Resilience

Latinx Stories and Immigration Enforcement in Washington State

By

Ricardo Gomez

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To Mary

You are my Washington anchor.

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All photos by Ricardo Gomez, except Figure 15, Portrait of Chief Joseph Nez Percé, Library of Congress https://lccn.loc.gov/2002722462

INTRODUCTION

This book is about the experiences of Latinx students in Washington state, told through the geography of the Columbia River and combined with an analysis of immigration enforcement practices that run against the Sanctuary provisions of Washington state laws. I researched and wrote this book during the pandemic crisis of 2021, at a time when I could not meet anybody in person, as a way to better understand and document the realities of being Latinx in the regions of Eastern Washington, where immigration enforcement frequently runs against the legal protections known as "sanctuary" that are afforded to immigrants in the state.

Washington state, in the Pacific Northwest, has a rich and varied history and geography. Within a short drive of Seattle there are mountains, forests, lakes, beaches, islands, glaciers, and the Puget Sound, which make Seattle an attractive city for outdoor and nature enthusiasts. Just a couple of hours to the east, on the other side of the Cascade Mountains, is Eastern Washington, a remarkably beautiful region of high desert and agricultural farmland. The landscape of Eastern Washington is defined by the meandering curves and canyons of the magnificent Columbia River—a river shaped by cataclysmic floods at the end of the Ice Age 12,000 years ago and then reshaped by the building of hydroelectric dams and reservoirs during the last 100 years, as part of the Columbia basin irrigation project. Irrigation from the Columbia and its tributaries expanded agricultural production in Eastern Washington to over a million acres of desert, in addition to managing water levels to allow more plentiful fruit orchards along the river. The economic bonanza benefited some growers and a handful of agribusiness companies at the expense of further impoverishing Native American populations, exploiting vulnerable immigrant farmworkers, and forever transforming the natural habitat of the historically abundant Columbia River salmon, now gone forever from the Upper Columbia and endangered as a species in the rest of the river basin.

Eastern Washington is predominantly rural, and unlike the more urban region of Seattle, people in Eastern Washington tend to be politically conservative, as evidenced by the nature of the political ads displayed on

the side of the roads during the electoral year 2020. The political divide between Eastern Washington and the predominantly liberal legislature is also evidenced in attitudes and behaviors toward immigrants and minorities in Washington state.

Washington is known to be an immigrant-friendly state, one that, unlike other states, issues driver licenses to residents independent of legal immigration status and offers in-state tuition to undocumented students. Washington state is also known as a sanctuary state, just like King County, City of Seattle, and the University of Washington, are known to be sanctuaries for immigrants. Eastern Washington, on the other hand, tends to side with pro-Trump and anti-immigrant rhetoric, all while taking advantage of the cheap labor of migrant farmworkers that sustain the agricultural economy. The notion of Washington as a sanctuary state does not have much resonance in Eastern Washington.

The "sanctuary" label has no specific legal meaning, but it generally prohibits collaboration and information-sharing with federal immigration agencies, and prohibits the use of campus, city, county, or state resources to ask, collect information, deny services, or detain persons for their immigration status. The church and other religious institutions have been spaces of sanctuary in Europe since as early as 600 CE, when English law recognized the asylum offered by the church system to individuals fleeing persecution.

Today, most governments seek to avoid direct confrontation with religious organizations offering sanctuary to refugees, immigrants and others seeking protection from unfair persecution. In the US, the sanctuary movement emerged during the 1980s, as a response to thousands of Central Americans fleeing violence in their countries, particularly El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, where the US supported repressive regimes as part of the anticommunist crusade spearheaded by President Reagan. The sanctuary movement in the US began mostly a faith-based service of hospitality to provide for the humanitarian needs of vulnerable refugees, but it quickly grew into a political movement that fought to end the oppression of the US-sponsored war in Central America. Contemporary expressions of sanctuary are not limited to faith-based organizations, as many secular organizations express moral outrage at injustices against vulnerable populations and seek to offer sanctuary protections to immigrants. There are also creative

expressions of sanctuary as resistance in the use of art, music, and stories. The anti-immigrant policies and actions enacted by President Trump galvanized protests and a spirit of resistance beyond church basements offering food and shelter for immigrants, with numerous states, counties, cities, and university campuses proclaiming sanctuary protections for immigrants. In Washington state there are laws that protect immigrants, and monitoring compliance with these laws has become one of the pillars of the University of Washington Center for Human Rights (UWCHR) work on immigrants' rights in Washington state.

Starting 2019, I collaborated with UWCHR and its Immigrant Rights Observatory, studying the implementation and compliance with Washington laws that offer protections to immigrant communities, particularly in Eastern Washington. To complement this work, and as part of my exploration of oral histories of Latinx communities in the US, I interviewed 25 Latinx students and alumni from Eastern Washington. At the same time, during 2020 and 2021, within the constraints of COVID precautions and without talking or interacting in person, I visited different regions of Eastern Washington. I walked around the places that students talked about in the interviews, and I admired the stunningly beautiful geographic features of Eastern Washington. Even though what I really wanted was to meet the students I had talked to over Zoom, to meet their families and share meals and stories, I had to observe from a distance, anonymously, in silence. The places I was visiting were generally closed, deserted, and empty due to COVID-19. The result is this book that combines three disparate threads: Latinx life histories, immigration enforcement, and the geography and history of Eastern Washington, all centered along the Columbia River valley and its tributaries.

This book explores the work of the UWCHR, particularly its work to defend and promote immigrants' rights in Washington state. Through public records requests, the Center documents the collaboration and information sharing of local and state law enforcement with federal immigration enforcement agencies, which predominantly target Latinx communities in Eastern Washington. Since such collaboration and information sharing is now illegal under Washington state laws, the findings of the work of UWCHR can be used by frontline human rights organizations in Washington state to advocate for stronger compliance by local and state law enforcement, and

stronger protection of immigrants' rights. In addition to documenting the work of UWCHR, this book offers a collection of oral histories from UW students or alumni from Eastern Washington who self-identify as Latinx. I use the term Latinx as a gender-neutral term for individuals who descend from Latin American ancestry and culture.

These Latinx stories, which I have edited for brevity and clarity, offer a glimpse of the rich lived experiences in some of the communities that suffer the racial profiling and abuses of immigration enforcement. These are the communities of migrant farmworkers that tend and harvest the fruits and agricultural produce of Washington, the communities of origin of many of the students at the University of Washington.

The Columbia River basin is the lifeblood of Eastern Washington, and the backbone of the story I share with you in this book. The analysis of immigration enforcement done with the Center for Human Rights, and the stories of resilience of Latinx students at UW, are woven around the geography and history of the Columbia River and some of its tributaries. The map on the next page offers a visual representation of the salient places in Eastern Washington that I mention in this book.

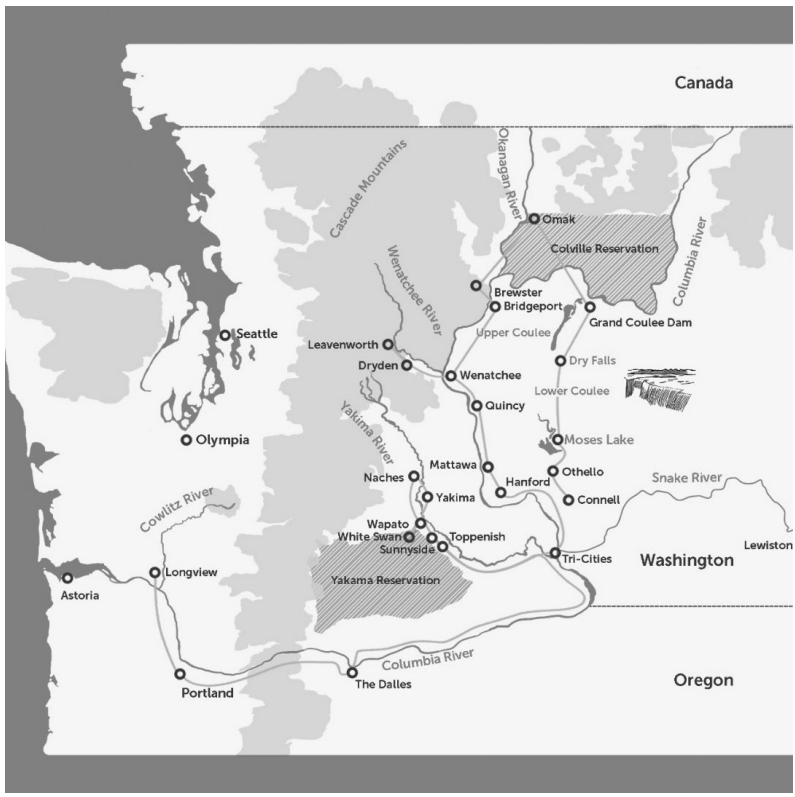

Figure 2: Map of Washington state and key locations mentioned in this book along the Columbia River and its tributaries (map by Andrew Weymouth)

Figure 3: Dry Falls State Park, site of the Ice Age catastrophic flooding and drainage that formed the Columbia River Basin

CHAPTER 1

COLUMBIA RIVER

The Columbia River has a section in Eastern Washington where the water no longer flows. It is called Dry Falls, and I here I start my journey to explore the stories of resilience of the immigrant farmworking communities in Eastern Washington. Standing in front of the cliffs of Dry Falls feels like traveling in time, which helps one understand how the region came to be what it is today. Dry Falls are the remnants of a long-gone waterfall, a horseshoe 3.5 miles long and 350 feet high that makes Niagara Falls look tiny. Surrounded by the high desert of the Grand Coulee, it is hard to imagine these falls once channeled ten times the combined flow of all the current rivers in the world. During the last Ice Age, more than 12,000 years ago, ice sheets dammed the Columbia River and the Clark Fork River, flooding the enormous Lake Missoula, a glacial lake with a surface of over 3,000 square miles that covered parts of present-day Montana, Idaho, and Washington. At the end of the Ice Age, Lake Missoula experienced around 40 cataclysmic floods known as jokalaups, glacial outbursts of ice, rocks and water breaking the glacial dam and causing torrential floods. These periodic cataclysmic floods carved the rocky gorges known as coulees—from the French-Canadian word coulee, meaning "to flow"— and created the Eastern Washington geographic features known as the Scablands.

Cataclysmic Floods of the Ice Age

The cataclysmic, glacial formation of the Washington Scablands was first identified by Harlen Bretz, a son of German immigrant farmers. Bretz was a Seattle high school biology teacher who took an interest in the geology of Eastern Washington. He went on to earn a PhD in Geology at tUniversity of Chicago in 1913, and became an assistant professor of geology, first at the University of Washington and then at the University of Chicago. In 1923, Bretz published the paper "Channeled Scablands in Eastern Washington," in which he suggested what was then an outrageous hypothesis: The Scablands were formed by massive, cataclysmic flooding in the distant

past. He did not know the source of the water that caused the floods, yet he insisted that the geological evidence was clear: he was "convinced that the relations outlined in this paper do exist and that no alternatives yet proposed by others or devised by himself can explain them." Bretz's theory was discredited because it went against the prevailing Doctrine of Uniformity or Uniformitarian Principle, the foregrounding theory of geology prevalent in the 19th century which assumed that the same natural laws and processes that operate today have always operated in the past and everywhere in the universe. After decades of dispute, Bretz and others identified Lake Missoula as the source of the water for the cataclysmic floods. In the 1970s, satellite images further vindicated Bretz's theories. In 1979, when he was 96 years old, Bretz was awarded the highest honor of the field of geology, the Penrose Medal, in recognition of his work on the Dry Falls and understanding of the Eastern Washington Channeled Scablands.

I stand at a viewpoint overlooking the Dry Falls, a massive cliff surrounding the place where the immense falls flowed at the end of the Ice Age. The interpretive center has been closed for months due to COVID-19, but the view is breathtaking. It is hard to imagine the massive flows of water, rocks, and ice coming from the Upper Coulee, North of Dry Falls, and dropping into the Dry Falls at 65 miles per hour to form the valley of Lower Coulee, heading South. Along the Lower Coulee valley there are a series of small lakes. Park Lake, Blue Lake, Alkali Lake, Lenore Lake, and Soap Lake are all pretty and popular today with jet skiers during summer months when the desert is hot, and the water is refreshing. Along the valley are also the Lenore Caves, part of the glacial formations carved out of the rocks. Some of the caves have petroglyphs drawn by the earliest inhabitants of the land, most likely around the end of the Ice Age, approximately 12,000 years ago.

There are several theories about how the early inhabitants of North America arrived to the continent. According to some archaeologists, early arrivers crossed the Bering Strait from Eastern Asia more than 30,000 years ago. Others suggest that late arrivers crossed along the same path about 12,000 years ago. The earliest archaeological remains in the Pacific Northwest are from present-day British Columbia, Canada, and from The Dalles, Oregon, on the Columbia River. The 1996 discovery of the remains of the so-called Kennewick Man near the Columbia River in Kennewick, Washington, helped establish early habitation theories in this region that

begin around 9,300 years ago. The manipulation and study of the remains of the Kennewick Man have caused much controversy with Northwest Indian tribes, who claim common ancestry with the remains and want to bury them according to tribal customs. DNA testing has confirmed shared common ancestry with today's Native Americans, particularly the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. Nonetheless, the remains of Kennewick Man continue to be stored at the University of Washington Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture and remain legally the property of the US Army Corps of Engineers, who found them while building the McNary Dam on the Columbia River.

Indigenous People and American Settlers

The region surrounding Dry Falls and the Grand Coulee gorges was the ancestral territory of the Colville Tribes, known today as the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and their people are presumed to be the descendants of the Kennewick Man. The Colville Tribes bring together twelve distinct tribes across a broad sector of Eastern Washington and into portions of British Columbia to the North, Idaho to the East, and Oregon to the South, in 39 million acres of the ancestral homeland of the Lakes, Colville, Okanogan, Moses-Columbia, Wenatchi, Entiat, Chelan, Methow, Nespelem, Sanpoil, Chief Joseph Band of Nez Perce, and Palus Indians. Each tribe is culturally distinct, though they share some similarities in language and culture, as well as shared cultural practices and teachings. The Sanpoil (sn̓pʕawílx) and Nespelem (nspiləm) Tribes used to live on either side of the Upper Coulee, above Dry Falls, and the Moses-Columbia (škwáxčənəxʷ) Tribe used to live in the region south and southwest of the Lower Coulee, below Dry Falls. The ancestors of the current tribes lived and moved following seasonal cycles to gather food, living on salmon and other fish from the rivers, berries, deer and elk from the mountain meadows, and roots from the plateaus. The tribes were grouped around the rivers, notably the Columbia River, and had salmon at the center of their physical and spiritual lives. Salmon fishing was central to the culture and sustenance of the Native population. One of the creation legends shows the importance of salmon for the original inhabitants of the land:

When the Creator was preparing to bring humans onto the earth, He called a grand council of all the animal people, plant people, and everything else. In those days, the animals and plants were more like people because they could talk. He asked each one to give a gift to the humans—a gift to help them survive, since humans were pitiful and would die without help. The first to come forward was Salmon.

He gave the humans his body for food. The second to give a gift was Water. She promised to be the home to the salmon. After that, everyone else gave the humans a gift, but it was special that the first to give their gifts were Salmon and Water. When the humans finally arrived, the Creator took away the animals' power of speech and gave it to the humans. He told the humans that since the animals could no longer speak for themselves, it was a human responsibility to speak for the animals. To this day, Salmon and Water are always served first at tribal feasts to remember the story and honor the First Foods.

Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Creation Story.

European settlers arrived in the region of what is now Eastern Washington during the early 19th century, although the Pacific Coast had been explored in the late 18th century by the British sea captain and fur trader Charles Barkley. Barkley named the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Salish Sea's outlet to the Pacific Ocean, after Juan de Fuca. de Fuca was a Spanish (or Greek) maritime pilot who claimed to have explored the region in 1596 while in the service of the King of Spain. Other Spanish, British, and Russian explorers, pirates, and adventurers visited the coast of the Pacific Northwest during the 1600s and early 1700s. In 1792, the Spanish Lieutenant Salvador Fidalgo established the first permanent European settlement in present-day Neah Bay, home to the Makah Nation, on the Northwestern tip of the Olympic Peninsula. Perhaps the most significant European explorer was George Vancouver, a British traveler who had sailed with James Cook in search of the Northwest Passage. In 1792, George Vancouver led an expedition along the coasts of present-day Oregon and Washington, including some 100 miles up the Columbia River. Vancouver's team surveyed and named islands (including Vancouver Island), inlets and outlets along the coast, and named features such a Mount Baker, Mount Rainier, and the Puget Sound, all of them visible from Seattle on a clear day.

The Lewis and Clark expedition of 1803-1806 reached the Columbia River from the east, arriving at the mouth of the river on the Pacific Ocean, near present-day Astoria, in November 1805. The Lewis and Clark expedition was commissioned by President Jefferson at the time of the Louisiana purchase, which had doubled the size of the United States. The mission of the expedition was to explore and map the newly acquired territory, to find a viable route across the western portion of the continent, and to establish American sovereignty and presence in the territory before other Europeans did. Secondary objectives of the expedition included the scientific study of the area's geography, plants, and animals as well as the establishment of trade relationships with local Native American tribes. The Lewis and Clark expedition marked the beginning of the devastation of the Native American tribes. As eastern populations moved west, British and American settlers seeking furs and gold disputed over the territory of the Native American tribes. British and Americans settled their dispute over territories in the Pacific Northwest called the Oregon Country with the Oregon Treaty of 1846. At that time, and until the end of the Mexican American War of 1848, the border with Mexico was just South of Ashland, Oregon. The Oregon Treaty made Oregonians (and Washingtonians) south of the 49th Parallel citizens of the United States, and eventually, the 49th Parallel became the US-Canada border. Nonetheless, the Oregon Treaty never consulted the opinion of the Indigenous peoples living there. Furthermore, the treaty did not consider Native Americans US citizens, and did not deem them to be entitled to their ancestral lands, even though they had been living there for more than 10,000 years.

Figure 4: Colville Confederated Tribes Headquarters in Nespelem, WA

The Native American tribes that lived in what was called the Oregon Country were quickly displaced by American settlers. 39 million acres of ancestral lands were taken away, and people were relocated to Indian reservations. To relocate people of the twelve original tribes that lived in the region, the Colville Reservation was established by US Presidential Executive Order on April 9, 1872, with an area of about 2.8 million acres. Three months later, in July 1872, a new Executive Order cut the size of the reservation in half, excluding the tribes from their lands on the Okanogan River and Pend Oreille River, both tributaries of the Columbia River, and the Methow and the Colville Valleys. Twenty years later, in 1892, the US Government changed its policy again and sought to dissolve Indian reservations by making allotments to individual families for subsistence farming. Congress took away control of the northern half of the Colville Reservation, opening it to settlement by non-Indians, and left the reservation with 1.4 million acres of land, a mere 3.5% of the original ancestral territory of the tribes. To add insult to injury, American settlers brought with them new illnesses that decimated the native population and established infamous boarding schools that forcibly separated children from their families and their culture to teach them English and convert them to Christianity. Only the

incredible resilience of the people of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation has allowed them to survive, and to maintain some of their identity, culture, and traditions.

I stand in front of the administrative headquarters of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in Nespelem. It is a large, modern building where the Colville Business Council oversees a multi-million dollar administration governed as a sovereign nation. Everything is closed and empty due to COVID-19. I wish I could learn more about this vibrant community that has around 9,500 enrolled tribal members, and a population of 7,500 living on the reservation. I admire the work of my Native American colleagues at the University of Washington, and the work of the Native North American Indigenous Knowledge group at the Information School, where I am a faculty member. Perhaps one day I will be able to get closer to understanding the lives of the Colville Tribes, or to any of the 29 federally recognized tribes—or the 11 unrecognized tribes—in Washington state.

Figure 5: Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River

Grand Coulee Dam

Between Dry Falls and the administrative headquarters of the Colville Reservation lies the Grand Coulee Dam. Built in the 1930s under President Roosevelt, it was hailed as one of the greatest marvels of engineering, the largest structure built in the United States at the time, and the source of electric power and water for irrigation in the Columbia River basin. At the same time, the Grand Coulee Dam caused irreparable harm to the people and the environment of the region. The dam flooded vast areas of Native ancestral territory, forced the displacement and relocation of numerous towns and native sacred grounds, and forever blocked the flow of salmon and other fish species from the upper Columbia River. The Grand Coulee Dam was so transformative to the region that it is reminiscent of the jokalaups, the glacial dams and torrential floods of the Ice Age that created the canyons and scablands of the Columbia River.

The idea of building a dam in one of the narrow gorges of the Columbia River goes back to 1892, but it was not until 1917 that a viable plan was developed to dam the river just below the Grand Coulee and flood

the plateau above it, just like nature had done at the end of the Ice Age. William Clapp, a lawyer from Ephrata, and Rufus Woods, publisher of the newspaper The Wenatchee Republic, promoted the idea of the dam using the newspaper. The positive media coverage about the dam prompted the visit of General George Goethals, who was one of the main builders of the Panama Canal. In 1922, Goethals made the case for a dam design for the Grand Coulee. Goethals's designs were followed by other designs by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 1926 to build the Grand Coulee Dam and nine other dams along the Columbia River and Snake River. The plan was deemed too expensive and unnecessary, as there was little use for all the energy, and no apparent need for additional agricultural production to warrant the massive construction project. A few years later during the Great Depression of 1929-1933, the idea of the Grand Coulee Damn became viable once again as part of the New Deal programs launched by President Roosevelt to reinvigorate the American economy. Not only would construction of the dam create immediate work for the unemployed, but it could rekindle the American myth of the yeoman farmer: the small family farm that embodied the ideal of a simple, honest, independent, and happy human being.

Construction of the Grand Coulee Dam broke ground in 1933, and quickly became the largest construction project ever undertaken. Following several modifications and expansions to the original plan, construction was completed in 1942, a few years after the smaller – but nonetheless massive – Hoover Dam on the Colorado River between Nevada and Arizona. The original Grand Coulee Dam cost $163 million in 1943 (the equivalent of $1.96 billion U.S. dollars in 2019). Its 1973 expansion, with the addition of a third power plant, added $730 million (equivalent to $3.27 billion U.S. dollars in 2019) to the total cost of the dam's construction. Around 8,000 people worked on the construction of the dam; 77 workers died on the job. The dam is 550 feet high and 5,223 feet long. The Grand Coulee Dam now has four power stations with a capacity of 6,809 megawatts and the dam's reservoir supplies water for 671,000 acres of farmland as part of the Columbia River Irrigation Project.

Mason City

The views of the Grand Coulee Dam are striking. The visitor center in Mason City is closed due to COVID-19, but the evidence of the transformation brought about by the engineering project is unmistakable. Upstream, to the East, is the flooded Columbia River, and downstream, first North and then to the West, are the managed waters that gently flow toward Lake Pateros, where the Okanogan River coming from Canada meets the Columbia. Hidden in plain view right next to the dam is Banks Lake, an artificial lake on what used to be the bed of the 12,000 year-old Upper Coulee Valley. Banks Lake is filled with water pumped from the Columbia as a reservoir for irrigation. Halfway down the flooded valley of Banks Lake is Steamboat Rock, a beautiful island of basalt rock cliffs that rise 800 feet to a 600-acre plateau of sagebrush meadows that were once used by nomadic Native American tribes and early settlers. The landscape around Steamboat Rock is an impressive display of basalt cliffs from the Upper Coulee, the longest and deepest of Eastern Washington canyons. At the south end of Bank Lake is Dry Falls, the place where it all began. Dry Falls was the belly button of the Columbia in the Ice Age and the driving force behind the current shape of the landscape in Eastern Washington.

Mayra

Mayra grew up in Mason City, after having lived in Mexico for a few years. Her parents decided to return to the US, where Mayra was born, in order to give her a better education. "They believed that that was going to be difficult to do in Mexico," she tells Geno, a Mexican colleague who helped me with some of the interviews for this project.

> *The town of Mason City is very small, and there was little diversity. Most individuals were either Latino or White. There were a lot of other Latinos in the community because there's agricultural work, so a lot of Latinos settled in that region because of job opportunities. Most of my classmates were Latinos. When I went to high school, there was a little bit more diversity, but most people were still primarily Latino or White.*

Mayra wanted to get away from the small-town life, and go to a bigger place with more opportunities, so she applied to the UW when she was finishing high school. "I wanted to get out and explore a big city and see what doors would open up for me," she said. The fact that she grew up by the Grand Coulee Dam, one of the engineering marvels of the US as well as one of its environmental and social catastrophes, did not come up. She experienced Mason City only as a small agricultural town with little diversity. Applying to college was not easy, since her parents could not really help her much:

> *I am Latina, and it was difficult because neither of my parents has an education. I didn't know what steps to take to apply to a university or what resources were available for me. I really had to put a lot of effort into looking into programs and the resources available. I was fortunate enough that the high school I went to had a program for minority students who were seeking higher education. The program is Upward Bound, and that was really my first step through the door to apply to a university. I had good counselors who helped me understand what the process would look like and how I needed to apply for financial aid. They also helped with the deadlines for applying to college and what those various steps looked like. I also did Running Start as a high school student, so that opened the door to college completely.*
>
> *I was a part of the CAMP program at the community college, and I was guided by a counselor who helped me every step of the way. He let me know that once I got into college I also had to apply to the degree that I wanted, which I was completely unaware of before going to the university. He led me through all of the steps that I needed to take to complete the applications. He also helped me with financial aid and scholarships. Scholarships were what helped me pay for my university degree.*

I will discuss the CAMP program, and other such programs that help minority students get to and succeed in college in a later chapter. For now, let me get back to the Grand Coulee Dam and its implications for the Columbia River and the region of Eastern Washington.

The Grand Coulee Dam started producing energy in 1942, when it was needed for aluminum smelters for constructing airplanes during World War II. The dam was also used to power the nuclear enrichment plant at Hanford Reach, downstream on the Columbia River. The sparsely populated community of Hanford was selected just a year after the Grand Coulee Dam was operational, a decision that took advantage Hanford's proximity to electric power, the possibility of using water from the Columbia to cool down the reactors, and the availability of an "isolated expanse of uninhabited land," which ignored the fact that it was the ancestral territory of Yakama Nation and the Wanapum Tribe, who lost access to the area that was for many generations their fishing and hunting lifeline along the Columbia River.

Hanford Reach houses nine nuclear reactors including Reactor B, the reactor that enriched plutonium for the first nuclear explosion in New Mexico on July 16, 1945, and for the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, Japan less than a month later, on August 9, 1945. The bomb in Nagasaki killed approximately 40,000 people, three days after another nuclear bomb over Hiroshima had killed an estimated 80,000 more people. Tens of thousands later died of radiation exposure. Today nicknamed an "involuntary park," Hanford Reach was made into a National Monument as a security buffer surrounding the Hanford Site. The area is a radioactive burial ground half the size of Rhode Island.

In addition to electricity, the Grand Coulee Dam expanded irrigation to over 670,000 acres of farmland on the Columbia River basin. While initially intended to attract unemployed people to become small family farmers, over one quarter of the initial farming settlers dropped out withing the first three years of the program, frustrated by the meager income and isolated lives of those accustomed to urban living. Large-scale irrigation and agribusiness were the primary beneficiaries of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. They obtained water and power at subsidized prices and fueled the growth of agriculture and food-processing industries. Downstream residents benefited from flood protection, and recreation-related commerce grew thanks to increased boating, fishing, and hunting in the region.

Native Americans, on the other hand, bore most of the cost and damage caused by the Grand Coulee Dam. The dam raised the level of the Columbia and Spokane Rivers by around 70 feet, flooding 21,000 acres of prime land where around 2,000 people of the Colville Tribes and around 200 of the Spokane Tribe lived, hunted, and fished. The loss of their traditional fishing sites, burial grounds, and sacred cultural gathering places was exacerbated by the loss of salmon on the Columbia River upstream from Grand Coulee Dam. Built without fish ladders, the dam blocked all salmon and other anadromous fish (i.e., fish that are born in freshwater, spend most of their lives in salt water, and then return to freshwater to spawn) from the Upper Columbia River. The engineers who designed and built the largest and most complex engineering project of the time briefly explored the idea of a flume and elevator to collect and carry fish over Grand Coulee Dam, or band-aid solutions such as trapping adult fish and hauling them in trucks to a release point above the dam, and trapping juvenile fish above the dam and hauling below the dam. In the end, the engineers decided that solving the problem of fish migration was too complex to warrant a solution, and they changed the ecosystem forever. Ivan Donaldson, the Corps of Engineers first biologist on the Columbia River, reported in 1942 that engineers working on the Grand Coulee Dam did not want to be bothered with the concerns of a scientist. Donaldson wrote in a memo that the attitude of engineers was "to hell with the fish, I'm here to build a dam." Despite failed attempts to recreate salmon populations through hatcheries, the damage was irreparably done. From a healthy watershed with the largest population of fish in the planet, the Columbia River lost its salmon population above the Grand Coulee Dam forever. In the words of a Spokane tribal elder,

> *Our ceremonies and spirituality were based on the rivers. When the dam went in it changed everything. It changed our way of life from hunters and gatherers to farming. It changed our spirituality and cultural realm . . . We hardly had time to relocate graves. Thousands of our ancestors went floating down the river and lots of historical sites were inundated. Farms and homes were destroyed. If they had done this to another groups of people, the mindset would have been different. The tribes were looked down upon and not given any consideration . . . Promises were made that everything would be taken care of for us . . . [but] we never received compensation for that dam.*

After years of lawsuits, promises, and negotiation, the Colville Tribes received some compensation from the US government in 1994: U.S. Congress approved a lump-sum payment of $53 million, and annual payments of at least $15.25 million in perpetuity for the Colville Tribes. This settlement was seen as a way to share the revenue of the energy produced by the dam, and in recognition of the harm caused to the Colville people with the dam's construction and the blocking of the salmon. In 2020, the Spokane Tribe finally received compensation as well. The Spokane Tribe will receive roughly $6 million per year for the first ten years, and $8 million annually thereafter (exact amounts will be based on the revenues generated by the power plants). Despite this late compensation, the tribes are still suffering the consequences of the Grand Coulee Dam and the transformation of their ancestral land, without enjoying much of its benefits.

The Grand Coulee Dam was the first and the largest of the dams on the Columbia, but it is far from the only one. With 75 dams along its 1,243 miles, the Columbia River is the most dammed waterway on the planet. Even though Washington State mandated as early as 1890 that all dams "wherever food fish are wont to ascend" must include fish ladders, by 1922 this law was rescinded, and The Grand Coulee Dam was built from 1933-1942 without a fish ladder. Chief Joseph Dam, 51 miles downstream from Grand Coulee Dam, was also built without a fish ladder. All other government-owned dams on the Columbia River, apart from Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee, have some sort of fish ladder so that salmon can bypass the structures and continue upstream to spawn. To help the survival of juveniles swimming downstream, these other dams have installed sluiceways that take fish away from the turbines and deliver them further downstream, or they have redesigned the turbines to make them less hazardous to fish swimming through them. Nonetheless, the population of Salmon on the Columbia River has vanished above Chief Joseph Dam, and is endangered in the rest of the river, except for a small pocket of healthy salmon around Hanford, ironically protected by the radiation of the site which has kept people and industrial development away from that stretch of the river.

Figure 6: Fruit orchards by the Columbia River

Migrant Farm Workers on the Columbia River

Agricultural farms were the great winners of the Columbia River Irrigation Project. The Grand Coulee Dam was the first step of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project, which included 300 miles of canals and irrigation water for more than 600,000 acres of farmland in the region. In the early 1900s, the Northern Pacific and Great Northern railways allowed faster and cheaper transportation of supplies and produce, and agricultural research and extension programs in colleges and universities further helped to boost agricultural production. Increased agribusiness was also accompanied by other unexpected changes such as depletion of public grasslands by intense cattle and sheep grazing, and the spread of sagebrush, which took over most areas where native bunchgrass used to grow. Sagebrush grows abundantly in areas damaged by overgrazing, and it is a hardy shrub that can live up to 100 years. The light grayish green of sagebrush now dominates the landscape of most uncultivated areas of the high desert. I associate its spicy, pungent, bitter smell with memories of irrigation projects that had started in Eastern Washington even before the Grand Coulee Dam. The US Congress