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Marcus Whitman as History and Myth:
The Evolving Values of Whitman College

Grace Fritzke
Secularization of Whitman College
March 30, 2016
The life and times of missionaries in what is now the northwest United States during the early to mid-19th century weave a complex picture of evangelism, nationalism, and patronizing treatment of native peoples. Between the late 19th/early 20th century and the present day, Whitman College has shifted the way it presents Marcus Whitman and the College’s history in order to better reflect its own values within the world that it prepares its students to enter.¹ The College’s values, as presented in its catalogs, originally revolved around Christian civilization and patriotic expansionism. American missionary Henry Spalding created the Whitman myth in the 1880’s, which reinterpreted Marcus Whitman as the savior of the Oregon Territory for the United States.² Influential Whitman College leaders including Cushing Eells and Stephen B.L. Penrose also used this myth. However, cultural shifts resulted in the College stepping away from the Whitman myth in favor of a broader perspective. Eventually the College reverted to a more limited perspective in order to laud Marcus Whitman as valuing education and cultural sensitivity. As part of these values, Whitman College highlights diversity in order to help students succeed in a multi-cultural world through personal growth and reflection. This growth involves students recognizing their personal contexts and privilege in order to become better global citizens. However, Whitman College’s catalog works to obscure the actions of its namesake, and so hypocritically buries its cultural context, including the construction of white Christian masculinity against the Indian body, which would undermine the College’s purported the value of diversity. For the College’s students, learning about the College’s past should be part of a foundation that allows its students to begin to critically examine their own contexts in

¹ In order to distinguish between Whitman College and Marcus Whitman, I will refer to Whitman College by either ‘Whitman College’ or ‘the College,’ and refer to Marcus Whitman as ‘Marcus Whitman’ or ‘Whitman.’
² In order to distinguish between the historical figure of Marcus Whitman and the romantic figure of Marcus Whitman that emerged after his death, I will refer to the historical figure by his name, and the romantic figure as part of the ‘Whitman myth’ or ‘the myth.’
order to become better leaders and global citizens. Whitman College, as an institutional global citizen, must act as an example to its students and acknowledge its cultural context.

Marcus Whitman is challenging to pin down as a historical figure because of the varying interpretations of him within the popular and academic articles and books that followed his death. As historian Carl Russel Fish put it, during the first half of the 19th century the missionary “wove the Christianizing of the Indians, agricultural colonization in Oregon and international politics into a fascinating mysterious web.” Marcus Whitman’s biographical information is fairly straightforward, even if his motivations and interpretations of his motivations are not.

Whitman was born and raised on the East Coast. A physician by trade, Whitman decided that he wanted to serve as a missionary under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). After Whitman’s marriage to Narcissa Prentiss, Marcus and Narcissa traveled west in 1836 under the ABCFM to what would become the Oregon Territory, with hopes of converting the notoriously proud Cayuse people at Waiilatpu. A large part of Whitman’s mission involved teaching the Cayuse “civilized” ways of living, including agriculture in addition to Christianity. When the American Board of Commissioners closed Whitman’s mission and fired Whitman’s fellow missionary Henry Spalding in 1842, Whitman traveled east across the country during the winter of 1842-1843 to convince the ABCFM to reconsider. Whitman was successful in convincing the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to keep the missions open and to retain Henry Spalding. While he was on the East Coast, Whitman also encouraged white settlers to make their way westward. It is possible

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that Whitman believed that the Cayuse and the settlers could coexist, and that he was making the transition easier by adjusting the Cayuse to white ‘civilized’ ways.\(^6\) However, once the flood of white settlers began in earnest, even though Whitman continued to preach, teach, and tend to the Cayuse in the ways that he thought best, he devoted less and less time to them. Measles and other diseases ravaged the camp at intervals, and the Indians had no resistance. Suspicion spread through the Cayuse that Whitman was poisoning them, or at least withholding the medicine that he was using for the white settlers who usually recovered. By 1847, measles had killed over half of the Cayuse’s people.\(^7\) Resentment built. Eventually, on November 29 of 1847, a small group of Cayuse men killed Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, along with twelve other men from the mission.

The mission at Waiilatpu had layered intentions. Marcus Whitman hoped to save the souls of the Indians by converting them to Christianity, but expansionism also played a role in Whitman’s decision to build a mission at Waiilatpu and in his following actions. Although converting the Cayuse to Christianity was the stated purpose of the mission at Waiilatpu, Whitman also wished for the United States to possess the Oregon Territory. In 1846 Daniel Webster, former Secretary of State and architect of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, wrote that, “The ownership of the whole country is very likely to follow the greater settlement and larger amount of population.”\(^8\) Whitman likely had a similar understanding. There is no doubt that Whitman was in favor of the United States expanding to include the Oregon territory. When it looked as though the ABCFM and the federal government were undervaluing the territory,

recalling Whitman’s mission, and Spalding’s mission and job, Whitman acted. He wrote to ABCFM, underlining the beauty and resources of the region. During his trip to Boston in 1843 to plead for his job, he also spoke with politicians and potential white settlers about the value of the Oregon Territory.9 By spreading information about western land, Whitman could encourage settlement and support for keeping the land for the United States. On the other hand, evangelism was indisputably central to the Whitman mission. In a letter to Dr. Wisner of the ABCFM in 1834, Whitman detailed his religious background and expressed his wish to become a missionary. Whitman revealed that after his father’s death he spent ten years in the care of his uncle, during which time he received “constant religious instruction and care” from both his uncle and his grandfather.10 In his letter to Dr. Wisner, Whitman also defined what he considered a missionary to do and be. Whitman wrote that the “Missionary cause” follows directly from the commands of Jesus and involves “the holiness and happiness of all that may be reclaimed from Sin.”11 His desire to become a missionary came from a self-proclaimed wish to spread Christianity and save as many people as possible. In fact, he wrote to Dr. Wisner that he believed “it the duty of [every] Christian to seek the [advancement] of the [cause] of Christ.12 He carried this belief with him to the Cayuse.

Whitman was optimistic about the ability of the Cayuse and other native people to be civilized to Christian European standards, in direct contrast to many of his contemporaries. Whitman historian and professor G. Thomas Edwards compares Whitman’s optimism to the distrust that other explorers and missionaries felt towards the Indians.13 For instance, explorer

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
Meriwether Lewis warned his men that they should “never place [them]selves at the mercy of any savages” because “the too great confidence of our countrymen in their sincerity and friendship, has caused the destruction of many hundreds of us.”\textsuperscript{14} Lewis was sent West by the federal government, and so without the evangelistic intentions of Whitman. However, evangelistic hopes did not prevent others from negative understandings of the Indians. David Green, secretary of American Indian Missions for the ABCFM and Whitman’s superior, believed that the Indians were “deluded, superstitious…and led astray by the devil and wicked men as well as by their own prejudices and lust.”\textsuperscript{15} Green did not believe that the Indians had the potential to be civilized to Christian or European standards. Cushing Eells, a fellow missionary with Whitman under the ABCFM and the founder of what would become Whitman College, reflected that he constantly doubted the conversion of the Spokane people with whom he was working, because it seemed to him that “the soul, spirit, body of an Indian steeped in superstition was impregnable by human appliances.”\textsuperscript{16} In contrast, Marcus Whitman believed that Christianity would civilize the Indians’ behavior and change their superstitious beliefs. He found that they “had a strong desire to be taught” and with sermons became favorably “more civil [and less] addicted to [stealing].”\textsuperscript{17} He founded a school to teach the Cayuse to read and write scripture, gave sermons, and taught hymns. Whitman also taught the Cayuse Western agricultural techniques to enable the Indians to abandon their nomadic lifestyle. Whitman viewed agriculture as a primary way to civilize the nomadic or partially-nomadic Indians, and he felt “an


\textsuperscript{15} Green to Whitman, April 16, 1846, (Marcus Whitman Crusader, Vol. 3, 1941), p. 175.


\textsuperscript{17} Whitman to Green, May 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1837, National Park Service, Public Domain, http://www.nps.gov/whmi/learn/historyculture/ marcus-letter-may-5-1837.htm.
entire confidence in [the Cayuse’s] disposition [and] ability” to farm.\textsuperscript{18} Even as an influx of white migration increased tensions between the white workers on the mission and the Cayuse, Whitman still referred to himself to Green as an “obedient fellow labourer for the salvation of the Indians.”\textsuperscript{19} He believed the Indians to be capable of being saved, and believed in his role as the person to save them.

Whitman’s efforts to convert the Cayuse people, to spread positive information about the Oregon Territory, and to bring white settlers from the United States into the region were romanticized, and evolved into a myth that romantically presented Whitman as an ideal Christian man, with remarkable patriotism and bravery. After Whitman’s death, his fellow missionary Henry Spalding created the myth in order to explain Whitman’s 1842 trip to Boston and New York in a more favorable light.\textsuperscript{20} Professor and historian Robert Whitner, in an address at Whitman College in 1983, emphasized that Marcus Whitman’s fellow missionaries created the myth of Whitman saving the Oregon Territory for the Union in order to “explain in a dignified manner why Whitman had risked his life…They could not say it was because they had been fired.”\textsuperscript{21} Spalding published his version of the Whitman myth in the California Congregationalist newspaper the Pacific on October 19\textsuperscript{th} and November 9\textsuperscript{th} of 1865.\textsuperscript{22} However, a version of the myth was published in the Sacramento Union on November 16\textsuperscript{th} of 1864.\textsuperscript{23} This article, though

\textsuperscript{23} S.A. Clarke, Sacramento Union, November 16, 1864, http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SDU18641116.2.1.
written by S.A. Clarke, references Spalding as the source of its information. Spalding’s version of events became a standard account, and, according to Robert R. McCoy, “historians and other writers…included this version in their manuscripts and publications.”24 Spalding simplified the historical story, cutting out the role of the ABCFM in Whitman’s decision to travel east. Instead, Spalding recounts to Whitman’s praises of Oregon. In a dialogue reported by Spalding, Whitman reacts to the news that Oregon has been traded away from the United States.

‘But, sir, you do not know what you are doing; you do not realize that the territory …could make a home for millions; that is has broad navigable rivers, leading to an ocean whose commerce includes the Indies and the empires of the Orient. […] Then there are beautiful and fertile valleys whose harvests will yield eventual increase to our nation’s wealth.’25

Whitman’s excitement about the resources available in Oregon makes him indignant in the face of losing the territory to another country. His indignation leads him to travel to “President Tyler himself…until he had awakened an interest in his cause in the minds of the President and a portion of his Cabinet.”26 This version of the story does not mention Whitman’s trip to Boston in order to speak with the ABCFM. Cushing Eells, in recollections from 1883, remembers meeting with Whitman before his journey, and similarly simplifies the reasons behind Whitman’s trip.

Clearly, Whitman strongly desired to go to Washington, D.C. and Boston, Mass. The controlling object was to make a desperate effort to secure if possible the North West to the United States. There were considerations relating to the Mission for which he desired to meet the Officers of the American Board in Boston. According to my recollection this topic occupied very little attention. The statement was made that we came to this coast for another object and that we should not be diverted therefrom. Dr. Whitman replied in the following words. “I am not expatriated by becoming a missionary.”27

26 Ibid.
Eells’ recollections paint a picture of a Whitman whose focus for going east was not to secure his own job, but to secure the interests of the United States. Simplification is a common element in many of the interpretations of Marcus Whitman. G. Thomas Edwards underlines that “By following only a single thread, many interpretations of Whitman have become ensnared in oversimplification, presentism, and negative interpretations.”28 Spalding, Eells, and others supported their own interests by propagating the idea that Whitman, the martyred hero, saved Oregon. Eventually, simplified stories of Marcus Whitman allowed the College to present its values and, in turn, successfully fundraise.

The language that developed as part of the Whitman myth specifically focused on Whitman’s role as a patriot and martyr. His mythic role as patriot evolved from his 1842-43 cross-country ride. In the Walla Walla Daily Union, Rev. N. F. Cobleigh of the local First Congregational Church wrote that even though “winter was approaching and no human power could oppose it,” still “Dr. Whitman saw, with a statesman’s vision, that one of the fairest portions of the country was liable to be lost.”29 Cushing Eells described Whitman’s purpose of saving Oregon for his country, saying, “In [Whitman’s] estimation, the saving, of Oregon to the United States, was of paramount importance.”30 Later Eells gleefully narrated, “On…the announcement of what [Whitman] had done Rockymountain men said ‘Impossible.’ No man could live to perform that journey, at that time of year. But he had done it.”31 No less important to the Whitman myth was Whitman’s “martyr’s death.” Oliver W. Nixon’s How Marcus Whitman Saved Oregon, published in 1895, calls Whitman’s story “A true romance of patriotic

29 Whitman College Catalog, 1882-83, Whitman College Archives, pp. 21-22.
30 Cushing Eells, Statements About the Object of Whitman’s Overland Journey, n.d., Whitman College Archives, WCMss33, Box 7, Folder 17, p. 2 of draft 2.
heroism, Christian devotion and final martyrdom.”32 Nixon’s voice was one of many formulating these themes. A poem by Alice Harriman that appears in Myron Eells’ *Marcus Whitman Pathfinder and Patriot* calls Whitman a “heroic martyr.”33 The poem “Whitman’s Ride” emulated the 1863 poem “Paul Revere’s Ride” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.34 It speaks of the mountains mocking Whitman’s coming, of Whitman’s silent firmness in his plan, and of how much “He—whatever might say the rest—Cared, and would colonize Oregon!” A *Daily Union* article by Rev. N. F. Cobleigh entitled “Dr. Whitman—His Monument” also describes the myth of Whitman saving Oregon, pitting him against Britain, the winter weather, and Native Americans.

He told his friends of the taunting words of the enemy: “The Americans are too late, and Oregon is ours.” Within twenty-four hours he started…to do what seemed impossible—to cross the mountains in the winter season, to swim across rivers whose edges were ice. He was partially frozen some of the time by his exposure, but on he went, heeding not the cold, or the still more dangerous red man, for the interests of coming generations were at stake.36

Cobleigh’s version of Marcus Whitman’s journey east is dramatic and inflationary. Whitman is doing the impossible: surviving the worst that the author can think of in order to win against a patriotic enemy. There is no mention of Whitman’s need to go to Boston in order to secure Spalding’s job and both of their missions. In order to explain to refuters why there is no official record of these meetings, Cobleigh offers that “President Tyler…promised that the plan to trade off Oregon should not be proposed, hence no official records give any account of this matter.”37

In a similarly complimentary vein, Reverend Wm. Barrows, who, according to Cushing Eells,

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“lodged under the same roof” with Whitman in a stop in St. Louis, glowingly said that “It would be difficult…to find [an express ride] that for distance, time, heroic daring, peril, suffering and magnificent consequences, could equal Dr. Whitman’s ride.” The act of crossing the winterized country became a war of sorts, won by Marcus Whitman, Patriot and Martyr. The myth wounds its way into books that otherwise were historical by nature, including Marcus Whitman and the early days of Oregon (1901) by Dr. William A. Mowry. The Whitman myth permeated the popular imagination to the extent that it became fact to a portion of its audience.

Even as the myth of Marcus Whitman saving Oregon gained popularity, others questioned its credibility. In 1886, respected Oregon historian Frances Fuller Victor rejected the controversial story, writing in Hubert Howe Bancroft’s History of Oregon. By the early 1900s, a substantial number of historians had discounted the story of Marcus Whitman saving Oregon through his traveling to the East Coast. In 1901, Ripley Hitchcock of the New York Times reviewed Dr. William A. Mowry’s book. Hitchcock explains Whitman’s purpose of going to Boston as to convince the ABCFM to keep his and Spalding’s missions open, as corroborated by historians such as Frances Fuller Victor and Edward G. Bourne, Professor of history at Yale University. Hitchcock acknowledges that Whitman was a brave pioneer who gave up his life for his cause, and who did not play a part in propagating the myth. He also highlights a few major problems with the myth, including that there are no records of Whitman in Washington, and the supposed trading away of the Oregon Territory was not an object of discussion at the time.

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39 Dr. William A. Mowry, Marcus Whitman and the early days of Oregon, New York: Silver, 1901, [https://archive.org/details/marcuswhitmanear00mowruoft](https://archive.org/details/marcuswhitmanear00mowruoft).


Hitchcock describes as the story of Whitman traveling to meet with the president as a “legend that was created by Spalding, bolstered up by the uncertain and easily excited memories of a few contemporaries, and decorated by local pride, and by the psychological which render concrete hero worship so necessary to the popular imagination.”

As Hitchcock hinted at in 1901, the popular imagination less concerned with the facticity of its stories than a historian may be. Although the facticity of the events described by the myth may not be accurate, the myth itself reflects the values of the people who propagated it. The specifically white Christian masculinity of this period allowed for this myth to flourish. Dr. D.K. Pearsons, a Whitman donor in the early 1900’s, presented to the College on May 14th, 1900, professing that Whitman College embodied the “missionary spirit…of true Christian patriotism and self-obliteration behind it.”

Pearsons went on to state his belief that “[T]his spirit will live on in [Whitman College’s] students, that it will prove to be the most intelligent, the most American, the most prophetic, the noblest, the most manly, and the most Christian to be met with among any body of students in our country.” He uplifted the manly Christian American as the moral ideal, which the College also believed. Marcus Whitman’s masculinity played an important role in the Whitman myth and the myth’s popularity. Masculinity often has certain common features that allow the man to maintain dominance. Marcia C. Inhorn and Emily A. Wentzell point out the masculinities across cultures “often share traits that enable social dominance, including command of wealth and resources, attractiveness, virility, physical strength, heterosexuality, and emotional detachment.” While the Whitman myth does not use all of these traits, it uses many of them. The myth points to Whitman’s physical strength and

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42 Pearsons to Trustees, May 14, 1900, Whitman College Archives, scanned by student, able to be shared with members Whitman community through Google Drive or other electronic format upon request to author.
heterosexuality. Poems and other works invoke the emotional detachment necessary for Whitman to undertake such a dangerous trip. The Whitman myth also places Whitman in command of the resources of Oregon. Specifically, Whitman took the resources of Oregon from Oregon’s native people, while simultaneously ‘civilizing’ them. Michael Taylor of Colgate University, in his 2015 work about Indian-styled mascots, writes about the ways that Euro-Americans set each other up as the masculine hero that conquered native peoples. According to Taylor, in order to justify colonialism, “Americans rewrite history, centering themselves as heroic in their endeavors and accomplishments over the new lands and peoples there.”

The setting up of the myth of Marcus Whitman as both evangelist and expansionist, missionary and patriot, put him at odds against Indians and their land. By making the white man’s struggle with the frontier and the peoples who lived there into a heroic effort, “the common settler/man [was transformed] into the masculine hero of mythical proportions who tamed the Wild West.”

The story of Marcus Whitman was manipulated in this way. Whitman became a rugged frontiersman who conquered the land, worked to conquer the Native Americans, and saved a vast territory for the glory of his God and his country. Whitman’s Christianity and mission work as an excuse for colonization became part of larger framework of Manifest Destiny that justified “the wresting of lands away from the Native Americans [by white people] in order to build a country, celebrated by the heirs, the male elite, and the new inhabitants.”

Supporters of the Whitman myth came from a culture that believed that white, Christian, Manifest Destiny was a heroic role that its males filled.

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46 Taylor, p. 125.
47 Taylor, p. 124.
It is important to note that although Whitman and the supporters of the Whitman myth supported ideas that are abhorrent to many today, they were sincere in their belief of doing God’s work. Cushing Eells both believed in Whitman’s sincerity and the importance of continuing Whitman’s work. Eells founded Whitman Seminary, which became Whitman College in 1882 (officially in 1883), in order to honor his co-missionary, Whitman, and to continue Whitman’s work for Christian civilization.\footnote{Whitman College Catalog, 1894-95, Whitman College Archives, p. 8.} Cushing Eells was the President of the Board of Trustees of the College from 1882 until 1893 when his son Myron Eells replaced him as president. As Cushing Eells was a supporter of the Whitman myth, and Myron Eells was a supporter of his father, it makes sense that the version of the Whitman myth that Cushing Eells expounded made it into the College’s catalog. Whitman College published its first catalog for the 1882-83 school year, and expressed its ideals through the Whitman myth and other College information. The ideals of Christianity and patriotism starts at the very beginning of the catalog with the College’s motto, \textit{Pro Christo et Patria}, or \textit{For Christ and Country}.\footnote{Whitman College Catalog, 1882-83, Whitman College Archives, p. 2.} The College also understood that its desire to pass down the values of Christianity to its students was helpful for raising funds for the school. Information about the College in its first catalog addressed this purpose.

Whitman College, the only institution of higher learning of the New England type proposed for this vast region, may, under the directing hand of Providence, with…a liberal pecuniary support of its friends East and West, have a rapid growth, and speedily become a strong power towards building up with the growth of this new land a civilization based upon thorough scholarship and Christian principle.\footnote{Whitman College Catalog, 1882-83, Whitman College Archives, p. 19.}

Besides underlining the importance of outside financial support, the College also echoes Cushing Eells’ wish to continue Marcus Whitman’s work for Christian civilization. It also underlines the importance of the “liberal pecuniary support of its friends in the East and West” for financial
assistance. Whitman College was aware of the power that the myth had and continued to use it to ask for money in its catalog. It is centralized in the College’s 1886-87 catalog, where the College reprinted an article by the president of the College, A. J. Anderson.\textsuperscript{51} This article was originally published in \textit{The Advance} of Chicago on May 5\textsuperscript{th} of 1887. Anderson wrote, “[Whitman College’s] trustees and friends feel that a great duty would be left undone did they not appeal for aid to the Christian public in sympathy with the patriotic work of Dr. Whitman and the Christian deeds of the American Board and its missionaries.”\textsuperscript{52} Anderson published the article to announce his intent to go east looking for funds to support the school that bore the name of “the Christian martyr and patriot, Dr. Marcus Whitman.”\textsuperscript{53} Some editorial comments published in conjunction with Anderson’s article are also reprinted in the 1886-87 catalog. These comments herald Marcus Whitman as the person “through whose personal influence it was that that vast region of our real Northwest was saved to the Union.”\textsuperscript{54} They also reference the belief that the Christian college has an essential relation to “the life and safety and freedom and perpetuated prosperity of the State.”\textsuperscript{55} A resolution from a June 20, 1887 meeting of the General Association of Congregational Churches of Oregon and Washington follows the editorial comments, and uses the romanticized Whitman myth, combined with the desire to spread Christianity, to voice support for President Anderson’s plan to go east to raise funds.

If, however, this Christian College is to continue its work, and be the power it is capable of being in helping to save the Northwest for Christ, if this monument to the memory of one of America’s greatest benefactors—Dr. Marcus Whitman—is to remain… we most heartily approve the action of…Pres. A. J. Anderson, Ph. D., to visit the East and solicit funds. No act more Christian or patriotic can be performed than the placing at once of the institution on a solid financial basis.\textsuperscript{56}

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\textsuperscript{51} Whitman College Catalog, 1886-87, Whitman College Archives, pp. 28-32.
\textsuperscript{52} Whitman College Catalog, 1886-87, Whitman College Archives, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Whitman College Catalog, 1886-87, Whitman College Archives, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{55} Whitman College Catalog, 1886-87, Whitman College Archives, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
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This passage in particular underlines the importance of Christianity and patriotism as the ideal values of the period. It underlines the importance of Christian colleges, such as Whitman College, for the propagation of Christianity in the region, and so calls for monetary assistance from East Coast sympathizers. President Anderson’s fundraising trip east was successful. Anderson emphasized the Christian character of the College’s students over their academic work, and reported that the College significantly increased the number of Christians it boasted between 1882 and 1889. The College continued to embed the Whitman myth and other romantic descriptions into the College’s pleas for funds. In the catalogs between 1888 and 1891, the myth resides in a section titled “Origin and Needs of the College.” The 1892 and 1893 catalogs place the Whitman myth in a “Concluding Statement.” Not only does this concluding statement ask for funds by emphasizing Marcus Whitman as a “never-ending inspiration to the loftiest ideals of patriotism and Christianity as well as of culture,” but it also points to Cushing Eells as a part of this romantic story. The statement tells of Cushing Eells’ great heart, his place as the most venerable figure in Washington State, and his desire to honor his martyred companion. It describes Eells’ actions as full of “self-denial and diligence, which seem more romantic than real.” The catalog effectively recognizes romantic nature of its own romantic explanation while clinging to the facticity of the events. The romantic Whitman myth helped the College in obtaining funds from East Coast donors, including, but certainly not limited to, Dr. D.K. Pearsons. In fact, G. Thomas Edwards concludes that “Marcus Whitman…may not actually have saved Oregon, but the Whitman myth saved the College.”

58 *Whitman College Catalog*, 1888-89, Whitman College Archives, p. 32.
59 *Whitman College Catalog*, 1892-93, Whitman College Archives, p. 20.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Edwards, p. 145.
Marcus Whitman’s life, a story that a fellow missionary created to avoid embarrassment, proved to be an essential asset to the financial health of Whitman College.

The College kept the story in its catalogs until 1966. This makes sense to a certain extent because of the large influence that Stephen B.L. Penrose had on Whitman College as its president from 1894 to 1934. Penrose was a supporter of the romanticized Whitman myth. He published “Whitman: An Unfinished Story” in 1935, identifying itself as a story and not as a history as such.\(^6\) Even though scholars, historians, and others had questioned the myth for at least a half-century by 1935, Penrose continued to use the myth “because he admired Marcus Whitman and because its repetition provided an opportunity to secure eastern money and thereby save the college.”\(^6\) Not only that, but the Whitman myth provided an excellent reflection of the College’s values. In 1894, at the beginning of Stephen B.L. Penrose’s presidency, the College began using its own consolidated version of the story of Marcus Whitman in its catalog:

Whitman College was founded in the year 1859, by Rev. Cushing Eells, to commemorate the name of Marcus Whitman, M. D. Dr. Whitman came to Washington …in 1836, as a missionary to the Cayuse Indians. By his famous ride across the continent in the winter of 1842-3 he saved Oregon to the United States, and led the first great wagon train of emigrants through the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast. He was murdered by the Indians whom he had come to save on the 29th day of November, 1847. As a patriot, a prophet and a martyr, he will ever be remembered. His place is high among the Nation’s heroes.

Rev. Cusing Eells and his wife came to Washington in 1838. They…spent nine years in preaching the Gospel far and wide. […]Visiting Waiyatpu, the ruined mission settlement of Dr. Whitman, he found a lonely grave into which the bones of all the victims of the massacre had been gathered. As he stood by the grave and meditated upon the heroic character of Dr. Whitman, and the mystery of his untimely fate, he consecrated himself then and there to establish a worthy memorial. He resolved to found a school for both sexes which should bear the name of Whitman, and perpetuate his work. The idea was the germ of Whitman College.\(^5\)

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\(^6\) *Whitman College Catalog*, 1894-95, Whitman College Archives, pp. 8-9.
The College’s version of its history emphasized the role of both Whitman and Eells as missionaries who were “preaching the Gospel.” It also includes Whitman’s saving of Oregon for the United States as part of his appeal. In this first version of the College’s consolidated history of its beginnings, the three words with which it summarizes Marcus Whitman are direct and strong: patriot, prophet, and martyr. In the 1898 catalog, after four years of using the descriptors of patriot and prophet, the College took to calling Whitman “a missionary, a statesman and a martyr.”66 This phrase remained in the catalog for over twenty years. Between 1921 and 1965, the College’s catalog undergoes other small but interesting changes in details of the story itself. Many of these changes reflect the ways that the College emphasized different aspects of the story of Marcus Whitman in order to better represent the College’s values. In 1922, for instance, the College catalog again shifted its descriptors for Marcus Whitman. Instead of describing the roles that Whitman took on during his life, the catalog became more specific about the characteristics that made Whitman worth emulating: his “lofty personal character, his far-sighted vision, and his public spirit, glorified by a martyr’s death.”67 In addition to highlighting and placing value on its interpretation of Marcus Whitman’s character, the College also professed a value of the spread of white Christian civilization. The 1882 catalog expresses the hope that Whitman College will build “a civilization based upon thorough scholarship and Christian principle” in the “new land.”68 In the 1898 catalog, the College explains that Whitman came and “with his wife establish[ed] the first Christian home on the Pacific Coast.”69 The 1902 catalog tells that Marcus Whitman “laid the foundations of Christian civilization” at Waiilatpu, and that Cushing Eells decided to create Whitman Seminary in order to “continue [Whitman’s] work for Christian

At this point, ‘Christian civilization’ implied a white civilization, and one that was inherently superior. The 1929 catalog adds information in order to emphasize the different ways the Whitmans may have accomplished “firsts” for white people in the Northwest. The catalog points to the birth of Alice Clarissa Whitman as “the first white child on the Pacific Coast,” as well as to how Whitman built the first gristmill and schoolhouse. By emphasizing these “firsts,” the College implies that the spreading of white Christian cultural systems should be celebrated. In fact, one of the College’s stated aims from its 1934 catalog is the hope that its students gain an education “That develops the capacity to enjoy and the power to use the intellectual heritage of the race,” presumably referencing Caucasians. Even though minor phrasing and structural changes occurred in the College catalogs between 1882 and 1965, the emphasis on the interpreted values of Marcus Whitman and his Christian culture remains throughout these years. Between 1882 and 1966, the College’s catalogs heralded the values of Christian character, patriotism, and white Christian civilization, and used its version of the romanticized myth of Marcus Whitman in order to flaunt these values as the College’s ideals.

Even if the Whitman myth expressed sincere commitment to Christianity and to the United States, albeit through colonization, eventually these ideals stopped representing the values of the College. Up until 1966, the College catalogs underlined the “gallant attempt of Dr. and Mrs. Whitman to bring the Christian religion to the western wilderness,” and placed religion in the realm of students’ education from the College. However, the 1966 catalog begins to separate the College from Christianity and the other values represented through its constructed

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70 Whitman College Catalog, 1902-03, Whitman College Archives, pp. 9, 10.
73 Whitman College Catalog, 1964-66, Whitman College Archives, p. 3.
Whitman myth.\textsuperscript{74} The College removed from its catalog the Whitman myth of Marcus Whitman saving Oregon and any mention of the Whitmans’ whiteness. Instead of acknowledging that “the College was founded on and is administered under its constitution and by-laws in accordance with the tenets of the Christian religion,”\textsuperscript{75} the 1966 catalog briefly mentions that it has a “Religious counselor” in its Office of Student Affairs.\textsuperscript{76} The College’s values in its catalogs had centered on Christianity, and had promoted white settlement and related patriotism, for over 80 years. Social changes and shifting understandings of how cultures interact prompted the College catalogs to follow suit.\textsuperscript{77}

While the College stopped officially recognizing Christianity as the source of its values, it still needed to present what it did value to potential students and financial contributors. Intellectual ability was and has been an ideal for the College, and so its catalog increasingly promoted the College’s aim “to produce graduates who are equipped with the intellectual ability to cope with any condition, and to help them secure a basis, free of prejudice, on which they can build a lifetime of learning and service.”\textsuperscript{78} The catalogs start looking for ways to focus on different parts of the College’s history in order to parse out ideals that they can salvage and apply to the College today.

What students find at Whitman in the 1990s, as they did in the 1890s, is a closely-knit, nurturing community—a “family”—of dedicated teachers and students working together

\textsuperscript{74} During the late 1960’s, the Whitman College football program was also coming to a close. For further research, it would interesting to look at the romanticizing of “Nig” Borleske and the white masculinity of the sport of American football in order to draw connections between the demise of football at Whitman College and the College’s changing values presented in its catalogs.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Whitman College Catalog}, 1964-66, Whitman College Archives, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Whitman College Catalog}, 1966-68, Whitman College Archives, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{77} There is a variety of important reasons behind this shift that should be researched further. The reasons behind the shift could include but are by no means limited to the personal beliefs and opinions of Whitman College’s presidents and influential leaders or donors, Title IX, globalization, the development of cultural ideas of missionaries, increased awareness of Native American issues, and the so-called political correctness movement.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Whitman College Catalog}, 1970-71, Whitman College Archives, p. 7.
to achieve lives of intellectual vitality, moral awareness, personal confidence, social responsibility, and the flexibility to deal with change.\textsuperscript{79}

In this section of the 1996 catalog, which remains in a similar form in the 2015 Whitman College catalog,\textsuperscript{80} the College underlines that there is still has a connection to its past, but avoids talking about its former ideals. Instead, the College starts to emphasize that the connection between the present Whitman College and the Whitman College of the past lies in its consistent commitment to intellectual approaches and an awareness of morality and character. The College acknowledges that it needs to prepare its students to “deal with change,” and references the importance of change explicitly in its mission statement. The mission statement was first printed in the 1997 catalog and uses similar language to the above 1996 catalog excerpt. The mission statement underlines the importance of intellectual development, but also highlights other characteristics including “confidence, leadership, and the flexibility to succeed in a changing technological, multicultural world.”\textsuperscript{81} The concept of a dramatically changing world is not a concept present in the catalogs from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} to early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, and reflects the College’s efforts to respond to a shifting environment.

As the College catalogs’ references to multiculturalism and a changing world increased, the College provided varying amounts of information about its namesake and its founder. The 1966 catalog calls Marcus Whitman a “medical missionary” who was “martyred,” refers to the Whitmans as “ministering” to the Cayuse, and acknowledges that “discontented extremists among the Cayuse killed Marcus and Narcissa Whitman in a general massacre.”\textsuperscript{82} As the years past, however, the College’s catalog wandered through more accurate interpretations of its

\textsuperscript{79} Whitman College Catalog, 1996-97, Whitman College Archives, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{82} Whitman College Catalog, 1966-67, Whitman College Archives, p. 2.
history and more condensed ones, and recently landed on an interpretation this is both condensed and sanitized. In 1971, the catalog no longer refers to Whitman as a martyr, but still mentions Whitman’s “religious and agricultural work.”83 In 1973, the catalog incorporates information about the measles outbreak that exacerbated tensions at Waiilatpu.84 The reference to the “measles epidemic and other events” remained until 1994, when the College began to condense its history of Marcus Whitman. The 1994 catalog does not give a reason for Whitman’s death, and removes any mention of Christianity. It only leaves the word ‘mission’ in reference to Whitman’s operation of a “medical mission.”85 The condensation of historical information in the catalog continues from there. The 2002 catalog reduces the story of the College’s namesake to a single sentence, telling that the medical missionary Whitmans were killed by Indians.86 The 2003 catalog further condenses the sentence by removing the description of the Whitmans as medical missionaries.87 For each of the following three years, the College’s catalog adds small historical details to its condensed history. In 2004, the catalog again calls the Whitmans “missionaries,” and returns to naming “Indians” as responsible for the Whitmans’ deaths.88 In 2005, the catalog clarifies that the Whitmans were killed by “a small group within a local Indian tribe.”89 The 2006 catalog acknowledges that this group “of individuals” belonged to “the local Cayuse tribe.”90 Even with these clarifying details, however, the history of the College’s namesake was limited to one sentence. Perhaps doing so allowed the College to avoid the necessity of infusing positive moral value into the events that occurred.

83 Whitman College Catalog, 1971-72, Whitman College Archives, p.16.
86 Whitman College Catalog, 2002-03, Whitman College Archives, p. 5.
87 Whitman College Catalog, 2003-04, Whitman College Archives, p. 5.
88 Whitman College Catalog, 2004-05, Whitman College Archives, p. 5.
89 Whitman College Catalog, 2005-06, Whitman College Archives, p. 5.
90 Whitman College Catalog, 2006-07, Whitman College Archives, p. 5.
Whitman College’s 2008 catalog represents a break from the College’s timid and condensed presentation of its history. Instead, the College boldly steps out with a new reinterpretation of Marcus Whitman. While avoiding the subject of who killed the Whitmans and why, the catalog implies that Whitman’s primary motivation for bringing his mission to the Cayuse was to spread literacy. The catalog briefly mentions that Whitman set up a mission, but focuses on the fact that the Whitmans set up a school to “teach the Cayuse Indians to read and write their native language.” While teaching of this sort was a part of the Whitmans’ activities at Waiilatpu, it was hardly the Whitmans’ main goal, that of Christian conversion. This imaginatively interpreted history of the Whitmans gives a nod to cultural sensitivity by noting that the Whitmans taught the Cayuse to read and write in their native languages. It also emphasizes to the catalog’s readers that Whitman College has a long tradition of valuing education. These two values of cultural sensitivity and education are socially acceptable ideals for the College to herald from Marcus Whitman’s historical actions. However, the Christian conversion that the College conveniently leaves out is not culturally sensitive. In the same 2008 catalog, the College also adds a “Statement on Diversity,” pointing to diversity as one of the College’s values because it “enriches our community and enhances intellectual and personal growth” by encouraging personal introspection. This diversity statement is in line with a value on cultural sensitivity. The College perhaps hopes that by upholding diversity as a moral ideal it will better be able to prepare its students for a diverse world.

The current (2015-16) Whitman College catalog utilizes a nearly identical version of the 2008 catalog’s sanitized and socially acceptable interpretation of the history of Marcus Whitman,

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91 Whitman College Catalog, 2008-09, Whitman College Archives, p. 5.
92 Ibid.
93 Whitman College Catalog, 2008-09, Whitman College Archives, p. 4.
as well as maintaining a similar “Statement on Diversity.” It expresses the hope that diversity will “ensure that all individuals are valued and respected and that intellectual and personal growth are enriched because of our differences.” The College hopes that the existence of a more multicultural college, one that reflects and prepares students for a multicultural world, will result in an increase in students’ personal introspection and growth. The College believes that in order for its students to become better global citizens its students need to be able to examine their own contexts and privilege, and how their contexts and privilege affect their interactions with the world more broadly. However, while the College hopes that introspection and acknowledgement of privilege, personal contexts, and other factors by its students will make its students better global citizens, Whitman College does not follow suit. Instead, the College works to bury its complicated and socially insensitive history that ironically is problematic because of its roots in a lack of regard for diversity. By trying to be true to its values of education and cultural sensitivity, the College hypocritically ignores its own context. In order to prepare its students “for citizenship in the global community,” Whitman College needs to set an example for its students to show the necessity of acknowledging its past in order to understand its cultural context, and understand how this context affects its position in the global community.

The historical figure of Marcus Whitman weaves a complicated web of facts, intentions, and myth. His evangelism and expansionism, along with his death on the mission at Waiilatpu,

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95 Ibid.
96 Whitman College Catalog, 2008-09, Whitman College Archives, p. 4.
set the stage for Henry Spalding to create the Whitman myth: the story of Marcus Whitman saving Oregon for the United States before being martyred at the hands of the Cayuse people. The Whitman myth was able to be successfully propagated as a result of the values of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Over the course of Whitman College’s history, a number of influential people supported the Whitman myth, including Whitman founder Cushing Eells and long-time influential Whitman president Stephen B.L. Penrose. The College’s catalog, from its first publishing in 1882 until 1966, used the Whitman myth in order to demonstrate the values of the College. These values included strong Christian character and a related sense of patriotism and expansionism. The Whitman myth became harder for the College to use to represent its values, as it support values such as Manifest Destiny and the positioning of white Christian masculinity against native peoples. Eventually, social awareness became strong enough that the College stopped celebrating the myth within its catalogs. Whitman College then played with various, more socially acceptable interpretations of the actions and death of Marcus Whitman. For a number of years its catalogs gave a wider perspective, explaining the measles outbreak among the Cayuse. However, the College recently decided to try to reinterpret the story to make it represent the College’s values once again. The new focus of the history of Marcus Whitman in the catalogs is on the Whitmans’ attempts to spread literacy to the Cayuse. The College also makes a nod to cultural sensitivity within this history in order to stay in line with its relatively new stated value of diversity. The College catalog currently highlights diversity with the hope that it will ensure personal growth for its students, in order to create better global citizens. However, an essential part of becoming a global citizen is a critical understanding of one’s own context. Whitman hypocritically buries a portion of its context in its catalogs by reinterpreting the story of its namesake in a misleading way, in an attempt to make its history more palatable.
In order to best understand its own context, and show its students what it means to act as an educated global citizen, Whitman College must acknowledge its past, and reflect on how the College’s history affects the current and future position of the College.
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