



The Contemporary and Controversial Issue of Makah Whaling

Whaling has been a traditional practise for many Coastal Native American groups in the East and West to those in Alaska and the Arctic Culture Area for 2,000 years. This case study will focus on the Makah Tribe of Neah Bay on the Northwest Coast of Washington State. The Makah have been hunting whales long before contact with Euro-Americans. The purpose of this case study is to understand the facts concerning whaling and analyse the different points of view. The issue of whaling and whether it is just and humane remains an issue in the media today and tribes continue to defend their right to continue whaling.

PRO WHALING

The Makah Point of View

The Treaty of Neah Bay 1855

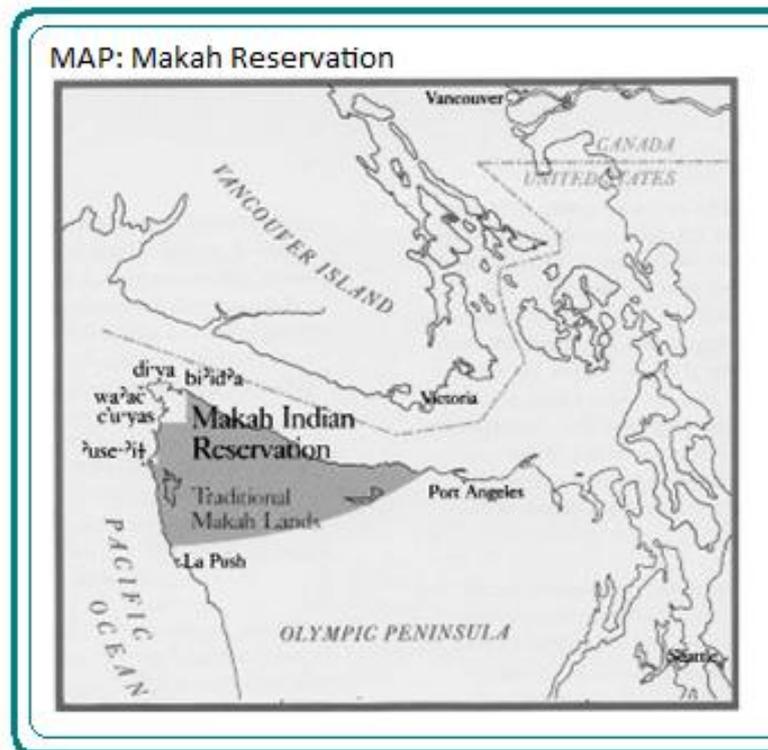
The Makah Tribe agreed with the United States Government to sign the Treaty of Neah Bay in 1855. The US Government signed in exchange for Makah land.

TREATY WITH THE MAKAH, 1855.

Jan. 31, 1855. | 12 Stat., 939. | Ratified
Mar. 8, 1859. | Proclaimed Apr. 18, 1859.

ARTICLE 4.

The right of taking fish and of whaling or sealing at usual and accustomed grounds and stations is further secured to said Indians in common with all citizens of the United States, and of erecting temporary houses for the purpose of curing, together with the privilege of hunting and gathering roots and berries on open and unclaimed lands: *Provided, however,* That they shall not take shellfish from any beds staked or cultivated by citizens.



Section 1 questions:

1. Does the Treaty of Neah Bay agreed in 1855 support or oppose Makah Whaling?
2. What do you think were the motives of the Treaty?

Excerpt 1: The Whale Hunt

"We will conduct it in a way that is as consistent as possible with our traditional manner of whale hunting, but also with the requirement of the International Whaling Commission and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The killing of the whale must be conducted in the most humane manner possible. When whaling on a canoe, the rifleman is stationed on a chaseboat and fires a specially designed .50 caliber rifle soon after the harpoon was thrown to dispatch the whale. This achieves immediate unconsciousness and death of the whale when fired at the target area near the base of the skull. It is the most humane method that can be employed. The carcass was beached at one of the Makah's traditional beaches and whaling family representatives carved the blubber and meat and distributed it in accordance with traditional Makah practice."

Quote taken from the Makah Tribal Council and Makah Whaling Commission January 2005



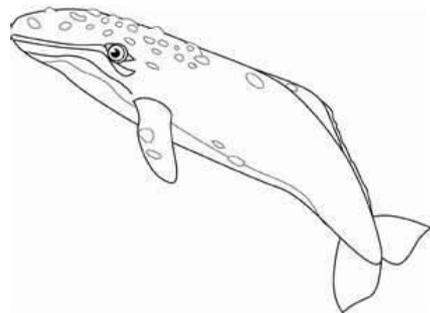
Artefact 1: Amulet of a Gray Whale.

From the Brenchley collection circa.1850



Excerpt 2: Spiritual beliefs. *“Whaling is central to Makah culture and hunting requires rituals and ceremonies that are deeply spiritual. Weeks and months go into the special preparation required before a hunt. Songs eased the paddling. Songs welcomed the whale to the village; welcomed the returning hunters and praised the power that made it all possible.”*

Quote from “Whaling Tradition”, Makah Tribe Website



Gray Whale

Population: 26,000.

Characteristics: Grey skin with light patches, head appears triangular from above, no dorsal fin.

Threats: North Pacific Population was largely destroyed by commercial whaling. It is estimated to be 100 Whales. The North Atlantic population was eliminated by whaling.

Courtesy of Greenpeace Online.

Section 2 questions:

Read Excerpts 1 and 2 written by the Makah Tribal Council and answer these questions.

1. Do you feel the Makah are acting humanely and justly in their harvesting of the Gray Whale? Explain why.
2. What is the one tradition the Makah have changed in their method of hunting? Give evidence.

Look at Artefact 1 from the Brenchley Collection and Excerpt 2.

- a. The Makah have carved the whale as a good luck charm, how do you believe the Whale is treated in Makah culture?

“Our opponents would have us abandon this part of our culture and restrict it to a museum. To us this means a dead culture. We are trying to maintain a living culture. We can only hope that those whose opposition is most vicious will be able to recognize their ethnocentrism—subordinating our culture to theirs.”

From the Makah Tribal Council and Whaling Commission
January 2005



AGAINST WHALING Animal Rights Activists



PAW Activists protesting against Makah Whaling.

Animal rights groups against the continuation of whaling include the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and the Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS). Most activism is directed towards whalers in Japan and elsewhere that sell whale meat and oil to make money. Whale oil is highly sought after to be used on machinery.

PAWS CLAIMS:

- The Progressive Animal Welfare Society distributes fliers in the Neah Bay area against whaling.
- They, like Sea Shepherd, claim the tribe have no need for whaling as they have adapted to modern life and use modern amenities.

SEA SHEPHERD CLAIMS:

- The Makah Tribe intend to conduct commercial whaling by selling meat to Japan.
- Claim the hunt is “slaughter” and conducted in an inhumane manner.
- “The ancestors of the Makah killed whales because they had to do so for survival. There is no survival necessity today to justify such killing”

“Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is opposed in principle to all whaling by any people, anywhere for any reason.”

Quote from “Whaling around the World” <http://www.seashepherd.org/>

Makah Whaling Facts:

- The Makah hunted 1 Gray whale between 1999 and 2000
- The Makah stopped whaling in 1920 due to the scarcity of Gray whales.
- Resumed hunt in 1994 when the Gray whale was removed from the Endangered Species List.
- The IWC – International Whaling Commission – quota allowed the tribe to take 20 gray whales between 2003 and 2007 with a maximum of 5 whales per year.
- Whaling is only permitted by the tribe if there is an unmet traditional subsistence or cultural need for the community.
- No whale meat is allowed to be sold, only artefacts carved by Makah carvers from whale bone.

From the Makah Tribal Council and Makah Whaling Commission – January 2005

Section 3 questions:

Read the “PAWS and Sea Shepherd’s Claims” towards the intention of Makah whaling.

1. Compare this belief with the “Makah Whaling Facts” and “The Treaty of Neah Bay” agreed with the U.S. Government. Explain the two arguments given.
2. **Are you for whaling or against whaling?** Using the case study give evidence and explain your argument.

Read both pink box quotes.

Do you agree with the statement that activists are opposed to whaling by any people and are not targeting Native Americans in particular? What do the Makah tribe mean when they claim activists are Ethnocentric and restricting their culture to museums?