Landscapes' Lessons: Native American Cultural Geography in Nineteenth-Century Oregon and Washington

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Abstract

The depth and complexity of the cultural significance of physical geographic spaces to Native Americans is often underappreciated or misunderstood. For Pacific Northwest indigenous groups, landscapes contained lessons by which to live and histories of their people and their neighbors. The stories embedded in the landscapes not only augmented the oral tradition but were also crucial to the maintenance of socio-cultural values of native communities. The stories the landscape produced served as cultural reminders, but their efficacy depended upon continued contact with those locales. Knowing this helps us better understand the upheaval wrought by the US removal policy, which relocated Indians away from familiar landscapes and the lessons they imparted to remote and too often mute reservation lands.

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Mathias D. Bergmann, PhD, is an associate professor of history at Randolph Macon College in Ashland, VA. He serves as the department chair and teaches courses on early American, Native American, and geographical history. His primary fields of research are nineteenth-century US Indian affairs and Native American history in Oregon and Washington. His forthcoming book on the Northwest's native peoples during the nineteenth-century will be published by the Oregon State University Press.

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Latin American artists in the nineteenth century developed interests in painting the local landscape as a way to create a sense of pride in their country's past, present, and future. We believe art has the power to transform lives and to build understanding across cultures. We believe that the brilliant histories of art belong to everyone, no matter their background. Smarthistory unlocks the expertise of hundreds of scholars, making the history of art accessible and engaging to more people, in more places, than any other publisher.

Histories of Art. Prehistoric. Unit Overview: Students research the cultural geographies of Native Americans living in King County and the Puget Sound region of Washington (Puget Salish), then compare/contrast the challenges and cultures of Native American groups in King County and Puget Sound to those of Asian immigrant groups in the same region. Used to its fullest, this unit will take nine to ten weeks to complete. Teachers may also elect to condense/summarize some of the materials and activities in the first section (teacher-chosen document-based exploration of Native American cultures) in order to focus on the student's needs.

Native people retaliated by executing some miners. Indian Agent Andrew Jackson Bolon left The Dalles to investigate, but a party of Indians murdered him, triggering a war that put U.S. Army forces in the field to force resistant Native groups to surrender. In the late nineteenth century, the people of the Umatilla and Warm Springs Reservations continued to live by seasonal rounds—hunting, gathering, and fishing at particular times of the year. But tragically for Indigenous people in eastern Oregon and Washington, in 1957 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built The Dalles Dam, which flooded the falls and destroyed the most important fishery on the Columbia River.