"We were at Our Journey's End"

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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.1 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.2 On arrival the couple took up a donation land claim
Barber, “We were at our journey’s end”

THE HANNAS paid a five-dollar toll to use the Barlow Cutoff to avoid the rapids of the mid Columbia River. Belle found great pleasure in the views of Mounts Hood, Adams, and St. Helens, wishing that she had the time to sketch them, and yet, “no pencil could do justice to them.” Despite the scenery, this leg of the journey was particularly difficult with narrow “dreadful” roads, steep terrain, and little feed for accompanying cattle. That route is depicted here in William Henry Jackson’s 1930 painting, *The Barlow Cutoff*.

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.
today. 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.”25 Foreshadowing the pseudo-science of craniometry, Puget identified their foreheads as “deformed or out of shape comparatively speaking with those of Europeans.”26 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.27 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.28 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.29

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.”30 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.31

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 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

> 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.\textsuperscript{42}

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 \textit{founders} of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them.”\textsuperscript{43} 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 \textit{homogenous} elements.”\textsuperscript{44} “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,
culturally, and religiously — this despite the community’s eventual establish-
ment 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 scorch-
ing, 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 circu-
lated 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
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.

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.”

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. 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.” 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.

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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.”60 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.61

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.62 During this same period, state politicians lobbied the federal government to revise the Fourteenth Amendment to eliminate birthright citizenship.63 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.64

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...
## CITIZENSHIP STATUS, VOTING RIGHTS, AND PROPERTY RIGHTS BY RACE AND GENDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship Status</th>
<th>Voting Rights</th>
</tr>
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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. |
| **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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPERTY RIGHTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>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>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>
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<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>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES OF SIGNIFICANCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790: Naturalization Act restricts citizenship to “any alien, being a free white person.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870: Congress opens naturalized citizenship to people of African descent but continues to exclude Native Americans and Asian immigrants from citizenship through naturalization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898: Filipinos became U.S. nationals under the Treaty of Paris following the Spanish-American War, and therefore not subject to exclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917: Asiatic Barred Zone Act bans immigration from numerous nations, including most Asian nations (not Japan), and India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924: Immigration Act of 1924 bans immigration by people ineligible for citizenship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952: McCarran-Walter Act repeals remnants of previous naturalization acts so that immigrants declared non-White could become naturalized citizens.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 1957.22 Twentieth-century forms of inclusion 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.”23

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>
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<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>Settlers and their children obscured/erased the violent history of settlement.</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 repurposed local Indigenous histories to create new mythologies that naturalized their presence.</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>
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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. Ibid., 126. Chinese and Indian migration numbers are for the years between 1846 and 1940.

15. Ibid., 83.


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.


52. Ibid.

53. The U.S. Senate ratified the Umatilla Treaty on March 8, 1859. Cliff Trafzer, “Native Barber, “We were at our journey’s end”


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.


70. For more on this see Katrine Barber, Death of Celilo Falls (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), Andrew H. Fisher, Shadow Tribe: The Making of Columbia River Indian Identity (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), and Roberta Ulrich, Empty Nets: Indians, Dams, and the Columbia River (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1999). In “Native American Environmental Justice as Decolonization,” Julia Miller Cantzler and Megan Huynh argue that post World War II treaty fishing rights struggles must be understood within the context of resistance to
Barber, “We were at our journey’s end”