

REID, Josh

Department of History
University of California
USA

After graduating in 1994 from Yale University with a double major in Political Science and Studies in the Environment, Josh Reid joined Teach for America, which returned him to Washington State. He taught middle school in Seattle for nine years, covering subjects like language arts, literature, math, world geography, and Washington State history. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded him a Teacher Leadership Project Grant in 2000. In fall 2003 Josh began the Ph.D. program in History at University of California, Davis. The University has awarded him the W. Turrentine Jackson Fellowship and several smaller grants. Earlier this year he presented at the Pacific Northwest Historians Guild conference in Seattle, WA. Under the guidance of Dr. Louis Warren, Josh is researching concepts of marine space for the Makah Indians circa 1850s to 1930s.

Marine Space and Makah Identity

The history of Indians in the American West typically avoids marine waters. Studies usually explore the loss of ancestral lands and its impact upon indigenous communities. The overall story that emerges from the literature is one-dimensional: Indians signed treaties that ceded their lands to whites; they moved onto reservations, where they became dependent upon government rations, and, assimilation policies eroded identities and impoverished communities. This template, however, does not fit the trajectory of Makah resistance, nor does it leave room for marine space. Located in Washington State, the Makah Nation lies at the northwesternmost point of the continental United States. Drawing upon a variety of nineteenth and early twentieth-century documents about the Makah – agent reports; diaries of James G. Swan, the first white school teacher at Neah Bay; letters and transcripts of interviews from the 1930s of Makah elders; and supporting documents used in several court cases – this study explores how they resisted Anglo domination efforts and economic autonomy. These conclusions identify marine space as the primary site of Makah identity, resistance, and success. This history of indigenous marine space strengthens the historical framework for current Makah efforts for reclaiming their marine waters through the revival of whaling, a valued practice central to their identity.