21, 1857, p. 2.


45. Weekly Oregonian, February 21, 1857; Abolitionists in the 1840s and 1850s frequently invoked the Declaration of Independence to intentionally and tacitly support racial equality while imparting patriotic allegiance, Sinha, The Slaves Cause: A History of Abolition, 68, 156, 212, 215, 233, 296–97, 404, 409, 447, 583; Stewart, Holy Warriors, 32.


48. National Era, October 22, 1857, p. 3; Poll Books for Elections, Washington County, Butte, Beaver Dam, South Tualatin, Cedar Creek, Dairy Creek Precincts, November 1857, Oregon State Archives, Salem Oregon; Bourke and DeBats Washington County, 164–65, 268–73, and 284–86; Early Oregonian Database, accessible on the Oregon Secretary of State website: https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/Pages/db-early-oregonians.aspx (accessed November 29, 2019); Carey, History of Oregon Vol. 3, 570. By 1857, the Stotts and Baxters had moved to or likely voted in other precincts for which poll books are unavailable.


Labbe, The Colored Brother’s Few Defenders 463
The total number of statewide voters (10,523) was derived from votes tabulated in the available poll books, precinct abstracts, and county abstracts correcting for errors in reporting precinct votes in Linn, Yamhill, and Wasco Counties. This total includes a conservative estimate of abstentions by summing the highest vote totals of the three referendum components (Constitution, Slavery, “Free Negroes”) at the most local, disaggregated level possible. This also allowed the calculation of an abstention rates for the three component votes. The highest rate of abstention by far was for the vote on “Free Negroes.” Roughly 8 percent of statewide voters abstained on the “Free Negro” vote. This abstention rate ranged from 1.5 percent in Curry County to 13 percent in Multnomah County.


51. Failing, whose “political views were a matter first of reason and then of faith,” apparently opposed the Constitution due to the small size of Oregon’s population, Joseph Gaston, Portland, Oregon, Its History and Builders, Vol. 2, (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911), 55–57; Failing also signed an 1851 petition advocating the repeal of the Territorial Black exclusion law when it threatened the removal of Black merchant and abolitionist Abner H. Francis and his brother. Provisional and Territorial Governments Papers, 1841–1859, Microfilm File 621, OHS Research Library.

52. Coleman, Dangerous Subjects, 155–56; Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery, 89–90.

53. Johnson, Founding of the Far West, 64, 404, note 83, citing Oregonian June 27, 1857.

54. Davenport, “Slavery Question in Oregon Part I,” 219; Davenport, “Slavery Question in Oregon Part II,” 316. Davenport also notes that in Rogue Valley “all but the radicals” defended free Blacks although none of them were up to the task of publicly awakening “men to the generous sympathies of equal fraternity.” This may have been a reference to John Beeson’s impolitic espousal of Black and Native American rights during his 1855 candidacy for the Territorial Legislature.


56. The available poll books indicate that 10.2 percent of voters cast the “potential abolitionist vote,” against the Constitution, against slavery, and for “Free Negroes.” Applying this percentage directly to the 10,523 voters statewide, gives 1,073 potential abolitionist votes. However voters only cast 1,081 votes statewide for “Free Negroes” and the available poll books also indicate that only about 60 percent of voters who supported “Free Negroes” also voted against slavery and the Constitution, in part because some pro-slavery voters also supported “Free Negroes.” If we apply this latter percentage, 60 percent, directly to total who voted for “Free Negroes” statewide (1,081), we get an estimated 649 voters statewide (6.1 percent) who cast the potential abolitionist vote. What percentage of this number were Bush’s “negro-monomaniacs,” genuine abolitionists or their followers is difficult to say.

57. Quoted from Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men, 288–90.


THOMAS JEFFERSON’S Notes on the State of Virginia was never intended to be a full-length book but was profoundly influential in how Europeans understood the young American country as well as how Americans viewed Jefferson’s home state of Virginia. Jefferson did not believe the United States could prosper as a multi-racial country, and those beliefs were blueprints for race relations adopted two generations later, when framers of the Oregon Constitution crafted racial policies in the state. Excerpts from Jefferson’s draft of the book, which he first wrote as memoranda in 1781 and expanded through 1785, are reproduced here.

“I advance it therefore as a suspicion only that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments of both body and mind.”

“[T]heir griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and soon forgotten with them.”
The excerpts below describe Blacks as naturally inferior to Whites, which became the very basis for White supremacy policies underlying “manifest destiny” claims of the pioneer generation. Jefferson goes on to describe Blacks as not feeling grief, or at least not for long, allowing him to escape the guilt of enslaving humans, even if he considered them naturally inferior. Observations such as the ones Jefferson penned were reflected on and replicated throughout U.S. history. They also formed some of the reasoning behind anti-Black arguments made during the Oregon Constitutional Convention in 1857.
Constitutionalizing Racism

George H. Williams’s Appeal for a White Utopia

by Philip Thoennes and Jack Landau

During the mid nineteenth century, migrants to Oregon created public policy around two issues then dominating national attention—race and slavery. The technologies of that age, in matters of transportation and communication, made Oregon isolated and far-removed from the rest of the country. This did not, however, mean that Oregon was cut off from traditions, legacies, and policies of White supremacy. Powerful ideas on slavery and race, formulated by the United States’ founding fathers, and especially Thomas Jefferson, influenced framers of the Oregon Constitution in 1857. It is not difficult to draw connections between Jefferson’s defense of slavery and belief that America could not succeed as a multi-racial society and White Oregonians’ adopting Black exclusion laws during the Provisional and Territorial periods.

BEGINNING WITH THE FOUNDING of a provisional government in 1843 and continuing through the writing of the Oregon Constitution in 1857, the framers of Oregon’s legal systems designed laws to exclude racial minorities—not only African Americans, but also Native Americans and people of Chinese descent—from enjoying equality before the law, participating in civic life, and living among White Oregonians. Indeed, one of the provisional legislature’s first official actions was to simultaneously ban slavery in Oregon and make black immigration to the region a crime punishable by whipping.¹ Many of Oregon’s founders rejected slavery for the same reason they sought to exclude free Blacks: the desire for a White utopia.

In the summer of 1857, sixty men gathered in Salem to draft Oregon’s first state constitution. The month-long convention proved a microcosm of the concerns and prejudices that animated political debate in mid-nineteenth-century Oregon—namely, fiscal conservatism, the question of slavery, and exclusionary racism.² On July 28, 1857, just days before the Oregon Constitutional Convention began, the front page of the Oregon Statesman featured a letter to the editor, “Slavery in Oregon,” written by George H. Williams, a delegate to the convention, prominent
ON JULY 28, 1857, Judge George H. Williams wrote a letter to the editor titled “Slavery in Oregon,” appealing to readers to reject Oregon’s becoming a slave state and to exclude free Blacks as well. The letter appeared on the front page of the Oregon Statesman, which is pictured above.

Democrat, and Chief Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court. That letter, reprinted here in its original form, is an important primary document to consider when examining the power of language and the structures of Oregon’s White supremacy. Williams’s arguments against slavery in Oregon helped set the political tone during the days leading up to the constitutional convention, and undoubtedly played a role in the eventual admission of Oregon as a free state — not because slavery was an abhorrent practice, but for the harm it would do to the “hardy pioneer” who had resettled the land.3

Two events in the 1850s provide a context for the political environment surrounding Williams’s opinions. The first was the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The Kansas-Nebraska Act advanced the idea of popular sovereignty by giving the people of the newly created Kansas and Nebraska Territories the right to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery. The act had the effect of nullifying the Missouri Compromise of 1820, legislation that simultaneously admitted Maine as a free state and Missouri as a slave state to maintain balance between North and South, and prevented slavery in newly admitted territories north of the 36° 30’ parallel. Violence nevertheless erupted in subsequent years over the legality of slavery in new states.4 Williams decried the violence that erupted in other states over slavery and expressed hope that in Oregon “good feeling and moderation may prevail in all that is said or done about the matter.” This wish for tempered political discussions quickly moved to a racist argument about how slavery would be a burden in Oregon: “negroes are naturally lazy, and as slaves actuated by fear of the whip — are only interested in doing enough to avoid punishment.” The second event, two months before Williams wrote his letter, was the U.S. Supreme Court’s declaration in the Dred Scott v. Sandford decision that the framers had
never considered citizenship for African Americans:

on the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the Government might choose to grant them.⁵

The court went on to opine that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was an unconstitutional infringement of the rights of slave owners to take their property into any state or territory they wished. Chief Justice Taney wrote that Congress lacked the authority to prohibit slavery in federal territories and could not delegate that authority to the territories themselves.⁶

The process of drafting a constitution and applying for statehood would reveal, in sharp relief, the lengths to which Oregonians would go to ensure the exclusion of African Americans. Williams acknowledged that many of his contemporaries, such as Matthew Deady and Joseph Lane, held pro-slavery views and that his letter represented a break with prevailing party ideology. Williams, however, did not object to slavery as an institution. Indeed, his letter is full of sympathy and admiration for Southern slaveowners — “as high-minded, honorable, and humane a class of men as can be found in the world.” He attributed the entire controversy over slavery to northern abolitionists, whose “foolish zeal” hardened the views of the South and only exacerbated the national crisis. Williams opposed slavery in Oregon on economic grounds, arguing that his fellow Democrats were incorrect in looking to enslavement as a means to address the labor shortage in Oregon.

In Williams’s view, such arguments were short-sighted for two reasons. First, Oregon’s climate did not support the type of agriculture that made the capital-intensive slave trade economically feasible: “To argue that slavery is a good thing in Alabama, and must therefore be a good thing in Oregon, is illogical, for Alabama has a hot climate and cotton bearing soil, which Oregon
has not.” Second, he argued that the presence of slaves in Oregon would “degrade [the] labor” of white workers because it puts them “upon a level with negroes.” Williams even claimed that the presence of Black slave labor in Oregon would degrade society as a whole:

Moral differences when they meet, like water, seek a common level, and therefore if white men and negroes are brought in contact without that perfect subjugation and rigid discipline which prevail among the slaves of the South, the white men will go down and the negroes go up, till they come to resemble each other in the habits, tastes and actions of their lives.

He closed the letter with a final plea for Black exclusion: “Taking everything into consideration, I ask if it is not the true policy of Oregon to keep as clear as possible of negroes, and all the exciting questions of negro servitude? Situated away here on the Pacific, as a free state, we are not likely to be troubled much with free negroes or fugitive slaves.”

It is impossible to know how much impact the Williams letter had on the proceedings of the constitutional convention of 1857. The letter itself, however, offers valuable insight to the logic that prevailed in Oregon’s founding as a state that excluded both slavery and free Black people. A transcription of the original letter is reproduced on the following pages.

**JUDGE GEORGE H. WILLIAMS**

**A TIMELINE OF HIS POLITICAL AND LEGAL LIFE**

**1844:** Admitted to the New York bar

**1852:** Appointed by President Zachary Taylor to serve as chief justice of the Supreme of Oregon Territory; arrived in Portland in 1853; reappointed in 1857

**August 1857:** Marion County delegate to Oregon Constitutional Convention; chair of the Committee on Judiciary; member of the Committee on Corporations and Internal Improvement

**1859:** Went into private practice

**1865:** Left Democratic Party and became a Republican; elected U.S. Senator (served until 1871)

**1873?:** Ulysses S. Grant makes him U.S. Attorney General (served until 1877); authored what would become the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution

**1886:** Among the first directors of Commercial National Bank, opened this year

**1902:** Elected Mayor of Portland at 79 years old. Won by 643 votes out of 13,000 total cast.

**1902:** Member of the new police commission, a subcommittee of the new Executive Board that succeeded the Board of Public Works and approved all city expenditures and franchise applications

**1905:** Lost re-election as Mayor of Portland
EDITOR STATESMAN — Sir: Though I have resided in Oregon more than four years, I have never appeared in the newspapers to discuss any question, public or private, and would prefer not to do so now; but deferring to the judgment of personal and party friends, and under the rule prescribed by you for correspondence of this kind, I have concluded to trouble your readers with an article upon slavery in Oregon.

_I do not reproach the slaveholders of the South for holding slaves. I consider them as high-minded, honorable, and humane a class of men as can be found in the world, and throughout the slavery agitation have contended that they were “more sinned against than sinning.”_

I have no pleasure in the question — nothing directly to gain — perchance something to lose by its discussion. Expecting however to have my home in this country, I confess to some solicitude that a question so deeply affecting all its interests should be fully discussed and wisely decided. Views like those here presented are not premature at this time. Much has been said for Slavery. Candidates for office have become its champions on the stump — documents have been circulated — a paper has been set up for its advocacy. These things invite, in fact, force discussion. Men are rapidly, perhaps inconsiderately taking sides, and determining as to their votes upon this question. Differing reluctantly from many friends for whose opinions I have respect, I am constrained to think that Oregon had better become a non-slaveholding State. I shall argue with facts and figures in favor of this position, I ask those concerned carefully and dispassionately to consider the subject in all its bearings, then do in reference thereto, what judgment dictates to be done. I appreciate the magnitude of the theme. To discuss all its features and effects, one must know, like a spirit of the past, and speak like a Sybil of the future. Conscious that this slavery discussion has shaken the pillars of the republic — has rent the most powerful church of the nation in twain — has appeared upon the plains of Kansas with fierce strife and bloodshed; I address myself to it, feeling somewhat as I would to approach a cloud charged with lightning and a whirlwind. I hope however, that the controversy will not grow up in bitterness, and bear its fruit in convulsions here, as it has elsewhere, but that good feeling and moderation may prevail in all that is said or done about the matter.

Whatever else may be alleged against those who oppose slavery in Oregon, they cannot, as it seems to me, be charged with commencing the contest about it. Daniel Webster said in his celebrated speech of March 7th, 1850, in the Senate of the U.S., that God had fixed the natural limits of slavery southward of this, and though dead, his words yet live and are true. On the 26th day of July, A. D. 1845, the real pathfind-
ers and pioneers to the Pacific coast resolved that “slavery or involuntary servitude should not exist in this Territory.” — On the 14th of August, 1848, the Congress of the United States, by a law voted for by Stephen A. Douglas, and approved by Jas. K. Polk, declared that “slavery should not exist in Oregon.” People came here — laws have been enacted — social habits formed — an entire system of polity set up, and I and those who think with me now, seek nothing but a continuation of this state of things, which these laws of God and man have established.

I quarrel with no one whose honest feelings or prejudices incline him to favor the institution of slavery, but when any man says that slavery would be an advantage to Oregon if adopted here, I must be permitted respectfully to dispute the correctness of his judgment. So far as I am able to judge of myself, I have no objections not local slavery. I do not reproach the slaveholders of the South for holding slaves. I consider them as high-minded, honorable, and humane a class of men as can be found in the world, and throughout the slavery agitation have contended that they were “more sinned against than sinning.”

Wise, patriotic and just were the fathers of the Republic, and their opinions and acts come down to us like the voice of departed experience to those just entering upon the stage of life. Thomas Jefferson was a great man — towering, like Saul, above his fellows for sagacity and judgment — born and bred in Virginia, and a slaveholder all his life. — On the 19th of April, 1784, he moved in the Congress of the Confederation that Slavery be prohibited in all the territory of the United States north of the 31st parallel of north latitude. Now slavery would have been either a benefit or an injury to that country. Jefferson must have determined that it would be an injury, and no man was ever more competent to decide such a question. On the 13th of July, 1787, the Congress of the Confederation voted unanimously to exclude slavery from the Northwest Territory. Massachusetts and South Carolina stood together in favor of that measure. South Carolina, exasperated by sectional strife, would no doubt at this time, condemn that vote, but I appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober. I appeal from South Carolina of nullification to the South Carolina of the revolution. I argue from this vote in 1787, that it was then the deliberate judgment of the whole United States in Congress assembled, that Slavery would be an injury to the Northwest Territory, and therefore it was excluded. North Carolina, in 1786 declared the introduction of slaves into that State “of evil consequences and highly impolitic,” and imposed a duty of £5 per head thereon. Virginia, in 1778, passed an act prohibiting the further introduction of slaves, and in 1782, removed all restrictions to emancipation. Maryland followed her example. Gradually these States were preparing to get rid of slaves, when abolitionism from the North, with a foolish zeal which has characterized it from that time to this, wounded their pride and awakened their jealousy, and then the movement went backwards, and slavery was forever enthroned in the heart and interests of southern society. I cite these facts simply to show that before the slave question was dragged...
into the political arena, the judgment of all parts of the country was against the advantages of slavery.

I will now produce a case quite analogous if not exactly parallel to

**Gradually these [southern] States were preparing to get rid of slaves, when abolitionism from the North . . . wounded their pride and awakened their jealousy . . . and slavery was forever enthroned in the hearts and interests of southern society.**

ours, to prove the impolicy of slavery in Oregon. Indiana and Oregon are both north of the forty-second degree of north latitude. They resemble each other in the productions of the soil. In 1803, Indiana was a new country, and almost as inaccessible as Oregon now is. — Railroads, canals and steamboats were then unknown. Emigration was therefore slow and labor scarce. Prairies were “few and far between.” Farms were generally made by cutting down the trees, and digging up the stumps. With his axe in one hand and his rifle in the other, the hardy pioneer went forth to his work, felling the forests with the one, and fighting the savage with the other. Trouble was of course incident to this state of things. The settlers looked round for relief. Some thought it would be found in slavery, and therefore petitioned Congress to suspend the ordinance of 1787, so that slaves might be introduced. That petition was referred to a committee of which the celebrated John Randolph was chairman. I quote from his report thereon: “In the opinion of your committee the labor of slaves is not necessary to promote the growth or settlement of colonies in that region — that this labor, demonstrably the dearest of any, can only be employed in the cultivation of products more valuable than any known to that quarter of the United States; that the Committee deem it highly dangerous and inexpedient to impair a provision wisely calculated to promote the happiness and prosperity of the Northwestern country, and to give strength and security to that extensive frontier; in the salutary operation of this sagacious and benevolent restraint, it is believed that the inhabitants of Indiana will at no very distant day find ample remuneration for a temporary privation of labor and emigration.” There spoke the statesman. Elevating his view above the exigencies of a day, he looked into the future with prophetic vision. Slaveholder as he was, he knew that the growth and prosperity of Indiana did not depend upon the labor of slaves, but upon the intelligence and industry of a free people. Oregon is now suffering from a “temporary want of labor and emigration,” and that is the great argument for slavery, but I meet it with the reasoning of John Randolph, and the confirmatory facts of history. Seven States of this Union, similar to Oregon in soil and productions, and to some extent in climate, have tried the institution of slavery and found it undesirable. Shall we now commit the folly of repeating the experiment? New York,
Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey and New Hampshire ascertained by actual trial that slavery was detrimental to their interests, and therefore abolished it. — Can we for any reason expect to find it otherwise? To argue that slavery is a good thing in Alabama, and must therefore be a good thing in Oregon, is illogical, for Alabama has a hot climate and cotton bearing soil, which Oregon has not, but to argue that because slavery was objectionable in Pennsylvania it would be so in Oregon, is logical, for with a cool climate, cereals and similar fruits are the chief productions of both.

I believe it is customary and proper to use the opinions of distinguished men in discussions of this kind. National whigs, I presume, have not forgotten Henry Clay. When three score years and more had silvered o’er his brow, he stood up in the Senate of the U. S. and uttered these words.

“Coming from a slave State as I do, I owe it to myself, I owe it to truth, I owe it to the subject to say, that no earthly power could induce me to vote for a specific measure for the introduction of slavery where it had not before existed, either South or North of that line. Coming as I do from a slave State, it is my solemn, deliberate, and well matured determination, that no power, no earthly power shall compel me to vote for the positive introduction of slavery either south or north of that line. Sir, while you reproach, justly too, our British ancestors for the introduction of this institution upon the continent of America, I am for one unwilling that the posterity of the present inhabitants of California and New Mexico, shall reproach us for doing just what we reproach Great Britain for doing to us. If the citizens of those Territories choose to establish slavery, and if they come here with constitutions establishing slavery, I am for admitting them with such provisions in their constitutions, but then it will be their own work, and not ours, and their posterity will have to reproach them, and not us, for forming constitutions allowing the institution of slavery to exist among them.”

Lewis Cass, in his Nicholson letter, which gave the Wilmot proviso its death blow, says: “We may well regret the existence of slavery in the southern States, and wish that they had been saved from its introduction.” — Again, he says, which is particularly worthy of our notice: — “Involuntary labor requiring the investment of large capital, can only be profitable when employed in the production of a few favored articles confined by nature to special districts, and paying larger returns than the usual agricultural products spread over more considerable portions of the earth.”

James Buchanan, speaking of the Compromise of 1850, says: “Neither the soil, the climate, nor the productions of California south of 36 degrees 30 minutes, nor indeed any portion of it, north or south, is adapted to slave labor, and besides, every facility would be there afforded for the slave to escape from his master, and such property would be entirely insecure in any part of California. It is morally impossible therefore, that a majority of the emigrants to that Territory south of 36 degrees 30 minutes, which will be chiefly composed of our citizens, will ever re-establish slavery in its limits.” — Would Mr. Buchanan
vote for slavery in Oregon? Would he vote for a "moral impossibility?"

Stephen A. Douglas, in a speech delivered in the Senate on the 14th day of February, 1857, says: "I am aware, sir, that the act of Congress was passed prohibiting slavery in Oregon, but it was never passed here until six years after the people of that Territory had excluded it by their own law, unanimously adopted. So Oregon was consecrated to freedom by act of their local legislature six years before the Congress of the United States by the Wilmot Proviso undertook to do what had been done and well done." Standing in the presence of a listening Senate, and pointing away to the Pacific, the "little giant" refers to the squatter sovereigns of Oregon and their slavery prohibition of 1845, and pronounces upon them the plaudit of "well done." May not a man safely follow in the footsteps of Jefferson, Randolph and Clay, or stand with Buchanan, [Cass] and Douglas upon this question?

I will now proceed to show from the nature of the case that slavery would be a burden and not a blessing to Oregon. Slavery is involuntary servitude — labor forced by power from unwilling laborers. There is no ambition, no enterprise, no energy in such labor. Like the horse to the tread-mill, or the ox to the furrow, goes the slave to his task. Compare this with the labor of free white men. Take the young man without family or property — no bondage fills the little horizon of his life with its unchangeable destiny. Conscious of his equality, of his right to aspire to, and attain any position in society, he will desire the respect and confidence of his fellow men. All the world is his for action, and all the future is his for hope. Employ the head of a family to do your work. Anxious to make his home comfortable, to educate his children, to provide a competency for old age, he will have strong inducements to be diligent and faithful in business. These motives energize free labor, but have little or no influence upon the slave. One free white man is worth more than two negro slaves in the cultivation of the soil, or any other business which can be influenced by zeal or the exercise of discretion. I do not claim that this is so where slaves are worked in gangs by a task-master, but it would be so in Oregon; for no man here can have slaves enough to justify the employment of an overseer and therefore every owner must manage his own slaves, or leave them to self-management. Situated as the farmer is in Oregon, he wants a laborer to be something more than a mere slave. He wants a man who can act sometimes in the capacity of agent — to whom he can entrust his business when absent from home, and who will go to the field and work without watching or driving. Negroes are naturally lazy and as slaves actuated by fear of the

One free white man is worth more than two negro slaves in the cultivation of the soil, or any other business which can be influenced by zeal or the exercise of discretion.
whip — are only interested in doing enough to avoid punishment. Now, if what I have said be true, it is perfectly manifest that a farmer in Oregon cannot afford to pay as much for the labor of a negro slave, as for the labor of a free white man. I say in the language of John Randolph, that slave labor is “demonstrably the dearest of any.” And I affirm that it will cost the farmer in this country, more to obtain the services of one slave, than one free man. To show the high price of slaves in the States, I might refer to different public journals, but I will quote from but one. The Central Organ, published in the parish of Avoyelles, Louisiana, says that, “13 field hands were recently sold in that place, at prices ranging from $1,365 to $2,360. The lowest sum was paid for a lad ten years — the highest was paid for a man 31 years of age. Four of the negroes were women, and nine of them under twenty years of age. Their aggregate value was $24,260.” Now from this statement, it is entirely safe to assume that a good, healthy negro man in Missouri, would be worth $1000, and the prospect in Kansas will not reduce the price. Horses and cattle more than double in value by importation from the States to this country, and without doubt the rule would hold good in reference to slaves, so that a good man in Oregon would be worth $2,000. Now the interest on this sum at 20 per cent would be $400 per annum, which would hire a white man for ten months, at $40 per month. State the facts in any way, and it will appear that the interest on the value of a good slave man will hire a white laborer from April to November, and there is little help needed by the farmer during the other portion of the year. But there are many other things to be considered. You employ a free man and you have nothing to do with him but to provide him with employment and food, and pay his wages. But with a slave it is different. Your house must be his home. You must provide everything for him, and pay all his expenses sick or well. You must watch him when he works and when he plays. You must tell him what to do, and whip him if he fails to do it. — Drunken, depraved and vicious as he may be, you must control his passions and be responsible for his acts. I remember that a slaveholder in St. Louis told me that the vicious behavior of a female slave which for some reason he could not or would not sell, caused him more trouble than all the other cares of his life.

Negroes are naturally lazy and as slaves actuated by fear of the whip — are only interested in doing enough to avoid punishment.
would be perfect leeches upon the farmer during our long rainy winters. They would be more useless here than in New England, for there the winter is cold and dry, and a man can work in the barn or in the woods, but the reverse is true in this country.

There is another thing in this connection to be noticed. When a man proposes to make an investment, the risk of its loss is always taken into the account. If you loan money on doubtful security, you ask more for its use than when the security is perfectly good. Mr. Buchanan said “that it was morally impossible for slavery to exist in California, because every facility was there afforded for the slave to escape from his master, and such property would be entirely insecure.” What is true of California in this respect is certainly true of Oregon. Slaves might accompany their masters to Oregon from attachment, but suppose a slave-dealer to start for the Oregon market, across the plains, with a band of slaves bought here and there; what regard would they have for a man who had bought them to sell again upon speculation, and who was taking them a returnless distance from the “old folks at home?” With all the safeguards of law and public sentiment, slaves are manacled to be taken by the trader from one slave State to another; how then could they be safely transported thousands of miles across a wilderness country with feelings of hatred and revenge rankling in their dark bosoms? To bring them by water, to say nothing about the expense, is a hazardous and almost impracticable thing. Suppose, however, all these difficulties overcome, and your slaves safe upon the soil of Oregon, then they would stay with you or not, just as they pleased. North is the Territory of Washington with its sparse settlements — its vast forests and mountain ranges, in which a fugitive slave might hide from an army of pursuers. Eastward dwell numerous Indian tribes, to whose welcome embrace a slave might fly and be safe. No fugitive slave law would avail there, or friends of the master be found to assist in his recapture. South is the free State of California, where doubtless the fugitive slave could find friends to speed him on to a more perfect freedom in Mexico.

Isolated as Oregon is by thousands of miles from other slave States, and all the supports of slavery, an effort to maintain the institution here would be almost as impotent as the command of the vain Canute to the waves of the ocean. Some say that slave property will not be so unsafe here as I pretend, for negroes will not go to and consort with Indians, but otherwise is the evidence. Gen. Jackson found fugitive slaves fighting with the Creeks in the war of 1812. Maj. Dade’s command of 112 (excepting four,) was slaughtered in the Florida war by a party of Seminoles and forty fugitive slaves, the negroes outstripping the Indians in ferocity and brutal treatment of the dead. There is another reason outweighing all others for the unsafeness of slaves in this country. I refer to public sentiment, and I say that slavery can no more stand as a useful institution with one-half of public opinion arrayed against it than a house can stand with one corner stone.
Look at the southern States. What a unanimity of sentiment exists there in favor of slavery. Look at the laws enacted and the pains taken to preserve this unanimity. This is a necessity of the system. Every man of common sense must see that slaves would not only be unsafe as property, but dangerous if their ears were filled with discussions as to the legality or justice of their bondage.

Much is said about the necessity of slaves in Oregon for domestic servants. I admit that there is a great want of household help in this country at the present time, but I deny that slavery would remove the evil. Various are the privations attending the settlement of a new country. People in Oregon cannot reasonably expect to have at this early day all the comforts and conveniences of an old community. Indiana, Iowa and the new States have suffered in this respect as we do now, but time brought to them as it will bring relief to us. Immigration is the natural, and as the experience of other States attests, the most efficient remedy for this complaint. Slavery, as it seems to me, would aggravate the trouble. Now there is not one family in ten in Oregon able to own a slave woman, (worth from $1000 to $1500,) so that if one family would be benefitted, nine would probably be worse off than they are at this time. Introduce slavery, and the chance of hiring a white girl to do housework is gone. White girls will hardly consent for wages to occupy in one family a position like that which a negro slave-woman occupies in another. Slavery might provide the favored few with domestic help, but a large majority of the people would be left to help themselves. What is it that we most need in Oregon? We have a beautiful country — a healthful climate — a rich soil — mountains big with minerals — rivers for highways, and an ocean stretching away to India for our commerce. We want more people, intelligent, enterprising and industrious people. Some profess to think that the establishment of slavery here would be the most speedy and effective way of supplying this want, but exactly the reverse is demonstrably true. I refer to the census of 1850 for evidence. Ohio and Kentucky are contiguous States, and nearly equal in size. Ohio has no advantages of climate or soil. — In 1800 the population of Ohio was 45,028, and the population of Kentucky was 179,871, but in 1850 the population of Ohio was 1,955,050, and the population of Kentucky 971,594, including 210,981 slaves. Can any reason be given for this immense difference in the growth of the two States only that the one was a free and the other a slave State. Take Indiana and Kentucky. They are adjoining States, and Kentucky has the larger territory. In 1810, Indiana had 23,890 people, and Kentucky 324,237, but in 1850 Indiana was ahead, and had 977,154. Illinois had in 1810, 11,501, but in 1850 she had 846,034. I compare these adjacent States, and contend that the figures show beyond controversy that slavery has been an obstacle to the

*Introduce slavery, and the chance of hiring a white girl to do housework is gone.*
growth, and an incubus upon the energies of Kentucky.

Everywhere the rule holds good. Missouri is a larger State, has a milder climate, a more prolific soil, and greater facilities for commerce than the adjoining State of Iowa. She had too, more than 25 years the start as a State, yet Iowa has nearly overtaken, and before the end of the present decade will surpass her in popular numbers. Who can doubt that Missouri would now have double her present population if the foot of a slave had never touched her soil? Compare Wisconsin and Minnesota with Arkansas and Florida. Have not the former sprung forward to giant greatness, while the latter have slowly dragged the overburdening car of Slavery.

Men who emigrate are not usually men of large fortunes, who own slaves, and live at their ease, but they are generally men whose limbs are made sinewy by hard work; who go to new countries to get land and homes, and who expect to depend chiefly upon their own labor. Slave States are objectionable to such men, for they are too poor to be slaveholders, and too proud spirited to wear the badge of slavery. Slavery has a terror in its very name to foreign immigration. Oppressed at home, they look to America as the “land of the free.” — When they come to us, they are generally ready to work on our farms, canals and railroads with white laborers, but they are not willing to take their places under the same task master with negro slaves. Establish slavery here and the effect will be as it has been elsewhere. You will turn aside that tide of free white labor which has poured itself like a fertilizing flood across the great States of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, and is now murmuring up the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. Will slaveholders in view of the great hazard of bringing and keeping slaves here, immigrate to any considerable extent? Will men run a great risk with their property when there is nothing to be made by it? Slave property is more secure and more profitable in Missouri than it would be in Oregon, then why bring it here? Millions of untouched acres in the new States of the South invite to the culture of cotton, sugar and kindred productions. Will the slaveholder wishing to emigrate go where his slaves will be secure and valuable, or will he make a wild goose chase across the Continent to engage in raising wheat, oats and potatoes?

Some people talk as though voting for slavery would supply the country with labor, but it will be found that money is more necessary for that pur-

Establish slavery here and the effect will be as it has been elsewhere. You will turn aside that tide of free white labor which has poured itself like a fertilizing flood across the great States of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, and is now murmuring up the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains.
pose than votes. Five hundred slaves here would cost between five hundred thousand and a million of dollars, and yet only one farmer in ten would be provided with a hand, if there be (of which there is little doubt) 5,000 farmers in Oregon. Let it be remembered that out of 6,222,418 whites in the slaveholding States, only 347,525 own slaves. How can slave labor be made to pay in this country? Can any farmer afford to buy and keep slaves, and raise wheat at 75 cents or $1 per bushel? If there were thousands of slaves now cultivating the soil here, where would be the market, and what the demand for the grain they would produce. Slaves are certainly not necessary or desirable for fruit or stock raising.

Much is claimed for slavery because the slaveholding export more and have a larger amount of personal property than the non-slaveholding States. I will compare Pennsylvania and Virginia in 1850. They are adjoining States, and that is a fair way to try the question:

Now I submit upon these figures which is the more powerful, wealthy and prosperous of the two States. True, the personal property of Virginia exceeds that of Pennsylvania, but this is because 472,528 blacks, estimated as so much population, are at the same time considered as personal property, worth from $500 to $2000 per head. I will not ask if 1,000 Pennsylvania families would not be worth more to Oregon — would not make more blades of grass — bring more wheat to market and dig more gold out of the mountains than so many Virginia negroes, and yet the census taker would say nothing about the value of the farmers, but call the negroes worth one or two millions of dollars. The exports of the South exceed those of the North, but that proves nothing for slavery here, for 84 per cent of exports of the slaveholding States are cotton, rice and sugar, which cannot be cultivated in Oregon.

I have heard it said that slavery would increase the price of lands in this country, but this is a very great mistake. I find by the census of 1850 that the average value of land per acre in New England is $20.27. In middle States it is $28.07 per acre, while the average value of land per acre in the Southern States is $5.34. None who are familiar with current events, can be ignorant of the fact that large quantities of land in the South have been worn out and reduced to a value merely nominal by slave labor. One very common argument for slavery is that laborers, if free, will engage in mining where they are wanted by the farmers. Admit such to be the fact, is the labor of a man lost to the country who makes $25 or $50 per month more in the mines than he would on a farm. Now the question is, what is good for the country, not what is of benefit to A or B, or any class of individuals, and I say that is best for the country which gives to labor its greatest reward, whether it be mining, farming, or any other business. Labor ought to be free so that it can go into that pursuit which pays the best, or produce that for which there is the greatest demand, and thus enrich and improve the country. Scarce as laborers have been, and loud as are the complaints about the state of things here, no where is the diligent farmer more prosperous than in this much abused Territory of Oregon.

Thoennes and Landau, Constitutionalizing Racism
California has mines, and her farmers obtain help, and so it will be here if the laws of free labor and free trade are left to work out their natural results. I am opposed to slavery in Oregon because it will degrade labor. Cavilled with as this objection may be, it is vain to deny it. Suppose A and B have adjoining farms. A is rich and can buy slaves to do his work. B is less wealthy and must hire white men. Now does not the hired white man of B seem to take the same position with the negro slave of A’s. Does not this system inevitably beget a sentiment that the man or woman who hires out to do farm or house work is put upon a level with negroes.

Society if true to itself will seek to elevate and not to degrade labor. Labor changes waste places and the wilderness into the fruitful field and the beautiful city. Laboring men deserve to be the honorable of earth. They make the country and fight the battles for its defense. They fill up with vigor of mind and body where riches and luxury produce decay. They give to humanity and fame the Franklin’s, the Fulton’s and the Webster’s of history. Every community ought to have a system of free or slave labor. To mix them aggravates the evils of both, and subtracts from the benefits of each.

Negro slaves . . . are an ignorant and degraded class of beings, and therefore they will vitiate to some extent those white men who are compelled to work or associate with them. Negro slaves it must be admitted, are an ignorant and degraded class of beings, and therefore they will vitiate to some extent those white men who are compelled to work or associate with them. Moral differences when they meet, like water, seek a common level, and therefore if white men and negroes are brought in contact without that perfect subjection and rigid discipline which prevail among the slaves of the South, the white men will go down and the negroes go up, till they come to resemble each other in the habits, tastes and actions of their lives.

Slaves in Oregon, if they do anything at all, must necessarily be “Jacks of all work.” They will go everywhere and do everything. They will be free enough to see and learn all the vices of society, and slaves enough to practice them without pride or self respect. I do not see how white men who expect to labor in Oregon, can consent to have negro slaves brought here to labor with them. Slaveholders, as a general thing, are not willing to sell their good men and women to be taken thousands of miles from relatives and home, but will sell the worthless and vicious, so that the Oregon market would probably be supplied with cheap negroes, which are a curse to any country. Slavery is intended to supersede the necessity of white labor; but I deny that any system is an evil which compels white people to work. Industry invigorates mind and body. It makes the appetite good and the sleep sweet. It leads to contentment, virtue and happiness. Suppose
a farmer has slaves to do his work, and sons to rear. Will these sons be as industrious as they otherwise would be, and is any father willing to have his children grow up without habits of industry? Indolence is a dangerous luxury for young people, and there is good sense in the Spanish proverb that “an idle brain is the devil’s work shop.” What will be the political effect of making Oregon a slave State? This is a grave question and ought to be carefully considered. Surrounded by non-slaveholding territory — her geographical position — her climate — the productions of her soil and the nature of her commerce, all unite and identify her with the northern States. Suppose we go into the Union as a free State, the North will be pleased and the South satisfied. No statesman ever dreamed that slavery would ever exist in Oregon, and for that reason Douglas voted for, and Polk approved its prohibition in our organic Act. And last winter, Mr. Stevens of Georgia, said in Congress, that he would be glad to have the northwest Territories come in as slave States, but did not expect it, for the laws of climate, production, and population would prevent. I believe that we could go into the Union as a free State, without objection or excitement upon that ground, for this is what all parts of the country expect; but as a slave State we should arouse the prejudices of the whole North; for, as there is nothing in our circumstances or interests to justify such a thing, it would be regarded as a mere political movement to extend the institution of slavery. I contend that we have a perfect right to have slavery or not, as we please, but we know what the sentiment of the North is upon this question, and we must take things as they are, and not as they should be. Can Oregon, with her great claims, present and prospective, upon the Government, afford to throw away the friendship of the North — the overruling power of the nation, for the sake of slavery? Would it be advisable, when we can avoid it, to go into the Union in a tempest of excitement upon the negro question? Oregon would have more influence in the councils of the country, as a free, than as a slave State. Free, conservative, and impartial, she would be like California, of the family of the North, and of the friends of the South; but as a slave State, she could only depend upon the sympathies of the slaveholding power? Slavery it is said, will save us from fanaticism, but this is not true. Fanaticism is not altogether confined to the free States. South Carolina is not behind Massachusetts in this respect. Garrison, Phillips & Co., occupy one extreme, and Adams, Rhett & Co. the other. The Tribunes and Couriers of the north, are seconded in their sectional warfare by the Mercurys and Deltas of the South. Political fanaticism within the last year, has desecrated elections in four of the chief cities of the South with violence and bloodshed. I admit that there is more intensity of thought and energy of action in the North than in the South, and that these produce many excesses which I condemn as much as any man, but at the same time they work miracles in science and art, and all the improvements of the age. Fanaticism, even if we have it as a free State, will waste itself upon abstrac-
tions and idealities about something thousands of miles away, while with slavery there will come a fanaticism like the Promethean vulture to prey upon our very vitals. Slavery here, in the nature of things, must be a weak institution. Fanaticism from the North would therefore assail it, and from the South rush in to its defense. Torn and distracted in this way, our happiness and prosperity would be sacrificed to a miserable strife about negroes.

Some argue that Oregon should become a slave State so as to make the slaveholding and non-slaveholding States equal in the Senate. Admitted now as a slave State, we might make the States nominally equal in that body, but how soon would Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, or some other Territory come in and destroy it. We might set to work to balance the Union, but have we any assurance that other Territories will concur in the movement. Territories ought and will consult their own best interests upon this subject, and Congress has no right to regulate the admission of States so as to preserve the balance of power between different sections of the Confederacy. I will quote upon this point from a speech made last winter by Mr. Douglas, in the Senate: “Is it, (says he,) to be a struggle to keep up an equilibrium between non-slaveholding and slaveholding States? Sir, I deny the power of this government to maintain any equilibrium upon the subject; it is contrary to the principles of the Nebraska bill; it is contrary to the principles of the Democratic party, it is contrary to the principles of State equality and self government to keep an equilibrium between slaveholding and non-slaveholding States in order that they may balance each other.” I add to this, that it would tend to create a geographical division which all true friends of the Union should try to break down and prevent. This theory looks very much like Calhoun’s still born project of dual executive in the Government.

I might go further in this discussion, but perhaps I have already written more than will be read. Whatever may be inferred from my arguments against slavery in Oregon, I disclaim all sympathy with the abolition agitators of the North and deprecate and denounce all sectional organizations upon that subject. I take the ground that the General Government has no right in any way to interfere with slavery, except to carry out the fugitive slave clause of the constitution, and have maintained the opinion that each State and Territory has the absolute right to establish, modify, or prohibit slavery within its borders, subject only to the Constitutional restriction to “persons held in service or labor in one State escaping into another.” I hold, too, that a man’s views as to slavery in Oregon are no test of his Democracy. To be national, the Democratic party must necessarily embrace those who prefer a free and those who prefer a slave State. Cobb no doubt upholds slavery in Georgia, where he lives, and Dickinson would oppose it in New York, where he lives, and both are good democrats. Buchanan, Cass and Douglas would vote against slavery in the States where they respectfully reside, and if they mean what they say,
would vote against it here if they lived in Oregon.

Taking everything into consideration, I ask if it is not the true policy of Oregon to keep as clear as possible of negroes, and all the exciting questions of negro servitude? Situated away here on the Pacific, as a free State we are not likely to be troubled much with free negroes or fugitive slaves, but as a slave state there would be a constant struggle about laws to protect such property — fierce excitements about running off or stealing negroes, for which this country is so favorable, and there would be no peace.

I have faith in the future of this country, but I do not conceive that its prosperity depends upon the spiritless efforts of enslaved labor, but upon the energies of a free and intelligent people. New routes of travel are being opened across the continent. New lines of steamships and clippers are being put upon the ocean. Facilities for traveling are increasing and expenses being reduced. The Pacific railroad is a proximate reality. Men who can lift their eyes above the little precincts of a day, will see in these things the promise of our growth and greatness as a people. I know what syren song self love sings for slavery; how pleasant it seems in prospect to have a slave to till our ground, to wait upon us while we wake, and fan us when we sleep, but are these the ideas to possess men whose business it is to lay the foundations of a State? History, philosophy, and posterity plead with us not to be wholly absorbed in the present, but to learn from the past and look to the future, and if we hear and obey this appeal, the lapse of 25 or 50 years, which is as nothing in the life of a State, will find Oregon teeming with a people, intelligent, prosperous and happy, and every man a freeman.

Geo. H. Williams.

NOTES

The views expressed in this article are the authors’ and do not represent the views of the Attorney General or the Oregon Department of Justice


FIEND WAS LYNCHED

MARSHFIELD, Or., Sept. 18.—The lifeless body of Alonzo Tucker, colored, who criminally assaulted Mrs. Dennis, is dangling from the end of a rope on a South Marshfield bridge, and is being gazed upon by hundreds of people. As was predicted a body of coal miners marched into town last evening armed for business. City Marshal Carter, who had Tucker in custody, attempted to take him from the pail just as the Libby miners entered, but the move was caught sight of by one of the van of the party and a mad rush was made for the negro, who managed to give his custodians the slip. He jumped under the wharf into the mud flats and eluded both officers and the angry mob until today.

The miners were fairly crazed with rage over the outcome, and stationed armed guards at every point of egress from the city. The patrol was kept up all night and at one time there was loud talk of avenging the wrath of the infuriated people upon the officers who allowed Tucker to escape. Every nook
1900–1902

WITHIN A SOCIETY defined by White supremacy, racism could be both extreme, as in the case of a violent lynching, or casual, as in the use of the demeaning “n-word” in a mundane advertisement. On the left is a graphic account a group of miners in Marshfield, Oregon, who took the law into their own hands and lynched Alonzo Tucker, accused of assaulting a White woman. Above, the D.M. Averill & Co. advertisement for fireworks on July 1, 1900, included “Nigger Chasers,” a thinly masked threat of violence toward Blacks.

In this environment created by White supremacist practices, non-White people could not control whether they encountered one, both, or neither of these examples of real and implied violence. Consequently, the stress of racial consciousness, whether on the surface or in the ever-present subconscious, is a burden non-Whites carry that often goes unrecognized by White people.
White Right and Labor Organizing in Oregon’s “Hindu” City

Johanna Ogdens

Throughout its history, White supremacy has been practiced in diverse ways with the goal of establishing systems of White control over societies. Local circumstances, pivotal events, and powerful individuals have shaped these systems, and the passage of time dictates constant change, adaptation, and variation — although violence as a means to uphold the system remains a commonality. During the early twentieth century, anti-Asian violence erupted along much of the Pacific Coast. How that violence played out in Portland, Oregon, differed from other locales, both in the United States and around the world. It stands as an example of how White supremacy, as practiced in one country, can both impact other systems and be impacted by expected and unexpected consequences.

St. Johns, Oregon, sits on the banks of the Willamette River a few downstream miles from Portland’s center. Today, St. Johns is just another city neighborhood. In the early 1900s, this otherwise unremarkable town was home to an ugly ethnic riot and to the critical beginnings of a radical Indian independence movement.1

In 1910, St. Johns had freshly blossomed from a collection of tents, shanties, and docks to a bustling town of four thousand. It boasted a new city hall and school, streetcar service to Portland, telephones, sidewalks atop muddy roads, hotels and boarding houses, and a lively real estate market. That recent transformation was one measure of the economic boom that Portland’s ponderously named 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair had delivered to the region.2 In the wake of the fair, industries swelled and new residents, including tens of thousands of laborers, flocked to the area.3

Some two hundred Indians, overwhelmingly British subjects and Sikh military veterans or farmers from Punjab, were among those who had arrived and
A GROUP OF INDIAN, likely Sikh, mill workers stand in front of a North Pacific Lumber Company mill building in Barnet, British Columbia. During the early 1900s, Indians lived and worked from British Columbia to California and were persistently targeted by anti-Indian violence, including in St. Johns, Oregon. No known photographs of Indians in St. Johns or the greater Portland area exist.
ACROSS THE WEST, Indians were members of multinational work crews, with English as a common language. While diverse workplaces were a source of friction in St. Johns, they also exposed Indians to radical labor organizers, including socialists and members of the IWW. This photo documents that perhaps half of Indians, for a variety of reasons, adopted western headgear over turbans.

were working in St. Johns’ new or newly expanded industries. The Monarch Lumber Mill and St. Johns Lumber Co. were their primary employers, and many lived in Monarch’s bunkhouse at the outskirts of town. Others shared apartments above downtown businesses or rented neighborhood houses. Years of articles in the local St. Johns Review had reported on the town’s growth and promise, urging residents to recruit friends and family to resettle in St. Johns and contribute to its glorious future. The Review, however, rarely mentioned the Indians living in town. One seeming exception occurred in the summer of 1907, a time of rampant anti-Asian sentiments in the North American West. The Review reported on the unspecified criminality of one “I. Wilson,” who the paper deemed representative of the “gang of Hindoos . . . temporarily” located in St. Johns who needed to be “given an emphatic invitation to move on.” That “invitation” was forcefully delivered on March 21, 1910. That night, downtown St. Johns erupted in anti-Indian violence perpetrated by a crowd of two hundred, including many White laborers, a Review reporter, the town’s
mayor, the police chief, and two police officers. Collectively, they attempted to terrorize and violently expel the Indians living and working in their midst.

While the St. Johns riot is not broadly known today, in those times, ethnically motivated violence was all too common in the North American West. Chinese migrants were targets of western racial animosities, almost on their arrival in California during the 1850s. More proximately, the St. Johns’ rampage of 1910 appeared an unsettling repeat of the 1907 riots that rocked towns from California to British Columbia and targeted Indian, Japanese, and Chinese shopkeepers and laborers. In the wake of the 1907 attacks, laborers and their organizations effectively banned Indians from lumber mill work in Washington state. Government entities refused to prosecute and punish perpetrators and, instead, enacted proscriptions against the mobs’ victims. British colonial and Canadian national and regional authorities effectively ended Indians’ continued immigration to British Columbia. They also established a global policing unit to monitor Indians’ growing disaffection and to disrupt their increasingly radical affiliations.

Given their 1907 experience, Indians in St. Johns were not inclined to suffer another attack without a fight. In 1910, they fought back on the night

THE 1910 RIOT IN ST. JOHNS began downtown outside Condon’s Saloon. The mob ransacked Indians’ homes and pushed one man, who lived above a downtown business, out of his second-story window. The crowd also targeted Indians working in nearby St. Johns Lumber Co. Indians were forced onto the trolley and told to never return, an order they ignored. This photograph documents downtown St. Johns in the summer of 1908.
of the riot and broadened and sustained their resistance over the next two years. Individuals armed, declaring “we have no protection.” As a community, they demanded prosecution of the rioters and were backed by the Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office and the British Consulate. They waged a media campaign and won allies to their cause. Most significantly, after the St. Johns riot and protracted legal battle, they became a center of anti-colonial organizing.

The St. Johns riot, prosecution, and Indian-activist aftermath illuminate a dense confluence of economic, race, and labor politics, globally and within Oregon, that shaped Indians’ daily lives and ultimately their anti-colonial movement. Several key premises guide this analysis. First, “race” is a wholly human creation whereby differences in human physiognomy — hair, facial features, skin tone, and the like — are assigned social value and power. Second, “White supremacy” connotes the global system of structural power and privilege arising from and in defense of the dominant, and often assumed, belief in the supremacy of people defined as White that underwrites colonial empires. Or, as W.E.B. DuBois more trenchantly put it, “Whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen.” Third, while White supremacy has long dominated humans’ global relations, it was and is neither invariable nor all-controlling. Instead, White supremacy shape-shifts across time, region, gender, and class, affecting the means and modes of both suppression and resistance.

This article will center on three interrelated aspects of White supremacy as expressed by, or with respect to, laborers. It connects the prosecution of St. Johns’ rioters to a particular brand of White supremacy pursued by powerful Oregonians to ensure a labor force. It explores why laborers dominated ethnic riots in St. Johns. Finally, it links the global forces shaping labor animosities and Portland’s racial policy to Indians’ anti-colonial organizing in the wake of the St. Johns’ affair.

RIOT IN THE “HINDU” CITY

Indians migrated to Oregon in pursuit of work and safety, incentivized by the seemingly unconnected events of Portland’s 1905 fair and 1907’s widespread western ethnic riots. Four to five hundred Indians were among the tens of thousands of laborers who came to work in the region’s new and growing industries in the wake of Portland’s fair. They settled from The Dalles to Astoria, most living along the Columbia River and working in its many lumber mills. Besides promising employment, Oregon’s added attraction after 1907 was that it was the only state in the West that did not erupt in communal anti-Asian violence. Oregon, then, seemingly offered Indians jobs and safe harbor from a punishing political storm. So it was a particularly bitter pill when, in 1910, hundreds of their neighbors and coworkers violently attempted to drive Indians from
their jobs, homes, and sense of safety in St. Johns.

By early 1910, Indians’ presence in St. Johns was a simmering undercurrent. In February, despite evidence being “scant,” the *Morning Oregonian* reported on the arrest of a “Hindu,” on suspicion of having set a fire at a St. Johns manufacturing site.¹³ Rumors circulated that St. Johns Lumber would replace Whites with “Hindus.”¹⁴ After the fact, the *Morning Oregonian* opined that the “race feeling” had been intensifying in St. Johns for weeks prior to the violence.¹⁵ Still, the exact trigger for the St. Johns riot remains unclear. The *Oregonian* reported that it began as an encounter between men in Condon’s Saloon, with alcohol a predictable fuse.¹⁶

A *St. Johns Review* article, headlined “Big Doings in St. Johns — Mob Chases Hindus from City in a Hurry,” provides a basic, if distorted, outline of events:

A crowd of Hindu haters met Monday night, either by accident or design, upon the street, and threats were made of chasing them all out of town. . . . The crowd had grown larger every minute, and a number of Peninsula young men had been attracted and joined the assemblage. The necessary leader [Gordon Dickey] then came to the front and a movement was rapidly formed to seek out the British subjects and banish them from St. Johns forthwith. With this intention a crowd made for the quarters occupied by the Hindus, while others went to the mill [St. Johns Lumber Company], which is running night and day. Every Hindu that was encountered was peremptorily ordered to stop work and get out of town at once.¹⁷
The paper described the night as “bordering on anarchy” and lauded the night police chief and mayor for calming the crowd. The Review also opined that Indians had not been robbed of valuables or cash, merely that the “Hindus” were treated “pretty rough” or even “decidedly rough.” One man’s leg was “reported to have been broken” and others “slightly wounded.” Finally, the Review reported that a “number of the Hindus” were “escorted” to or “placed” on the streetcar to Portland, and told not to return.

Portland newspapers were more inclined to depict the actual violence, describing windows broken, doors off hinges, bits of clothing scattered, “Hindus [pulled] out of their beds,” and “everywhere the evidence of riot, and in a few cases, bloodshed.” The Morning Oregonian reported that one Review reporter had participated in the riot. But neither the Review nor the Oregonian interviewed Indians until well into the trials some three months later. In court, Indians testified to being robbed at gunpoint of valuables and hundreds of dollars and to being beaten, sometimes with a gun. They revealed that one man was pushed out of a window, and that local authorities either passively watched or actively participated in the attacks.

The Review contested only the means of the riot — it was unlawful and brought trouble to the city — not its aims. The paper claimed to speak on behalf
of “all” townspeople. “We all want the Hindus to go and mingle with their
own kind. If they were cleanly in their habits, conform to American dress and
customs, be of some good to the community, no objection to their remaining
and becoming useful citizens would be made. . . . They love to parade up and
down the public thoroughfares. Strangers coming to town get an impression
that it is a Hindu city, and it is a great incentive for them to make a hasty exit.
But to remove them, mob methods are not the proper ones.” In short, Indians
had no place in the town and no right to threaten St. Johns’ reputation and
future with their public “parading” — that is, being a part of town life.

Indians, however, were not cowed by the rioters or by the sentiments
expressed by the paper. Instead, they fought against their attackers and
for their right to live and work in St. Johns as equal members. On the
morning after the violence, a group of Indians, led by labor contractor
Kanshi Ram, went directly to British Consulate James Laidlaw in Portland
to demand action. Laidlaw contacted the Multnomah County D.A.’s office
and requested intervention. On March 22, the day after the riot, Indians
walked the streets of St. Johns with Deputy District Attorney C.W. Garland
in tow, pointing out their attackers. Garland issued nearly two hundred
warrants. Laidlaw lodged a complaint with the U.S. State Department,
which instructed the U.S. District Attorney’s office to assist with the local prosecution. U.S. Secret Service agents soon appeared in St. Johns, questioning and arresting area residents. Laidlaw hired local attorneys to assist with the prosecution. These agencies’ convergence on the town within a week of the riots ratcheted up tensions even more. The Review was incensed that Garland arrived with a “horde of deputies and a band of dark-skinned British subjects . . . arresting citizens right and left without the least regard as to their guilt or innocence.” A Multnomah County grand jury eventually issued formal indictments, but getting to that point involved a messy public fight.

On the first day of St. Johns’ Justice Court hearings, the courtroom was packed with supporters of the accused. Indians were also present, but reportedly stayed outside. In deference to the workingmen, proceedings were held at night and on Saturdays, with sessions sometimes lasting until midnight. Judge Conrad Olson feared the hearings would consume the entire summer, given the sheer number of cases as well as the number of
witnesses, attorney fights, and translations necessary. Every day seemed to add new drama. John Kim, a plaintiff and the acting interpreter, was accused by St. Johns City Attorney Henry Collier of influencing testimony. A brazen Hendricks took the stand that day and admitted to watching a “Hindu” being beaten but claimed to be unable to identify the perpetrators. The major turning point came with the removal of Olson for his remarks following the testimony of N.E. Ayer, manager of St. Johns Lumber Company. Piqued by Ayer’s continued support of the Indians, including his promise to hold their jobs, the Review reported that Olson said, “if the wife and children of Mr. Ayer of St. Johns Lumber Co. were forced to mingle daily with the Hindus, the lumberman who is assisting the prosecution would soon change his opinion regarding them.” The Ayer family was present in the courtroom. Olson went on to accuse the Indians of lying in their testimony. The Oregonian reported that the Hindus “resented” the statement, and “gathered in the hallway immediately and decided to protest.”

Garland, the lead prosecutor who had already experienced other means of the city’s obstructionism, declared Olson’s remarks the final straw. He ordered the investigation immediately removed from the

ON APRIL 27, 1910, the Morning Oregonian reported that the St. John’s mayor and eight others, including eight police officers, were indicted for failing to disperse rioters who attacked the town’s Indian residents. Charges against the mayor and police were eventually dropped. Two White laborers were convicted, but their sentences were suspended.
local court and turned over to the grand jury, a body empowered to compel testimony with the threat of jail. Judge Olson may not have been entirely unhappy with this turn of events; days earlier, he had requested the grand jury take charge. He was, after all, in the unenviable and volatile position of agreeing with the sentiments of the rioters but charged with prosecuting them in clear public view.32

In this politically charged atmosphere, Indians and non-Indians alike awaited the grand jury findings, most especially whether city officials would be indicted for not attempting to quell the riot. The grand jury worked for three weeks, as local newspapers speculated on the findings and their release date.33 On April 26, 1910, the Morning Oregonian announced the indictments for failing in their duty to disperse the rioters or stop the disturbance: Mayor J.F. Hendricks; G.W. Dunbar, the night Chief of Police; O.R. Downs, Justice of the Peace; and G.W. Etheridge, a policeman. Dunbar and Etheridge were also indicted for assembling to drive the Indians out of town, assault, battery, robbery, carrying weapons, and disturbing the peace. Collier was implicated by the grand jury’s official report, but escaped indictment.34 Dickey was indicted as the ringleader. “Dickey,” the Morning Oregonian wrote, “is accused of having dragged one of the terrified Hindus from the very presence of Mayor Hendricks by the hair of his head, while the dusky skinned native of India screamed for protection. The Mayor was at that time presiding in the City Hall at a meeting of the firemen, and the Hindu had fled to him for protection, it is charged.”35 Besides Dickey, laborers Ray Van de Bogard, John N. Groves, and Dan Herrold, along with Milton Unger, a sweetshop owner’s son, were also charged.36 Given the contentious nature of this case, and that St. Johns was a small town, it is noteworthy that the 100 or so local witnesses...
interviewed by the grand jury, and thus responsible for the formal charges being made against their neighbors and city officials, were named in the indictment.37

Separate trials for the indicated men were set in Portland. Dickey, considered the ringleader and the legal linchpin, was the first to be tried in June 1910.38 Taraknath Das, one of the more prominent Indian radical activists on the West Coast, was appointed as the court’s interpreter in the proceedings, raising a serious question about how closely Oregon authorities were attuned to the broader politics of the Indian community.39 Dickey was represented by three attorneys, and his trial lasted two weeks.40 The British Consulate had attorneys present to assist with the state’s prosecution, as did the U.S. District Attorney’s office.41 Dickey’s defense team subpoenaed at least seventeen witnesses, and the state almost ninety, White and Indian alike.42 Throughout, the St. Johns Review editorialized about the autocratic and “czar-like” legal tactics being employed against the town’s citizens and officials.43

After two years and multiple hearings and trials, ultimately only two laborers, Dickey and Van De Bogard, were convicted. Both had their prison or jail times suspended, and both were released on parole without bond, “pending . . . good behavior.”44 Charges were dropped against all of the indicted police.45 After a year, Hendrick’s felony charges were dismissed.46 He promptly petitioned the St. Johns City Council to pay his legal fees, which, on a close vote, it agreed to do.47 All trials were completed by March 1912, a full two years after the riot. Their repercussions, however, echoed long and far after.

While justice was woefully inadequate, that the trials even occurred was nonetheless notable for the times. The much larger 1907 anti-Asian riots in Bellingham and Vancouver, B.C., received no such prosecutorial attention.
The British Consulate in Seattle performed the formality of a complaint to the U.S. government but pressed no further. Bellingham authorities threatened action, but those arrested were never prosecuted, reportedly due to their inability to secure witnesses. In Vancouver, the government took no action against the rioters. Instead, the local and provincial governments, in league with British colonial authorities, banned further Indian immigration and intensively surveilled the extant community.

Yet, in response to a smaller riot, Oregon authorities, with the aid of the British and U.S. governments, pursued, prosecuted, and convicted assailants. The ensuing legal and political battle was unprecedented in the West, and its ambivalent outcome is emblematic of Oregon’s specific racial strategy. By prosecuting the rioters, including the city officials, Portland authorities made an object lesson about mob violence in small-town Oregon. But the failure to secure numerous convictions, impose jail time, or definitively incriminate city officials indicates the strategy’s ultimate loyalties. The verdicts suggest a political unwillingness to convict Whites over issues of race. Ultimately, authorities seemed to say enough was enough and declare the matter closed.

The British Consulate’s involvement in the St. Johns prosecution was significant. As a Portland resident and member of the city’s elite, Laidlaw likely embraced the local racial ethos. More importantly, he likely viewed mollifying Indian subjects as best serving British interests. By 1910, the British Crown and its consulates were closely monitoring the unrest and radical organizing among Indians in the North American West. By intervening in the St. Johns affair, Laidlaw attempted to blunt Indians’ roiling discontent and foster the belief that British and American authorities could be trusted to protect Indians’ lives and dignity. His actions had little effect. As radical St. Johns’ resident Sohan Singh Bhakna later wrote, Laidlaw “did not do anything meaningful” with respect to the riot. Shortly after the close of the trials, Indians in St. Johns began organizing to overthrow British rule of India.

OREGON’S RACIAL STRATEGY

The comparative racial calm of Portland and its environs, relative to the West Coast, was not due to a pervading sense of equality, but instead, to a particular iteration of White supremacy with respect to labor needs. Western Oregon’s racial strategy directly facilitated the nurturance of a White state built on the labor of workers from around the globe. It was not meant to champion Chinese, Japanese, or Indian rights or to foster their inclusion as citizens.

As articles in this issue highlight, Oregon was founded as a state for White people. Laws such as the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act (DLCA) fostered the dispossession of sovereign Indigenous peoples and the transfer of land
ownership to Whites. Founders excluded African Americans from residence in Oregon. The state constitution was an overtly exclusionist document that explicitly denied the vote and property ownership to any “Negro, Chinaman, or Mulatto,” and restricted the vote only to “male” citizens. Oregon’s founding in the late 1850s reflected an America wracked by race and an impending Civil War.

Yet influential Oregonians in and around Portland also forged a strategy to attract and retain Chinese migrants. Men who penned and supported Oregon’s constitutional racial proscriptions came to recognize that Chinese migrants fleeing violence in California during the 1860s could provide Oregon with needed labor. As historian Marie Rose Wong writes, Oregonian editorialist Harvey Scott believed that, “as long as the country was filled with a large number of Asiatics willing to work, why not adroitly exploit them as a state resource?”

Scott and others continued to oppose citizenship or any civic equity to Chinese and other non-White peoples. But those powerful men also utilized their judicial and policing positions, along with control of the influential Oregonian editorial page, to establish a civic compact decrying and combating ethnic violence. They proved effective.

Widespread ethnic rioting and expulsions did not take place, and from 1880 to 1910, Portland’s Chinese population increased as people fled the violence of other regional cities. Second only to San Francisco’s in size and prestige, Portland’s Chinese community hosted opera houses, shops, and gardens, and by 1890 comprised 25 percent of Portland’s foreign-born population. Millionaire businessman Moy Back Hin was appointed an honorary consul in 1906, one of only four in the United States. Portland was also a global center in the production of forged documents for subverting exclusion, a business involving both Chinese and White people and aided by local port inspectors.

Portland leaders’ strategy created rifts between local authorities and federal agencies overseeing immigration, with important implications for later Indian organizing.

Scott’s “good sense” of promoting industry and growing rich by utilizing Asian labor gained considerable currency among local businessmen, politicians, and ordinary citizens, and the practice persisted through waves of migrants from Japan, India, and elsewhere. While the strategy failed to prevent violence altogether, the pact was well-established in western Oregon by 1910, as evidenced by the prosecution of the St. Johns rioters. Oregon’s history is a reminder that while the world was engulfed by what DuBois dubbed “the white religion,” its practice varied in time and place, shaping people and movements, sometimes with far-reaching consequence. The particular practice of White religion in Oregon impacted Indians’ migration to the state and their later political organizing. The St. Johns riot illustrates
that the policy could not always contain racialized fears, and that events well beyond Oregon influenced local sentiments. It also highlights the class fractures within White supremacy, locally and globally.

**WHAT’S EMPIRE GOT TO DO WITH IT? ORGANIZED LABOR AND ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE**

During 1910, national media ran fearmongering articles on the supposed “Tide of Turbans” and “Hindoo invasion” threatening the West. In turn, the riot in St. Johns was widely reported on, adding more grist to the region’s animosity mill. Anti-Asian vitriol spread in whispers and grumblings from
one mill to the next, with worn exclusionist handbills passed along in saloons and boarding houses. I have found no evidence of explicit exclusionist organizations in St. Johns before that March night. Nevertheless, leaders of organized labor and overt exclusionist movements dovetailed, in both strategy and philosophy, and the labor newspapers of the day framed a pervasive anti-Asian message. In this, Portland was no exception.

The Portland Labor Press (PLP) was the city’s leading labor newspaper and the mouthpiece of the Portland Federated Trades Council. In the summer of 1907, the PLP reported that the council represented five-thousand men and women, and over forty unions. By February 1910, the paper declared that “every union in Portland” reported an increase in membership and “slow but steady improvement in hours and wages.” During the years preceding the St. Johns unrest, the PLP reported on strikes, documented the state of various trades, and opined on civic elections.

The pages of the PLP were also consistently peppered with anti-Asian rhetoric, primarily against the Chinese and Japanese. This included numerous reprints of exclusionist missives and demands to maintain the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. There were calls to prevent the admission of “coolie labor” and enjoinders to “join a labor union and protect yourself against the Japanese invasion.” The PLP argued that the solution to crime was to target immigrants. It carried numerous reports on New Zealand and Australian labor organizations’ efforts to restrict Chinese immigration. In March 1907, the PLP supported the launch of a local Labor Party, which supported Asian exclusion.

The paper did not simply express fears about competition for jobs but also constructed Asian laborers as morally deficient if not depraved. Its pages carried obscene notes such as “Three bad Chinamen have been turned into good ones by electrocution [at] the Massachusetts state prison for killing four others in a tong war. Total of seven reformed Chinese for the state.”

In the supposed service of labor, in February 1910, the PLP wrote: “It is said no one ever sees a Jap funeral and that the 10-cent Jap restaurant makes use of the cadavers to save butcher bills. This is a little strong, but it is passing from hand to hand among some of the union labor men as a means of encouraging patronage of white cooks.” While obviously dehumanizing, the articles fed White supremacist views and actions, and delineated the PLP’s position on the racial boundary of laborers to be organized and defended.

Intersecting with its consistent anti-Asian politics was the PLP’s hostility toward the newly formed Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The PLP condemned the IWW for two reasons. First, the IWW opposed the American Federation of Labor (AFL), with which the PLP and the Trades Council were associated. Unlike the IWW, the AFL under the leadership of Samuel Gompers organized only skilled, and overwhelmingly White, workers and was an
avid proponent of Chinese exclusion. Second, the PLP attacked the IWW for recruiting Chinese, Japanese, and Indian workers — all overrepresented in unskilled positions — into its organization. In one article, the PLP dismissed the IWW’s recruiting principles as being merely in service of a numbers game to undermine the AFL, writing it was “little wonder that that organization is accepting Japanese into membership in order to make a showing.” In 1907, the PLP refused to back an area IWW-led strike of 3,000 lumber mill workers, a large stoppage by Portland standards. Instead, the PLP criticized the IWW’s disruption of the American labor movement with respect to the movement’s ethnic and skill divides.

The PLP, like other western labor presses, consistently demeaned “coolie” or “contract” laborers. These were dog-whistle terms signaling non-White and, by definition, unfree, inferior workers’ inhabiting a demeaned position within the global colonial labor system that privileged organized, White laborers. In February 1910, the PLP reprinted shrill claims from the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL), an explicitly exclusionist San Francisco–based organization that drove the 1907 riots: “There recently arrived in one day 191 Hindoo laborers at the port of San Francisco. Many people consider them worse than the Chinese coolie.” The AEL, and thus the PLP, were agitated over a lapse in San Francisco immigration officers’ regulation of Indian migration. U.S. immigration officials instituted the selective enforcement of administrative rules and effectively slashed the entry of Indians from 1,710 in 1908 to a mere 377 in 1909. Several immigration agents in San Francisco, however, refused to abide by the prejudicial policy promoted by agency superiors and local nativists, and by the close of 1910, they briefly restored Indian immigration to previous years’ levels. The resulting landings that year — a mere 1,700 Indians amongst millions of other migrants — constituted “nothing more nor less than a threatening inundation of Hindoos over the Pacific Coast” that mainstream and exclusionist newspapers hysterically railed against. This political hurricane of national headlines and western labor agitation made landfall on March 21, 1910, turning a routine Monday night in St. Johns explosive.

White workers were key organizers and actors in the St. Johns violence, much as laborers had been in other ethnic conflicts in the American West. They had grounds to be frustrated with their lives. They suffered the dangers and physical tolls of the mills and mines that built the West, while the wealth they produced overwhelmingly flowed to bankers and industrialists. Given the global power and legacy of White supremacy, however, White workers’ frustrations frequently manifested in beliefs that if other laborers, including Indians, were shut out, their position could be improved or at least safeguarded.
Laborers’ organizations were largely unwilling to stand for parity as the most effective weapon in their fight for economic equality. While many, if not most, western workers believed that Asians threatened “white jobs,” only a vocal minority organized to expel Asian workers or were swept up in moments of rage. A tiny percentage of laborers, most notably those affiliated with the IWW and a few within socialist circles openly rejected this outlook.

Yet, given how endemic White supremacy was and is globally, it is difficult to argue that workers were more racist than anyone else. For years, men and women from all walks of life took part in anti-Asian violence, from California to British Columbia. In St. Johns and elsewhere, shop owners and professionals spoke from podiums, mingled in crowds, threw rocks, broke windows, and robbed and beat “Hindus” and others. Mainstream newspaper reporters fanned if not instigated the hysteria. Editors and politicians recited a litany of differences — from ethnicity, skin tone, and appearance to religious practices, values, and ethics — that branded them as impossibly and forever alien. People in similar positions around the globe offered similar rationales with similar intent and effect: the curtailment of the rights of “Asians.” Still, while the belief in and action on White supremacy dominated society, laborers had specific fears and animosities rooted in the racial hierarchy of global
colonialism that played out in global mills, mines, and factories. Whiteness, in other words, was and is rent by class.

Between 1850 and 1930, more humans traveled the world than at any previous time in history. In North America, migrants were not primarily shopkeepers, doctors, or teachers. They were workers who came by the millions and did the critical, and often dangerous, labor of felling the trees, working the mines, and setting the rails that built the country. In the North American West, these workers were in the trenches of a labor system that formed the epicenter of the world’s ethnic mixing. This massive movement of global peoples, so essential to industry, also threatened the promises and expectations of the White settler society that very same industry underwrote.

Colonialism and democracy were deeply incised by a global racial hierarchy. European powers did not grant democratic rights in India or in other countries they colonized, which gained those rights only after ending colonial rule. In settler colonies such as the United States and Canada, however, White men fought for and benefitted from the greatest extension of democratic rights ever extended to commoners. Globally, in belief and in fact, “White” became synonymous with republican self-rule, “free” people, and the privilege of work befitting “free labor.” This correlation had even greater valence in America, the only settler country that maintained a slave system within its territorial borders. As historian David Roediger argues, domestic chattel slavery bound “white” and “free” in America’s
labor rhetoric, a conflation that endured after slavery was formally abolished and enveloped other non-White peoples.\textsuperscript{79} These beliefs and their underlying economic realities constructed and maintained a two-tier labor force and civic polity largely and enduringly defined by race.

White laborers’ ethnic hostilities festered in the disconnect between settler colonies’ social and political expectations and their economic realities. Industrialists’ need for legions of workers and settler colonies’ political promises to White commoners did not perfectly align. Moreover, the power relations in which such disparities were resolved favored industrialists, not workers. Laborers’ anxieties were further heightened by the rapid, and ravaging, industrialization that upended their lives following the American Civil War. It transformed not only how they lived and worked, but with whom, as millions of global workers migrated to the western United States. Founded on the promise of land ownership and an ever-expanding western frontier, the late 1800s also brought Americans to the end of a continent and, for millions, to the end of dreams of being independent, landed producers, rather than permanent wage laborers.\textsuperscript{80}

For millions of American laborers, unprecedented race mixing and often brutal proletarianization were entwined realities; their politics reflected this dual reality. Sociologist Jonathan Hyslop dubs labor’s particular brand of racism fused with class struggle as “white labourism,” arguing that it dominated the global organized labor movement and served as a “partner in empire.”\textsuperscript{81} Or, put in the parlance of those times, the “our” in the common fighting refrain of “don’t take our jobs” and “don’t invade our country” was deeply tied to the legacy of settler colonialism and the specific expectations of European commoners. In a young town such as St. Johns, where the social order was still being determined — very much including whether the community would accept its many global laborers — it is not altogether surprising that the brooding racial and class animosities of the entire coast turned a Monday night saloon encounter explosive. Powerful Oregonians were ultimately unable to control these larger empiric dynamics of labor and race.

Focusing on empire broadens the conceptualization of the race politics of organized labor beyond White workers’ fear of wage competition, the existence of an economic downturn heightening fears of job loss, or a specific tactic used by “bosses” for keeping workers divided and exploitable. All of these claims hold some truth, but in other ways fall short. They overstate owners’ planning and control and degrade laborers’ agency, if sometimes of an ugly sort. In 1910 St. Johns, there was no economic downturn, Indians were not substantially underpaid, and area unions were strong. Perhaps more
importantly, “competition” implies rationality, while notions of colonial “entitlement” and “promise” reverberate precarity and manifest unpredictably.

A global, colonial frame on labor also helps explain Indians’ political focus in St. Johns in the wake of the trials. Notably, while they suffered no fools, Indians’ organizing focus was not against White workers; and, although they utilized the justice system, their essential focus was not on greater rights in America. Instead, as Sohan Singh Bhakna put it, “The St. John’s attack was a wakeup call and a game changer for all Indians working in Oregon and Washington State. . . . [workers] took the slavery curse to their hearts [for the] first time.”82 In the spring of 1912, nearly simultaneous to the close of the St. Johns riot trials, they organized a new group called the Pacific Coast Hindi Association and elected Sohan Singh Bhakna president, Kanshi Ram treasurer, and G.D. Kumar secretary.83 They became the organizing nucleus for Ghadar, the global, radical independence movement formally launched downriver in Astoria, Oregon, in 1913.84 From North America, Ghadar gathered recruits from across the world, primarily through the distribution of its newspaper. Ghadar sought the overthrow of British rule of India, and with the outbreak of World War I, several thousand recruits returned to India with that intent.

Ghadar represented a particular political turn that can only be understood through the global lens of empire. As historian Maia Ramnath writes, it was a merging of “the history of race and class in the United States, and of colonization,” which organizers linked to “an explicitly anti-imperialist revolutionary program, rather than simply calling for inclusion in the existing society. Thus the Ghadarites’ galvanizing moment occurred precisely at the point where the politics of race, labor and imperialism converged.”85 Those frames came together in St. Johns not singularly, but in the context of the wider attacks on and resistance by Indians. In other words, like the causes of the St. Johns riot, the source of Indians’ political awakening was not simply a result of local events, but an expression of global colonial currents. Not coincidentally, that awakening came in North America, where racial targeting, exclusion, and laborers’ democratic rights existed side by side.

Indians’ organizing highlights a surprising synergy to the racial targeting and democratic exclusion of Indians and others, which paralleled White laborers’ (relative) democratic rights in settler colonies. The Indians who founded Ghadar fought those laborers who targeted them for their non-Whiteness, but they also sought the rights and relative freedoms those same workers exercised. They explicitly did both in St. Johns. It was in their exposure to democratic freedoms, if deeply riven by class and racial oppression, that Indians saw the power of self-rule and organized to
become citizen laborers of India. Indians came to understand that obtaining the rights to rule and be citizens of their own country — rights globally reserved for Whites — was crucial. Without such powers, they would always be considered “black thieves everywhere” as later Ghadar poems put it.

Skin tone and turbans were markers of the global colonial hierarchy of race and labor that followed Indians from the fields of Punjab to the mills of the Pacific Northwest. They arrived in an America perverted by domestic African chattel slavery, where notions of free and unfree labor and citizenship were deeply implicated by ethnicity. (Europe, by contrast, profited from that “peculiar institution” at arm’s length with overseas colonies.) “Coolie” was an epithet hurled at them despite their being, like millions of other migrants to North America, “free” wage laborers. By virtue of their ethnicity, Indians carried onto tainted American soil the racial signifier of “coolie,” racialized and degraded as unfree workers by the PLP and other labor newspapers.

Whiteness wears many markers, but at its heart is, and was, the suitability for citizenship, political inclusion, and self-rule. In the wake of the St. Johns riot and with the aid of radical intellectuals, Indians came to realize that without overthrowing British colonial rule, they would always be considered “black thieves everywhere.” This linkage between global colonialism’s racial hierarchy and the conditions of labor guides us beyond consideration of the injurious curse of racists to the workings and divides of global labor,
which politicized and motivated thousands to reverse the course of their lives and risk everything to return to India to overthrow colonial rule.

The interdependence of labor, race, and colonialism is intrinsic to understanding North American labor politics. As Hyslop argues, the “internationally constructed synthesis of militant labour and racist visions was a major cultural source of the rise of working class racism” across the colonial empire specifically aimed at and in response to Asian laborers.91 Without this perspective, our history is distorted. A false divide is imposed between so-called ethnic history and labor history. A radical history under our nose — the Indians of St. Johns who drove the foundation of Ghadar — is silenced. The politicization and actions of Indians and others must instead prompt rethinking of the frame of American labor history to include a global colonial perspective that shapes the attitudes and position of all laborers, not just non-White “others.”

NOTES

I would like to thank the editor and guest editors for their vision and hard work in bringing this edition together, along with Erin Brasell and Helen Ryan for their smart and focused help in finalizing this piece.

1. I use “Indian” to denote people who hail from current-day India and Pakistan, roughly lands formerly known as Hindustan before independence in 1947, and who were then British subjects. “Native” or “Indigenous” denoted the peoples whose lands in North and South America were occupied and stolen, initially as part of a British colony and then by the newly minted American and Canadian governments. “Hindu,” in its best usage in these times, meant people from Hindustan. Its common usage also conflated a religion and a people. The majority of Indian immigrants to North America during these times, however, were Sikhs, along with a small number of Hindus and Muslims. “Hindu” was commonly used as a racial pejorative, alternatively spelled as “Hindoo.” I use the term “Asian” as a term of convenience, but advisedly given its Orientalist connotations. In American race politics, it has worked to lump people of many cultural backgrounds into one alien “other.”


6. The riot was on the night of Monday, March 21, 1910. Because the Review was a weekly, the first report of it was on Friday, March 25, 1910.


8. Jensen, Passage to India, 51.

9. “More Arrests for Riots Promised,” Morning Oregonian, March 24, 1910, p. 4. The Daily News [hereafter TDN], responded to the Indians returning to work, and that some of them were armed, and threatening to cause a “Race War,” as its front page article put it. (“Race War?,” TDN, March 25, 1910, p. 1, 3). TDN, a Portland paper, was consistently sympathetic to white laborers in its coverage of the riot. In the wake of the riot, it lacked from lamenting that “innocent men [were] arrested” (meaning the rioters), to predicting an ensuing “race war” (“Race War?”), and by April, claiming “there was no riot” (“All About That ‘Riot’,” TDN, April 2, 1910, p. 3).


16. Ibid.

17. “Big Doings in St. Johns,” Review, March 25, 1910, p. 1. The Review was a bi-weekly paper and this was the first edition after the riot.

18. Ibid. This Review account stands in sharp contrast with the fact that the next day numerous city authorities were served warrants for their arrest by the Multnomah County District Attorney and the sheriff.

19. Ibid. It is worth noting that the streetcar men who participated in the riot that evening were union men who won a long strike beginning in late 1906, which had broad community support. See, for example, Portland Labor Press, “Carmen Are On Strike,” December 17, 1906, p. 1; and “Were Illegally Under Arrest,” January 21, 1907, p. 1.


30. “Hindus Roiled by Remark of Olson,” *Morning Oregonian*, March 29, 1910, p. 12. The Indians were accused of lying several times, including of falsely accusing men of having taken part in the riot.


42. *State v. Dickey*, Multnomah Co. Circuit Court, Motion and Affidavit, on behalf of Dickey, undated; Affidavit on behalf of Dickey, Undated Certification of R.L. Stevens, June 4, 1910, Sheriff Multnomah County Oregon of Service of Subpoenas by JH Jones, Deputy; Form CC9 Criminal Subpoena on behalf of the State of Oregon, June 2, 1910; Affidavit of C.W. Garland, June 1, 1910; Multnomah County Circuit Court microfiche, Portland, Oregon.


45. State v. Dunbar, C 1538, Multnomah County Circuit Court, undated and untitled document, Multnomah County Circuit Court microfiche, Portland, Oregon.

46. “Hindu Riots Case Ended,” Morning Oregonian, March 6, 1912, p. 12. I have not yet located the court documents for the mayor’s case.

47. Supplement to the Review, March 8, 1912. Dunbar similarly petitioned for the City to pay his legal fees, but it was not approved. “Council Proceedings,” Review, March 15, 1912, p. 1; “Council Proceedings,” Review, April 5, 1912, p. 1. Perhaps more can be learned if more case files are located. The grand jury records, rich in witness testimony, reportedly have been destroyed. Court records indicate prominent local citizens posted the thousands in bail after Dickey’s and others’ arrest. Who in the community felt the need to support the rioters, and what about the many who seemingly did not support them and gave testimony against them?

48. Multiple conversations and emails with historian and Bellingham riot expert, Dr. Paul Englesberg of Ferndale, Washington, January and February 2014.


50. Some precedence for Oregon authorities’ prosecution of the St. Johns rioters can be discerned in the response to the Boring murder trial of 1907. That murder and trial demand further research and attention, including in its proximity to the Everett, Washington, riot. See footnote 24 for more on that incident.

51. St. Johns officially became part of Portland soon after the trials concluded. While economics was likely the primary motivation for the merger, it is possible that the small town’s ethnic policy chastening was part of the terms of St. Johns’ admission.

52. My research regarding Laidlaw and his role in St. Johns are limited to records held in Laidlaw’s personal records held in the James Laidlaw papers, 1886–1977, MSS 21, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Portland, Oregon [hereafter OHS Research Library], which hold nothing specific to the St. Johns events. I also reviewed the records of the U.S. Attorney for the Judicial District of Oregon held at the Seattle Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington. Laidlaw was also involved on some level with the Boring, Oregon, prosecution of the murder of an Indian laborer. With time and money, research in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, D.C., and the British National Archives in London might secure more correspondence between Laidlaw and his superiors and with the U.S. State Department.


54. Marie Rose Wong, Sweet Cakes, Long Journey: The Chinatowns of Portland, Oregon (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2004), 51. I have largely adopted Marie Rose Wong’s argument from Sweet Cakes, Long Journey, regarding the establishment of Oregon’s racial policy with respect to the Chinese, which was not homogenous throughout the state, but more in northwestern parts of Oregon. See especially pages 6, 31, 33–34, 47, 49–50, and 51–60.

55. Wong, Sweet Cakes, Long Journey, 16, 47. Carl Abbott provides the following statistics: in 1880, the Chinese numbered 1,700; by 1900 they were at least 7,800. Abbott, Portland in Three Centuries: The Place and the People (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2011), 56–57.

56. Wong, Sweet Cakes, Long Journey, 176, 178. San Francisco, Boston, New York,
and Portland all had Chinese consuls.

57. Ibid., 123.
58. Ibid., 143–44. If ruled by a port inspector ineligible to enter, or reenter, the United States, a Chinese person could appeal through the courts through a process called a habeas corpus filing. Eighty percent of such filings in Portland were by Chinese and the vast majority of these were ruled in favor of them, to the distress of customs authorities and their overseers in Washington, D.C. Ibid., 141.

59. See Wong, Sweet Cakes, Long Journey, for an extended analysis of the racial policy forged around Chinese and its impact on Portland.
61. One example is the front page, “Mayor, Justice, Police Indicted,” Los Angeles Herald, April 27, 1910, p. 1, reporting on the indictments of the St. Johns city officials.
63. PLP, February 11, 1910, p. 4.
67. PLP, August 24, 1906, p. 2.
70. This writer is aware of, and does not mean to naturalize, the concept or erase the historical and often violent history involved in determining who was considered white — for Italians, Slavs, Irish, Jews and others — that was an integral part of those times.
76. Lake and Reynolds, Drawing the Global Colour Line, 6, 23.
77. As historian Rudi Batzell writes, “Often seen as simply racist, the [Chinese] Exclusion Act was specifically aimed at barring labour migration: Chinese scholars and merchants

78. It is outside the bounds of this article to discuss democracy and neo-colonialism.


80. In the 1890s, the closing of America’s so-called “frontier” became an important American historical reference point and analytical frame as expressed by Frederick Jackson Turner.


83. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 52. The group is also referred to, given transmigration issues, as the Hindustan Association of the Pacific Coast. On his return in India for Ghadar, Kanshi Ram was executed. Bhakna was arrested and sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment. He was released after sixteen years, but re-imprisoned for his revolutionary activities. He remained active in radical politics until his death at the age of ninety-eight.

84. *Ghadar* translates as either mutiny or revolution. In the immediate sense, Ghadar was unsuccessful, with most adherents immediately jailed or executed in India. The movement is, however, credited with being the opening salvo of twentieth-century independence and with inspiring successive radical movements and organizers.


88. Perhaps as a consequence, Marx never fully theorized this pressing issue that stands at the core of the call for workers of the world to unite.

89. With England’s outlawing of African chattel slavery in the 1830s, the nation sent out Indian indentured labor — “coolies” — exporting men and women across the empire, if not to North America. Compared to the millions of indentured Indians working across the globe, the several thousand in North America were a mere drop. To the later regret of British colonial overlords, however, these few Indian “free” wage laborers in North America, buoyed by Queen Victoria’s 1858 promise of equal status, unleashed a clash of competing colonial promises and aspirations that with Ghadar came to haunt British rule.


1904–1916

THESE TWO ADVERTISEMENTS, published in the early to mid 1900s in La Grande and Klamath Falls, Oregon, echo anti-Chinese sentiments during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1882, Congress passed the first Chinese Exclusion Act, which specifically banned entry of Chinese laborers into the United States. In 1902, the law was renewed and made permanent; it was not repealed until 1943.

On March 1, 1904, (top right) the owners of Pap’s Chop House advertised in the La Grande Observer for “white help only” and guaranteed patrons would receive polite, clean service where “no Chinaman has prepared your food.” In this advertisement, the restaurant owners revealed that racism and ethnocentrism — a belief in the superiority of one’s own ethnic group — were acceptable to newspaper readers.

On February 21, 1916, (bottom right) Roberts & Hanks hardware store owners participated in a “Pay-up Week” campaign designated by the Klamath Falls mayor and endorsed by the Klamath Falls Businessmen’s Association. The campaign was intended to encourage people to pay their debts to local-run businesses, and many hoping to collect advertised on the page. In their “The Chinaman Always Pays His Debts” advertisement, the hardware store owners explicitly state that White people are superior to Chinese people.
WHEN YOU EAT AT
PAP’S CHOP HOUSE

You are certain that no Chinaman has prepared your food.
The Really and Truly Best Meal in Union County for the price.

20 CENTS
Everything neat, fresh and clean. We solicit a trial: Polite service assured.

Pap’s Chop House

THE CHINAMAN ALWAYS PAYS HIS DEBTS BEFORE NEW YEARS
You Are Better Than the Chinese
WHY NOT PAY YOURS?
ROBERTS & HANKS HARDWARE
Liberty Ships and Jim Crow Shipyards

Racial Discrimination in Kaiser’s Portland Shipyards, 1940–1945

JOHN LINDER

During the turn of the twentieth century, a time shaped by Jim Crow policies, unions won significant battles over workplace control. Unfortunately, many prioritized their power to favor perceived self-interest over equity and merit. The impact went far beyond employment itself. If the Black family breadwinner could not provide stable, adequate financial support for their family, it affected every other aspect of life. Little or no money coming in means no access to housing, no access to sufficient food, no health care, no money to send children to first-rate schools, no money to influence the political process, etc. — all of which predetermines that the penalties imposed by racism will be passed on to the next generation to be repeated there.

THE BLACK POPULATION of the Portland-Vancouver area grew tenfold during World War II, from approximately 2,000 in 1940 to more than 20,000 in 1945. The new arrivals were part of a demographic tilt that brought millions of Americans west to work in the burgeoning war industries and the businesses that supported them. In Portland, most sought work in three huge shipyards the Kaiser Company constructed to produce freighters, known as Liberty Ships, as well as aircraft carriers, tankers, and landing ships.

Most African Americans came to Portland from the South, leaving behind an average family income of less than $500 a year for jobs that paid nearly $3,000 per year at the height of the war boom. One thing they did not leave behind was Jim Crow segregation. Nearly three-fourths of the skilled jobs in the Kaiser shipyards were under the jurisdiction of Local 72 of
DURING WORLD WAR II, eight million Americans moved West seeking work in the growing war industries. In Portland, most sought work in Kaiser Corporation shipyards, constructed to produce Liberty Ships, aircraft carriers, tankers, and landing ships. In this 1943 photograph, the SS Robert Newell launches from the Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation shipyard in Portland, Oregon.
This cartoon, published on June 29, 1943, in the People’s Observer, a Black-owned newspaper in Portland, Oregon, highlights the bitterness felt by many African Americans who were being sent to fight a “war of democracy” against proponents of a “master race” while the U.S. government allowed and even promoted blatant discrimination at home.

While the shipyards were crying for skilled labor, qualified Black workers were consigned to laboring jobs or forced to join a segregated and powerless “auxiliary local.” Called on to build weapons for the “war for freedom” abroad, Black workers were systematically denied the most elementary freedoms at home. This history sheds light on how today’s gross racial inequality — exemplified by the nearly seven-to-one ratio between White and Black average household wealth — is rooted not only in slavery but in systematic discrimination ever since. It also provides lessons in how both corporations and the government reinforce discrimination while claiming to do the opposite. Segregation in the Kaiser yards was initiated by the Boilermakers Union, but the Kaiser Company brought the union into the yards and followed its dictates to fire Black workers. The federal government, more interested in maximizing war production than ending segregation, failed to enforce its own anti-discrimination order. Significant victories were won by Black workers and organizers who relied on mass action and the threat of mass action rather than the promises and proclamations of government and company officials.
“ONLY AS JANITORS”

The rapid increase in war production, beginning in 1940, held out the prospect that Black workers might finally establish themselves as a permanent part of the country’s industrial labor force. While war spending ended the Great Depression for Whites, however, jobless African Americans found that “No Help Wanted” signs at factory gates had been replaced with signs reading “Help Wanted — White.” Company officials were often equally blunt. The president of North American Aviation, asked by Black civic leaders about prospects for employment in his new bomber factory near Kansas City, Kansas, stated, “the Negroes will be considered only as janitors and in other similar capacities. . . . While we are in complete sympathy with the Negro, it is against the company policy to employ them as mechanics or aircraft workers.” More than half the openings in war industries were closed to African Americans, with the exception of shipbuilding, where 28 percent were closed. Most defense plants had no Black workers at all. In late 1940 and early 1941, the National Association for the Advance of Colored People (NAACP) and other civil rights organizations “held mass protest meetings, but the exclusion” of African Americans continued.

Black leaders were quick to point out that U.S. politicians’ angry denunciations of Hitler’s master-race ideology were hard to square with the federal government’s tolerance of racism in its own front yard. Roy Wilkins, editor of Crisis, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), wrote: “It is pretty grim . . . to have a black boy in uniform get an orientation lecture in the morning on wiping out Nazi bigotry, and that same evening be told he can buy a soft drink only in the ‘Colored’ post exchange!” The experience of mass layoffs and racist violence following World War I had taught African Americans not to wait for war’s end to resume the fight for equality; their leverage was greatest when they were needed in the factories and armed forces. A popular story circulated about a Black soldier on a Southern bus who “resisted the driver’s efforts to shift him to the Jim Crow section by taking off his coat and declaring, ‘Well, I’m fixing to go off and fight for democracy. I might as well start right now.’”

A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union, rallied this sentiment when he called for 10,000 Black people to march on Washington, D.C., on July 1, 1941, to demand “the abolition of Jim-Crowism in all Government departments and defense employment.” Randolph mobilized the finances and membership of the Brotherhood to spread the call nationwide. The official call for the march, published in the brotherhood’s journal, The Black Worker, stated:
IN JANUARY 1941, A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the largest union of Black workers in the country, called for a march on Washington to demand an end to discrimination in war industries and the armed forces. The March on Washington, D.C., Movement won passage of Executive Order 8802, banning discrimination by war contractors.

While billions of the taxpayers’ money are being spent for war weapons, Negro workers are being turned away from the gates of factories, mines and mills — being flatly told, “NOTHING DOING.” Some employers refuse to give Negroes jobs when they are without “union cards,” and some unions refuse Negro workers union cards when they are “without jobs.”

As the date for the march approached, predictions of the turnout rose to 100,000, and Roosevelt moved into full gear to stop it. Both Franklin Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt met with Randolph and other Black leaders, but they held firm in their demand for an end to discrimination in the war industries and armed forces. On June 25, one week before the scheduled march, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which banned discrimination “in defense industries or Government because of race, creed, color, or national origin,” ordered that all government defense contracts include a provision “obligating the contractor not to discriminate,” and established the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) to ensure compliance. Only then did Randolph “postpone” the march, but he maintained the March on Washington Movement to press for effective action by the FEPC and led rallies of more than 10,000 people in New York, Chicago, and St. Louis during the summer of 1942.

Executive Order 8802, perhaps the most important victory for civil rights since the Fifteenth Amendment, was won through mass action and the
threat of mass action by African Americans. Before the march was called, Randolph and other civil rights leaders could not even get an appointment to see Roosevelt, whose priority was war production, not ending discrimination. This helps explain why the FEPC often appeared to be fighting with one hand tied behind its back. Attacked by southern Democrats and lacking consistent support from the Roosevelt administration, the FEPC never had the power to force the most hard-nosed employers and unions to desegregate. The conflict that would soon erupt in the Kaiser shipyards demonstrated that FEPC attempts to enforce Executive Order 8802 were trumped by the desire of both Kaiser and Roosevelt to avoid any action that might slow the shipyards’ record-setting launches.

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT addressed employees of the Oregon Shipyard in 1942. In the foreground from the left: Gov. Charles Sprague, Henry Kaiser, Edgar Kaiser, and Roosevelt. Kaiser was the nation’s preeminent military contractor. Oregonship launched freighters faster than any shipyard had before or has since.
LIBERTY SHIPS AND JIM CROW SHIPYARDS

In January 1941, with a contract to build cargo ships for Britain to replace those being sunk by German submarines, Henry Kaiser and his son Edgar Kaiser leased eighty-seven acres on the Willamette River and broke ground for the Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation, commonly referred to as Oregonship. Henry Kaiser had no shipbuilding experience, but as the leader of the Six Companies consortium that built the Boulder, Bonneville, and Grand Coulee dams, he had a reputation as a man who could get things done — the “Atlas of Industry,” as Fortune Magazine dubbed him. After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Kaiser Company built two more shipyards, one on Swan Island and one in Vancouver, Washington.

The shipyards operated twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and generated an insatiable demand for steel plate and labor. Beginning with no shipyard workforce of his own, Kaiser turned to the Metal Trades Department of the American Federal of Labor (AFL), the coordinating body for thirteen unions in the shipyard trades, to help him recruit skilled workers and begin construction of the yard.

In May 1941, with only 66 workers employed at Oregonship, Kaiser signed a contract with the Metal Trades Department and the Portland Metal Trades Council. A year later, with only 191 workers employed at the Vancouver yard and none at Swan Island, Kaiser and nearly all the other major West Coast shipyard owners, Kaiser chief among them, signed a regional “master agreement” with the Metal Trades Department. These closed-shop contracts required workers to join the appropriate AFL union — to “get union clearance” — as a condition of employment, but workers had no voice or vote in choosing the unions. Before the war, Boilermakers Local 72 had no funds and fewer than 200 members. Two years later, the local had close to 60,000 members and collected dues from nearly three-fourths of the shipyard workers in the skilled trades, making it the “largest local union in the world.” Kaiser had essentially created Local 72, and in the process locked Black workers out of most skilled jobs.

The Boilermakers union typified the craft unions that comprised the majority of the AFL. With the exception of a brief period after its founding in 1886, most AFL unions representing skilled workers excluded African Americans from membership, treating them as competitors who threatened the jobs and privileges of the skilled, White, male workers who comprised its base. Randolph’s repeated appeals to the AFL to hire Black organizers and to refuse membership to unions that barred African Americans were met with calls for “patience” from AFL officials and statements about the
Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Kaiser opened yards in Vancouver and on Swan Island, and workers from throughout the country flooded into the Portland-Vancouver area to fill the new jobs. Here 15,000 to 18,000 people are gathered at Multnomah Stadium in Portland on February 12, 1942, to receive applications for the Boilermakers Union. The union controlled nearly 75 percent of the skilled jobs in the shipyards and refused to admit Black members.

need to “educate” White workers, rendered hypocritical because those same officials refused to fund any education.²⁰

Black workers were only able to join unions in large numbers after dissident AFL leaders, recognizing the necessity of organizing all workers in any given industry into a single “industrial” union, formed the Congress for Industrial Organization (CIO) in 1935 and split from the AFL. In 1936 and 1937, the CIO conducted the most successful organizing drive in U.S. labor history. By occupying factories in sit-down strikes and fighting pitched battles to defend their picket lines, workers in auto, steel, and other basic industries won union recognition. The CIO recruited all workers, regardless of race; no attempt to organize basic industry could have succeeded otherwise. Between 1935 and 1940, Black union membership grew from 100,000 to 500,000.²¹
Despite these successes, nearly all of the AFL unions representing skilled workers maintained their color bars, weakening themselves in the process. At the 1937 Boilermakers International Convention, delegates’ two dominant concerns were competition from the CIO and from Black workers. A delegate from Newport News, Virginia, complained that in shipyards there, the White wage scale ranged from 38 to 94 cents an hour while the Black wage scale ranged from 14 to 20 cents an hour, “with the white man doing the same work.” The delegate concluded, “I ask you delegates to consider this very serious question, because it means organization or no organization in the shipbuilding industry.”

The divide-and-rule approach evident in the employers’ racist wage scales was reinforced by a union policy that could be described as “divide-and-be-ruled.”

Fearing that the CIO would organize “the Negro” and anticipating increased shipyard work, the Boilermakers delegates authorized segregated auxiliary locals, stipulating “that the membership of the colored men be confined to such separate locals.” The rules governing the auxiliaries leave no doubt that their purpose was to control Black workers while denying them full union membership. Auxiliaries were under the supervision of White locals and were not allowed to choose their own business agents or form grievance committees. Auxiliary members received only one-half as much in death and disability benefits as did White members. Worst of all, Black workers were barred from transferring to other locals, could not be employed as apprentices, and could not be promoted to higher job classifications without the approval of the White local and the international union president. As Thurgood Marshall wrote several years later, the only thing equal about the auxiliary unions was the dues paid. Auxiliaries also ensured that Black workers would be first to lose their jobs when the war ended. Responding to several White workers in Los Angeles who feared that auxiliaries would divide Black and White workers, a Boilermakers’ business agent argued that if Black workers became members of the regular union, they would retain their membership after the war, whereas the auxiliaries would be dissolved.

RESISTANCE

Discrimination by Boilermakers Local 72 received national attention in the fall of 1942, after the Kaiser Company, facing a severe labor shortage, sent recruiters throughout the country. Thousands of workers poured into the Portland area, among them African Americans who discovered on arrival that they were excluded from most skilled jobs by the Boilermakers.
ON SEPTEMBER 30, 1942, five hundred men from New York arrived in Portland, Oregon, to work in the Kaiser shipyards. Thirty-nine of those recruits were Black. A photograph of the “Kaiser Karavan” train was published on that day in the Oregonian.

Union and the Kaiser Company. In an angry letter published in the August 7 Oregonian, Rev. J. James Clow, Portland president of the NAACP, protested the Boilermakers’ exclusion of six Black workers. “We are constantly called upon to forget everything, to concentrate upon winning this war,” he wrote, but some people “seem unable to forget their race prejudice for the duration.”

On September 30, 1942, the first “Kaiser Karavan” arrived in Portland. The train carried 490 men, recruited from New York City, of whom 39 were Black. According to historian Frederic Lane, when the Kaiser organization began hiring in New York, “they were reminded [by federal manpower officials] that they must not discriminate, and in consequence filled some cars of their westbound trains with Negroes.”
By this time, approximately 3,000 Black people had arrived in Portland by their own means, more than doubling the city’s Black population and challenging established patterns of domination and subservience. Even before the first train arrived, the growing Black population was met with hostility. A mass meeting of 500 Albina residents demanded that no more African Americans be housed in their district, blaming them for increased crime. “We Cater to White Trade Only” signs sprung up in restaurants and taverns. The Portland Central Labor Council protested the importation of “undesirable” workers “from other sections without regard to local conditions” and sent a letter to Henry Kaiser demanding that no more workers be hired unless they were cleared through representatives of appropriate unions and assigned to the appropriate crafts.

Shortly after the Kaiser Karavan arrived, seventy-five Black workers living in Hudson House, a huge dormitory complex for single men near the Vancouver shipyard, voiced their own protest against Kaiser’s hiring practices. In what became known as the Hudson House Resolution, the workers stated:

We, the Negro people employed by the Kaiser Company, maintain that under a false pretense we were brought from east to west to work for defense, and we demand, within due process of law, the following rights: (1) to work at our trades on equal rights with whites; (2) to go to vocational school or to take vocational training on equal rights with the whites.

The workers charged that when they were signed up in New York, they were classified according to their skills, but when they arrived in the shipyards, they were assigned to work as unskilled laborers receiving less pay than agreed on in New York. “We can work at common labor in New York,” one worker said. “When we signed up we were promised the opportunity to get something better. If there’s nothing but common labor for us we ask to be sent home.”

These workers had not just come west for higher wages. They knew that the war industries would bust as quickly as they were booming; even the Liberty ships were built to last only five years. Although wages were higher

“WE CATER TO WHITE TRADE ONLY” signs began appearing in businesses in Portland following an increase in African Americans who came to work in wartime industries. The cartoon on the right, published on September 30, 1943, in the People’s Observer, shows a Black U.S. soldier walking past one of the signs.
JOSIE LUCILLE OWENS, was a welder in training for skilled positions offered to Black workers in Kaiser’s Richmond, California, shipyard. Trained workers often were denied opportunities to use their skills in the Kaiser yards in Portland. Eventually, many Black workers were employed as welders, most often after being forced to accept membership in Jim Crow auxiliary locals.

than they had been during the Depression, inflated prices combined with a war-time wage freeze left Richmond, California, shipyard workers with weekly savings of about six dollars. A few workers might buy a house or a little land with what they would save, but most would be left with only one bankable asset after the war — their skill. An experienced welder or machinist would be in demand following the war, and Black workers were determined to have an equal opportunity to learn and apply these skills.

On October 17, the Oregonian reported that “spokesmen for nearly 100 New York Negroes who were imported to work in the Kaiser company shipyard at Vancouver, Wash., Friday said that the Negro workers might fail to report to
work Monday unless they are given definite assurances that alleged discrimination against them will cease.\textsuperscript{39} The spokesmen “contended that approximately half their number are qualified for journeymen’s scale, but are able to get only helper or laborer jobs.”\textsuperscript{39} Following these protests, Kaiser began employing a number of Black workers at skilled jobs, initially without any union clearance, utilizing a clause in the contract permitting companies to hire workers without union clearance when the union could not supply sufficient numbers. Eventually, most unions granted some form of clearance to Black workers.\textsuperscript{40} In general, the exclusion of Black workers depended on the skill level of the trade. The Laborers Union, whose members did heavy, unskilled work, was about one-third Black, and the Scalers and Cleaners Union was about 20 percent Black. The Machinists Union and the Molders Union, representing skilled workers, excluded Black workers from membership while collecting dues from a handful of Black helpers in exchange for temporary work permits that could be revoked at any time. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) was an exception among the skilled trades; concerned about winning public support for unions, it accepted many Black members and had several Black leadmen and shop stewards. The Boilermakers, with jurisdiction over 72 percent of the skilled jobs, continued to deny any union clearances to Black workers.\textsuperscript{41} On October 21, the Portland Metal Trades Council sent a letter to Kaiser Company demanding that Black workers promoted since October 16 be returned to their former positions. A front-page headline in the \textit{Oregonian} read: “Negro-Yard Difficulty Nears Crisis: Boilermakers Union Chief Protesting Kaiser Promotions.”\textsuperscript{42} Hoping to avert a crisis, representatives of the Kaiser Company, the U.S. Maritime Commission, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, the Portland Metal Trades Council, and other parties held a conference in Portland on November 10 and 11. They unanimously agreed that their organizations would abide by both the letter and spirit of Roosevelt’s Executive Order 8802 and pledged, “there will not be permitted, either by management or by labor, any limitation or restriction against workers because of their race, creed, color or national origin in the processes of recruitment, upgrading, training or any other phase or condition of employment.”\textsuperscript{43} Despite their pledge, the Boilermakers lost no time in evading the agreement by chartering a segregated auxiliary local, No. 32-A, in December. The auxiliary had no meetings, no elections, and no union hall, but it provided a fig leaf for the Boilermakers to claim that they would clear “any man regardless of race, creed or color” — all he had to do was sign up with the auxiliary.\textsuperscript{44} Recognizing a trap, many Black workers fought the auxiliary. “200 Negroes Oppose Union: New Auxiliary Plan Meets Disapproval,” read a
headline in the January 31, 1943, Oregonian. Julius Rodriguez, chairman of the recently formed Shipyard Negro Organization for Victory (SNOV), explained that leaders of the Hudson House protest had formed the SNOV, which included the New Yorkers who lodged the initial protest and another 400 Black shipyard workers. "If faced with the alternatives of joining the auxiliary or being discharged, the Negroes still will refuse to join and will 'continue the battle from the outside,' Rodriguez asserted."

Local 72 officials used the auxiliary to drive Black workers out of skilled jobs in the shipyards. Following the union’s demands, Kaiser personnel gave stop-work cards to Black workers employed as welders and in other classifications under Boilermakers’ jurisdiction and told them that they would have to join the auxiliary. Company records showed that between January and November 1943, a total of 345 Black workers were discharged, or fired, after they refused to join the auxiliary; 217 were rehired within a week, presumably after joining the auxiliary. Estimates of the auxiliaries’ membership ranged between 600 and 800, but workers were often reluctant to admit to being members.

In April 1943, Lee Anderson filed suit in Multnomah County Court against Local 72 and Oregonship. Anderson, a forty-two-year-old man from Winslow, Arizona, had moved to Portland in March 1942. He worked as a laborer on swing shift at Oregonship while taking welding courses at a government training school from 12:30 at night to 7:30 in the morning. After he had 300 hours of training, he was told by the instructor to go to the union hall to get cleared as a tack-welder, the least skilled welding job. When he got to the hall, his White classmates were all given cards, while he and another Black worker were denied them. In testimony before the FEPC, Anderson recounted how Earl Ingram, president of Local 72, had told him, “For your benefit, in the Constitution and By-Laws of the Boilermakers Union, under no circumstances will a Negro be allowed in the Boilermakers.” After he had 500 hours of training, Anderson returned to the Boilermakers’ hall and was again sent packing. In January 1943, a supervisor at Oregonship promoted him to a welder’s position. The job lasted all of four hours before company officials told Anderson that he was being pulled off for non-union clearance and suggested he join the auxiliary. “I told them that was out. . . . Because I wasn’t joining no dirty discriminatory setup like that where I had no rights at all.” When company personnel tried to get Anderson to go back to his old job as a laborer, he recounted telling them, “if I go back and couldn’t work as a welder, I wanted no part of the shipyard.” He quit and found a job building the Vanport housing project, his 500 hours of training as a welder
having earned him a grand total of four hours work.\textsuperscript{49}

The People’s Observer newspaper championed Anderson’s case. Launched in June 1943, the Observer was published and edited by William H. McClendon, a shipyard worker who had earlier published the Portland Observer and revived it at the behest of SNOV members. The People’s Observer advocated “courage, militancy, and aggressiveness” in the struggle against discrimination in the shipyards, condemning both the racists and those “pseudo-liberals” in the Black community who advocated acceptance of the auxiliary.\textsuperscript{50}

In the midst of this conflict, the CIO demanded that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) void the closed-shop contracts between Kaiser and the AFL unions because, having been signed before any appreciable workforce was hired, the contracts undemocratically denied workers the right to choose their own bargaining agent. The NLRB, following its own rule that closed shop contracts required approval from 50 percent of the employees in a workplace, charged Kaiser with entering into illegal bargaining agreements and ordered elections for workers to choose their union. AFL officials did not dispute the facts but charged the NLRB and CIO with disrupting war production. Roosevelt urged speedy settlement of the dispute, and in the summer of 1943, Congress passed a rider preventing the NLRB from interfering with any contract that had been in existence for over three months. Knowing

\textbf{ON JULY 21, 1943}, the People’s Observer newspaper reported that the Kaiser Company fired over two hundred Black workers for refusing to join the segregated auxiliary union, which was subservient to the White local and would be dissolved after the war.
full well that the major AFL shipyard union was excluding Black workers, Congress vitiated its own labor laws and in so doing destroyed a golden opportunity to enable both union democracy and equal opportunity in the shipyards.51

**MASS FIRINGS AND THE FEPC HEARINGS**

Despite the severe labor shortage, the Kaiser Company complied with the Boilermakers’ demands that it fire Black workers who had not joined the Jim Crow auxiliary. The first large-scale discharges occurred on July 14, 1943, when Kaiser fired 80 Black workers in its Vancouver yard for “non-union clearance.”52 When Kaiser laid off 120 more men later in July, the People’s Observer accused the company of conspiring with Local 72 to fire three key Black activists, who were informed by Kaiser’s personnel director that they would not receive clearances to work anywhere in this area.53

The SNOV and NAACP responded immediately. Rodriguez and Clow traveled to Washington, D.C., where they met with the FEPC and national officers of the NAACP. When he returned, Clow addressed a rally of nearly 1,000 Black shipyard workers at Hudson House.54 In August 1943, the SNOV and the Portland NAACP filed a complaint with the FEPC, leading to hearings in Portland on November 15 and 16. The record of the FEPC hearings provides a rich source of personal testimony by the victims of discrimination and a case study in buck-passing by its practitioners. Statements by shipyard worker Raymond Gee demonstrates that, above all, Black workers wanted to gain the skills and experience needed to achieve a foothold in the skilled trades:

> About four months after we were out there, we demanded to be working as the regular welders. As I said before, we were tacking. That is, we were just helping the ship fitters put a slip here and dog there and such as that. On a Sunday morning, approximately April 19th, we went down to Mr. Hunt’s office. That is the superintendent of welding. And we asked that we be allowed to do regular welding. Mr. Hunt told us, he asked us, were we satisfied with the pay we were getting, weren’t we getting $1.20 an hour, the same as everybody else? We told him that was not the main issue. The main issue was that we wanted to learn the whole art of welding the same as anybody else. We wanted an equal opportunity. Mr. Hunt told us in these very words, “War or no war, as long as I am superintendent of welding in this yard, you will not work along side of a white man.”55

Apparently, a company official told Hunt to back down, because a little while later, he permitted Gee and his coworkers to resume regular welding,
demonstrating the pressure Kaiser was under from Black workers who were demanding that the company follow the law.

In their complaint, the SNOV and NAACP alleged that in addition to enforcing discriminatory stop work orders issued by the Boilermakers, Kaiser also practiced unlawful discrimination in many cases where union membership was not an issue. The company denied work to a skilled Black draftsman “solely because of his race and color.” No Black employees held foreman positions in any of the three yards, and only a few were employed as leadmen. The company maintained all-Black work crews under the supervision of Whites.56

Edgar Kaiser and the company’s lawyer claimed that their hands were tied by the union when it came to upgrading and training Black workers because the issue of union clearance was strictly an internal union matter; company intervention would be a violation of the National Labor Relations Act. Local 72’s representatives contended that they wanted to help Black workers advance but were forced to deny them union membership because of the international’s constitution and bylaws. The union’s expressions of concern for Black workers were clearly fraudulent, but there is validity to the claim of domination by the international. Fearing that their power would be eroded by “this great mass of new members” who “knew little or nothing about Unions or Union procedure, and unfortunately didn’t want to learn,” the international officers directly governed at least ten “subordinate” locals nationwide, including Local 72.57

The Boilermakers International sent no representatives to the hearings but expressed its views in a telegram from Vice-President Charles MacGowan, stating, “We have no specific knowledge of any Negroes being held out of work, but Negroes and Whites alike can return to work if and when they pay their dues as provided by the Constitution of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders and Helpers of America, including the Auxiliary constitution.”58 The international assumed the legitimacy of the auxiliary, ignoring that its discriminatory character was at the heart of Black workers’ grievances. After the FEPC issued its findings in favor of the Black workers, the international, evading responsibility for its own role in fueling racial hostility, threatened that if upgraded Black workers faced attacks from Whites, the FEPC “will have to bear full responsibility for racial outbreaks that will shock the nation — if not the world.”59

In its findings, issued on December 9, 1943, the FEPC stated the motivation behind Kaiser’s discrimination was “entirely irrelevant”— no labor contract could stand above the Executive Order banning discrimination:
The Companies admit that they are and have been following the policy and practice of refusing to hire Negroes in skills subject to the jurisdiction of the Boilermakers’ Union . . . and the policy and practice of discharging Negro employees certified as not in “good standing” by these Unions, notwithstanding the Companies have had notice and knowledge that Negroes are not admitted to membership in these Locals. . . .

The Companies contend that they are bound to follow the aforesaid practices because of the closed shop provision of a contract known as the “Master Agreement.” . . . This contention cannot be accepted. . . . Regardless of the measure of the Union’s responsibility in this case, the power to hire and fire remains with the Companies, and their obligation to eliminate the obvious and
admitted discrimination because of race or color in hiring and firing is primary and fundamental. . . .

The committee directed the Kaiser companies to “desist from refusing to hire and discharging Negroes who fail to secure clearance from said unions” until the commission informed the companies that the unions had eliminated their discriminatory practices.61

The FEPC had no judicial power to enforce its ruling, but court decisions in two other states supported Black workers who were opposing other Boilermakers auxiliaries. The California Supreme Court ruled that the auxiliaries were “the equivalent of a complete denial of union membership.” In Providence,
Rhode Island, where the Boilermakers’ local had admitted Black workers as full members, the international replaced the local’s officers and demanded that Black workers join an auxiliary, despite opposition from a majority of White workers. The Black workers sought and won a court injunction that declared the practice of segregating them into an auxiliary local “illegal and void.”

Despite these judicial rulings and the FEPC’s harsh condemnation, the Boilermakers reaffirmed their auxiliary policy at their 1944 convention, although they modified it to grant auxiliaries representation at conventions of the international. In May 1944, Local No. 72 again demanded discharges of Black workers in the Kaiser yards “for non-payment of dues” to the auxiliary, and Kaiser again complied.

Henry Kaiser and Edgar Kaiser publicly proclaimed the importance of ending discrimination in order to meet the needs of war production but bowed to the demands of Boilermakers officials. Had the Kaisers instead followed the law, they would have confronted both the institutional power of Boilermakers officials and racism among White workers, many of whom had never worked alongside Black people. In August 1944, Kaiser management at Swan Island promoted Roland Veney, a Black electrician who had studied electrical engineering, to the position of leadman of a mixed-race crew, responding to “a directive issued by the FEPC . . . and enforced by the Maritime Commission.” Eighty percent of the White electricians walked out in response, declaring, “We white men will not stand for a Nigger to be our boss.” As reported by “A Worker,” in a letter to the editor, “the strikers returned to work the following day, after being told to do so by the union.”

While the work stoppage demonstrated racism among White workers, company supervisors apparently encouraged these attitudes. The Swan Island worker’s letter stated: “The root of the strike can easily be traced to the company. The supervisor on one occasion before a hearing of the F.E.P.C. stated that in his opinion no Negro should be upgraded higher than a journeyman. . . . Four leadmen (company men) participated in the walkout.” None of the strike leaders were disciplined. By enforcing the Boilermakers’ Jim Crow practices, Kaiser Corp. sent an unspoken message to its supervisors that discrimination was acceptable.

Had Kaiser Corp. refused to fire Black workers, it would have reinforced the best elements among the workforce. White workers were by no means unanimous in supporting discrimination and were influenced by contact with Black workers, attitudes of company and union officials, and the nature of the war itself. Shortly after the electricians’ strike, Maynard Olsen, a White electrician who helped lead the strike and had just been inducted into the Navy, apologized for his actions. Explaining that he had been influenced by the racism of other White workers, Olsen told Walter Carrington, a Black electrician
THIS ARTICLE, published on June 17, 1945, in the Oregonian, paints a grim picture of post-war employment prospects for African Americans. Even before the war ended, the Kaiser yards laid off 2,000 Black workers. Smaller shipyards in the area were more openly discriminatory than the Kaiser yards, and outside the shipyards, only 1.1 percent of the workforce was African American. Employers surveyed held out little hope for Black workers, except perhaps as janitors or if White labor was unavailable.

who had fought for Veney’s promotion, that, as the People’s Observer put it, he could not “fight with his life for his own freedom . . . knowing that he had thwarted another man from enjoying that same basic privilege — freedom.”

Chauncey Del French, an Oregonian who led a pipefitting crew in the Vancouver yard, relates how working with a Black man altered the racist views of three White crew members from the South. When John Willie, a powerful Black man from Arkansas, joined their crew, the three started complaining. French assigned them to work with Willie to move an extremely heavy, twenty-foot length of pipe across the yard and up two decks. When they finished the job, one of the three approached French and explained why the three, who had never “worked shoulder to shoulder with a Negro” and were ready quit, had changed their minds. After the three White men placed a board under one end, just to see if they could lift it, Willie easily picked up the other end himself with one hand! When they reached the
Weilie took off and returned with a block-and-tackle, or pulley. The White worker who related the story wondered what Willie was thinking because the only place he could hang the pulley was a gun stand higher up than they needed to go, so Willie explained that they could haul the pipe up to the stand and then slide it down the stairs far more easily than carrying it up them. “Brains, that's what he’s got” the worker concluded. “He’s all man, an’ he kin work with us anytime, anywhere.” Had French shared the racist views of the men under him, the outcome would certainly have been different.68

VICTORIES: SOME MOOT, SOME LASTING

In May 1945, sixteen months after the FEPC ordered Kaiser to stop firing workers who refused to join the auxiliary, the company indicated it would do so. By that time, however, it was largely a moot victory, because shipyard workers were being laid off in large numbers as the war was drawing to a close. “Negroes in Portland: What is Their Postwar Outlook?” asked a feature article in the June 17, 1945, Oregonian. The answers were grim. The war years had seen no tangible advances in Black employment outside the shipyards. Most employers interviewed by the Oregonian stated bluntly that they would only hire Blacks as janitors, or if White labor was unavailable — an unlikely scenario, given the thousands of Whites who would be returning from military service and looking for work.69

The end of the war also brought an end to the FEPC; Congress cut its funding in 1945 and terminated it altogether in 1946. Its job of winning equal employment opportunity certainly had not been completed, but the government no longer needed Black labor or was as fearful of Black unrest.

Lee Anderson’s case never went to trial. Lawyers for Kaiser and the Boilermakers filed enough motions to stall the case and drain the resources of the NAACP, which was backing Anderson’s efforts. Records at the Multnomah County Courthouse show no legal action after September 21, 1943, and the case was dismissed in 1951.70 Segregated unions remained legal until the civil rights movement won passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

CONCLUSION

It was not inevitable that the majority of Black shipyard workers would remain locked out of skilled trades for the duration of the war. If the Kaiser Company had prioritized equity in employment and its contractual obligations under Executive Order 8802, it could have permitted workers to elect their own bargaining agent. Most of the smaller Seattle shipyards, those not covered by the “master agreement,” signed contracts with the CIO Industrial Union.
of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America, leading to much greater equity both during and after the war.\(^7\)

As the shipyard industry’s sole customer, the federal government exerted control over the entire operation. The Navy and the U.S. Maritime Commission chose the location of the yards, the design of each type of ship, and the time allotted for construction, often with Roosevelt’s direct involvement. Above all, government officials signed and canceled contracts, giving them a tremendous amount of weight that could have been thrown into enforcing Executive Order 8802. The FEPC never exercised its power to call for the cancellation of contracts with companies that were in violation of the order.

The work of breaking down color bars imposed by corporations and unions ultimately fell to Black people and their allies. When he proposed the March on Washington, Randolph wrote: “Only power can effect the enforcement and adoption of a given policy. Power is the active principle of only the organized masses, the masses united for definite purpose.”\(^72\) During the war years, Black workers did not have enough power to effect the enforcement of policies they had won, but the struggles they launched began building the power that would successfully challenge Jim Crow in the Civil Rights era.

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NOTES


4. “The colour of wealth: The black-white wealth gap has been constant for half a century,” The Economist, April 6, 2019, p. 23.


10. Foner, Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 240.

11. New York Times, June 26, 1941, in


18. Ibid., 296.


21. Ibid., 231.


24. Ibid., 295.


43. Transcript of Fair Employment Practices Committee Hearing held in Portland, November 1943, p. 267, reproduced in Herzog, “A Study of the Negro Defense Worker.”

44. “Union to Halt Dual Signups: Boil-


49. Ibid., 50–51.


58. Transcript of FEPC Hearings, in Foner and Lewis, The Black Worker from the Founding, 294.


60. Transcript of FEPC Hearings, in Foner and Lewis, The Black Worker from the Founding, 294.

61. Ibid.


64. “Deception in the FEPC,” People’s Observer, June 8, 1944, p. 4.


66. Ibid., 4.


69. Oregonian, June 17, 1945, p. 3.

70. Multnomah County Courthouse Records, No. 149-054, Complaint in Equity, April 7, 1943.


1910–1916

THE POWER OF NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES lies not in some truth or insight they capture, but rather, in their usefulness to the dominant culture. When consistently attached to non-White individuals and groups, stereotypes marginalize and dehumanize their targets, such as in these two advertisements published in newspapers in Medford and Ashland, Oregon. Blacks were often labeled as lazy, shiftless, prone to criminality, and dangerous as a way to rationalize imposing discriminatory treatment on them. Native Americans were typically portrayed as sullen, untrustworthy, dishonest, and suspicious, when doing so served the need to direct special, negative treatment toward them.

Ironically, such depictions could be flipped in the case of Native Americans, while still not acknowledging their basic human qualities. When the notion that dishonesty is the default quality of Indigenous peoples, those who defy that description are elevated by the unexpected rarity of their exceptionalism. Their nonconformity to the assumed norm singles them out and raises them to the epitome of the quality for which they now stand, in its most rare and eminent expression.
Honest Injun!

Savage Tires — as honest as the proverbial honest Indian. From the first to the last mile of service you know that you are getting more than full value for the reasonable price you paid.

1000 miles to the good at the start, because of our guarantee mileage allowance.

And at the finish, more than likely from 1000 to 10,000 miles better off than you would have been with the tires you formerly used.

Honest materials and manufacture, honest prices, honest service.

Savage Tires

FACTORY DISTRIBUTORS:

C. E. GATES

Medford, Ore.
“They can't come in through the front door because you guys won’t let them”

An Oral History of the Struggle to Admit African Americans into ILWU Local 8

OREGON VOICES

by Sandy Polishuk

A system of White supremacy has many spinning wheels, all interactive and interdependent. Perhaps the most important level of every White supremacy system is the ground floor, the everyday normal people, who through their daily and routine decisions, behaviors, and attitudes allow the system to operate. This level makes a system of White supremacy so entrenched, so enduring, so powerful. It is also this level that makes it vulnerable, that makes evolution, correction, possible. To be permanent, White supremacy must be unanimous. But it never has been. Most people want to do the right thing. When the actions of those few who do resist make it apparent that continuing to support White supremacy is not that right thing, then comes change.

THE INTERNATIONAL Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU, now “International Longshore and Warehouse Union), the union of West Coast longshoremen, adopted a new constitution “that specifically exempts race, religion, creed, color, nationality, or ‘political affiliation’,” at its fourth annual convention in 1941. Because the union also had a long tradition of and commitment to democracy and local autonomy, that clause resulted in contradiction when a local asserted autonomy in its decision to exclude Black workers. In 1968, this contradiction took center stage when twenty-six Black longshoremen filed suit against ILWU Local 8 and the Pacific Maritime Association, the organization of the employers, asserting they had been allowed to work but had wrongly been denied promotion and membership in the union. The result, by year’s end, was a
consent agreement with Local 8 that would eventually change the face of the union in Portland.

Under the leadership of the ILWU’s founding president and master negotiator, Harry Bridges, longshoring had become a well-compensated and desirable profession, so it is not surprising that membership in the union was — and is — something to fight about. Bridges was a rank-and-file longshoreman who rose to leadership in the union during labor struggles culminating in the San Francisco 1934 General Strike. At that time, the union was the International Longshore Association (ILA). The ILA headquarters were on the East Coast and its more conservative president, Joseph Ryan, tolerated Bridges only because of his power in the union’s West Coast branch. When Ryan finally cut off Bridges’s salary in 1937, Bridges took all but three of the West Coast locals with him and formed the ILWU.

The ILWU became an affiliate of the CIO, which, “at its founding convention in 1938 . . . declared its ‘uncompromising opposition to any form of discrimination, whether politi-
cal or economic, based on race, color, creed, or nationality."² Some ILWU locals, however, failed to fully live up to those anti-racist ideals. In 1945, for example, the Stockton local charter was suspended after members refused to work alongside a Japanese American worker recently released from wartime incarceration, and in the early 1970s, Black longshoremen sued Local 13, Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach, California, under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, seeking equal treatment in promotion and other effects of racism. Portland’s Local 8 was an especially flagrant offender.³

Unlike most other ILWU city ports, the Portland waterfront had been lily-white through much of the twentieth century. The City of Portland itself was very ‘white’; before the influx of shipyard workers during World War II, Blacks comprised only 0.6 percent of Portland’s population — slightly over 2,500 people. By 1960, Portland was home to over sixteen thousand African Americans, an eight-fold increase but still only 2.1 percent of the population.⁴

There had been pressure on Local 8 from above, from both Bridges and the international union, as well as from within by progressive longshoremen who wanted to see change, but those Local 8 members were very much in the minority. Some Black men had tried to make their way on the Portland waterfront, but had hit a wall and given up. As an oral historian in the region, I had interviewed a number of retired members of Local 8 and had heard about two Black men who made the attempt during World War II when work was plentiful: Harry Mills and Theophilus Jermany.⁵ During the 1960s, African Americans’ hopes for fair labor practices were raised by the civil rights movement and the resulting 1964 Civil Rights Act. The act did not end discrimination in private employment or grant the Justice Department power to initiate desegregation or job discrimination lawsuits, but it did create an atmosphere and expectation that discrimination would no longer be tolerated — as well as grounds on which to sue. The docks were hiring in 1963, and both civil rights groups and the international pressured Local 8 to include some Blacks. For the first time, forty-six Black men were hired as Class B longshoremen.⁶

Then, as now, there are three classifications of workers on the waterfront. Class A longshoremen are fully registered and are the only ones eligible for union membership. Class B are called to work after all the class As have been placed in a job that day. Casuals, holders of “white cards,” with no official standing, are technically issued to anyone asking for a single day when there are no available A- or B-men and more workers are needed. These titles were adapted to an already existing system in 1959, in response to the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, better known as the Taft-Hartley Act. Class B workers were to be allowed into the union and could be promoted to Class A after a probationary period.⁷

A longshoreman’s workplace differs from most unionized workplaces, because the invitation (or requirement) to join the union when one is hired, or shortly thereafter, does not come automatically or quickly but only after a trial
period and a vote of the local membership. Together, the Coast Labor Relations Committee (CLRC) in San Francisco, consisting of representatives of the international union, and the employers’ organization, the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), serving the ports in the Northwest, approves the addition of names to the B list. But the local union and the local PMA, as the “joint committee,” ran the Portland hiring hall.5

In 1968, forty-six Black men were working on the Portland waterfront, and twenty-six of them filed suit, alleging they were not being advanced from Class B to Class A.9 Julia Ruuttila alerted me to this struggle when I was interviewing her for an oral history of her life and work. This story was beyond the scope of the biography of Ruuttila I was writing, but knowing the progressive reputation of the ILWU, my curiosity got the better of me. In 1994, three years after Ruuttila’s death, I interviewed a number of the players in the conflict. Excerpts from those interviews, as well as some earlier ones, are reproduced here. Participants on both sides of the case predictably had memories and ideas influenced by their differing roles and points of view, sometimes contradicting each other: “We were doing it” vs. “We had to sue to get it.” It is a story of what happened when an autonomous local’s membership was sufficiently racist to successfully resist opening its membership to African Americans and of the African Americans who fought back.

Linell Hill’s name was on the case as lead plaintiff. He had been allowed to work as a B-man under pressure from the international and the federal government to admit Blacks workers. Hill rose to work as a crane operator and a foreman. He later served as vice president of Local 8 and 92, the walking boss or foremen’s local.10 I interviewed two other Black workers, Bob Fambro and Theophilus Jermany. Fambro had previously worked on the waterfront in Philadelphia, where the union was the ILA. He was the only African American working on the Portland waterfront when he started there as a casual in

HARRY BRIDGES founded the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in 1937. He is pictured here in 1967 giving a speech at the ILWU Ladies’ Auxiliary in North Bend, Oregon.
By the time I talked to him in the mid 1990s, not only was he in the union, but so was his son, Bob Fambro, Jr. His wife, Clara Fambro, was President of the ILWU’s Federated Auxiliary. Bob Jr. and Clara were present for the interview. Fambro Sr. did not join the suit and, in fact, was proud that he had gotten into the union the “regular” way. Jermany had tried to work on the waterfront much earlier, during World War II, but grew discouraged and gave up.

I also interviewed the lawyers on both sides, one a Jewish American and the other an Italian American. Not surprisingly, their points of view (and their clients’ interests) differed, and therefore their accounts of the case are quite different as well. Portland attorney Paul Meyer represented the Blacks who filed the complaint against Local 8 and the PMA. Meyer was one of the lawyers who had restarted a defunct Portland American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) affiliate in 1955. The union was represented by Frank Pozzi, who was still their attorney when we spoke in 1994. His first experience on the waterfront was as a working longshoreman.
I also interviewed three White men who were union longshoremen. Larry Sefton and Jimmy Fantz, the latter a strong ally of Harry Bridges, both began working on the waterfront in the 1930s and were part of the faction wanting to break the color barrier in the local. In 1959, Fantz replaced Matt Meehan as the Northwest international representative. G. “Johnny” Parks came to the waterfront after his discharge from the Navy following World War II. He worked as the Northwest Regional Director of the union for sixteen years, retiring in 1985. Again, there are conflicting accounts. No one on the defendant’s side — that is, the union — wanted to be seen as racist. The plaintiffs naturally wanted to be seen as justified in taking their action.

I have also included excerpts from my interviews with Ruuttila, who was secretary to the Northwest international representative, Matt Meehan, from 1948 through the late 1950s. She also worked as a reporter for the union’s newspaper, *The Dispatcher*, until 1987.

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*Here, the ILWU’s attorney gives some historical background and recounts how one African American worker, Harry Mills, was working as a longshoreman on the Portland docks but was refused admittance to the union:*

**FRANK POZZI:** It all started . . . [because] the employers didn’t want blacks. This was the truth . . . . Then at the beginning of World War II or during, there was a fellow named [Harry] Mills. Mills came to Portland. Some guys got him in. Jimmy Fantz did a lot to get him in, [to] help. And they just turned him down, the local. And they did it really because, one, they didn’t know any better, but number two, it wasn’t because he was black, it was because everybody thought Harry [Bridges] had put the whole deal together and this is typical of the local saying to Harry, “Go to hell Harry.” But Harry would always come out on top before it was all over.

And he did this time too. It took a lot of years, but he did it.

There was a guy in Portland from the NAACP and he was involved. We had marches on the hall, you know, and all that baloney. Which did no good by the way, it really was no good. It slowed things down a lot, actually in getting things done.

**LARRY SEFTON:** A decision was made during the Second World War. Theophilus Jermany was working as a casual, had applied and had been passed by the [union] committee. The man that was business agent at the time moved regarding the application of Jermany that for the good of the local his application be denied.¹²
There were eight of us that voted no. Only eight of out more than a thousand. It was cut and dried. I am positive that this was the first time that a recorded position [on Blacks] was taken.

Sefton did more than just vote no. He was one of the longshoremen who, hoping to break the color barrier, had actively recruited Jermany. Here, Jermany explains how, despite literally having a “plug” that would allow him to be selected, White union members effectively excluded him from access to daily jobs.

THEOPHILUS JERMANY: Some of the Longshoremen would meet me in Vancouver at the restaurant and talk to me about taking the job. That’s how secretive they were about it, you know, they wanted to talk to me over there . . . then I went in and signed up.

I never had any idea about any promotion. I know that they quit signing me out. Larry [Sefton] made me a plug with my number on it and I would go down to put the plug in early in the morning and then everybody that worked there knew my plug so when jobs would come up in the morning, they’d just pass the plug on and put it in the bottom
and just never get signed on some days. In other words, I was just frozen out and people I’d wanted to be a partner, they never would sign us out together.

Jimmy Fantz was another White longshoreman who supported the integration of the workforce but struggled to effectively change the local’s practice.

**JIMMY FANTZ:** Well, nobody got mistreated during the war because we were following a strictly pro-war program and we needed lots of casuals during the war. Blacks were needed. One of them [Harry Mills] stuck around. . . . Come time to take him in the union, we had a procedure. . . . There was some people that objected so they voted down his acceptance.

I talked to [Mills]. I did the best I could, you know, to convince him it was for the benefit of his race as well as himself to try to get past this stumbling block. He said, “I don’t have to put up with this.” That had been a stick in my craw and I was determined to try to change that and it was a lot of years there that I was trying to do whatever I could. I even joined the NAACP and told them what my objective was, that it was the right thing to do, to change [the union’s policy of excluding Blacks].

When I was president in 1937, of the local, by that time quite a few of these blacks had decided that they were going to take advantage of the privileges we had in our industry to go to any local and present our book and work for awhile and see what’s going on. Another Black man, Bob Fambro, had a very different experience when he first came to the docks after relocating to Portland in 1962.

**ROBERT “BOB” FAMBRO:** [I] went by the Longshoremen’s hall and everybody was pretty courteous to me cause I still had those [ILA] buttons that I had on the east coast on my hat. I went in and I was told, “You come back in a few days and we’ll put you on.” So
A morning came where it was a lot of snow on the ground and I said, “This is a good chance.”

A few guys didn’t like the idea of me being there but they didn’t say nothing. . . . Every once in awhile you’d come around . . . where a group of guys is standing there and they would hush up real quick, change their conversation right quick.

After I figured out who to talk to, it was not bad. I went around and made friends with a few guys, a few of the old-time longshoremen. They might have said a good word for me. They gave me a little protection. If somebody was gonna do something they’d tell them to lay off.

They had the gang system, certain gangs I tried to keep from going in cause they was so racist and sometimes those guys would be getting the long jobs and it’d be sometime I would be without work for a long while and not being able to go in on those gangs. I didn’t want to go in on them because I didn’t want to [get] into trouble. I mean I would have to carry a firearm with me all the time.

One time they dropped paper on me in the hold. . . . I jumped . . . but a whole bolt of paper was sliding back and forth and it hit me just as I went to get up under the coal bin. I knew it wasn’t an accident. One of the guys even admitted it later on, did it on...
purpose, but he could always say the winches was bad.

Periodically, the international would intervene.

JULIA RUUTILA: Things got so bad that Lou Goldblatt, secretary-treasurer of the international union, came to Portland. He was one of the best people the union had. That was 1964 when work was booming on the waterfront and they were going to take in four hundred new “B” men, and Harry Bridges had said that every one of the four hundred should be black to make up for the years of discrimination.

Lou Goldblatt came to Portland and he said, “Things can’t go on like this,” and he said, “There’s got to be a compromise. You’ve got to take in forty blacks.”

The 1964 compromise resulted in forty-six Blacks being admitted as “B” men. Frank Pozzi, attorney for the ILWU, argued that the lawsuit therefore was unnecessary.

FRANK POZZI: We had an all-day meeting, negotiating with the International in San Francisco in about ’64 . . . there wasn’t any pressure. It was a friendly meeting. It was the union itself that was doing it regardless of [the] civil rights [act] because the union always believed in civil rights. There were a few guys in Portland that weren’t very good and we worked it out.

Anyway we agreed in a very informal manner and then finally formally to do something about getting blacks into the local. So the International was saying one thing and we were really agreeing but, you know, there was a little discussion. We went forward to finally conclude it and that took what two years, three years before any damn law suit.

G. “Johnny” Parks, a White longshoreman, resisted allowing Blacks in the union.

G. “JOHNNY” PARKS: I started out on the waterfront in 1947. There were no blacks there. The old-time longshoremen were very set in their ways and they didn’t care if the world knew it. Some of the old timers that were here from the 1934 days and so forth, resented not only blacks, they resented my being on the waterfront and that’s where I got the name Johnny. They called me a Johnny-come-lately and they wouldn’t even talk to me.

When the controversy came up about blacks, I took offense at that. I don’t want the international union or the courts saying “You’ve got to take so many because you don’t have any.” I opposed that theory. I was even called a racist at times.

I said to myself, “There aren’t any blacks here, but if blacks want a job here let ‘em get a job the same way the Swedes and the Norwegians and the Irishmen and these other ethnic groups get it. Let ‘em come in through the front door.” And a lot of my black friends, especially in San Francisco, who were officials of the union, agreed with me and said, “Johnny, we understand that. Only thing is it can’t happen that way because they can’t come in through the front door because you guys won’t let ‘em in."

But anyway it worked out. We took in those black people and had some
pretty good restrictions too. They couldn’t have a police record, felonies that is, and they had to be registered voters because the committee felt that a person that was a registered voter was a little more responsive to civic duties and not an irresponsible person. And so the black people that came into Local 8 in the main were good people.

**JULIA RUUTTILA:** When they finally did take those forty [sic] “B” men in, it was still difficult for the blacks because there was a ruling on the waterfront if you were in a fight — you know it’s so dangerous working on the waterfront — that the people in the fight would both be fired; but in those early days, the only ones that got fired were the blacks. So some of the real racists down there would provoke fights and they got rid of a great many of them, but Robert Fambro, he stood up to all of it. He was one of three or four or five, maybe, that survived.

**BOB FAMBRO:** A lot of pressure came from Bridges. This local here had always been a headache of his. He dried up this port once for ten or twelve months when they refused to do something. He had all the ships pull out of here. He had a lot of power. Those shippers would listen to him pretty close.

**LINELL HILL:** We were originally hired in 1964 as “B” men. We were what they call “off-street” hires. It was a lot of institutional racism,

![Linell Hill](courtesy-of-ilwu-archives)
subtle racism, outward racism, outward animosity, not only towards the black longshoremen, but to the white longshoremen who were considered “off the street.” In other words, you had registered longshoremen who felt as though their child should have had this job.

Oh yeah, I was concerned with my safety. You had winch drivers, you had hold men, you had a lot of people that did try to put you in what we call the bite, put you in a precarious position to get hurt. I mean, I took all precautionary measures, you know. But there’s a lot of other ways to get to you as opposed to just hurting you. Work practice, you know. There was work practice that make you do the majority of the work, you know, put you in the position to work the hardest. Not being told how to do the work, where they would tell the white longshoremen. You know, you can do a whole lot of work and then the boss’d come back and tell you to tear it down. “Why did you do it like this? Why’d you do it like that?”

A lot of the guys that they didn’t harass out of here, black and white, they worked ‘em out of there. I mean it was hard work, real hard work then. Everything was hand mucking. Most of the black longshoremen that were hired at that time come from very menial jobs: bellhops, busboys, worked in hospitals. You did jobs that didn’t require any physical. The intent was to hire people that wouldn’t last. Maybe six or seven guys got run off.

The Black workers filed their 1968 complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) against Local 8 and the PMA, under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In June, the EEOC “found that reasonable cause existed to believe defendants . . . were in violation of Title VII,” the section making discrimination in employment illegal. When conciliation efforts to achieve voluntary compliance proved unsuccessful, Paul Meyer filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court. In December, representatives of all the parties met in Judge Gus Solomon’s chambers to work out a settlement. The representatives of the Joint Port Registration Committee agreed to begin admitting the Blacks to “A” status and to move them for union membership by August, but they refused to allow continuing oversight of new applications by the state Bureau of Labor.

**PAUL MEYER** Attorney for the plaintiffs: Prior to ’64 they had a thousand fifty “A’s” and a hundred and fifty “B,” none of whom were black, nor were any black men admitted to membership in Local 8, for which you needed to be for “A” registration. And the 300 men then holding casual, or white cards, only eleven were black.

Registration then opened for approximately 300 “B” longshoremen and the joint committee established criteria. One hundred would come from the best qualified applicants among the then casual, 200 from other applicants. The civil rights organizations made efforts and so 46 of the 299 “B” were black, as registered in February of ’64. That was about the first time blacks had been permitted to work except for a few casual workers. . . .

We alleged that they [the joint committee] intentionally engaged in unlawful practices, in violation of Title
VII. Part of the way it came about was they established a point system when they added the black men into the “B” registration to determine when “B” would be promoted to “A.” That had never been done before. Prior to ’64 it was customary when class “A” registrations opened to promote substantially the entire class of “B” men to “A” status which then made them eligible for the union.

[The point system] was a technique to discriminate against blacks. And then we also had nine who had been promoted to “A” and therefore ostensibly should have been entitled to union membership, but they were each refused because each had opposed practices made unlawful by Title VII.

LINELL HILL: The lead plaintiff: The ’68 suit was to eliminate the practices within Local 8. The officers and the rank and file of Local 8 had come up with a thing called the point system where we had to have 70 points to move into the class “A” status. You could lose points but you couldn’t gain points. You had no knowledge of who had filed charges against you. A gang boss, any registered longshoreman, whatever they perceived to be “bad work practice,” you got to work late or whatever, and they would write you up and they would turn it into the hall. Everyone started with 100 points. Only thing you could do was maintain or lose.

I had 100 points so to me it was saying it was a stronger case when a person with 100 points complained. It didn’t bother me because I knew that I had the backing of the Pacific Coast Longshore Contract Document.17

We had run our gauntlet with the grievance procedure, that much of the grievance procedure that we could eke out of our officers. And we had the backing from the coast committee, also Harry Bridges. Matter of fact, the International was a friends of court in the law suit.

A lot of them [black workers] didn’t sign [onto the lawsuit] because the
officers of Local 8 told a lot of guys, if you don’t sign we’ll see to it that you get registration. And they did. The guys that didn’t sign, they weren’t held back.

A lot of the guys just come right out front and told us, said, “Man I’m afraid I’m gonna lose my job. I been through this before and when they get through shaking out the sheets and iron the laundry, I was left holding the bag.”

**POLISHUK**, “They can’t come in through the front door because you guys won’t let them”

**PAUL MEYER:** [Judge] Gus Solomon, was a very dedicated civil libertarian. He wanted to make some progress. Frank Pozzi, who in his public persona purported to be a liberal and a Democrat and all the good things that liberals are supposed to be, but in this case, to me, he was supporting the union and their bigotry, unashamedly and with passion. I was not afraid of going to court because I think it would have been devastatingly difficult for the union. I think we would have exploded them.

**FRANK POZZI Attorney for the union:** Gus [Solomon] got us in there and Gus said what are you doing? Say “We’re doing it.” We were. At the time, we were doing it, you see. We were taking ‘em in. Well a couple of guys tried to stall it, but it was coming and so we told Gus what we were gonna do and he in effect okayed it.

Right then the only thing that the local was concerned with, the local president, as I recall, was just insisting on doing it in order, the way we had agreed upon, his union. That’s all. And that’s all the hell Gus did. It was all overgrown. It was gonna happen. It had to happen. Everybody agreed it would happen. Even the one or two in the diehards. And it did happen. . . . [The law suit] didn’t make any difference. [Did it speed it up?] six months, a year, maybe. No I don’t think that really did it.

**LINELL HILL:** You could tell Pozzi had cut some deals with Judge Solomon. Judge Solomon’s consent decree stated that they weren’t supposed to discriminate against us on registration, but they did. We walked out of that God-damned room, nothing changed. We just had some shit on paper, but it was up to us to push it. A lot of things that I feel we achieved through the law suit, it was never put down on paper. We achieved “A” registration but we didn’t achieve Local 8 registration, see.

The coast registered us above the objections of Local 8. The local couldn’t stop us from working class “A” man, but by not giving you local registration, they could keep you out of the Local 8 membership meetings. I had all the benefits. I was dispatched as a class “A” longshoreman, but I paid “B” longshoreman dues because I was not a member.

So then time came to pass where the rank and file started waking up. “Here’s a guy working right next to me. He’s paying twenty dollars a month and I’m paying forty. He’s getting the same benefits I am and it’s costing me another twenty dollars a month to keep him out of the membership meeting?” So they say, “Shit, let’s give ‘em Local 8 registration.” We got coastwise registration in ’68. [Local 8 registration came in August of 1969.]
PAUL MEYER: The major thing was that it got all of my people, as I recall, into “A” status and into the union. And there were some face-saving devices. To me it was a bunch of pettifoggery about we’ve got to save our faces so we’ll do it gradually as if we’re doing it out of the goodness of our hearts, not because we are required to by the law. And you know, Gus is sitting there as a judge looking at the long run and figuring probably that, you know, for people who have been discriminated against for 300 hundred years in this country, another year or six months isn’t gonna be the be-all end-all and it probably will quote “take better” if the union isn’t offended by the process or feel like they’ve been bloodied.

Longshoreman Parks, who advised African Americans to come in through the (closed) front door gets the last word:

G. "JOHNNY" PARKS: I said, “Well, I’ll tell you something Judge, we must have something good going for us. It’s the only union in this country that people are suing to get into.”

NOTES

1. Foster Hailey, “Bridges Code Put Into Union’s Laws; Race, Creed, Color, or Politics Barred by Coast Dock Group as Membership Test,” New York Times, April 9, 1941, p 22. See also https://www.ilwu.org/about/ten-guiding-principles/.


5. All interviews in person unless otherwise noted; all tapes in possession of author. Robert (Bob) Fambro with Bob Jr. and Clara Fambro, February 25, 1994; Jimmy Fantz with Charlotte Fantz, June 11, 1992; Linell Hill March 1, 1994; Theophilis Jeramy, June 13, 1990; Paul Meyer March 21, 1994; G’Johnny’ Parks May 13, 1992; Frank Pozzi December 26, 1990, June 10, 1992 (on phone), March 29, 1994 (on phone); Julia Ruuttila multiple interviews between December 1, 1983 & April 6, 1987, Larry Sefton April 2, 1994. Interview transcripts have been heavily edited for publication here.

6. Pilcher, Portland Longshoremen, 60–62. See also Sandy Polishuk, Sticking to the Union: An Oral History of the Life and Times of Julia
Ruuttila (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2003), 133–34.
8. Since the PMA’s founding in 1949, the principal business of the PMA is to negotiate and administer maritime labor agreements with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). This includes a coast-wide contract covering nearly 15,000 longshore, clerk, and foreman workers at twenty-nine ports along the West Coast, from southern California to the Pacific Northwest. See http://www.pmanet.org/overview.
11. One might get the impression that, due to the eventual success within the union of Hill and the Fambros, issues of racism and discrimination ceased to exist in the local. That is not the case; these problems persist in the local as they do elsewhere, and issues continue to arise with minority and female members sometimes organizing and/or calling out their concerns within the union and even in public. A recent example took place in 1993, as documented by Jim Hill, “Black Longshoremen Cite Bias,” *Oregonian*, April 10, 1993, p. E01: “The African American Longshore Coalition said it had sent letters to Gov. Barbara Roberts, Mayor Vera Katz and Rep. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., asking them to help create ‘an open and fair workplace.’ The target of the coalition’s efforts is Local 8 of the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union. ‘Racism is very rampant and alive on the waterfront,’ said Jerome Polk, a Portland longshoreman and coalition member.” The article was likely in response to a press release of the African American Longshore coalition, sent on April 9, 1993, and reading, in part: “Our employer, The Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), and our union, Local 8, have failed to respond to our letters of inquiry [sent January 27, 1993] on the issue of African American Longshoremen being systematically phased out of the Longshore Industry in Portland.”
12. The business agent is an elected and paid union officer who represents the interests of the members of the local in disputes with the employer; in other unions, the position is often called a union representative or steward.
13. At this point in the interview, Jimmy’s wife Charlotte interrupted to say that she did not think he had been president that early.
14. Pre-mechanization, when the work was heavily physical, gangs of four to six men formed to unload and stow cargo.
15. The Modernization and Mechanization (M & M) agreement, negotiated by Harry Bridges in 1960, included a shifting to a more coastwide hiring strategy and to the international wielding authority over promotion of B-men to A. For more detail see Louis Goldblatt, *Men and Machines* (San Francisco: ILWU, 1963).
AGATHA CHRISTIE is one of the world’s most popular authors of mystery novels. The novel shown here is one of her most successful. Written in the 1930s, it was an example of how casually acceptable the use of demeaning racial language was during that time. The book was eventually made into a popular movie in 1965, titled Ten Little Indians, with numerous remakes into the twenty-first century. The basic plot of the novel remained the same, but the evolution and imagery of the title changed dramatically over time. It is perhaps a revealing and hopeful sign. Change is possible. While it is not possible to determine whether such change is driven by increased sensitivity or the pressures to preserve profitability, it still stands as evidence that the influence of White supremacy is not immutable.
From Nativism to White Power

Mid-Twentieth-Century White Supremacist Movements in Oregon

by Shane Burley and Alexander Reid Ross

The Ku Klux Klan, a racist, terrorist organization born after the Civil War, was rebooted following World War I. This resurgence was the high-water mark of classic White supremacy ideology in Oregon. By the end of the 1920s, the Klan's influence had died of self-inflicted wounds. The vehicles that would carry White supremacy activism into the next generations of Oregon life were inspired by international strains of anti-Jewish bigotry and competing claims of White Protestant religious destiny — both conjoined with classic notions of nineteenth-century racism. The individuals, organizations, issues, and activities those forces introduced to Oregon culture and politics redefined what White supremacy ideology would look like in Oregon during the second half of the twentieth century.

DURING THE PERIOD between the two world wars, White supremacist organizations in Oregon were influenced by rise of fascism in Germany and Italy. Thoroughly antisemitic and White supremacist, these groups focused outrage against what they misconstrued as outsized Jewish influence in banking and in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. Although their membership numbers remained relatively small, these organizations provided a crucial link to the development of radical right-wing groups during the postwar era.

All of these interwar fascist groups in Oregon could appear populist — with their rhetoric outlining a combative relationship between the good, productive “people” and the evil, parasitic “elites” — but racism remained their guiding principle. Leadership repeatedly asserted that the implementation of federal New Deal policies amounted to a consolidation of a Jewish-dominated ruling class responsible for the impoverishment of common people. The leading scholar of comparative fascist studies, Roger Griffin, argues that fascism is defined by calls for or attempts to reclaim a mythically pure past, and we add that fascism can further be defined as a mass movement...
THE AMERICAN GENTILE YOUTH MOVEMENT distributed stickers such as this one across the country during the late 1930s, according to a 1938 *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States* hearings report. This and other White supremacist materials are held in the George Rennar Papers at the Oregon Historical Society Research Library in Portland, Oregon.

with intense reliance on specific, collective identities. In the cases of the groups discussed here — from interwar German-associated organizations to the postwar Christian Identity movement — that sense of identity is linked to White supremacy and is rooted in antisemitism.

We define White supremacy as a set of ideological or institutional precepts attributing superiority of White people over everyone else. While White supremacism is often expressed through individuals or group ideologies, it can also manifest in institutional inequality. In this discussion of fascist-inspired White-supremacist movements of the mid-twentieth-century Pacific Northwest, we focus on White supremacism’s taking the form of an ideological emphasis on mystical Aryan glory in opposition to a paradoxical loathing of Jews as, simultaneously, rich bankers, Bolsheviks, and federal authorities.

Significant documentation of those interwar organizations in the Pacific Northwest can be found in just two document cases that compose the George Rennar papers in the Oregon Historical Society Research Library. Covering the years 1922 to 1959, the collection includes meeting minutes, correspondence, leaflets, and other primary-source materials that provide glimpses into a variety of interconnected, racist, and nationalist organizations from those years. The documents
SILVER LEGION OF AMERICA members, also known as Silver Shirts, pose in front of Silver Lodge in Redmond, Washington, in about 1936. William Pelley, pictured in black in the center of the second row from the front, founded the group and embraced White supremacy, antisemitism, racism, and anti-communism.

Materials in the Rennar collection indicate important links between the interwar organizations and the more militarized White supremacist, or White nationalist, organizations that took root during the postwar period in the Pacific Northwest. The ideology of British-Israelism — that is, the belief that Anglo-Saxon people and not Jews are the true genealogical descendants of the Bible’s “chosen people” — appears as a connecting feature, with spiritual leader William Dudley Pelley a central figure in that connection.\(^6\)

It is possible to say that Pelley’s devout Methodist upbringing in a hard-bitten coastal Massachusetts town determined his ambitious rise to American mystic. A talented writer, Pelley imbued into his early stories his millenarian faith in a utopian future of
direct democracy, which gained him stature enough to leave his East Coast roots for a career in what he called “the necromancy of movie making.” During the 1920s, Pelley’s increasingly arcane mixture of the occult and populism was influenced by prevailing spiritualist ideas of the time as well as his 1918 sojourn through Civil War-ravaged Siberia, where antisemitic attitudes pervaded, and a sense that Jewish producers held back his Hollywood career. His biographer argues that “the great irony of Pelley’s work during the 1920s is that he had to dwell among the libertine residents of southern California to produce defenses of traditional values.” At the end of the decade, Pelley experienced a dream-vision that drove him to dedicate himself entirely to mystical pursuits. He understood humans to be refractions of “Love by Vibration” emanating from the “Divine Mind” that was accessible through clairaudient communication with the “harmonious plane” above Earth. Published in 1929 in the popular American Magazine, Pelley’s testimony of spiritual transformation “became one of the most widely read accounts of paranormal activity in American history.” He moved to Ashland, North Carolina, to immerse himself in the development of his new cult. As he built a following based on an apocalyptic interpretation of the “Age of Aquarius” and “pyramid dates,” around which the universe vibrated most intensely, Pelley came into contact with Nazi ideas. With the rise of Hitler, Pelley converted his mystical sect into a paramilitary political movement, espousing a brand of state corporatism in which White, native-born citizens would own equal shares of national stock, Black people would become “wards of the state,” and Jews would be relegated to one city in

**WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY** is depicted here in a line drawing on a pamphlet titled “What You Should Know About Pelley Publications.” Pelley was a central figure in White supremacist movements across the United States, including the Silver Legion of America. In the pamphlet, Pelley explains that readers should ready themselves “with a knowledge of Red-Jewish tactics,” so that they will know how to lead “when the aroused Christian element of the nation finally takes the form of vigorous vigilantism.”
each state and would risk death if they strayed beyond those boundaries to migrate.\textsuperscript{10}

The emergence of Germany’s “New Reich” also stimulated some German immigrants to the United States who blamed the Weimar system for political instability and economic precarity. With the help of the government in 1932, a German immigrant founded a group called Friends of the Hitler Movement to promote the idea of German culture identified with Nazi propaganda. It was soon reorganized and renamed the Friends of New Germany (Bund der Freunde des Neuen Deutschland), and at a national convention in 1936, elected new leadership and became the German-American Bund. Members needed to demonstrate German-language skills and to guarantee that they possessed Aryan racial pedigrees.\textsuperscript{11}

By the mid 1930s, the Friends of New Germany boasted some 5,000 to 10,000 members nationwide, although its Portland chapter likely never exceeded 100 active members.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1934, a Portland newspaper editor named Adam Hochscheid became president of the local chapter of the Friends of New Germany.\textsuperscript{13} Virulently antisemitic, Hochscheid’s Nachrichten newspaper became a staunch defender of the Nazi regime, identifying opposition to Nazism with anti-German sentiment. The Hochscheid warned readers of another newspaper that lies were being spread about Germany and publisher Nachrichten publisher, A.E. Kern, provided lists endorsed businesses.\textsuperscript{14} In 1935, according to an informant report, Friends of New Germany members began handing out a flyer that attributed a list of crimes to Jews and encouraged supporters to “Buy Gentile! Employ Gentile! Vote Gentile!”\textsuperscript{15}

The U.S. government declared the Friends of New Germany to be an extension of the German Nazi Party in 1936, and as the group imploded, Hochscheid stepped down from his position as president and focused on the Nachrichten.\textsuperscript{16} Later that year, Friends of New Germany was replaced by the German-American Bund. Within a year of establishment, the German-American Bund claimed about ninety Portland members with roughly the same membership as its predecessor.\textsuperscript{17} What the Bund lacked in numbers it made up for in performative impact. According to an informant report, meetings were held in the backroom of a Portland cafe, “A large colored picture of George Washington occupies a prominent position on the wall facing the membership and a crayon sketch of Horst Wessel, young Nazi, killed in Hitler’s abortive ‘Beer Hall Putsch’ occupies a less prominent position on another wall.”\textsuperscript{18}

The Bund’s Oregon stronghold in Portland was never particularly large relative to some chapters in other cities throughout the country.\textsuperscript{19} While the national membership grew to some 8,500 members, 5,000 to 6,000 “anonymous sympathizers,” the only chapters in the Northwest were the Portland, Seattle, and Spokane Ortsgrups, presided over by the Bezirke, based in Oakland.\textsuperscript{20} It is difficult to estimate the total membership in Portland. Average attendance of the meetings was about thirty members, and events could summon up to three hundred members and sympathizers.\textsuperscript{21} To gain clout, the
THE NEW EARLE HOTEL, located at what is now Northwest Sixth Avenue and Davis Street in Portland, Oregon, was reported as the location of Friends of New Germany meetings during the 1930s. Aided by the Nazi government, a group of German-Americans founded the group to promote German culture aligned with Nazi ideals, including Aryan racial pedigrees.

Bund’s leadership built bridges with other organizations that organized around antisemitism, especially Pelley’s Silver Shirts.

The Silver Shirts first appeared in Portland soon after the national group was established in 1933. Initially caught up in power struggles between former Klan leaders and associates, the openly pro-Nazi Silver Shirts in Oregon grew to some 400 members in Eugene alone by the end of that year.22 Meetings included lengthy speeches by White supremacists, Klansmen, and regional organizers such as Roy Zachary, a Seattle restauranteur who helped shape the Washington-based Christian Party as the political wing of the Silver Legion.23 Speakers addressed things such as the “communism run by the Jews,” and how American citizens will have to stop the threat by use of violence, if necessary.24 Talking points at a November 30, 1938, meeting included statements such as: “Jews claim to have caused all wars of the past 2000 years and brag that they have made therefrom immense profits,” and “Jews plan destruction of the American Government in the near future and under the present administration control both government and finance to further these plans.”25 One lecturer discussed “a definite plan of the Jewish Communist to ruin the country,” adding that “the International Jewish bankers financed the Russian Revolu-
tion[,] that two percent of the population were Jewish and they controlled the [sic] 98 percent of the Russian white people.” Articles from Pelley’s journal, Liberation, circulated by the Oregon Silver Shirts even suggested genocide. On August 15, 1936, Pelley gave a speech in Portland, which, according to the Oregon Liberal, a weekly broadsheet edited by former Klansman Lem Devers, was attended by some 500 Silver Shirts.

Oregon’s Silver Legion remained active through the 1930s, with chapters in The Dalles, Bend, Medford, Toledo, and St. Helens. By 1939, the Silver Shirts boasted 125 neighborhood councils in Portland with between six and twenty members each, as well as several councils across the Columbia River in neighboring Vancouver, Washington. In 1938, between 250 and 300 people came to hear Zachary speak in Portland. “Every red blooded American citizen should have a good gun and ammunition,” Zachary told a captivated crowd. “Put up a target and have your wife practice shooting it if you want to keep a free government.” As one early distributor of Silver Shirts material exclaimed, “look what has happened — the Jews wax fat while gentiles struggle for mere existence.” One Pacific Northwest leader suggested that Jews should be fully disenfranchised, and their voting rights provided to Native Americans, continuing Pelley’s romanticism about American indigenous people. The Bund similarly promoted the narrative of the “vast Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy,” in the words of political scientist Leland V. Bell, declaring that their shared purpose with Nazi Germany was to fight the scourge of Communism, which threatened the destruction of America. Thus, interlocking opposition to Jews as the embodiment of foreignness, elites, and Communism became a central component of a burgeoning movement that implicitly identified Whiteness as the principle criteria for entrance into the national community.

While the Federal Government monitored the Silver Legion and the Bund for dangerous activities, some members of local governments found them useful, particularly as a counterforce to communist influence. The Portland Police Bureau’s “Red Squad” did much of the work against left-wing social movement, particularly organized labor, that would have been in line with Silver Legion’s politics. Formed in the 1910s to monitor radical activities, the secretive “Red Squad” produced a series reports that detailed different groups, that harbored “red” sympathies. By August 1937, the Red Squad’s leader, Captain Walter Odale, had joined a Silver Shirts spin-off called the American Defenders. According to meeting notes, the American Defenders received support from a man named “Kemp” — likely Wilford Kemp, a San Diego millionaire who had been Pelley’s running mate on the Christian Party ticket in 1936. In turn, the American Defenders contributed $100 toward printing Pelley’s propaganda and made plans for a “Committee of One Thousand” to serve as a vigilante organization. Odale wrote that Portland was “reportedly the third largest center of Nazi activity in the United States,” in the October 1, 1937, Red Squad “Weekly
CAPT. WALTER ODALE, pictured here in 1949, led the Portland Police subversive activities detail, or “Red Squad,” during the 1930s. Odale’s Red Squad integrated with groups such as the Silver Legion and American Defenders in its efforts to quash communist influence, especially among organized labor.

Ten days after that meeting, the first issue of Americans Incorporated’s Radical Activities Bulletin came out, picking up where the Red Squad had left off. With lengthy articles on the activities of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a labor union’s organizing of timber workers, and internal struggles within the Portland School Board, the Radical Activities Bulletin maintained the general drift of the Red Squad’s reportage. It reported that “one Legion post in Milton-Freewater,” returned a petition to deport the president of the International Woodworkers of America “with 133 signatures obtained in less than three hour’s [sic] time.” The organization looked abroad as well, condemning support for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War as pro-Soviet and anarchistic, while denouncing as a Communist front a Chinese-American picket against a pig iron plant that was sending munitions to the Japanese Empire. Key members were prominent businessmen and police officers, including Odale, who was on the board of directors, and Louis Starr, who headed up the organization. As the

Report of Communist Activities” and asserted: “It can be safely said, that if it were not for the Communist Party, there would be no Fascist or Nazi scare.” That would prove one of the final Red Squad reports. The Oregonian revealed on October 26, 1937, that Red Squad member and school district board director Louis E. Starr had interrogated a student union leader at Lincoln High School. Public controversy ensued, with the president of the Council for Economic and Social Research stating four days later to city council that the squad’s work could “by no stretch of the imagination, be termed engaged in law enforcement.” On October 30, a new group called Americans Incorporated, filed articles of incorporation under Oregon’s state laws. A month later, during a business-only meeting of American Defenders, it was reported that should Odale’s Red Squad have to stop its activities, “his work and records will be taken over by a new [private] organization, Americans Incorporated.”

International Woodworkers of America
Anti-Defamation League’s David Robinson noted, the organization attracted “certain fascist individuals who saw an opportunity to ride their hobby under the guise of fighting communism.”

Americans Incorporated had significant partners. In a February 24, 1939, event at Benson Polytechnic Auditorium, former governor Charles H. Martin performed the task of public honorary chairman at an Americans Incorporated National Defense and Americanism Rally, emceed by Mayor Joseph Carson. It is difficult to assess the size of Americans Incorporated, partly as a result of the secretive behavior of some of its members, but its influence in high society is indicated by the major politicians who helped to promote the group. Examining Americans Incorporated in light of its obscure origins (out of the cross-over between the Portland police and Silver Shirts, and fostered by the American Defenders) brings to focus the group’s role as a public-facing brand of Portland’s far-right ecosystem. The existence of a relationship between the Silver Shirts and Portland’s police is further illustrated by a February 1940 informant’s report found in the Rennar papers, which notes that Silver Shirts boasted of “making excellent progress in the Police Department and that it would be well organized.” The report added that the organization’s members believed “if any trouble starts in Portland the Police will be with [the Silver Shirts].”

The American Defenders, Bund, and Silver Shirts met in houses, cafes, and Portland’s Turnverein Hall, run by pro-Nazi activist Otto Uhle, as well as the Harmony Hall, Norse Hall, Woodman Hall, and Redman Hall, which was associated with a romanticized notion of Native American culture. Historian Roger Griffin has argued that fascists’ identification with indigeneity and the representation of an archetypal human community manifest their desire for rebirth of their own mythical, ancestral community, whether Nordic or Italian or “100% American.” In early 1938, the American Defenders announced they were joining the Americanization Council that was already affiliated with “twenty one patriotic organizations in the city of Portland,” including “the German Folksbund and the K.K.K.” Many of the groups listed were relatively small, and there is little evidence that the Americanization Council ever manifested to any public effect.

One of the phenomena that drew together members of the fascist milieu during the 1920s and 1930s was the growing popularity in North America of an eccentric body of thought known as British-Israelism. British-Israelists asserted that Anglo-Saxons were the true genetic descendants of Biblical Hebrews. Emerging as early as the sixteenth century, this idea gained popularity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fostering a sense of Anglo-American mission in the world. While many British-Israelists thought that the Jewish people were either Khazar “Asiatics” or had originated through a rebellion against the divine commandment not to intermarry with “Edomites,” more virulently antisemitic formulations, which formed the basis of the post–World War II Christian Identity religion, asserted that Jews were the spawn
THIS CHART, published by the Anglo-Saxon Federation, provides the group’s justification for why Anglo-Saxon people, not Jews, are true descendants of the Bible’s chosen people. These views, known as British-Israelism, were shared by many fascist groups during the 1920s and 1930s.

Connections to British-Israelism run deep in Oregon. Reuben Sawyer, the leading lecturer and organizer for the Oregon Ku Klux Klan, had lectured on British-Israeli principles while serving as a pastor at Portland’s Eastside Christian Church during the early 1920s and played a role in the founding of the British-Israel World Federation in 1920. A.A. Beauchamp, editor of the British-Israelist publication Watchman of Israel, found the viciousness of Klan antisemitism and racism distasteful, and Sawyer’s affiliation with the Klan came to an end in 1924. He remained active in British-Israel circles until the 1930s, when leadership passed into new hands.
THIS FLYER, titled “Shall These Subversive Forces Dominate the United States?,” was distributed by Americans Incorporated. The group was founded in 1937 and continued the work of the Portland Police “Red Squad,” railing against forms of foreign extremism, such as communism, dictatorships, and fascism.
British-Israel gospel spread through the network of Oregon's interwar White supremacist organizations. G. Fred Johnson, president of the Oregon branch of the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, a British-Israel organization, spoke on themes such as “Masonic History,” “Pyramid Symbolism” (a particular obsession of Pelley’s), “Racial Origins,” and “Israel Truths.” The Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, including Howard B. Rand, who sat on the national commission and the executive council of the British Israel World Federation, obtained support from local Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches and from the Associated Fraternal Societies and Portland Chamber of Commerce. An intelligence memo from 1936 noted that, as they made the rounds of churches and luncheons, the British-Israelists’ talk “seemed very much like the mouthings of William Dudley Pelley.” The proximity between Johnson, Rand, and the ideology of the Silver Shirts further elucidates the extent of fascist networks that were both within Oregon and tied into larger, transnational ideological systems. That the British-Israelists found such a warm welcome from local religious and political representatives suggests that the Silver Shirts also had a fertile seedbed on which to cultivate their bizarre and occult theories.

THE EXPERIENCE of World War II would forever change the character of fascism in the United States. Amid pressures on fascists from the House Committee on Un-American Activities under Congressman Martin Dies during the late 1930s and early 1940s, the isolationist movement, which fought U.S. entry into World War II, had helped promote pro-Axis causes without clear and direct associations with fascism. The movement therefore received, and accepted, the support of fascist groups. Shortly before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Oregon Sen. Rufus Holman told fellow lawmakers:

*I have always deplored Hitler’s ambitions as a conqueror. But he broke the control of these internationalists over the common people of Germany. It would be a good idea if the control of the international bankers over the common people of England was broken, and good if it was broken over the wages and savings of the common people of the United States.*

Following the declaration of war on Japan and subsequent dissolution of the national America First Committee, former Silver Shirt Delmore Lessard declared himself the head of Oregon’s anti-interventionist America First Committee. Under the guise of the group that had already officially disbanded, Lessard disseminated pamphlets produced by A.E. Kern & Co., the same publisher responsible for the Nachrichten. Following World War II, in 1947, Lessard joined Holman, a former Klansman, to create the anti-Zionist group American Foundation, Inc.

Meanwhile, other Silver Shirts carried on, in spite of the official dissolution of their group in April 1940. Erstwhile Silver Shirts leader Henry Beach consolidated his activities into what he discreetly called the “Research Club.” Once considered the spokesperson for the Silver Shirts in Oregon, Beach hoped to organize “ten thousand armed people in Portland.” Beach faced pressure from the U.S. army to
stop his radical activities or leave the West Coast in 1942 after defending Pelley for publishing anti-government materials. He fought to remain in the Pacific Northwest but retreated from far-right politics.62

After the war, former Silver Shirts joined with members of other interwar far-right groups to transform the British-Israeli interpretation of the Bible into the angrier denial of the humanity of Jews and other minorities. Emerging in California and spreading throughout the Pacific Northwest, the so-called “Christian Identity” movement built on British-Israel origin stories to express White supremacy. Instead of identifying Jews as Asians, Christian Identity taught that Jews were the spawn of Satan and that all non-Whites were “mud people” who did not have souls.63 Former Silver Shirt John Metcalf, who was inspired both by Pelley’s spiritualism and his focus on Jewish conspiracy, came to join the circles around the Christian Identity movement, as did Henry Beach.64

Amid the growth of Christian Identity within the increasingly revolutionary far right, an intriguing interplay emerged between above-ground advocacy groups and clandestine paramilitary organizations. By 1951, right-wing activist Irvin Borders had taken the leadership of a new group based in Los Angeles called America Plus, Inc., which attempted to counter disenfranchised ethnic and racial minorities’ growing demands for wages and housing. A distinguished retired Marine lieutenant general, Pedro del Valle, who claimed to have known Mussolini “personally and served with his forces in Ethiopia,” became involved with America Plus and urged its leaders to endorse his “Minutemen” idea, which would “have a semi-military purpose in checking the violence and sabotage, which the enemy constantly perpetrates in our country.” America Plus leaders proved receptive but demanded absolute secrecy. Desperate to stem the tide of the “one-worldists” and “internationalists,” del Valle went on to form a new group called the Defenders of the American Constitution, Inc., with other retired military officers.65 The secretive militarization of White supremacy that characterized del Valle’s paranoid ideas, disseminated in his bulletin TASK FORCE, would find a thriving ecosystem in the Pacific Northwest of the 1950s and 1960s.66

One California-based Christian Identity group founded by Army lieutenant colonel William Potter Gale, called Army of White American Kingdom Evangelists (“Awake”), demanded that its chapter leaders subscribe to del Valle’s bulletin and join his Defenders of the American Constitution, Inc.67 Gale’s close associate, Robert DePugh, took inspiration from del Valle and Gale’s ensuing, short-lived paramilitary group, The Rangers, forming a sub rosa paramilitary group of his own called The Minutemen to prepare for an incoming Communist assault on the contiguous lower forty-eight states.68 DePugh’s Minutemen claimed tens of thousands of members, although the FBI estimated their national membership at between 200 and 1,000.69 Silver Shirts and Klansmen joined the vigilante Minutemen, which in 1965 plotted to assassinate Martin Luther King, Jr., with
ON JULY 8, 1938, the Astorian-Budget published this image of an anti-Jewish flyer found in a Portland, Oregon, store window. The image includes hand-written notes on the poster deriding its antisemitic content.

1,400 pounds of stolen dynamite. Members of the group also allegedly blew up a police station in Redmond, Washington, a town that had been a thriving hub for regional Silver Shirts during the 1930s. They plotted to bomb Redmond’s City Hall and rob four banks before the FBI caught up to them in January 1968. After the FBI’s crackdown on the Minutemen, Beach helped pick up the slack of political organizing by piggybacking on Gale’s ideas and purportedly establishing the virulently antisemitic Posse Comitatus in Portland, Oregon. In a later interview with the Oregonian, Beach recalled that the Silver Shirts had been “a very spiritual group” and that Pelley wielded extraordinary metaphysical powers: “Pelley taught me to communicate with the spirit world.” Beach would transfer what he had learned from Pelley to Posse Comitatus, a prototype for the Patriot movement that concentrated resentment against what leaders labeled as an encroaching federal government captured by outside influences often assumed to be Jewish or of a competing, usually Communist, nation.

The post-war far right began reorienting toward Posse Comitatus. One of del Valle’s contacts in Oregon, John Birch Society member and Hitler admirer Dean Kennedy, announced that his Lane County chapter of the National Association to Keep and Bear Arms (NAKBA) would join Posse Comitatus en masse. Claiming to have a presence in all fifty states, by 1974, the FBI observed Posse Comitatus chapters in six Oregon counties and labeled the Lane County chapter as the “most active to date.” Yet, during the mid-1970s, Beach was openly admonishing recruits to “never let it be known how many members you have. . . . Not knowing how many of you there are, makes the TRAITORS more afraid of the influence you have.”

Political geographer Carolyn Galalaher has argued that Posse Comitatus
began to gain power by instrumentalizing the rural disenfranchisement stemming from the farm crisis in the Midwest and connecting it to Christian Identity leader Richard G. Butler’s calls for a White homeland in the Pacific Northwest. In 1973, Butler created a Christian Identity compound on Hayden Lake, in Idaho, about eighteen miles from the Washington state line, which became a hub for the most extreme members of Posse Comitatus as well as Klansmen and other extremists bent on race war across Oregon and Washington. This center for the growing White supremacist movements in the Pacific Northwest facilitated an interconnected network of organized crime responsible for bank robberies and assassinations throughout the 1980s. The “White power” movement that had come to roost in the Pacific Northwest was, therefore, not just informed by or imitative of but directly descended from Oregon’s interwar White supremacist, fascist movements.

**CHRISTIAN IDENTITY** took on a much more revolutionary character during the 1970s and 1980s than had earlier British-Israelism, reframing the story of supposed Anglo-Saxon diaspora portrayed as the “lost tribes of Israel” in eschatological terms in which racial enemies (Jews) and subordinates (non-Whites) were enemy combatants in a literal spiritual war that justified acts of violence in the name of Armageddon. Likewise, Posse Comitatus found a new narrative of rural discontent and form of organizing, one that was revolutionary because it depicted the federal government as captured by alien interests. That shift in ideological intensity and praxis came with a shift in broader conditions, such as the change in social values after the Civil Rights movement, which contributed to the development of the “White Rights” movement’s identity.

The new “White nationalist” or “White power” movement in the post-war period was defined by an explicitly revolutionary character and reliance on vigilante violence pitted as much against the federal government as against African Americans, Latinos, immigrants, and members of the LGBTQ community. White nationalists have tried to distinguish themselves from White supremacists by defining their movement as the ideological pursuit of White political sovereignty and social separation from non-Whites; however, this distinction does not absolve White nationalists from being identified as White supremacists, because their ideology is simply a particular strategic implementation of White supremacy.

In our study of the materials available regarding interwar fascist groups and their immediate allies, as well as the ensuing White power movement...

**LEFT:** These two maps, published in a 1990 Coalition for Human Dignity report titled *Organized White Supremacist Groups in Oregon*, document White supremacist organizations that existed throughout the state. The report highlights over two dozen groups operating in Oregon at the time of publication. As the keys indicate, the maps point out the types of organizations, their location, and the type of media used to spread their messages.
that developed through their post-war networks, we have found several important points. First, the interwar period appears to have been a time of coalition, through which Anglo-Saxon supremacy promoted by the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s gave way to a more marginal assemblage of identity-based, far-right groups, including occult British-Israelists and German-American supporters of the Nazi Party. "Aryan" heritage in opposition to Jewish hegemony appears to have been the glue that ensured this coalescence. Second, we uncovered elements within Oregon's political establishment, including members of the police, that supported groups intertwined within the fascist networks around the American Defenders. Hence, the marginality of the identity-bound fascist groups was folded into a broader far-right ecosystem that included Portland's then-mayor Carson, former governor Martin, then-Senator Holman, and police officers such as Odale. Meanwhile, fascist groups and their allies were surveilled by the Anti-Defamation League and the FBI, adding to the complexity.

Our research suggests that, as a result of federal opposition during World War II, those who had been engaged with the Silver Shirts during the interwar period increasingly began to mobilize in opposition to the government and in favor of White political sovereignty. Rhetoric of "Aryan" heritage and Jewish hegemony was replaced,

ON MAY 5, 1991, White supremacists gathered outside Portland City Hall to protest the civil trial ruling against Tom Metzger, who was found financially liable for the recruitment of Skinheads in Portland, leading to Mulugeta Seraw's murder in 1988. According to the Oregonian, the rally was organized by the White supremacist group American Front, and was met with about one hundred counter protesters.
in more public-facing discourse, with conspiracy theories about a “One World Government” and “internationalist” bankers, providing a more accessible milieu for recruitment from a broad pool of political affiliations. With the rise of Donald Trump as President and of “Independent Trumpist” organizations, such as Patriot Prayer and their Alt Right bedfellows that bring fascism to bear again in cities such as Portland, we can see how the interwar fascist movement, while ultimately a failure, helped sow the seeds for today’s rural discontent as manifested in the modern Patriot movement.54

NOTES

The authors want to thank Larry Lipin for substantial editorial assistance.

1. The literature on fascist organization in Oregon is much less extensive than that on the Ku Klux Klan, reflecting the smaller size of the movement. See Eckard Toy, “Silver Shirts in the Northwest: Politics, Prophecies, and Personalities in the 1930s,” Pacific Northwest Quarterly 80 (October 1989): 139–46.


6. Materials relating to the ideology of British-Israelism can be found in Mss 2918, George Rennar papers [hereafter Rennar papers], box 1, Anglo-Saxon Federation folder, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Portland, Oregon [hereafter OHS Research Library].


8. Ibid., 41.
10. Ibid., 57, 77–78, 86.
17. Silver Shirts meeting report, February 10, 1939, Rennar Papers, box 2, Silver Shirts folder, OHS Research Library.
Silver Shirts folder held at OHS Research Library.

28. Silver Shirts meeting report, February 10, 1939, Rennar papers, box 2, Silver Shirts folder, OHS Research Library. These numbers were likely inflated, since they came from the Silver Shirts themselves.


30. Silvers, November 1933, Rennar papers, box 2, Silver Shirts folder, OHS Research Library.

31. Silver Shirts meeting report, November, 20, 1938, Rennar papers, box 2, Silver Shirts folder, OHS Research Library.


33. Untitled American Defenders meeting notes, September 17, 1937, Rennar papers, American Defenders folder, OHS Research Library.

34. Untitled American Defenders meeting notes, October 23, 1937, Rennar Papers, American Defenders folder, OHS Research Library; Untitled American Defenders meeting notes, December 4, 1937, Rennar Papers, American Defenders folder, OHS Research Library.

35. Untitled American Defenders meeting notes, October 9, 1937, Rennar Papers, American Defenders folder; Untitled American Defenders meeting notes, December 24, 1937, Rennar Papers, American Defenders folder, OHS Research Library.


40. A number of Radical Activities Bulletins covering these subjects are located in the Rennar papers, box 1, Americans Incorporated folder, OHS Research Library.

41. Americans Incorporated, Radical Activities Bulletin, Portland, Oregon, no. 14, March 11, 1938, Rennar papers, box 1, Americans Incorporated folder, OHS Research Library. The report also noted that Australian-born Harry Bridges, who founded the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in 1937, should also be named on the petition. For more on Harry Bridges and the ILWU in Portland, see Sandy Polishuk, “They can’t come in the front door because you guys won’t let them,” Oregon Historical Quarterly 120:4 (Winter 2019): 546–61.


44. “Fascist Party,” Portland Voter, July 30, 1938, Rennar papers, box 1, Americans Incorporated folder, OHS Research Library; Louis E. Starr to Myer Rubin, February 14, 1939, Rennar papers, box 1, Americans Incorporated folder, OHS Research Library.

45. Report, February 29, 1940, Rennar Papers, box 2, Silvershirt Legion of America folder, OHS Research Library.

46. Meeting places are named throughout the Silvershirt Legion of American folder in box 2 of the Rennar papers at OHS Research Library.

47. American Defenders Meeting Report, January 8, 1938, Rennar papers, box 1, American Defenders folder, OHS Research Library. Fred Gifford had revived the Klan in 1937, claiming that the primary focus was to fight both “communism and fascism in this country” and to keep the U.S. Silver Shirts folder held at OHS Research Library.
“safe for the democratic principles that made it great.” “Klan Revival Due in Oregon, Gifford Says,” Oregon Journal, October 19, 1937.


49. Ibid., 121–70.


51. Ibid., 22–23.


53. Business card for G. Fred Johnson, Lecturer, Rennar papers, box 1, Anglo-Saxon Federation folder, OHS Research Library. Rand’s public talks throughout the month of September included luncheons in Portland at the Rose City M.E. Church, Church Forum in the Imperial Hotel, the Multnomah Civic Club at the Congress Hotel; and in Salem and Clatskanie at the American Lutheran Church. See 1936 handbill published by the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, Oregon Headquarters, Portland, Oregon, Rennar Papers, box 1, Anglo-Saxon Federation folder, OHS Research Library.


55. “Memo” April 21, 1936, Rennar papers, box 1, Anglo-Saxon Federation folder, OHS Research Library.


58. Letter from Delmore Lessard, Acting Chairman, Oregon Chapter, America First Committee, April 30, 1941, Rennar Papers, box 2, Misc. folder, OHS Research Library.


60. For more information on American Foundation, Inc., see the “American Foundation, Inc.” file in the George E. Rennar Papers, which includes newspaper clippings and the group’s articles of incorporation.


64. See Toy, “Silver Shirts in the Northwest.”

65. See letter exchange between del Valle to Irvin Borders of America Plus, sent August 14, 1951, and a response from American Plus via Aldrich Blake sent October 3, 1951. Regarding his claim about Mussolini, see de Valle’s letter sent August 9, 1962, and addressed to National States Rights Party organizer J. Paul Thornton. For quotes on “one-worldism” and “internationalists” see TASK FORCE, April 1955. This material is available in Pedro Del Valle papers, 1949–1978, University of Oregon Libraries, Coll 126. These sources are included in an excellent summary of del Valle’s work, which can be found in Kevin Coogan, “The Defenders of the American Constitution and the League of Empire Loyalists: The First Postwar Anglo-American Revolts against the ‘One World Order’, a paper delivered at Amsterdam International Institute for Social History, 2004.
66. For instance, among Del Valle’s myriad correspondents was Dean Kennedy, a John Bircher and Defenders of the American Constitution member who led a strange anti-gun-control group called the National Association to Keep and Bear Arms, based in Medford, Oregon. That group’s acronym, NAKBA, is the same word Palestinians use to describe the mass displacement following the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, suggesting perhaps the same ultranationalist anti-Zionism that characterized del Valle’s own antisemitic writings. To view their correspondence, see Pedro Del Valle papers, 1949–1978, University of Oregon Libraries, Coll 126. For more on Kennedy, see Levitas, Terrorist Next Door, 115–16, 120, 137.


69. Ibid, 60.


71. While some sources follow Beach’s claim to have founded Posse Comitatus in 1969, Leonard Zeskind insists that Gale founded the group in 1971 and Beach plagiarized him. Zeskind, Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream (New York City: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2009), 72.


74. Levitas, Terrorist Next Door, 120.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 119.


78. Kathy Marks, Faces of Right Wing Extremism (Boston: Branden Books, 2011), 85, 139.


83. George Hawley, Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2016), 246. It should be noted that in this case, it is pursuing political separation motivated by their belief in their inherent supremacy.

1946

ON A MAJOR TRANSPORTATION ARTERIAL at 5474 Northeast Sandy Boulevard in Portland, Oregon, stood the Coon-Chicken Inn, a popular restaurant defined by the prominent display of a demeaning, negative Black stereotype. From the 1930s to the 1950s, Black Oregonians endured the constant reminder that it was acceptable in a White supremacist society for their race to be publicly debased and humiliated.

The ideals and images of White supremacy co-existed deep into the twentieth century and beyond. While those who embraced the most extremist views on racism and violence became a minority — rather than a majority — of Oregon’s White population, the legacy of earlier generations continued to flow through the channels of Oregon life on many levels.

At times, that legacy can be detected in a continued pattern of advantage and special privilege enjoyed by Whites, embedded in the institutions and operations of Oregon life, of which they may be generally unaware. Non-Whites in Oregon consistently resisted and contended with the often submerged, yet powerful, forces of historic inequality. The physical reminders of that legacy, such as photographs and menus, are preserved in the Oregon Historical Society Research Library collections.
White Supremacy and Hatred in the Streets of Portland

The Murder of Mulugeta Seraw

OREGON VOICES

by Elden Rosenthal

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Pacific Northwest became once again targeted for creation of a White homeland. The creators of this racist paradise were not successful but did manage to focus national and worldwide attention on their attempt. For Oregonians, that attention harkened to the motives and behaviors of the pioneer generation and brought unpleasant comparisons to the surface. When White supremacy is infused into the institutions of a state, there is always tension between the concepts of law and the principles of justice. Which shall prevail, the democratic right to be a racist or the human right to not be the victim of discrimination? As the legacy of old ways and new justice battle on the streets of a new century, we shall see.

THE PORTLAND, Oregon, courtroom

I was sitting in had irreplaceable blood-red marble walls and columns. The rug was tattered and soiled. It was an apt setting for the brawl about to begin.

A television camera had been set up to broadcast the proceedings. Out of concern for the jurors’ physical safety, the judge instructed that the camera operator was never to point the camera at them, rather to focus only on himself and the participants. A metal detector had been set up outside the courtroom; armed police sat inside while others patrolled the rooftop of the courthouse. In 1990, this was all highly unusual. So was the case: an immigrant’s family was suing the White Aryan Resistance, seeking money damages for inciting the murder of Mulugeta Seraw.

Seraw was twenty-eight years old, one of approximately two-hundred Ethiopian immigrants living in Portland during the late 1980s. The community was tight-knit, and those who knew Seraw
described him as intelligent, gentle, and kind. Sometime after midnight on November 12–13, 1988, a Saturday night, Seraw was leaning in the passenger window of a countryman’s parked car in the quiet residential Kerns neighborhood of Southeast Portland. There was only one other car on the street, a silver-and-black Nissan moving slowly toward the Ethiopians. Inside the Nissan were three neo-Nazi skinheads and their girlfriends, members of a loose knit group that called itself East Side White Pride. As the Nissan approached Seraw and his friends, racial epithets poured out the window. The three skinheads jumped out in full attack mode.

The assault was swift and deadly. Kyle Brewster, a former homecoming king at Portland’s Grant High School, held Seraw down while Ken Mieske assaulted him from behind. Swinging a Louisville Slugger baseball bat, a symbolic American icon, Mieske crushed Seraw’s skull. The skinheads then sped away, leaving Seraw in a pool of blood on the pavement. He never regained consciousness.

**THE MURDER** of Mulugeta Seraw shocked Portland. The self-image of the state’s largest city was decidedly progressive and tolerant at that time. That young men raised in Portland

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**PROTESTERS GATHER** outside Pioneer Courthouse in Portland, Oregon, on September 18, 1989, after Kyle Brewster pleaded guilty to murdering Mulugeta Seraw, an Ethiopian immigrant. Brewster, along with Ken Mieske and Steve Strasser, who also pleaded guilty to the murder, were members of East Side White Pride, a white supremacist group in Portland.
would commit an unmistakably racist murder seemed unbelievable to the city’s predominantly White citizenry. Portland should not have been so surprised.

African Americans have been subjected to various forms of discrimination for most of Oregon’s history, and the Pacific Northwest was becoming a haven for White-supremacist organizers during the 1980s. Richard Butler, a Hitler-admiring racist, moved to Hayden Lake, Idaho, in 1974, established Aryan Nations as the White supremacist political arm of a racist Christian church, and proposed the creation of a White ethnostate in the Pacific Northwest. A follower of Butler, Robert J. Mathews, subsequently founded the Order, a White supremacist terrorist group that committed numerous armed robberies and at least two murders in pursuit of its goal to create an all-White Christian state in the Pacific Northwest. Mathews was injured escaping a shootout with the FBI in Portland on November 24, 1984. He was killed on Whidbey Island two weeks later, when the FBI firebombed his hideout in an effort to end an armed standoff.

During the mid 1980s, Nazi skinheads became a palpable presence on Portland’s city streets and in the clubs that played their brand of hard-core rock music. Six months before Seraw’s murder, the Willamette Week published a front page story describing the city’s new breed of racists:

The men, whose ages range from the late teens to the early 20s, have shaved heads and are dressed in militaristic-looking outfits that include heavy, steel-toed boots. The women . . . also have their hair cut short and are attired in fatigues and jackboots. Most of them are covered with elaborate, permanent tattoos that feature skulls and other images of death.

[They] call themselves skinheads, and they believe it is their sacred duty to defend the sanctity of the white race. . . . [T]heir beliefs . . . are drawn from the teachings of the Ku Klux Klan and from the heated rhetoric of the European-based, right-wing National Front party.

At about the same time, Tom Metzger, once a Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and his son, John Metzger, formed the White Aryan Resistance (WAR) in southern California. WAR published a crude racist and anti-Semitic monthly newspaper and began recruiting skinheads to become the “shock troops” of the White supremacy movement. In the fall of 1988, Metzger sent a recruiter, Dave Mazzella, to Portland. Metzger instructed Mazzella to organize Portland skinheads and recruit them to the violent ways of WAR. Mazzella, boyishly skinny, almost frail in appearance, met the husky Mieske and other members of East Side White Pride. His credo of street violence belied his appearance, and he found the Portland skinheads receptive to his message.

Mieske and his colleagues were arrested within days of Mulugeta Seraw’s death. Mazzella was also jailed, but was released without being charged. Mieske eventually pled guilty to murder. Brewster and the third skinhead involved in the assault admitted to aiding and abetting the murder. The Metzgers were never criminally charged.
ON MAY 12, 1988, six months before the murder of Mulugeta Seraw, Jim Redden, a reporter for Portland’s Willamette Week, published an article on the growing presence of White supremacist groups in the city.

A FEW MONTHS after the murder, I was invited by Paul Meyer to a dinner of civil rights lawyers at Allesandro’s, a downtown Italian restaurant. Meyer was a founder of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Oregon and a member of the national ACLU board of directors. Morris Dees was coming to town, Paul explained, looking for local counsel to assist him in bringing a civil case arising from the murder of Seraw.

Born and raised in Alabama, Dees and his law partner, Joe Levin, had founded the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in 1971. In a series of spectacular cases, Dees took on the
DURING THE MID 1980s, Tom Metzger, former Grand Dragon of the KKK, and his son John Metzger formed the White Aryan Resistance (WAR) in southern California. This page from a WAR publication illustrates extreme violence advocated by the group and was included as a plaintiff’s exhibit in the civil suit over Mulugeta Seraw’s murder.
KKK in the South. His strategy was to seek compensatory and punitive damages from the Klan for the victims of Klan members’ criminal actions. Dees had achieved large jury verdicts for the families of African Americans brutalized by the Klan, forcing Klan chapters into insolvency. In retaliation, arsonists set the SPLC offices afire in 1983 and Dees repeatedly received death threats.  

During dinner, Dees explained that Mazzella, the young man WAR sent to Portland to organize skinheads, had turned himself in to the Jewish Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in Santa Ana, California. The ADL then contacted the SPLC, and Dees immediately flew to California to debrief Mazzella. Based on Mazzella’s statements — statements that corroborated information the SPLC had previously collected on the Metzgers and WAR — Dees intended to sue WAR and the Metzgers for inciting the murder of Mulugeta Seraw. Dees filled us in on the Metzgers’ neo-Nazi White supremacist beliefs and their goal of ridding America of non-Whites and non-Christians. He told us that the planned lawsuit in Portland, if successful, was intended to put the Metzgers and WAR out of business. For legal and logistical reasons, Dees and the SPLC needed local counsel to assist in the case. All expenses would be covered, he explained, but local counsel must be willing to serve pro bono, that is, without being paid.

As Dees explained the case, I thought about my mother’s parents fleeing antisemitism in Russia and my father escaping from Germany in 1936. Since graduating from law school in 1972, I had been practicing civil rights and personal injury law in Portland. By the time I met Dees, I had come to the view that, in the United States, civil rights violations are often best vindicated by making wrongdoers pay, literally, for their misdeeds. I told Dees that my personal and professional history had prepared me for this case and that I would be honored to serve as his co-counsel. He studied my face, and I knew I had struck a responsive chord. I was about to work with Morris Dees against American neo-Nazis to assert the primacy of law over violence.

The key to prevailing in the lawsuit was to prove that the Metzgers intentionally incited the violence that resulted in Seraw’s death, which would depend primarily on Mazzella’s testimony. Mazzella had told Dees about the inner workings of the Metzger operation, including how he had been instructed to recruit skinheads to WAR by encouraging violent street confrontations with non-Whites. Dees was understandably concerned that the Metzgers might try to intimidate our star witness by sending skinheads to physically frighten him.

Dees and the SPLC lawyers originally filed the case in federal court in Oregon, under a federal statute passed during the aftermath of the Civil War that prohibits conspiracies to deprive persons of their civil rights. The law was specifically intended to protect the formerly enslaved people, now freed. Dees, however, was unaware that Oregon law does not require the pretrial divulging of witness names.
or their whereabouts. By contrast, in the federal court system, there are procedures available to require one’s opponents to identify the names and addresses of all witnesses that will be called at trial. Oregon law only requires each side to explain in pretrial pleadings what they intend to prove. A few weeks after the case was filed in federal court, I explained to Dees that if we brought the case in state court as a wrongful death claim, not as a federal civil rights claim, we would not have to disclose Mazzella’s address. Dees promptly agreed. The case was dismissed from federal court and refiled in Multnomah County Circuit Court in the fall of 1989.

THE MULTNOMAH COUNTY presiding circuit court judge, who is responsible for the administrative business of the county’s court system, was also at the time responsible for ruling on pretrial legal motions in all pending civil cases. When Tom Metzger discovered that the presiding judge, Don Londer, was Jewish, he began bad-mouthing the judge to the various court clerks he was dealing with, complaining that a Jewish judge could not possibly be fair to him. It is never a good strategy to start insulting a judge. The court clerks, predictably, relayed Metzger’s bad-mouthing to Londer.

In Multnomah County at that time, the presiding judge would typically assign a judge to actually preside over a trial the day before that trial was set to begin. Dees was concerned that a last-minute assignment would make it difficult, if not impossible, to arrange for proper courthouse and courtroom security. We were also of the view that exposing a judge to Metzger’s shenanigans for months leading up to a trial would be advantageous. We decided to file a motion seeking the immediate assignment of a trial judge. Metzger was delighted to agree with the request, seeing it as a way to get the case away from Londer. Shortly after filing the motion, we convened in the judge’s chambers for him to consider the matter.

A judge’s chambers serve as a private office and as a place to conduct business with lawyers away from the eyes and ears of the public. Lawyers are usually more relaxed in chambers, the conversations often more candid than in open court. Londer occupied the largest and nicest chambers in the courthouse, with comfortable chairs, a sofa, and a view of a Portland city park. Typically, no court reporter is present in chambers to transcribe the discussions.

In attendance for the hearing were Tom Metzger (Metzger and his son were ostensibly representing themselves, although they were receiving advice from a Texas lawyer who did not formally appear in the case), the county docket clerk, and an official court reporter. “What is she doing here?” I thought as I sat down. Londer was all business — the customary chambers informality was missing. Looking at me sternly, he asked why I had filed the request, listened to my explanation of security concerns, and then asked Metzger if he agreed. Metzger, of course, voiced enthusiasm for the immediate assignment of a trial judge. With the court reporter taking down
every word, Londer then asked me if I understood that assigning a judge now would mean that all preliminary matters as well as all trial matters would be ruled on by the trial judge and that the assignment would be final. I understood this and stated so. Metzger expressed his understanding as well.

With a flourish Londer turned to the county’s docket clerk, Gwen Byhre, and asked what judge was available for a special advance assignment. Byhre paused, leafed through some papers, and then announced that Judge Ancer Haggerty was the next judge available for a special assignment.

“Any objection, counselor?” Londer gravely asked.

Aancer Haggerty! A former interior lineman for the University of Oregon Ducks, a Marine Silver Star recipient for combat bravery in Vietnam, and a former public defender, Haggerty was also the only African American circuit court trial judge sitting in Oregon. I averted my gaze from Londer’s stare. “No objection,” I mumbled. Metzger quickly assented to the assignment. “He must not know,” I thought. “He probably thinks Haggerty is Irish!”

Now I understood why Londer had brought in the court reporter. He
immediately assigned the case to Haggerty and again reminded us that the decision was final. As I left his chamber, Londer shook my hand. He never said a word about it to me again.

**TRIAL WAS SCHEDULED** to begin on October 8, 1990, and skinheads began arriving in town days in advance to support WAR. Just before trial, my wife and I received a threatening call on our home phone. From early October through the trial, the Portland Police provided Dees, Haggerty, the Metzgers, and me with police protection. There were three shifts of two armed policemen assigned to protect me twenty-four hours a day. Sixth Avenue, the street between my office and the courthouse, was blocked off during the trial. A SWAT team armed with automatic weapons was stationed atop the courthouse.

Dees had recruited Cathy “Cat” Bennett to help us pick a jury. Bennett was one of the country’s first jury consultants, an incredibly gifted and observant woman who volunteered her services for the trial. She had pioneered a new approach for trial lawyers to use when questioning potential jurors. Rather than asking whether they were for or against a party to a lawsuit (i.e., “Mr. Jones, will you have any difficulty voting for the plaintiff if the evidence favors his claims?”), Bennett encouraged lawyers to ask open-ended questions with the hope that jurors would reveal their thoughts and views about important issues (“Mr. Jones, what are your thoughts about immigrants who come to Oregon to study at our colleges?”). At the end of the first day of trial, we had questioned all the potential jurors. In court the next morning, we selected a jury and the trial began.

Dees made our opening statement. After telling the jury about Mulugeta Seraw’s life and murder, he carefully outlined how we intended to show that the Metzgers were personally responsible for what had occurred. Dees outlined the twisted White supremacist thinking of the Metzgers and their political goal of making the United States a White Christian nation. He explained that Tom Metzger had developed the plan of recruiting skinheads to act as his troops, training them to perform random acts of violence against “mud people” and Jews in the hope of inciting a White racial uprising.

I had been concerned that Dees’s deep southern drawl and fractured grammar would not work well in a Portland courtroom. I could not have been more wrong. Here was a man from the Deep South who had traveled to Portland to represent the family of an Ethiopian immigrant. The incongruity of the situation combined with Dees’s down-home way of talking to the jury captivated the courtroom right from the start.

Tom Metzger spoke for himself to the jury. He was a short, square-shaped man with an obvious toupee. He claimed he had nothing to do with Seraw’s murder, that he was the victim of a witch hunt because of his views regarding White nationalism. Metzger portrayed himself as a victim, claiming
that we were suing him because of his political views, that we were trying to deny him the right to free speech that was protected by the First Amendment. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, has been clear that “preparing a group for violent action and steeling it to such action” is not speech protected by the First Amendment. Just as a mafia boss cannot claim First Amendment protection for telling a lieutenant to “take care” of a rival, so Tom Metzger could not legitimately claim immunity for sending Mazzella to Portland with instructions to use violence to recruit skinheads.

After opening statements, the plaintiff puts on evidence first. We played incriminating tape recordings of Metzger praising Mieske and the other skinheads for doing their “civic duty” in Portland. We put into evidence newsletters published by Metzger with cartoons depicting Blacks as ignorant drug addicts and criminals. We showed the jury WAR publications urging violence. We called the former state medical examiner, William Brady, to describe how Mulugeta Seraw had died. Dr. Brady was well-known in the courthouse for his lurid descriptions of fatal wounds and his booming bass voice. He described in brutal detail the skull-crushing injuries Seraw suffered.

We brought Seraw’s father, Seraw Tekuneh, to Portland from the north-

**TOM METZGER** (left) is pictured here with Morris Dees (right) of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) at the civil trial over Mulugeta Seraw’s murder. SPLC brought a civil suit against Metzger and the White Aryan Resistance for inciting the murder.
ern Ethiopian highlands where he lived, along with Seraw’s son, Henock Mulugeta Seraw, from Addis Ababa. Seraw’s father was a short, dignified man who made his living as a farmer. He testified with the help of an Amharic interpreter about Seraw’s life, about his decision to leave Ethiopia and travel to America to study. He told the jury about selling a cow to pay for Seraw’s travels, and of his pain at losing his only son.

Before the trial I spent a few hours with him, helped by an interpreter. Seraw’s father asked me who the people were who killed his son. I responded by asking if he knew about the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 by Mussolini’s army. Seraw’s father had heard stories of the invasion. “It was those people,” I told him, “Fascists, people with the same beliefs as Mussolini, who killed your son.” Seraw’s father nodded solemnly — now he understood. When we visited Seraw’s grave, the police officers who were with us cried.

We put the imprisoned Mieske on the witness stand as an adverse witness, forcing him to describe the assault. We called witnesses to the skinheads’ actions leading up to the assault. Heidi Martinson testified that she was in the skinheads’ Nisan when Seraw was murdered. She
described how the skinheads initiated the confrontation and stated that Seraw was unarmed and did nothing to provoke the assault. She told the jury that she saw Mieske club Seraw twice with a baseball bat.

And, of course, Mazzella testified. He explained how he had been sent to Portland to recruit skinhead members of East Side White Pride to the Metzgers’ organization. He testified that he took Portland skinheads into public parks looking for lone African Americans to assault. Violence, he told the jury, built “respect” for WAR.  

Tom and John Metzger testified in their own defense, stressing that they had been a thousand miles away from Portland when the murder occurred, that they had nothing to do with what had happened. But we had the letter that John Metzger had written to the Portland skinheads, introducing Dave Mazzella and inviting the East Side White Pride to join WAR’s Aryan Youth Movement, a letter that concluded with the chilling admonition that “We work with any pro-White, anti-drug, White group as long as they do not talk. Racial Regards.” We also had bank records that showed WAR was a for-profit business that provided the Metzgers with a steady, albeit modest, income from the sale of Nazi paraphernalia and donations.

Relying on the established legal precept that holds persons and entities liable for the expected actions of their agents, as well as the law of civil conspiracy, we established the necessary elements to prove the defendant’s legal liability.

As the trial unfolded, Haggerty remained stoic and judicious, ruling on various issues as they arose. Despite the abhorrent racist evidence presented daily, Haggarty was expressionless, sitting above the fray in his judicial robes, an ever-present reminder of the

**MULUGETA SERAW** (October 21, 1960–November 13, 1988) was an Ethiopian immigrant living in Southeast Portland. Those who knew him described him as intelligent, gentle, and kind. Seraw’s murder shocked the city and revealed a dark underpinning of White supremacy that many Portland residents had long ignored.
JOHN METZGER’S LETTER to Portland’s East Side White Pride group was submitted as evidence in the trial. He discusses sending White Aryan Resistance (WAR) recruiter Dave Mazzella to Portland to organize local skinheads and give East Side White Pride “a feel of how we [WAR] work” — committing violence against non-Whites.
ludicrousness of Metzger’s warped views.

The two-week-long trial was front-page news and the talk of the town day after day. In addition to the live television coverage, reporters from across the country sat in the courtroom.

CLOSING ARGUMENTS spanned two court days. Dees made the first closing argument. He carefully walked the jury through the evidence we had presented. He pointed out how we had provided overwhelming proof that the Metzgers were in the business of hate and violence. He reviewed the numerous ways we had proven this and how the Metzgers’ decision to send Mazzella to Portland directly led to Seraw’s violent death.

John Metzger followed Dees, reiterating the defense theme that he and his father had nothing to do with the murder, that they were a thousand miles away when the killing occurred. Court then adjourned for the weekend. On Monday morning, Tom Metzger made his closing argument. He began by attacking lawyers, by referring to lawyers as a parasite class. He then argued that America was changing for the worse, and that his vision of White nationalism was justified. He claimed that people who saw the world the same way he did were everywhere and that he was being victimized for his beliefs.

Rereading Metzger’s argument almost thirty years later, his rhetoric is uncomfortably familiar and current: “We’re being invaded from Mexico and everywhere in the south,” he argued. Metzger concluded by describing the plight of White Americans as he saw it: “There is a growing underclass of white people in this country. They are dropping through the grating. They are becoming poorer and poorer and poorer. And they don’t like what’s happening in this country...”

I gave the rebuttal argument after Tom Metzger sat down. I stressed the odiousness of his message, and concluded: “Our community will not remember the hundreds of thousands of words spoken in this courtroom when this trial is over, but our community and indeed our country is going to remember your verdict for a long time. Give us the verdict to put this man out of business.”

The jury began its deliberations at 11:45 a.m. A few minutes before 5:00 p.m., their verdict was delivered to a packed courtroom. By a vote of 11 to 1, Tom and John Metzger, and WAR, were found liable for the death of Mulugeta Seraw. The family’s compensatory damages and the community’s punitive damages were assessed at $12.5 million, the amount we had asked the jury to award. At the time it was one of the largest verdicts in Oregon history. The verdict was national news.

After the verdict, the entire litigation team, along with our security details, celebrated in the dark back bar at Jake’s, Portland’s venerable downtown seafood restaurant. One of the celebrants at Jake’s was San Diego trial lawyer Jim “Mac” McElroy. McElroy had spent the entire trial in Portland helping in whatever way he could. After the verdict, Dees asked
him to take on the task of collecting the judgment. Through McElroy’s efforts, we forced the sale of the Metzger family home and hounded Tom Metzger as a creditor for twenty years.17 McElroy also traveled to Ethiopia to meet with Seraw’s family. With the family’s blessing, he eventually adopted Seraw’s son, Henock. McElroy raised Henock, who now is married and a commercial airline pilot, flying big passenger jetliners.

The Metzgers appealed the verdict. The judgment was affirmed by a unanimous Oregon Court of Appeals in April 1993. The Metzgers unsuccessfully sought first Oregon Supreme Court and then U.S. Supreme Court review. The litigation finally ended in May 1994.18

THE TRIAL AND VERDICT struck chords that continue to quietly reverberate. Dees moved on to successfully sue Richard Butler and the Aryan Nations, in Idaho, forcing a sale of their compound following a $6.3 million verdict and resultant bankruptcy.19 On the thirtieth anniversary of Seraw’s murder, Portland proclaimed “November 13th of each year to be Mulugeta Seraw Day.”

Metzger’s White nationalism presaged the current, widespread emergence of White nationalism and White supremacy as a political reality, along with its accompanying violent shadow. I had not considered the possibility that Metzger’s message of White nationalism and White supremacy would gain traction, but recent events have reminded me of what we heard in the courtroom. The public utterings of candidate and President Donald J. Trump seemed to be copies of Tom Metzger’s closing arguments.

METZGER IN THE COURTROOM: “We had a nice little community [in Fallbrook, California] . . . it was clean and nice. The schools were great. And they went over us like a steamroller destroying that little town. . . . We’re being invaded from Mexico and everywhere in the south.”20

PRESIDENT TRUMP, OVAL OFFICE: “Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?”21

PRESIDENT TRUMP TWEET: “This is an invasion of our Country and our Military is waiting for you!”22

When Trump took office, he immediately began seeking authorization to build a wall on the southern border to stop immigration from Mexico and Central America and enacted policies to greatly reduce asylum seekers.23 He enlisted advisors with avowed White nationalist connections.24

Along with the increase in White supremacy rhetoric, hate crimes nationwide have recently increased dramatically.25 In Portland we are acutely aware of this reemergence. If it is not a Jeremy Christian, it is the Proud Boys or Patriot Prayer bringing violence to our streets.26 On August 12, 2017, White supremacists rioted in Charlottesville, Virginia, terrorizing the city and killing Heather Heyer.27 On October 27, 2018, a White supremacist gunman killed eleven congregants worshiping at the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue, the synagogue where my parents were married.28 On August 3, 2019, a White nationalist gunman
WHITE ARYAN NATION (WAR) propaganda from the mid 1980s that advocated violence at the U.S. border resonates today. In this flyer, WAR tells its followers: “If it ain’t white . . . waste it” to “stop the mudslide” into the United States.
posted an anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant manifesto on an internet chatboard and then killed twenty-two persons in an El Paso, Texas, Walmart.  

Are there lessons to be learned from the sordid events in Portland of November 13, 1988? Sadly, it cannot be ignored that holding views of White nationalism and White supremacy inevitably lead to violence. The murder of Mulugeta Seraw is part of a continuum of violence that began with the brutality of slavery, continued through the decades of Jim Crow and lynchings, and have recently thrust themselves into the news with disturbing frequency. The threat inherent in racist ideology must be recognized and vigorously opposed on every occasion when its bile surfaces.

NOTES

1. Author’s December 4, 2018, telephone interview with Abinnet Hile.
3. See, for example, other articles in this “White Supremacy & Resistance” special issue of *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120:4 (Winter 2019).
11. All jurisdictions require that a member of the local state bar association be involved in any filed lawsuit.
12. Pro bono is shorthand for the Latin phrase *pro bono publico* (‘for the good of the public’); the client is not charged a fee.
17. Under Oregon law, a judgment can be the subject of collection efforts for only twenty
years. Oregon Revised Statutes, sections 18.180 and 18.182.


Epilogue

by Eliza E. Canty-Jones

THANK YOU for reading this special issue of the Oregon Historical Quarterly. The work of preparing this issue for publication has been both professionally satisfying and emotionally wrenching. Since we began this project in summer 2017, the news has been filled with reports of White supremacist organizing and violence. White supremacists have repeatedly and proudly marched in Portland, Oregon. Men deploying White supremacist rhetoric have attacked Muslims praying in Christchurch, New Zealand, Jewish people gathering in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and families perceived to be Mexican shopping in El Paso, Texas.

These events are tied to both the history we have been exploring through this special issue and to one another. After the massacre in El Paso, historian of radical right movements Kathleen Belew wrote:

*The white power movement imagines race war, incited by mass violence among other strategies. The core texts of this movement . . . provide a road map to how such violence could succeed. To call them manuals is too simplistic: They provide the collective ideas and vision by which a fringe movement can attempt a violent confrontation that could lead to a race war.*

As we undertook the labor of creating this investigation of White supremacy and resistance in Oregon history, it was impossible to ignore the contemporary violence that is linked to the legacy of that history. Our sincere hope, as Carmen Thompson wrote in the introduction, is that the work we have produced offers readers a “freshness of thought” that can itself be a tool for resisting White supremacy.

While we believe this issue provides a substantial framework for understanding the history of White supremacy and resistance in Oregon, we know it is by no means comprehensive. The work of perceiving the structures of White supremacy, and the attendant expectations of Whiteness, is the work of a lifetime. For 120 years, the Oregon Historical Society has published this journal every three months. We expect that investigations of White supremacy will continue to fill its pages for years to come.

THE WINTER 2019 ISSUE of the Oregon Historical Quarterly (OHQ) presents authoritative scholarship on the subject of White supremacy and resistance in Oregon history. OHQ staff, in consultation with two guest editors and many additional advisors, have undertaken the work of creating this issue with extreme care and commitment. Focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the special issue includes new and newly considered scholarship, primary sources, and unique framing of a complex aspect of Oregon’s history. Twelve authors, supported by over twenty peer reviewers, explore themes such as settler colonialism, labor organizing, and the global color line.

This project is not neutral on the subject of White supremacy. Its creators believe that organizations, leaders, and public policies that advance and institutionalize the idea that people categorized as White are superior to other people are harmful and always have been. It therefore is important to learn both about how White supremacy has been woven into many of our policies and social norms and about the many, diverse people who have resisted that institutionalization.

The creation of this special issue reflects many of the Oregon Historical Society’s core values, as articulated in its 2019–2023 Strategic Plan, including: “addressing historical exclusion”; “exploring and embracing multiple ways of knowing”; and “welcoming challenging conversations.” The process of creating the special issue continues OHS’ “work with diverse community partners whose advice guides many aspects of our work.”

All issues of OHQ are the result of extensive research, peer review, revision, developmental editing and copy-editing, fact checking, and meticulous layout and proofreading. Because of the collaborative process we have used for this issue, that work has been even more extensive than usual. This timeline outlines that process.

Through a brave, evidence-based, and scholarly investigation of some of the most uncomfortable parts of our state’s history, this special issue of OHQ offers significant fulfillment of OHS’ commitment to a vision of an Oregon Story that is meaningful to all Oregonians.
TIMELINE

June 2017
OHQ Editorial Advisory Board asked staff to consider creating a special issue on the history of White supremacy in Oregon. The discussion was prompted, in part, by then-recent, racially motivated attacks and murders on the MAX (light-rail) in Portland. OHQ’s advisors recognized that — as a scholarly journal that embraces complexity and context — OHQ could bring to the public valuable perspective and knowledge on this subject.

October 2017
OHQ staff hosted two dozen scholars for a discussion of how the journal might approach the project. They discussed: What question(s) should be addressed by the special issue? Who should be involved in the work as authors? What major themes should provide parameters for the work? In response to this meeting and discussions with individual advisors, the OHQ Editor recruited a “design team” to hone the project’s direction. The team included: Natalia Fernández, Curator and Archivist of the Oregon Multicultural Archives and OSU Queer Archives; James Stanley Harrison, Portland Community College; Dr. David Lewis, NDN History Research; Dr. Darrell Millner, Portland State University; Scot Nakagawa, ChangeLab; Dr. Carmen Thompson, Portland State University and Portland Community College; and Eric Ward, Western States Center.

Winter and Spring 2018
Through two in-person meetings and remote communications, the design team created a proposed table of contents. OHQ staff, design team members, and advisors began soliciting proposals, which were due in mid June 2018. Historians and design team members Dr. Darrell Millner and Dr. Carmen Thompson agreed to serve as guest editors.
**Summer and Fall 2018**

Guest editors and *OHQ* editorial staff reviewed and made decisions about proposals, editorial staff communicated responses to prospective authors, and all solicited additional submissions.

**January and February 2019**

Guest editors and *OHQ* editorial staff reviewed submitted manuscripts, and editorial staff recruited peer reviewers for all submitted manuscripts.

**Spring and Summer 2019**

Through multiple in-person meetings as well as email communication, the guest editors and *OHQ* editorial staff reviewed peer-reviewers’ reports, discussed revision requests, reviewed and discussed revised manuscripts and associated peer review reports, and made final decisions on editing and publication. *OHQ* staff communicated with authors about (often multiple) revision requests. Guest editors and *OHQ* editorial staff discussed additional material to include in the issue as well as how to make it as inviting as possible to a broad readership. Dr. Thompson began writing an introductory essay.

**Summer and Fall 2019**

In consultation with guest editors, *OHQ* editorial staff copy-edited all manuscripts, sourced images, created pages, fact-checked all articles, conducted research for additional features (timeline, pop culture interludes, and bibliography), oversaw proofreading, and incorporated final changes. Dr. Thompson completed the essay.
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