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AGITATIONS IN WESTERN AMERICAN RANGELANDS:
MEMORY, PROPERTY AND REGIONALISM IN THE MALHEUR NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE OCCUPATION

Jake Edington
April 2021

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography

Advisor, Professor Brian Godfrey

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the last two centuries, Oregon rangelands have been home to a multitude of separatist agitations. In the last decade, the most memorable instance, the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016, was instigated by a dispute between the federal government and rural ranchers over access to federal grazing land. Arguing that they were given a constitutional right to land, occupiers led by Ammon Bundy gained widespread media attention throughout the dramatic, month-long standoff. This project examines the Malheur occupation, as well as two other past agitations in Oregon, the State of Jefferson movement, and the Battle of Bunkerville, in conjunction with three central concepts that link these events: property, memory, and regionalism. Entangled with additional issues including Mormonism, constitutionalism, and colonialism, an investigation of these concepts raises the question of who has the right to land? While I find that in this case, the right to land is first and foremost based on issues of whiteness, I also find that these events reflect legitimate feelings that rural ways of life are under threat and conclude by advocating for a continued exploration of these rural geographic issues.

CHAPTER 1: NEWS FROM NOWHERE

Eastern Oregon is not a place that often generates national news stories, or dramatic headlines. Nevertheless, in early January 2016, international news reporters descended upon Malheur and Harney Counties to cover an armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge where a dispute raged over cattle ranchers' access to federal cattle grazing land. For the following six weeks, major international media outlets such as *The New York Times* and the *BBC* headlined stories with explosive titles such as "I Would Rather Die than be Caged" and "The War for the West Rages On". Media attention was drawn to the visually sensational components of the occupation: heavily armed standoffs between the FBI and ranchers, dramatic press conferences and a visit from a man who divinely blessed the occupation in a period 18th-century costume of George Washington. Equally captivating was the conclusion to the occupation which consisted of an intense car chase that ended in the death of one of the occupiers, as well as the arrest of the organizers. Their subsequent trial in Portland was closely followed and their acquittal of federal charges sparked significant controversy. No doubt, it was easy for those following the coverage, including myself, only a few hundred miles away across the Cascades, to look at images of the spectacle unfolding and agree with the assessment that "this was one whacked-out American story" (McCann, 2019). However, these reports have had the unfair effect of reducing the occupiers to caricatures of far-right extremists without due discussion of the broader context of the occupation, or respectful attention to grievances outlined by the occupiers. An examination of both topics reveal a more complex story than may be initially apparent.

The Geography of Oregon

Harney and Malheur Counties are two of the largest in the United States by landmass, each rivaling the total area of the state of Massachusetts. Land, and by its extension property, is the foundation of prosperity in southern Oregon. Livestock, in particular cattle ranching, is an essential industry and the relationship between access to

land, and economic prosperity is clear. “Land means life” (Wolford, 2004). The vastness of Harney County is immediately apparent to visitors, and the sweeping vistas and feeling of emptiness are only amplified by the apparent lack of people. In fact, the population density of both counties is one of the smallest in the nation. Harney County, for instance, has a density of 0.7 people per square mile, making it the fourteenth smallest county by population density in the contiguous United States. Burns, Oregon is the largest city in either county with a population totaling an unsurprisingly modest 2,806 (United States Census Bureau).

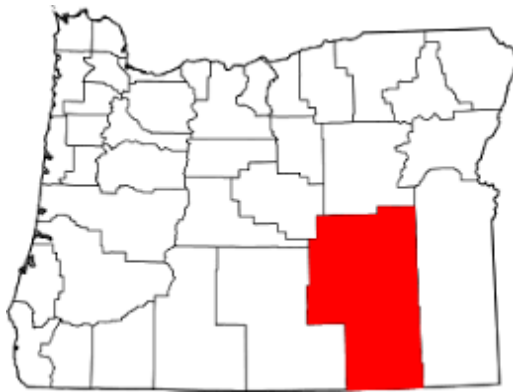


Figure 1. Malheur County

I live in Portland. Despite residing in the same state as Harney County, the eastern and western halves of the state are divided by the Cascade Range which creates a significant disconnect between the two sides. From my own experience, rural areas east of the Cascades are only frequented by outdoor recreationists and those driving further east to Boise, Idaho and beyond. This division contributes significantly to regionalist feelings of spatial and cultural identity throughout the state. Although the Northwest United States consists of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, most urbanites in Portland, Seattle and beyond consider the Northwest to exclusively be the narrow Willamette Valley corridor between Seattle and Sacramento. Even climatic associations reflect these spatial misconceptions. Although much of the Northwest consists of high desert and alpine climates, it is most known for the Deciduous Rainforests and high rainfalls which occupy the Willamette Valley. The lack of desire to

visit rural areas throughout the state is compounded by significant political polarization. Oregon's urban areas are some of the most liberal spaces in the country, hosting shows such as *Portlandia* which poke fun at its extreme progressiveness, while rural areas such as Malheur remain overwhelmingly conservative. This political polarization is accentuated by the fact that almost all the state's political and economic power reside in its two largest cities, Portland and Salem. Despite the vast majority of land being located in right leaning rural areas, Oregon's state government consists of a so-called democratic "super majority" which has allowed liberal population centers along the Willamette valley to be decisive in any statewide political issue.

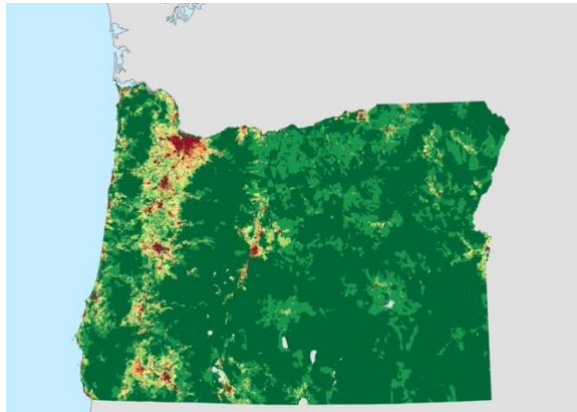


Figure 2. The Population Density of Oregon with high concentrations
In the Willamette Valley, 2020

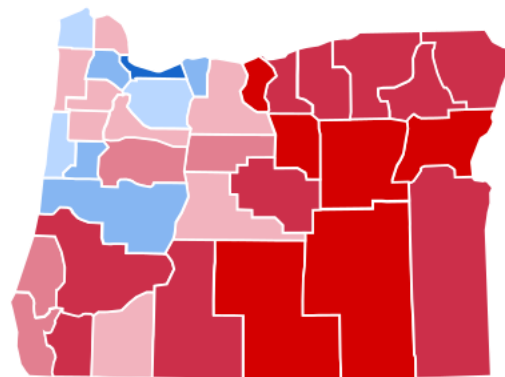


Figure 3. Oregon Political Divide, 2016

Because of its explicit connection to people who live in it, an exploration of property is central to a discussion of the Malheur occupation. As was stated by the occupiers almost daily, the occupation was explicitly based on their belief that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) ignored the rights of cattle ranchers and other rural citizens and lacked the authority to control grazing land. Their argument that the BLM was just “[a]nother intrusive tyrannical government entity, doing what they do best: abusing power and oppressing the backbone of America”, is not new to rural Oregon, nor the rural West (McNall, 2018). In fact, memories of government neglect are commonly expressed. As a result, throughout the past century, armed altercations over “federal tyranny” have numbered more than a few and a collective memory of an unjust federal government has been deeply embedded in rural cattle ranching communities like those in and surrounding Harney County. As often expressed by the occupiers, these traumatic memories continue to shape collective understandings of what it means to be a rural American.

My own interest in property, regionalism, and collective memory has led me down an inquiry into this particular group of occupiers. The insistence of the occupation's leader, Ammon Bundy and his followers that they have legal, even constitutional grounds for occupation and their dedication to a task which they believe has been divinely bestowed upon them has left nagging, and unanswered questions in my mind. Why did Bundy's group find it necessary to occupy the Malheur National Wildlife refuge? How do concepts of memory, property, and regionalism actively shape who has the right to land? Through examining the complexities of the Malheur Wildlife occupation, this project aims to address these questions.

The Battle of Bunkerville and Mormonism

There are many important pieces of background information which shaped the buildup to the occupation, two of which are the 2014 Battle of Bunkerville and the Mormon faith of the occupiers. A brief examination of these two topics reveals three broader concepts: memory, regionalism, and property which become central to understanding the complexities of the occupation.

The organizers of the Malheur occupation, Ammon Bundy, Ryan Bundy, and Jon Ritzheimer had each been involved with acts of resistance against the federal government before 2016. They were all central to the 2014 “Battle of Bunkerville” at the Bundy ranch in Nevada, a standoff over a court order requiring that Ammon Bundy pay \$1M in grazing fees for past access to land adjacent to his ranch. While the BLM rounded up his cattle, Ammon’s father Cliven continued to assert that they wouldn’t pay the fee, resulting in an armed standoff and the first mobilization of “Bundy’s Army”, a network of fellow ranchers in rebellion against the BLM. Eventually de-escalated by the Sheriff’s office, the BLM retreated from the ranch and stopped pursuing charges against the family. A self-proclaimed victory for “The People” over tyranny, the momentum of the Battle of Bunkerville emboldened the group.

The Battle of Bunkerville demonstrates the important, active role of property which surrounds the Bundy’s. Conflicting claims to property instigated the conflict in Nevada and were similar to those feelings that structured the Malheur standoff. These years-long grievances suggest the importance of property rights to the Bundy’s as well as demonstrate how experiences such as the Battle of Bunkerville shaped their later understanding of the space around them. Referred to as spatial imaginaries by academics such as Wendy Wolford, geographers have argued that particular understandings of space play an active role in formulating social groups such as the C4CF (Wolford, 2004). Undoubtedly, one central element of these constructed spatial imaginaries is settler colonialism. The Bundy’s have been criticized extensively for their dismissal of Native American narratives which complicate their justification for the occupation. Additionally, the Battle of Bunkerville and the mobilization of “Bundy’s Army” highlights the strong regional identity that exists among members of the C4CH. The Bundy’s clearly saw themselves as fighting not only for grazing rights, but also for a way of life which exists among supporters of their agitations and that they viewed as under threat by federal interference. As a result, not only are concerns of property evident in Bunkerville, but issues of regionalism stemming from discontent with the federal government and allegiance to western identities. The issues of property and regionalism in the Battle of Bunkerville and the later Malheur occupation are two clear contributors to particular understandings of space. A third concept is memory. While memories of past grievances

are discussed during the Battle of Bunkerville, they are elaborated by the occupiers' deep religious faith. Turning to a brief examination of the role of Mormon faith in the occupation helps highlight the importance of memory as a central concept.

Throughout the occupation, supporters and members of Bundy's group often cited their Mormon faith as a key component to the occupation. They argued that they were divinely chosen to occupy the refuge and that God supported their endeavors. During the Malheur occupation, Cliven Bundy, reflecting upon his experiences at the Battle of Bunkerville, argued that God had helped him and his supporters. "Could those people that stood (with me) without fear and went through that spiritual experience ... have done that without the Lord being there? No, they couldn't" (Sepulvado, 2016). The Bundy's have cited their memories of faith's power more than once and often have used them to justify their presence in Malheur. Citing Mormon scripture, they have argued that the occupation is "In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children" (Sepulvado, 2016). Additionally, memories of past violence against people of Mormon faith including founder Joseph Smith are often brought up as a comparison to threats of violence by the Police against the occupiers. They further equate their claims of legal mistreatment by state and federal governments to memories of past persecutions of Mormons in the wake of the killing of Joseph Smith. These strong, traumatic memories of religious persecution have shaped many of the stated justifications for the occupation. The production of memories such as those related to faith are a central concern of this investigation.

Using the exploration of the Battle of Bunkerville, and devotion to the Mormon faith to mine for key concepts of property, regionalism and memory is one way in which I organize the complexity of the Malheur occupation. Nevertheless, memory, property, and regionalism are not the only central components of the occupation. In addition, issues of religion, violence, law, and American identity are also entangled. A cursory examination of the occupation reveals two different narratives, one which concerns an anti-government protest over property, and another concerned with the collective memories of the occupiers. However, consideration of those additional components demonstrate that property, regionalism, and memory are intertwined. Despite media reports that would glorify the Malheur standoff through reporting on its explosive nature,

an examination of these concepts- which have worked to construct particular understandings of space throughout the last two centuries – reveal an underlying complexity. While these understandings are first and foremost based in whiteness and colonialism, they are not radical. They reflect legitimate concerns that rural ways of life are under threat by outside forces. An examination of property, regionalism and memory reveals how these understandings coexist. Finally, the Malheur occupation demonstrates that rural geographies are important to study. Rural studies highlight the powerful way that everyday experienced concepts such as memory and property have the ability to shape understandings of space and the world. As in the case of the occupation, those understandings can have powerful, violent consequences.

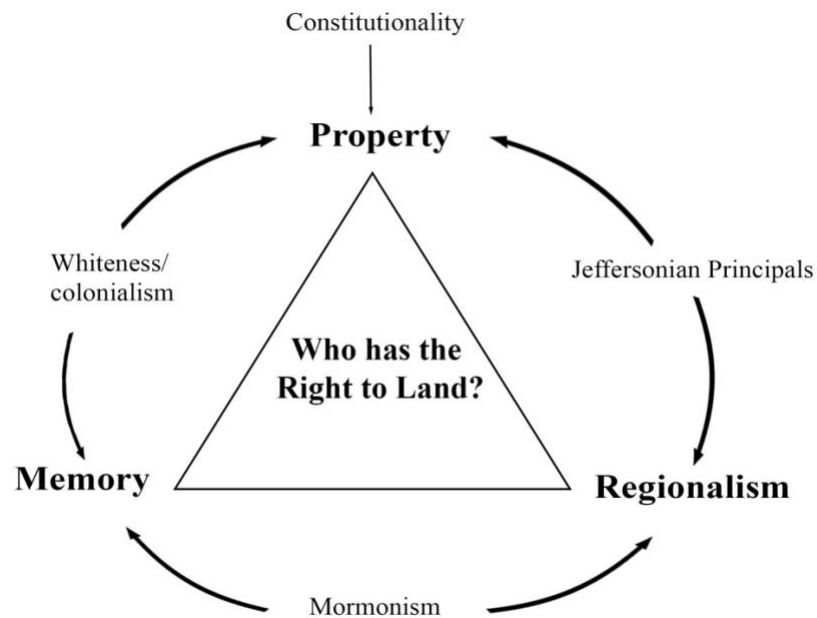


Figure 4. Ammon Bundy, 2016 (Carpenter, 2016)

Theoretical Framework

In an event as complex as the Malheur occupation with many different components, it can be difficult to separate the core central theoretical concepts from one another. Particularly in the Malheur occupation, central issues weave together to form a web of intertwined and interrelated strands. One way of parsing those strands is to examine particular issues through historical events that serve as a form of catalyst for analysis. I use three separate events, the State of Jefferson movement, the Battle of Bunkerville and the Malheur occupation to do so. In another attempt to parse out a

discussion of a particular topic amidst a weave of interrelated issues, I have chosen to focus on three central concepts, property, regionalism, and memory in order to explore these particular events. Branching off of the three central concepts are a host of related sub-concepts and issues which are linked to one, two or all three of the central issues. Through examining them in conjunction with the central concepts, I parse through the web in search of making sense of the complexities that exist in these particular rural geographies.



With an aim to examine memory, property, regionalism, and other concepts in the context of the occupation, an examination of theory independent of Malheur helps make sense of the occupation's complexities. In order to construct this framework, I draw upon geographical theory of collective memory, property, and race discourse. These theoretical writings help inform different components of how the occupation came to be.

Central to the understanding of the causes of the occupation is a shared sense of the history of past disputes over federal property in Oregon. While this memory is not shared by all rural Oregonians, groups such as the C4CF have maintained a strong following through multigenerational support. In order to think about the role of memory,

I borrow analysis from Huyssen and from Halbwachs. Undoubtedly, the Malheur occupiers created their own shared knowledge of past experiences, what Maurice Halbwach calls a “collective memory”(Halbwach, 1980). When examining historical instances that build one’s memory, careful attention must be paid to not only the past but the present. According to Huyssen, memory can be thought of as a re-presentation of the past, hence the act of remembering is tied to the present (Huyssen, 2007). These acts have a dimension of betrayal, whether it’s forgetfulness or absence, and so a natural tension occurs between the subjectivity of memory and the perception of the objectivity of history. In Malheur, this tension is unmistakable, whether it’s between conflict over indigenous and colonial right to land, or conflicting perspectives of constitutional rights.

Today there exists “a hypertrophy of memory” according to Huyssen, a radical shift in memory brought forth by modernity (Huyssen, 2007). Our overwhelming interest in understanding memory throughout the interconnected, global world has resulted in the setting in of a “memory fatigue”, an exhaustive debate over the uses, abuses, and framework for understanding memory (Huyssen, 2007). One area where fatigue is particularly present is the debate on whether the globalization of memory has made memory studies focus on a more global or more local approach, as well as which is more comprehensive. Many proponents of a global approach point to instances of tragedy to support the importance of a focus on global memory. The occurrence of racial war, for instance, suggests a global failure to live in peace and otherness and to prevent racialized violence. However, a global approach can often disregard or block local narratives and histories which contribute to smaller collective memories. Memories of trauma are often latched onto particular local situations, even when they are temporally or politically distant from the original event. In cases where global memory blocks local narratives and histories, “screen memories” are produced (Huyssen, 2007). He argues that in these cases, only a focus on the local can address them. In the instance of Malheur, there exists memories which, despite being labeled as global by the Bundy’s, are actually local and regionally experienced. This tension constitutes the foundations for conflict.

As previously discussed in the context of grazing land, property rights were the Bundys’ primary concern throughout the occupation. The basis of the occupiers’ argument, their insistence that they have a constitutional right to access federal land,

depends upon particular constructions of space formed by issues of property.

Geographers such as Nick Blomley underscore the importance of studying property. He argues that in a world where lived experiences are dominated by issues of property, it is important to explore both its qualities and its geographies (Blomley, 2003). He further finds that the geographies of property include issues of violence, law and space and that they “are closely entangled” and construct our spatial understandings (Blomley, 2003). Blomley, as well as legal geographers such as Kedar argue that there is a clear connection between the geographies of property and the social ordering of inequality. Kedar explores the active role of property and law and concludes that they “both work to inform oppressive power structures” (Kedar, 2003). Finally, he asserts that issues of race are deeply entangled with power structures and that they highlight racial inequalities.

Jake Kosek as well as Bonds and Inwood further explore the intersection of race and property. Kosek writes about the navigation of claims to land that have racial foundings and the baggage which they bring. On one hand, groups use racial identities to enhance their rights and claims to property which comes with those pasts (Kosek, 2004). Kosek further argues that a deviation from those pasts results in a dilution of the legitimacy of those claims and to jeopardize past treaties, deeds, or legal bindings. On the other hand, the same groups can be trapped by their claims to a historical narrative that oversimplifies a complex racial story and leaves little opportunity for counter-narratives (Bonds & Inwood, 2017). This dynamic is evident in Malheur where the connection between race, property and memory is clear. Frameworks presented by Kosek, Bonds, and Inwood entangle these issues and present understandings of how they construct issues of space.

If concepts of property and memory help inform *what* constitutes understandings of space, an equally important concern is *how* they act to produce space. Blomley argues that spatial understandings can be “everyday or imagined, material or discursive” (Blomley, 2003). Analysis from Cresswell and Pulido expands upon the power of discourse in shaping understandings, particularly those related to race. Cresswell asserts that discourses are not limited to writing but are “all forms of representation which bring things into Being” (Cresswell, 2012). Furthermore, he argues that discourses produce certain “truth effects”. These truth effects differ from objective truths because they are

produced by “limited sets of experiences which inform the discourse” and are therefore socially constructed (Pulido, 2002). One area where the impact of discourse is particularly noticeable is in the academic study of racialized issues such as those underlying the Malheur occupation. Pulido argues that geographers tend to stick to studying the whiteness of geography because “it may be that whiteness is just a less problematic area of inquiry” (Pulido, 2002). In Malheur, white discourses of violence, law, and property cover up other underlying racial dynamics. An exploration of that cover up is key to the production of spatial imaginaries of the occupiers whose experiences have created fundamentally white discourses.

Research Methodology

With a focus centered on entanglements of memory, regionalism and property closely related to The Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, I gather research from two different information sources. One, secondary reports, writings, and academic literature which followed the occupation are explored to provide insight into the day-to-day developments of the occupation. I further build upon the small body of literature related to Malheur, such as previous examinations of race and property issues by applying them to other components of the occupation. Two, testimonials from occupiers make up the main source of research. Public interviews, testimonials in later court trials, and transcripts of speeches further inform my analysis. In addition to interviews, photographs of Burns and Malheur are included in order to give readers a sense of place from my own perspective and to help inform an overall visual context.¹

In order to explore how memory and property discourses have shaped understandings which led to the occupation, I examine multiple topics including past events, violence, law, religion, and American identity. This chapter presents a research question of why a group such the C4CH felt it necessary to occupy the Malheur National Wildlife refuge. Building from this initial question, in chapter two, the buildup to one 20th Century agitation is traced through the State of Jefferson movement. Not only is the State of Jefferson movement an example of historic grievances in rural communities in

¹ While I had hoped to conduct interviews directly with key figures, COVID 19 measures prevented me from doing so.

the Northwest but the event provides a lens with which to examine principals put in place by President Thomas Jefferson which have shaped Western, rural approaches to property, and regionalism. These issues continue to have an important impact on rural geographies. In chapter 3, another example of separatism in Western Rangelands is examined, the Battle of Bunkerville. Chapter 3 builds upon concepts from chapter 2 and highlights the interconnection between issues of Religion (Mormonism) and Whiteness with Property, memory, and regionalism. In chapter 4, I explore the present-day culmination of rural agitation in Oregon, the Malheur National Wildlife Occupation, an event which ties together both memories and histories brought forward in preceding chapters to produce a “counter memory” that complicates the relationship between governmental entities and local, rural communities. Finally, in chapter 5, I explore the importance of studying rural geographies. Issues of property, memory, and regionalism, which surrounds all of us, deserve to be studied, while they have been examined at length in larger, urban communities, they have equally important implication for smaller, rural ones. Rural geographies continue to play an active role in shaping what it means to identify as an American and provide unique insights into how property, regionalism, and memory activity shape understandings of space.

CHAPTER 2: THE MANY STATES OF JEFFERSON

While the Malheur Refuge occupation has often been referred to as the climax of tensions between rural ranchers and the federal government, less attention has been given to equally explosive past events. One of them was the so-called “State of Jefferson movement”. In the early 1940s, extreme discontent with the Federal government boiled over in rural, southern Oregon. While partially stemming from anger that the United States was heading towards involvement in a second World War, like in the Battle of Bunkerville, the Jefferson movement was derived from feelings that government entities had neglected and misrepresented rural Americans (Michel, 2016). Calling back to past political figures such as Thomas Jefferson who proclaimed that the west should remain free and called for the establishment of a “great, free and independent empire” in Oregon Country (Ronda, 2004), support of a growing separatist movement consolidated behind many southern Oregonians and northern Californians. Led by radio personality Gilbert Gable who described himself as the “hick mayor of the westernmost United States,” the movement for independence from the United States and the creation of a new nation, The State of Jefferson, gained momentum (Horton, 2014). Frustration with a lack of infrastructure in rural communities and access to natural resources formed the basis of their feelings that government entities no longer cared about rural Americans. “The resources that had brought early settlers—the copper, the timber—remained, but any access was blocked by crumbling infrastructure. The state government had focused their energies elsewhere, letting the local roads disintegrate” (Michel, 2016). Support for the movement peaked in late 1941 when separatist legislation failed to pass either the Oregon or California state legislatures and advocates for the movement took it upon themselves to create a new, sovereign state.

Described by the New York Times as “determined mining men, with pistols in their belts ... [and] grim faces,” armed supporters blocked both sides of Highway 99 through the proposed new territory, collecting fees from cars who wished to pass through to other areas up or down the coastline (Davies, 1941). While hundreds of armed supporters took part in the movement, from outside of the Northwest, the armed

occupation of the new Jefferson Territory was largely “regarded as a publicity stunt” (Holson, 2018). While the State of Jefferson movement quickly ended in December with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entrance of the United States into World War II, it has continued to be a landmark event in many rural Oregonian memories.



Figure 5. Supporters of the State of Jefferson movement block Cars traveling down Route 99 (Michel, 2016)

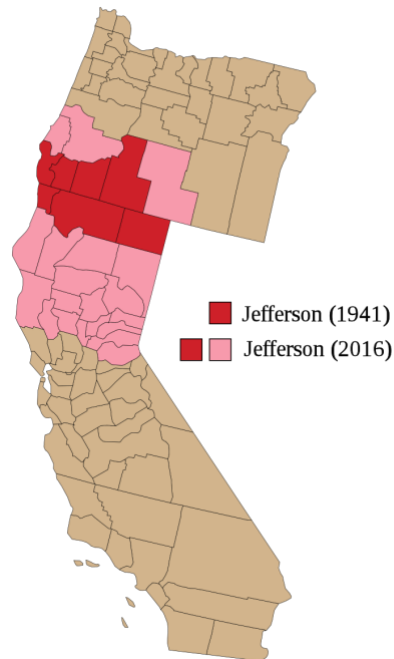


Figure 6. The Proposed State of Jefferson in 1941 and 2016

The dramatic events in Malheur have undoubtedly had the effect of overshadowing other instances of agitation in western rangelands such as the State of Jefferson movement. Even though they differ significantly in both time and space- the State of Jefferson Movement occurred further to the west and three-quarters of a century apart from the Malheur occupation- little focus has been given to studying the relationship between the two events, particularly given both of their agitational and separatist undertones. In the most obvious, visual example of the connection between the two, members of the Bundy militia have been photographed in the Malheur compound wearing State of Jefferson independence memorabilia. Featuring a green background with a golden circular seal, the State of Jefferson flag is a physical manifestation of the legacy of the 1940's movement. Even the details of the flag, a yellow circle that represents a gold mining pan, and two black X's askew from one another representing betrayal by state governments are reminiscent of aspects of the Malheur occupation. Known as the "Double Cross", the two X's signify the two regions' "sense of abandonment" by the central state governments, in both southern Oregon and northern California (Koseff, 2016).



Figure 7. The Proposed Flag of the State of Jefferson

Jeffersonian Principals

President Thomas Jefferson, the namesake of the Jefferson movement, was a pivotal figure in the Westward Expansion of the United States throughout the turn of the 19th Century. Through an examination of President Thomas Jefferson's impact on rural western America, the significance of the State of Jefferson movement as a reflection of his legacy is brought into sharp focus. Furthermore, this pivotal 20th Century agitation acts as a "stepping stone memory", connecting the far distinct past to the present through distinct, single generational memories. Rather than being regarded as events with two separate agendas, I argue that the Malheur occupation is a continuation of memories as well as issues of property which were brought forward not just by calls for independence in the 1940's, but from the founding members of the Nation.

In three key ways, Jefferson's actions as President shaped western conceptions of property and the later production of specific, active memories. Firstly, as President, Jefferson oversaw the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the size of the nation and setting a course of Westward Expansionism. Secondly, he organized the Lewis and Clark expedition into the area known today as Oregon, strengthening expansionist beliefs, and further fueling the movement of white settlers westward. Thirdly, Jefferson began the

process of Native American removal from newly acquired territory in order to make room for white settlement, thereby fueling widely held cultural beliefs of manifest destiny. These actions had a direct impact on shaping western rangelands beginning in the early 19th century and continuing through the present day.

While the Louisiana Purchase secured free, and safe passage westward into the Mississippi River Delta, long before 1803, Jefferson was the primary statesman who pushed for unrestricted American use of the Mississippi river system (Hemphill, 1935). Recognizing that the Mississippi River was a more efficient means of transportation than other land-based methods, he knew that the acquisition of the Mississippi would help bolster commerce trade throughout the nation and was in line with the overall national interest of economic growth. Jefferson's belief that that the west held one of the keys to the future of the nation expanded beyond just the implications for commerce trade, but to the security of the nation against existential threats from both Britain and Spain who also contested areas around the Mississippi. As a result, Jefferson "deserves more than the fortuitous honor of being President when the Purchase was made" for "no other American had been equally interested in the contest for an un-checked communication by water between the Ohio River and the Gulf of Mexico" (Hemphill, 1935). Despite never straying much further west than Monticello, the combination of settler expansion into the Ohio valley throughout his Presidency as well as dangers of encroachment from the west from the Spanish, French, English, and even Russians continued to make Western Expansion a central component in Jefferson's project of growing an American "empire of liberty". Jefferson eventually succeeded in securing all of the land between the Mississippi and Rockies in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase from the French who were more than happy to sell it for quick cash following the crumbling of Napoleon's empire. Described by academics such as Bernard DeVoto as "one of the most important events in world history", the Purchase laid the foundations for legitimizing Westward Expansion, both practically and ideologically (Koelsch, 2008). Furthermore, the acquisition from the French placed acts of property purchasing as a central avenue to achieve territorial expansion, applauded by writers of the time such as General Adolphus Greenly who praised Jefferson's "extra-constitutional act of annexation by purchase" (Koelsch, 2008).

With a single agreement, The United States doubled in size and became a territorially expanding empire, rooted in property.

Concurrently to actions surrounding the Louisiana Purchase, desire to expand the nation's empire and to accumulate vast swaths of the west as American property was accelerated by Alexander McKenzie's crossing of the Rockies to reach the Columbia river in 1793. A British explorer, Mckenzie's book the expedition titled *Voyages From Montreal* described what he had found and laid an implicit British claim to territory in the west. Historians such as David Nicandri have compared this act to the beginning of the Cold War, calling it 'the functional equivalent of Sputnik in 1957' (Nicandri, 2016). Jefferson's response was the Lewis and Clarke expedition, beginning in 1802 with goals of mapping the geography of the west as well as cataloguing its flora and fauna. Implicit in the goals were economic and political objectives including cornering the fur trade market, and potentially discovering the elusive Northwest Passage into the Pacific for commerce, as well as to undermine European claims to the far west. The allure of the undiscovered west, envisioned by Jefferson to be "a garden of verdure and American virtue" shaped the goals of the mission which included carefully navigating alien territory and acting as practical and rational as empire-builders. Furthermore, Jefferson instructed Lewis and Clarke to be diplomatic when encountering Native Americans in their westward expedition, a far different treatment of Native Americans from the already common practice of their removal and dispossession from ancestral land elsewhere in the United States.

While Lewis and Clarke were exploring "a lifetime of imaginative geography" in the west, the third key policy of Jefferson's "great empire of liberty" was well underway, the removal of Native Americans from their ancestral land. Coupled with the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clarke expedition, Jefferson laid the practical foundations of manifest destiny, the cultural belief that Americans were destined to spread across North America with the help of Native American displacement. While Jefferson believed in a "natural equality" between white Europeans and Native Americans, he also emphasized a need for "developing" the Native American and improving their civilization to be more in line with the United States. According to policies set forth by Jefferson, "fulfilling the Native American" entailed civilizing, and colonizing their land in order to develop their

ways of life. Accordingly, Jefferson encouraged the seizure of Native American property in the name of progress. “For Thomas Jefferson, therefore, the Native American is respected less for what he is than for what he can become” (Nicandri, 2016). The belief that Native American’s were equal, yet less “developed” than white United Statesians contributed to a strong cultural belief that white settlers were destined to spread westward throughout the Americas. In a letter to James Monroe, Jefferson expressed this sentiment writing “it is impossible not to look forward to distant times when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits, and cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent” (Koelsch, 2008). Jefferson’s actions as President, including facilitating the Louisiana Purchase, the Lewis and Clarke expedition, and Native American Displacement set the course of American Westward Expansionism and Manifest Destiny as well as solidified the importance of property in the territorially expanding nation. The legacy of Thomas Jefferson and practices he encouraged continue to be evident in far later events including prominently in the State of Jefferson movement in the 20th Century.

Separatist agitations in the State of Jefferson movement were not new to 20th Century rural Oregon. Spurred on by the continued practices of Westward Expansion set forth by Jefferson, conflicts over self-determinism in western rangelands, particularly those in the Northwest had taken hold since the first white settlers had arrived on the Oregon Trail. For instance, in 1854, five years before Oregon officially became a state, citizens of the same southern Oregon counties met "for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of organizing a new territory and to devise means to effect the same" (Yreka, 1854). Similarly, on the northern California frontier a few years later, an outspoken group sought legislation for those above the 14th parallel "to withdraw from the State" (Davis, 1952). Although neither resulted in concrete outcomes in favor of the agitators, they demonstrate a steady stream of feelings that would eventually boil over in the 1940s.

Travelers driving along Route 99 on the 27th of November 1941 were stopped by armed members of the State of Jefferson movement who informed passerby’s that they

were entering the newly founded 49th State of the Union. A brochure handed out to drivers read:

Proclamation of Independence

You are now entering Jefferson, the 49th State of the Union.

Jefferson is now in patriotic rebellion against the States of California and Oregon. This State has seceded from California and Oregon this Thursday, November 27 1941.

Patriotic Jeffersonians intend to secede each Thursday until further notice. For the next hundred miles as you drive along Highway 99, you are travelling parallel to the greatest copper belt in the Far West, seventy-five miles west of here. The United States government needs this vital mineral But gross neglect by California and Oregon deprives us of necessary roads to bring out the copper ore. If you don't believe this, drive down the Klamath River highway and see for yourself. Take your chains, shovel and dynamite.

Until California and Oregon build a road into the copper country, Jefferson, as a defense-minded State, will be forced to rebel each Thursday and act as a separate State. (Please carry this proclamation with you and pass them out on your way.) (Lalande, 2017).

While centered in Southern Oregon counties, agitations surrounding issues of infrastructure and rangeland neglect from the Jefferson movement not only highlighted particular local grievances in industries such as copper mining and forestry, but it provided a model for how to gain significant attention for rural issues. As a result, the Jefferson campaign “proved a convenient sounding-board for the broadcast of economic and political grievances elsewhere”(Post-Enquirer, 1941) and was utilized by other groups in the West including Northern California, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada. Separatist actions in Southern Oregon share with these other like-minded events the claim that members are being forced to act in self-defense, and that they are “defense-minded”. They channel their namesake, Jefferson, in their collective, generational memories of manifest destiny, as well as their knowledge that property is an essential component to producing a livelihood. Furthermore, events during Westward Expansion such as the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clarke expedition reinforce the belief that from the founding of the nation, white Americans have been supported in their occupation of Western frontiers. Members of the State of Jefferson movement channeled both of those

sentiments and when their grievances were repeatedly dismissed and ignored, they turned to a concept considered by Jefferson as well as other founders to be sacred to the birth of the Nation, self-determinism.

While the general conclusion by both academics and reporters have been that the State of Jefferson movement was never taken seriously outside a small, local contingent of unhappy Southern Oregonians and that the movement “never approached the status of a functioning political entity” (Davis, 1952), little attention is given to its legacy and influential impact on future grievances by rural farmers who continue to experience similar feelings of neglect. The Jefferson movement provides a link in the lineage of memories of Western rural communities which connect modern lived experiences to principles set forth by Jefferson during the founding of the nation. While academics have argued that “the ‘State,’ as has been pointed out, was a giant publicity stunt, directed at drawing the attention of responsible officials to the internal needs of the Oregon-California borderland” (Davis, 1952), it played a very meaningful component of an occupation launched by a 21st Century group of agitators, the Bundy family. Concepts related to western property ownership such as self-determinism, and manifest destiny, while often thought to be antiquated in the present day, continue to have a lasting impact on rural geographies. The State of Jefferson movement provides an instance that bridges the far past into the present. Memories brought forth by events in the 1940s have a single generational lineage, easily accessible by those alive in the present day. While time may have dulled memories of President Jefferson in the late 18th and 19th Centuries, the State of Jefferson movement in the 1940s continues to linger vividly in the minds of many rural Americans.

CHAPTER 3: MORMONISM AND WHITENESS IN BUNKERVILLE AND BEYOND

While the State of Jefferson movement highlighted the way in which issues of property and regionalism have been central to Western Rangelands throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries, its significance as a historical event continues to be relevant into today, linking the distant past to the present. Both geographers and sociologists have noted the particular strength of traumatic memories such as those grievances which sparked the State of Jefferson movement. I argue that not only are those memories easy to recollect by many rural ranchers today due to the strong emotions tied to them but that they provide instances that tie the distant past into the present. While memories of Western Expansionism are far removed from the lives of those living in the 21st Century which requiring recollections spanning multiple generations, more recent events such as the State of Jefferson movement span only a single generation. Bridging the gap from distant memory to lived experience, more recent events produce a type of “bridge” which both creates a clear link to the distant past as well as heightens the relevance of contentious themes. I contend that along with the State of Jefferson Movement, the Battle of Bunkerville as well as the theme of religion are examples of what I call “bridge memories” that have linked distant past events to the Malheur occupation and the present day.

Mormonism and Faith

Throughout the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation, supporters and members of Bundy's group often cited their Mormon faith as a key component to their agitations. They argued that they were divinely chosen to occupy the refuge and that God supported their endeavors. "Could those people that stood [with me at Bunkerville] without fear and went through that spiritual experience ... have done that without the Lord being there? No, they couldn't" (Sepulvado, 2016). The Bundy's have cited their memories of faith's power more than once and often have used them to justify their presence in Malheur. Citing Mormon scripture, they have argued that the occupation is

“In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children” (Sepulvado, 2016). Faith that God supports their task of occupying the Malheur refuge is one way in which the Bundy’s have justified their occupation as righteous. An examination of historical events tied to Mormonism and rural agitations gives context to those feelings.



Figure 8. The Battle of Bunkerville (Childress, 2017)

While 20th Century agitations such as the State of Jefferson movement highlighted ways in which early American issues of property and constitutionality have seeped into the fabric of many communities, other events in western, rural areas complicate those relationships with the introduction of other contentious themes. One of those events is the aforementioned “Battle of Bunkerville” between the Bundy family and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on their Nevada ranch in 2014. While continuing to evoke issues of government neglect, property, and regionalism in line with those who protested at the State of Jefferson movement, the Battle of Bunkerville highlights an additional interconnection between issues of religion and Whiteness with property, memory, and regionalism.

In particular, the Bundy’s family’s devout Mormon faith has had substantial impacts on their role in participating in, and leading rural agitations against the Federal Government. I argue that their grievances of governmental neglect, coupled with intense

feelings of regionalism and independence have produced traumatic memories, strongest of which are those produced by their intense Mormon faith. On the one hand, Mormonism has been a tool to galvanize the production of counter-memories that give credence to intense regionalist feelings, while on the other their faith has created certain shields that have covered an underlying colonial, settler narrative that exists underneath.

In addition to their immediate success at Bunkerville which drew widespread attention to issues of ranching on federal property, Bunkerville also drew a comparison to past conflicts between Mormons and the federal government. In particular, memories of past violence against people of Mormon faith including founder Joseph Smith are often brought up as a comparison to threats of violence made by the police presence on the Bundy ranch in 2014. They further equate their claims of legal mistreatment by state and federal governments to memories of past persecutions of Mormons in the wake of the killing of Smith. While these traumatic experiences are legitimate, they do not contain a substantial basis for the occupation. Instead, memories of violence against Mormons have constructed blinders that have shielded underlying structures of whiteness. Connections between Mormonism and the preservation of whiteness are clear, even from the beginnings of the church. The practice of polygamy is one key way in which whiteness is manifested in Mormon teachings. Openly practiced into the 20th Century, the clear relationship between the practice of Mormonism “to polygamy to ensured racial purity... (reflects) an ideal prescription for ‘whiteness’”(Clark, 2016). Not only do Mormon teachings tout whiteness as a prescription for purity, but they have also continuously defended the advancement of whiteness in western, rural communities such as Utah and Oregon and argued that whiteness was prescribed by God. As a result, in rural areas deemed by many to be unrepresentative of the racial diversity of the nation, “Mormon members and leaders dug their heels into western soil to prove that Mormons were not only white, but polygamy was a guarantee of ultimate ‘whiteness.’ This was not racial purity limited to American and European scientific findings, but whiteness defined by God, who directed and guided man in his quest for knowledge” (Clark, 2016). White teachings continue to be manifested in the 21st Century and throughout the Malheur occupation.

Memories of underlying whiteness in Mormon teachings clearly demonstrate the active doings of memory which have shaped actions made by the Bundy family around issues of whiteness. The most notable of which is the relationship between the occupiers of Malheur and the nearby Burns Paiute Tribe. While Bundy and his followers made a century-long claim to an entitlement of land surrounding the wildlife refuge, their temporal claims are insignificant compared to those of Native Americans which were forced off their land by white settlers long before the Bundy family had ever arrived. While Bundy addressed this hypocrisy during the occupation, he dismissed their claims for lacking relevance to the current situation. “We also recognize that the Native Americans had the claim to the land, but they lost that claim. There are things to learn from cultures of the past, but the current culture is the most important” (Ryan Bundy, 2016). A dismissal of information that portrays the occupation unfavorably as well as the presenting of a contrived argument that “current culture is the most important” is hypocritical, especially given the occupiers' repeated claims that the occupation is a way to correct some of their past cultural traumas. While faith in God and memories of Mormon persecution were often cited as reasons for the occupation, an examination of those claims reveals that there exists disguised, underlying issues of whiteness that have had a more powerful impact on the occupiers. Although endorsements of practices such as Polygamy are no longer endorsed by the official teachings of the Mormon church, their legacies continue to produce a white, colonial narrative to which their followers continue to subscribe. In the instance of Malheur, that endorsement is clear in the hypocritical claims of the right to land made by Bundy and his Followers and has continued to be made evident by the continued unsuccessful efforts of the Burns Paiute Tribe to reclaim a millennium of heritage land.

Colonialism and Violence in Settler Geographies

Geographers such as Nathan Syre have extensively examined the entanglement between property in western ranching lands and settler colonialism. While the Battle of Bunkerville and the Malheur occupation both highlight the ways in which Mormonism, in particular, has been a focal point for their entanglement and have produced particular spatial imaginaries, Sayre explores how broader rangeland practices in the American

West shifted from sheep herding to cattle ranching through an imperial lens. While sheep herding by early settlers was an ethnically diverse practice, a combination of unequal access to natural resources, specific range science research on the inefficiencies of sheep, European breeds of crops and racism resulted in the replacement of herding with cattle ranching by European settlers (Sayre, 2018). Range science research on cattle that could be fenced in and required far less space than sheep revealed a new practice more “in line with capitalist notions of property and governance; ranching” (Sayre, 2018).

Additionally, racism towards foreign shepherders stemmed from white southerners who viewed shepherding as a northern practice (Sayre, 2018). Over time, the production of spatial imaginaries that emphasized the benefits of cattle ranching based on racism, capitalism, and imperialism turned from feelings that came from lived experiences to “scientific knowledge claims” (Sayre, 2018). The reconception of rangeland space around cattle ranching essentially ended sheep grazing practices in the western rangelands and cemented the power of white European cattle ranchers. Although Sayre explores the roles of property and violence in the context of the specific ranching example, he does not speak to their broader influence outside of that case study. Turning to Blomley helps to examine that more expansive perspective.

According to Blomley, one important implication of property is its connection to violence. Like in the case of property, it is important to realize that “violence has a geography” (Blomley, 2003). Geographers should critically examine how notions of space matter to violence. According to Blomley, space is more than just “a passive template for the inscription of violence or an object to be manipulated to create political representations” (Blomley, 2003). Rather, “property, space, and violence... are closely entangled” (Blomley, 2003). The instances of the frontier, survey and grid presented by Blomley provide examples of this entanglement. For example, the important ways in which violence against shepherders on western frontier shaped national identity illustrates the key component of violence along with property. Blomley argues that while “such foundational violence’s are frequently forgotten or are rationalized according to some higher logic such as manifest destiny”, they are part of the “necessarily violent nature of colonial settlement” (Blomley, 2003). Rather than distinctly building off of one another in a cause-effect relationship, “Space, property, and violence were performed

simultaneously” (Blomley, 2003) Another important point that Blomley makes here is that violence does not necessarily need to be enacted to be operative. Even violence’s that are persuasive and discursive have an important materiality and “can be said to act in more internalized yet no less disciplinary ways” (Blomley, 2003). By entangling space, property and violence, Blomley demonstrates firstly that violence is important to property in terms of “its origins, actions, and legitimations”, while at the same time being powerfully geographic (Blomley, 2003). He secondly demonstrates how “space gets produced, invoked, pulverized, marked, and differentiated through practical and discursive forms of legal violence” (Blomley, 2003). When thinking about how spatial imaginaries are produced, it is important to consider how property and violence shape lived experiences, perceptions, and conceptions of spaces.

Despite the Bundy’s labeling themselves as victims of governmental overreach, out of all the parties involved in the Malheur occupation and related events, the Burns Paiute Tribe stand alone as the undisputable victim of these events. Consisting of around 1,000 acres near Burns, the Burns Paiute Tribe Reservation is home to around half of the 420 enrolled members. Although nearby to their ancestral home, they were displaced from the area that is today known as the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. During the occupation, Burns Paiute Tribe chair Charlotte Rodrique responded on behalf of the Burns Paiute Tribe to Ammon Bundy’s declaration that they we’re the “rightful owners” of rangelands such as those within the Malheur Refuge. “You know, who are the rightful owners? It just really rubs me the wrong way that we have a bunch of misinformed people making statements going on national TV making statements that have no foundation- they’re not the rightful owners” (Wilson, 2016). Rodrique additionally expressed offence by the notion that the Bundy’s could return the refuge lands to their rightful owners when “I’m sitting here trying to write an acceptance letter for when they return all the land to us” (Peacher, 2016). Members of the Burns Paiute Tribe Council also responded to reports that despite having surrounded the compound, law enforcement was permitting Bundy and his followers to drive into Burns in order to restock supplies including food, and fuel. “What if it was a bunch of natives that went out there and overtook that” Council member Jarvis Kennedy asked. “Would they have let us come

into town and get supplies? They need to get the hell out of here. We don't want them here" (Peacher, 2016).



Figure 9. Charlotte Rodrique, Chair of the Burns Paiute Tribe addresses the ongoing Malheur occupation, Jan, 2016 (Wilson, 2016)

Not only have the Burns Paiute Tribe expressed frustration over the Bundy's position that they are the rightful owners when compared to Native American ancestral land that has been stolen for Centuries, they have also taken issue with the specific location of the occupation, at the Malheur refuge which holds many ancestral artifacts of the Burns Paiute Tribe. While Bundy has argued that federal wildlife managers are enemies of the people and agents of the federal government who protect their unconstitutional claim to ownership of rangelands, the Burns Paiute Tribe has called them "good partners". According to Rodrique, "We look at (wildlife managers) as protectors of our cultural sites and artifacts in that area" (Wilson, 2016). Ultimately, the Burns Paiute Tribe described the Bundy's and their followers as "ramrodding their way through things and being destructive" and proclaimed that they "would not dignify (Bundy) with a meeting" (Peacher, 2016).

The Bundy's have enacted discursive violence to maintain control over property rights in western rangelands and to prevent Native Americans from returning to their heritage lands. While claiming to be victims of unconstitutional overreaches from the

federal government, they have often cited memories of generational ownership of western rangelands as justification for their entitlement to the land. These memories also betray the truth for white settlers had only been in the west for a short period of time. Temporal arguments such as those made by the Bundy's justifications look especially weak when compared to indigenous claims to the same land which have existed for millennia. Nevertheless, as a result of constitutional and generational claims to land, a collective memory of "right to land" was embedded among the occupiers. This memory is steeped in trauma which has stemmed from the belief that the federal government has stolen land that is rightfully theirs and ultimately has acted to construct spatial imaginaries that justified the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

CHAPTER 4: IN THE COURT OF THE MALHEUR KING: COLLECTIVE AND COUNTER MEMORIES IN MALHEUR

If the State of Jefferson Movement and the Battle of Bunkerville are bridge memories that have temporally connected a variety of complex, contentious themes including regionalism, property, religion, and whiteness to rural agitations in western rangelands, then the Malheur occupation represented the climax of those tensions. While the occupation was a recent event in terms of academic literature, there has been some writing recently published. One central piece has been Inwood and Bonds' discussion of whiteness and property. They argue "The MNWR takeover illuminates how discourses of whiteness and property rights are essential to the ongoing production of white supremacy within the US settler state" (Inwood and Bonds, 2017). In Chapter 3 and in Chapter 4, I take a position consistent with their assertion that scholars should not "see the takeover of the MNWR as merely an extreme form of anti-government protest" (Inwood and Bonds, 2017) and that issues of whiteness and property are central to the occupation in addition to a variety of other contentious themes. Still, I take issue with the way they present an overly certain seeming conclusion. Most notably, they do not adequately explore grievances brought forth by Bundy and the occupiers. As a result, the piece unfairly dismisses as well as overlooks many of the event's complexities and presents its argument as a forgone conclusion.

Through an exploration of memory, regionalism, and property, I aim not just to be critical of the occupation, but to also make sense of feelings of mistrust and forgottenness brought forth by the occupiers. In doing so, I find that writings which have dismissed the perspective of those who were involved have only contributed to feelings of mistrust and neglect that were foundational to the occupation. They also contribute to a growing alienation between some in rural communities and urban centers of political power and a growing feeling that people in far off government positions or large cities do not care about rural Americans and are unwilling to consider their lived experiences or perspectives.



Figure 10. The Bundy's and their Followers inside the Malheur compound, 2016 (Parks, 2016)



Figure 11. Patrolling the Edges of The Malheur Refuge, 2016 (Park, 2016).

Members of the Bundy militia have shared these bridge memories amongst themselves, creating a powerful shared vision of the past which they utilized in the

formation and the mobilization of the C4CH. Those shared knowledge of the past, what Maurice Halbwach calls “collective memories”, have had important impacts on the justifications for the occupation in 2016 (Halbwach, 1980). While these memories are treated as truths by the occupiers, they, like other memories, should be distinguished from objective histories. While they have important implications for how the occupiers have thought of the past, Huyssen reminds us that they also have important implications for the present. According to Huyssen, memory can be thought of as a re-presentation of the past, hence the act of remembering is tied to the present (Huyssen, 2009). An examination of memories from the past is one way in which to learn about the construction of events in the present.

Memories of Trauma

Unlike an examination of objective histories, memories, especially traumatic ones, can act to deceive the beholder, as well as the researcher (Freyd, 1996). These acts have a dimension of betrayal, whether it’s forgetfulness or absence, and so a natural tension occurs between memory which is necessarily somewhat subjective, and history which is traditionally presented as objective. On one hand, memories can overtly betray those who remember them. The misremembering of clear and obvious facts is one example of overt betrayal, another is the tendency for people to place themselves at events that they were not, in fact, present at. On the other hand, memory betrayal can also be subversive.² Subversive memories, often embedded in discourse, are hard to identify and can actively influence without being noticed (Kansteiner, 2002). Because of their difficulty to identify, this type of memory is particularly powerful.

Collective understandings produced from memories such as those from the 1940’s gave the Bundy’s significant support, as well as constructed spatial imaginaries which gave credence to the belief that the occupation of Malheur was a necessary task. While grievances centered around feelings that federal and state governments do not adequately support rural communities have constituted portions of the occupiers’ spatial imaginaries, their belief that they are entitled to land around Malheur constructs another important

² Overt and subversive memories can also be described as surface and underlying memories. I use these terms interchangeably.

portion. The Bundy's argue that particular passages in the Constitution as well as the original intentions of the framers gave them the constitutional right to own western rangelands controlled by the federal government (Headley, 2016). These claims are instances of overt memories that have betrayed the truth. Legal scholars agree that there is no credence to the occupiers' constitutional claims (Headley, 2016). In reality, selective portions and passages of both the Constitution and writings by founders such as Jefferson were used overtly by the Bundy's to manipulate the truth effects of their followers.

Constitutional Justifications

Issues of legal geography such as the constitutional claims made by Bundy and his followers have been studied by academics including Alexander Kedar. Like in the case of their Mormon faith, there is a clear relationship between constitutional claims made by the Bundy's and issues of whiteness as well as colonialism. In his writing, Kedar examines the relationship between legal geography and issues of colonialism through examining the legal geography of ethnocentric settler states. Throughout his essay on the Israeli constitutional system, Kedar explores assumptions on the role of law and supreme courts in establishing and sustaining settlers' geographies of power. In his writing, Kedar agrees with other prominent legal geographers such as Nicholas Blomley and David Delaney on their assertion that law shapes geography rather than how geography shapes law (Kedar, 2003). Kedar argues that this approach is further important when considering the intersection between law and space. "[T]he legal and the spatial, are, in significant ways, aspects of one another" (Kedar, 2003). Kedar terms this relationship "splices" and focuses on how they both work to inform oppressive power structures (Kedar, 2003).

Through his Israeli case study, Kedar finds that "legal structures constitute important building blocks in the ordering and legitimization of spatial hierarchies" (Kedar, 2003). For instance, the categorization and maintaining of people into three groups in an Ethnocracy, the founders, the immigrants, and the indigenous people is legitimized by legal structures (Kedar, 2003). The founders retain power through making on enough of their legal promises such as holding free and fair elections, or placing

natives into their own legal categorizes, to convince the immigrants and indigenous people that the system is fair. In reality however, it makes the status quo seem acceptable and contributes to “the belief that inequality is inevitable rather than a product of influential social actors” (Kedar, 2003). Legal structures also produce and legitimize new property regimes which contribute to the creation and endurance of discriminatory land regimes. They actively work to produce social, economic, and political inequalities as well as to conceal them within larger legal structures (Kedar, 2003). Because geography is “not the result of natural phenomenon” (Kedar, 2003) and is instead constructed, it is especially important to explore how legal structures have contributed to the formation of particular geographies.

While Kedar uses the term of “ethnocracy” to refer to a nation with a singularly dominant ethnicity in a multiethnic territory, a similar framework can be applied to smaller scale events including the agitations at the Malheur standoff. An initial examination of the actors in the Malheur occupation produces a clear delineation between Kedar’s founders, immigrants, and natives. It is evident that in the context of Malheur, the founders are the controllers of political influence in local, state, and federal seats of power. The immigrants are Bundy and his followers who have moved into the west following practices of Westward Expansion. Finally, Native Americans who have been pushed off of their land in this case are the natives who have been made to believe that inequality is a way of life. The delineation of the founders, the immigrants, and the natives are useful because they help to illuminate the key power brokers in the conflict, most centrally of which are political entities that have control over key aspects such as rural infrastructure projects as well as federal grazing lands. However, this preliminary delineation is complicated by the Bundy’s in two key respects. Kedar presents the immigrants as being deceived by the founders who have convinced them as well as the natives that their oppression and the system of inequality is fair. Bundy and his followers would undoubtedly agree with this assessment by calling back to collective memories of a lack of infrastructure projects in rural communities as well as neglect from regional and federal political powers. However, from the perspective of Native Americans whose land has been seized by white settlers, the “immigrants” also act as power brokers through maintaining substantial control over property in western rangelands.

Counter Memories in Malheur

Conflicting notions of the identities of power brokers are not only present throughout the Malheur conflict, but in the collective memories of past agitations as well. Opposing collective memories have provided space for the production of certain “counter-memories” by the Bundy’s and their followers which seek to produce a particular historical narrative that is sympathetic to their cause. Coined by Michael Foucault as resistance to official versions of history by rescuing “ignored, forgotten, and excluded histories,” the social and political implications of counter-memory have had significant impacts on the identities of many rural Americans (Foucault, 1977). Collective memories and collective counter-memories stress the relationship between memory and its social context and, according to Foucault, are a key component in the formation of community, identity, and social bonds (Foucault, 1977). Despite influencing social dynamics, sites of collective counter-memory depend on a spatial component to transmit and spread across communities, most commonly in spaces where experience meets technology, urban areas, and institutions (Demos, 2012). Examples of the most obvious sites of counter-memory are often associated with mass media, political discourse, and mass spectacle. For instance, the Arab spring uprisings used collective counter-memory to reanimate memories of the unfulfilled promises of the struggle for decolonization and the Occupy movements collective learning around the struggle for equality, anti-corporate globalization, and social justice. Consequently, these events often run counter to official histories of governments, and the dialogue of mainstream mass media in favor of practices of certain acts of “memorialisation” -a collective process of relearning- of forgotten, oppressed, and excluded histories (Tello, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, sites of collective counter-memory tend to be predominantly progressive in their goals and large in scale, what TJ Demos and Debord call “the society of the spectacle” (Debord, 2012). Although I agree that oftentimes counter-memory is found alongside instances where the historical narrative is remembered as a socio-political spectacle, I would amend Demos’ definition to include all instances of what Foucault would argue are, “subjugated knowledges” and those that are “counter to the society of the spectacle” (Foucault, 1977). In this definition, the scope of counter-

memory is not only limited to just spectacles like the Arab springs, but less grandiose instances which can also produce effective collective counter-memories.

Despite not having the same progressive agenda as typical examples of counter-memory, rural organizations such as the Bundy's and the C4CH have used collective counter-memory to reimagine history for purposes in line with their stand at Malheur. Pertaining to Jefferson and 19th Century western expansionism, Bundy and his followers have reimaged how past events have been remembered and memorialised, ultimately reforming the identities of many rural, western Americans. Through countering the society of the westward expanding American spectacle, the Bundy's have predominantly used collective counter-memory as a way to reimagine history, including the role of their ancestors from being a part of a larger American value of manifest destiny dictated by those in seats of power on the east coast, into part of a regionalist movement and the creation of "great, free and independent empire" in the west, beholden to no one outside of a local sphere. In this memorialisation, they have not only reconceptualized spatial events such as the State of Jefferson movement and the Battle of Bunkerville, but social remembrances as well. Despite the rejection of their argument that federal grazing land is unconstitutional by multiple legal scholars, geographers, and other academics, the constitutional argument made by the Bundy's nonetheless continued to be the predominantly popular opinion among the C4CH. Coupled with the highlighting of particular Mormon histories including persecutions and land displacement as well as evidence of infrastructure neglect from distant governments, the Bundy's have not only used a single instance of collective counter-memory, but a web of collective memories pertaining to issues of property, religion, constitutionality, and colonialism to produce an overwhelming counter-memory. These new collective memories have no room for dissenters, whether its community members who dispute their memorialisations or Native Americans who point out the hypocrisy of their own displacement from white spaces.

While media outlets have presented the Malheur case as being relatively straightforward, a group of conservative ranchers who spontaneously took up arms against the federal government, these stories betray the complexities of rural America. Rather, a dive into rural agitations in only one particular area, rural Oregon, exposes conflict which has existed since white Americans moved westward in the early 19th

Century. These conflicts highlight three prominent concepts, property, regionalism and memory as well as a multitude of other periphery issues including legal geography, religion, and settler colonialism. Despite often having the label of spontaneity, events such as the Malheur standoff grapple with issues that surround Americans everyday such as property, memory, and collective identity. Rather than being dismissed as an outlandish event, Malheur, the Jefferson movement, and the Battle of Bunkerville all provide a window into what it means to identify as an American in a spatial setting where half of modern-day Americans reside, in small, rural communities.

CHAPTER 5: SPACES OF RURAL CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

If we live in a world that is saturated by issues of property and memory, it seems to me important that we explore their complexities, intricacies, and geographies. Both academically and conversationally, geographic issues of property and memory have tended to be explored in the context of urban centers, cities, and large populations. This focus makes common sense, if most fundamentally geographers are concerned with how humans interact with their environment, spaces occupied by an abundance of humans are a convenient location of study. As a result of this focus, when addressing the complexities of memory, for instance specific traumatic memories, geographers often turn to events that are recognizable and that impact significant numbers of people such as natural disasters, war, and terrorist attacks. The cultural importance of these events is clear, they inspire books, movies and national holidays and are convenient for cultural geographers to study.

Throughout my examination of the Malheur National Wildlife occupation and related events including the State of Jefferson movement, the Battle of Bunkerville, and issues of Mormonism, I make a case for the studying of rural geographies. Despite rural events being smaller in notoriety, they have important impacts in examining the intricacies of property, memory and ultimately what it means to identify as an American. Although urban areas have grown to house a majority of the population in the United States with continued expected upward trend, a significant percentage of Americans continue to live in rural communities and are therefore an important constituent of American life (Karl, 1988). These places, and the spaces they occupy tell of a cultural and historical geography which dates to western expansionism, Jeffersonian principals, and further back to the ancestral homes of Native Americans. The Malheur refuge and surrounding area is no different. It may seem risky for geographers to study rural areas, there is an undoubtably smaller audience than in urban areas where more attention tends to be placed on by academics, however I deem it to be a necessary component in helping to solve a “crisis in geography”, the overwhelming skewing of research towards less problematic, and diverse areas of study.

A Crisis in Geography?

Academics such as Laura Pulido have pointed out significant areas in which geographic study has omitted due focus, attention, and critical reflection. Specifically, she points out that studying issues of whiteness in geography, both as a topic of research in the field, and in reflection of the academy of geography as a discipline has been shied away from, partially because “whiteness is just a less problematic area of inquiry” (Pulido, 2002). She argues that other topics of research are much safer in the minds of many geographers, particularly due to the whiteness that exists within the geographic discipline, and advocates that the academy must do a better job at hiring people of color to help address the current “crisis in geography” (Pulido, 2002). Similarly, to issues of race, the historic role of women in geography has been practically nonexistent. The rise of feminist geography, and feminist scholars in geography, changed how women participated in, and were studied throughout the academy.

I argue that rural cultural geographic studies have also been neglected in favor of projects in the urban landscape. My own studies as an undergraduate student are evidence of this lack of focus, while there exists an entire urban studies department and geographic classes based on particular urban issues, discussion of rural cultural issues often feels pushed into the background, save for an occasional discussion of the urban-rural divide. The correlation between city size and education level is well documented, giving those in cities a competitive advantage over those in rural areas and confirming that both academics and students predominantly come from urban areas, go to college in urban area, and graduate into urban areas (van Maarseveen, 2020). Despite being a broad discipline focused on many directions, the educational background of geographers does not lend itself to rural studies. That is not to say that rural geography has not been studied before. Traditional areas of study including agricultural geography, resource management and conservation, land use and planning, population and migration, economic development, settlement patterns, rural infrastructure and recreation and tourism are all issues of rural geography. However, in a world where the political, economic, and cultural divide between rural and urban Americans is larger than ever and discussed more than ever before, it seems necessary as part of the geographic project to feature issues of rural cultural geography more prominently.

Similarly to urban geographic focuses, the study of rural geography can feel overwhelming due to the vastness of rural issues, places, and spaces. Turning back to the Malheur National Wildlife occupation and the third concept which I have used to examine western rangeland agitations, regionalism, I contend that its importance goes beyond these particular cases and can be used to help tackle the vastness of rural geographic issues. While the Bundy's were concerned with a seemingly tangled web of issues and a vast temporal focus spanning centuries, their concern with spatial issues were bound into a tight, regional focus, particularly with issues of western rangelands and spaces of governmental neglect. Not only was this regionalist focus a powerful tool due to the collective identities of the occupiers originating in responses to western expansionism and Jeffersonian principals, but because it narrowed the broad issue of government neglect in rural communities to one particular case, federal grazing lands in rural Oregon. In the broader context of rural cultural studies, geographers should take this ideographic example as a way to find new directions in rural geographic studies, and to give rural issues due focus.

An Ideographic Approach to Rural Geography

Geographers have often debated the strengths and weaknesses of ideographic and nomothetic geographic approaches. A nomothetic approach to geography is useful in helping geographers think logically in instances where they wouldn't have without it, however it has many shortcomings as a holistic approach and cannot stand alone as a framework without forcing the restriction and limitation of the questions which geographers ask. The adopted view of quantitative theory, as defined by Cloke et al. is that, "there exists spatial laws or rules which (if only geographers could uncover them) would prove to be at the root of all human existence" (Cloke et al, 1991). Taking a normative approach which attempts to create those rules is a convenient solution to geography's identity crisis. That identity crisis, Cresswell argues, stems from the belief that geography does not get enough respect as a discipline because the regional approach is "parochial" (Cresswell, 2012). The hierarchy of the "hardness of science" shows that, "the closer we get to human life, the lower down the hierarchy we fall" (Cresswell, 2012). By framing geography as close to a natural science as possible, the academic and

professional reputation of the discipline can be secured and bolstered. “Scientists get respect” (Creswell, 2012).

Despite its usefulness, a nomothetic approach also has glaring weaknesses. Most notably, geographers identify and compare things that fall outside of a natural scientist’s analysis. Sauer highlights this fact through the example of species identification. We classify species through “the judgement of those well experienced in significant differences,” in conjunction with, “a ready curiosity on the meaning of likeness and unlikeness”, not through quantification (Sauer, 1956). Furthermore, just like how spatial scientists fail to see, “beyond the map”, by not acknowledging the perceptions in the map created by the bias of the mapmaker, (Cloke et al, 1991) a nomothetic approach fails to see beyond the scope of its spatial laws, which Harvey argues, “restricts the nature of the questions they ask” (Cloke et al, 1991).

An idiographic approach to geography solves the weaknesses of nomothetic classification which often lacks interpretation or analysis, although it alone also presents shortcomings. An idiographic, or regionalist perspective, is persuasive because it recognizes that geographers don’t gain competence by learning, “one special skill, ... formal processes of analysis and generalization are subordinate” (Sauer, 390). Furthermore, a regionalist perspective is less bound by an overarching structure as Paterson points out. “Regional studies are less bound by old formula, less obliged to tell all about a region” (Cloke et al, 1991). Critiques of the idiographic approach often feel reminiscent of those of the nomothetic approach when it is argued that the scope and parameters of the idiographic approach limits one's ability to see beyond its framework and to insert oneself in a larger discussion. Kimble implies this when he says, “regional geographers may perhaps be trying to put boundaries that do not exist around areas that do not matter” (Cloke et al, 1991). This point is more explicitly stated by Hudson when he suggests that a regional approach is, “perfectly reasonable through intellectually limited objectives” (Cresswell, 81).

Despite the shortcomings of an ideographic approach, studies of particular regions in rural geographic studies such as rural rangelands in rural Oregon produce particular cultural understandings that are less obliged to “tell all” about issues of rural geography. When considering the regionalist approach to exploring issues in rural Oregon, both

political and spatial polarization becomes immediately evident. My own experiences living in Oregon inform the significance of the divide between urban and rural. Most often the zone of transition between urban and rural is a subtle one as urban spaces move outward into suburban zones and finally rural areas, however the shift is more dramatic in Oregon. The Willamette valley, which is home to practically all urban centers in the state, is flanked by mountain ranges to both the east and the west, creating a significant physical divide between urban and rural areas. As a result, the most rural places throughout the state feel even further removed from cities such as Portland and Salem due to the increased travel time required from driving through the Cascade Range, making rural areas rarely visited.

The combined spatial, cultural, political, and economic divide in Oregon produces a feeling for those residents the western portion of the state that people living across the Cascades are alien to common, local values. In this sense, despite being grouped into one political entity, there exists significant regional polarization throughout the state. If geographers aim to study issues such as the Malheur Wildlife occupation and other related rural agitations, they should consider this tension. A nomothetic method, based on overarching macro theory applied to all rural geographic areas does little to address the particular regional divide that exists. Only a micro, ideographic approach that considers the region as the scope of analysis can provide the detail necessary to make sense of cultural geographic intricacies which reside in, and around topics such as property, memory, and regionalism. Through doing so, it becomes evident that when addressing questions such as who has the right to land in events such as the Malheur Wildlife occupation, the answer does not lie in one path of exploration. Issues such as property, memory, religion, and whiteness have all been explored and must continue to be explored. While the Malheur occupation foremost was an issue of whiteness, it was also a reflection legitimate concerns that rural ways of life are under threat by outside forces. Additionally, they were intermixed with issues of government neglect, of regionalism, the representation of rural voices, and American identity. An examination of property, regionalism, and memory reveals how these understandings coexist.



Figure 12. Federal property surrounding the Malheur Refuge (Carpender, 2016)

Moving Forward

The federal trial and subsequent acquittal of Ammon Bundy for leading an armed takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge raises questions of how the legacy of the occupation will shape future events in rural Oregon. Claiming that their occupation protested government overreach and were no threat to anyone, the Bundy's escaped charges ranging from conspiracy, to using and carrying firearms in relation to a crime of violence. Since their acquittal, the Bundy's have been involved in a number of notable controversies, although none of them as visually spectacular as the Malheur occupation. Most notably, in 2020 in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, Bundy protested stay-at-home lockdown orders and mask mandates in Idaho, arguing once again that they exemplified governmental overreach. After refusing to wear a mask or to leave the Idaho capital building, Bundy was once again arrested.

It is evident by continued agitations against state governments by Bundy and his followers that their work is not finished. Despite their occupation being successful in terms of giving Bundy a nationwide megaphone, the occupation has not resulted in any legal changes, nor increased public support for their actions. The occupation has left a mixed legacy, while those within Bundy's circles have praised their actions, others, including within communities in eastern Oregon, have condemned the occupation. In the following 2016 elections held in Harney County which produced a turnout of record numbers, all the winning candidates vocally opposed the occupation, complicating

Bundy's position as well as his claim that he speaks for The People. While many continue to feel misrepresented by both state and federal governments and believe that more resources should be directed to rural communities such as those in and around Harney Country, the methods by which Bundy used in the Malheur takeover continue to be controversial. Although the future of the C4CH and "Bundy's army" is uncertain, the grievances that they raise remain a prominent issue. Just as the Jefferson movement preceded the Battle of Bunkerville, and was followed by the Malheur occupation, I expect that tensions highlighted by Bundy and his followers will remain a central issue for many Americans in western rangelands, regardless of the format by which they are brought forward.

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