

FIRST PEOPLES

IN THE BEGINNING: TREATIES

Join us Mondays through Nov. 28, 2005, as we take a look at the contributions — past and present — of Washington's First Peoples.

It's hard to pinpoint the exact moment when Washington's First Peoples came into contact with European explorers. Explorers from across the world sailed to the Pacific Northwest starting with Juan de Fuca who, in 1592, journeyed from Mexico seeking a northwest passage. In the 1770s, Capt. James Cook navigated up the coast of Oregon and Washington attempting to locate the mouth of the Columbia River. Others that followed included lesser known British explorer Robert Gray and Canadian explorer and cartographer David Thompson. It wasn't until 1805 that the famous Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery reached the Northwest, opening this area to settlers.

What is indisputable is that numerous indigenous tribes and bands inhabited what we now call Washington state. These First Peoples of Washington were then and continue to be rich in tradition and culture. Some of their villages lined the river banks and ocean shores while other tribes lived inland. They lived on an abundance of salmon, fish and other sea life and wild game. Roots, berries and other vegetation rounded out their diets. All of Washington state was their bounty to enjoy.

In 1853 the United States Congress designated the territory north of the Columbia River as Washington Territory, though it was already recognized as Indian Land. From that moment on, gaining full statehood was the goal of the territorial government. By law, the U.S. government had to recognize Indian ownership in order to enter into the treaties that would allow for white settlement. This was no

easy task, as the tribes were becoming increasingly threatened by the already encroaching white settlers. To resolve this conflict, Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens embarked on a marathon mission to secure peace and negotiate territory for non-Indian settlements.

From 1854 until 1856, Governor Stevens met with tribal leaders, oftentimes gathering numerous tribes together to sign a single treaty. Seven treaties were the end result of his effort. These confederations of tribes still live together on reservations established at that time. People are still very aware of the original band or tribe from which they originated. Some tribes have even successfully sought their own recognition and reservations.

These treaties designated the lands where the Tribes were relinquishing their ownership. The treaties also designated the lands where the Tribes were reserving their interests — hence the word reservation was born. The treaties also clearly reserved Tribal practices of fishing, hunting and gathering foods from their usual and accustomed places. These treaties are still valid agreements today and are the subject of celebration as well as litigation at times. Just as the Declaration of Independence (signed in 1776) and the United States Constitution (signed in 1783) are valid documents, so are the Indian Treaties.

Washington finally achieved statehood in 1889. Congress passed the State's Enabling Act granting statehood but also included language that the rights of Tribes would be respected and Washington state was to leave the Tribes alone.

Today, there are 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state. Many of these tribes were signators to a treaty negotiated with Governor Stevens thus making them "federally recognized" in today's world. Being federally recognized is an important status because it is

an official recognition of a tribe's inherent authority or sovereignty to govern itself and regulate its internal affairs. Federal recognition ensures treaty obligations are fulfilled such as providing healthcare and education for the tribes. It creates a government-to-government relationship between the federal government and the Indian tribes.

Some of the tribes left out of the treaty-making process, or who didn't move to the reservation established for them, have gained federal recognition by either a Presidential Executive Order or through a Congressional Act. Today, there are seven unrecognized tribes that are in various stages of seeking federal recognition. These tribes include the local Duwamish, Snohomish and Chinook tribes.

In 1989, the State of Washington officially recognized the tribes with the signing of the Centennial Accord. The Centennial Accord promises mutual respect between the State of Washington and tribes, with each recognizing the sovereignty of the other.

ACTIVITIES

- 1: Look through today's Seattle Times for articles pertaining to Washington's First Peoples. Skim them and choose one to read thoroughly. If there are none, find an article that you think impacts Washington's First Peoples and explain why you chose it.
- 2: As a class, brainstorm a list of questions you have that you hope this series will answer. Group the questions into various themes/topics and as you find the answer, record them.



BRIAN CLADOOSBY
SWINOMISH
TRIBAL CHAIRMAN

"As the first inhabitants of this beautiful area, we lived in harmony with nature and respected all living and non-living things that God created. In the last 150 years, our way of life slowly declined to the point where our culture was almost assimilated. I'm thankful that our elders held on to the old ways. Today, in the 21st Century, we are starting to see revitalization in Indian Country and it is having a positive impact on our people. Education is becoming more and more of a priority for our people. Our educated children will lead us to an even brighter future."



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CHAPTER 2:

ARTS & CULTURE