

Session Proposal: 2014 Pacific Northwest History Conference

Presenter: R. Gregory Nokes

Affiliation: Author

Length of presentation: 45 minutes

A/V needs: projector and screen

Title: AFRICAN AMERICANS NOT WANTED HERE

Presentation Summary:

The population of the Pacific Northwest was shaped in part by exclusion laws aimed at barring free African Americans from living in the region. There were three such laws: 1844-1845, 1849-1854 and 1857-1926, the latter written into the Oregon Constitution. The 1844 law included a provision for severe lashing of free blacks who refused to leave.

I will posit in my presentation that the existence of these laws, although seldom enforced, served to discourage African Americans from emigrating to what was then known as the Oregon Country, and helps explain why there are so few people of color in the Pacific Northwest today.

The laws, which largely prevailed south of the Columbia River, had other impacts, which worked to the benefit of Washington. Rather than risk expulsion from Oregon, two well-known free African Americans, George Bush and George Washington, settled north of the river where they made significant contributions to the development of the Washington Territory.

It is not widely known that while free blacks were discouraged from coming to the region, early settlers brought as many as 50 African American slaves into the territory. This occurred in spite of laws that ostensibly prohibited slavery.

I have a slide presentation that includes discussion of the exclusion laws; the slaves in the region; the slaveholders who brought them, and an 1852 slavery case known as *Holmes vs Ford*, the only slavery case adjudicated in territorial courts.

Presenter contact information:

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Resume:

R. Gregory Nokes was 40 years in journalism with The Associated Press and The Oregonian, from which he retired in 2003 to pursue a second career as an author. Among his positions with The AP were foreign correspondent in Latin America, and chief State Department Correspondent. He traveled to more than 50 countries on news assignments, which included accompanying several presidents and many other officials on foreign trips. He was both an editor and reporter with The Oregonian. A native of Oregon, Nokes did his undergraduate work at Willamette University and attended Harvard as a Nieman Fellow in 1971-72.

Nokes is the author of two non-fiction Northwest histories, both published by Oregon State University Press: *Massacred for Gold: The Chinese in Hells Canyon* (2009) and *Slaves on Trial in the Oregon Territory* (2013). It is in this latter book that Nokes addresses the issues of exclusion laws and slavery that are the subject of his presentation. He has also written for the Oregon Historical Quarterly, most recently an article in the fall 2013 issue entitled "Remembering Chinese in Hells Canyon and the Pacific Northwest."

Nokes lives with his wife, Candise, in West Linn, Oregon.