

The Plateau Indians Cross-Disciplinary Teaching and Learning group explored the experiences and viewpoints of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation from the pre-Contact period on into the present. Whenever possible, we privileged Native perspectives, and concentrated on themes and materials that were articulated by members of the local American Indian communities as pertinent to their ongoing lives in the eastern regions of Washington and Oregon. We also consulted local experts to provide valuable cultural and historical context to enhance our growing knowledge about the displacement and confinement of Native peoples on reservation lands, as well as current efforts to maintain and revitalize treaty rights that remain vital to Tribal sovereignty.

To some extent, the members of the group learned what we already knew—that American Indian Studies is inherently cross-disciplinary. What was most effective about this particular workshop was how the various readings, discussions, and activities filled gaps in our knowledge-bases that we were aware of but had not yet time to address; moreover, we often discovered issues to which we were either ignorant or within which our Euro-American sensibilities rarely make connections.

To begin our exploration, we conducted a three-hour round-table discussion with Jennifer Karson, editor of *As Days Go by: Our History, Our Land, Our People: the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla* (Oregon Historical Society Press, 2006). This volume collected writings by members of the Confederated Tribes about their own experiences, from their own perspectives. As editor, Karson had unique insights into the problems of working across linguistic divides to best represent the concerns of peoples who wish to maintain a sense of cultural integrity in a language that was often foreign to the concepts the authors were working to represent. Moreover, since many of these concepts are held sacred, the authors had to work amongst themselves and with Karson to explain as much as possible about their worldview without divulging privileged ideas to an uninitiated audience. Since the scope of the book encompassed mythology, history, geography, traditional customs, legal concerns, and the problem of transliteration, our conversations were robust and ranged from ideas about literary sovereignty to the preservation of traditional food-collection in the face of hegemonic row-agriculture and industrial meat production.

Our next meeting found us at Fort Walla Walla, where museum Director James Payne delivered a lecture and tour on the arrival of white settlers in the Walla Walla Valley from with all the assets of the Fort Walla Walla Museum at our disposal. His talk focused largely on the history of the Fort, the development of the Treaty of 1855, the unfortunate erosion of Treaty rights and the contraction of Reservation lands, as well as the restoration of the rights of the Confederated Indian People in the past few decades.

Following that, we met to screen parts of a film called *Celilo Falls and the Remaking of the Columbia River* as well as to discuss the book *Salmon and His People: Fish and Fishing in Nez Perce Culture* (Confluence P, 1999). In it, we discussed the relationship between the Plateau Indians peoples and salmon fishing, as well as the detrimental effect that mid-century river engineering had on the Natives' way of life. Part of the discussion focused on pre-Environmentalist attitudes toward the natural world, and the continuity out of Puritanical notions of land "stewardship" that conflated "improving" natural features of the landscape

for human purposes with “freeing” it to serve “God’s will.” This rhetoric, forged on the shores of New England as far back as the 1630s, underpinned American ideas about interfering with the environment well into the 1950s, as was demonstrated in speeches given by F.D.R. and others leading to the damming of Celilo Falls—a central hub for Plateau Indians fishing and cultural/commercial exchange.

Following that meeting, we met for three hours with and following a presentation from Eric Quaempts and Teara Farrow Ferman, leading members of the CTUIR Department of Natural Resources, to which we invited members of the student body as well as participants from the Environmental Studies Cross-Disciplinary group. Mr. Quaempts and Ms. Ferman discussed the “First Foods” initiative, the innovative approach taken by the CTUIR to articulate the centrality that traditional foods play in the production and preservation of Plateau Indians history, culture, and sovereignty to groups—like Whitman—that fail to understand the cohesive and interconnected relationship between food collection and all facets of Plateau Indians’ lives. While at first a simple notion, the “First Foods” approach quickly reveals itself to be a sophisticated method of self-presentation that explains a great deal about the Plateau Indians Peoples, from mythological ideas about their origins to current efforts at water- and fishing-rights’ restoration, and future plans regarding the restoration of water distribution to a more natural pre-Western expansion distribution based on cutting-edge hydrological research.

We concluded our group’s efforts with a visit to the Crow’s Shadow art institute, the Nixyawii Governance Center, and the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute, all on the CTUIR reservation. This day-long trip encompassed many facets of CTUIR historical and contemporary efforts at self-representation, from their successes at maintain critical aspects of their traditional lifestyle through the sophisticated treaty negotiations of 1855 to state-of-the-art political and artistic venues of governance and artistic production.

All members of the group reported success in achieving learning outcomes and enhancing opportunities to bring cross-disciplinary approaches to teaching in extant and future courses. We learned that it is critical for all instructors and students to work toward a shared vocabulary within which complex disciplinary-specific content can be shared with novice students and colleagues. We also recognized that given our unique position on the historic homelands of peoples with a rich tradition and heritage, we must work to better embrace the expertise of the peoples whose training may appear non-traditional to Euro-American academia but nevertheless constitutes a rich body of knowledge to which academia rarely has access. Finally, we saw many opportunities to increase Whitman’s interactions with the Tribes and its many brilliant people, though we also recognize that such interactions must begin with building much greater trust not just between Whitman and the CTUIR, but individuals within each constituency. This may mean reconsidering current and future research on reservation lands and peoples until a more comprehensive and sensitive Internal Review Board process is put in place; it also means exploring ways in which Whitman can better serve the CTUIR’s interests before continuing to pursue its own pedagogical and research interests without a clearer sense of reciprocity in mind.

Finally, we realized that we failed to effectively tap Whitman's own resources fully, and are working to look more productively—as future iterations of similar cross-disciplinary groups might do—at the Maxey Museum and especially the Eels collection as sites for enhanced exploration of Plateau Indians issues and interests.