Teacher Resource Information:
Negotiating Cultural Barriers

The common social and governmental attitude during the latter part of the nineteenth century was to assimilate and "civilize" the nation's Native American people. In the years following the Bear River Massacre, leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints also determined assimilation to be in the best interest of the surviving members of the Northwestern Shoshone.

Beginning with the baptism of over 600 Shoshone people in 1875, and continuing for the next 80 years, the LDS church worked closely with the Shoshone to make the difficult transition from their traditional nomadic hunting and gathering cycle to Euro-American culture and agricultural settlement style.

Unfortunately, learning to adapt to the ways of the white world often came at the expense of the people's own Shoshone identity. During the years at the Washakie Farm, well-intentioned white church leaders and school teachers felt the Shoshone's hope for the future required an almost complete break from the ways of the past, which resulted in the loss of language, stories and cultural pride.

The following accounts from members of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation reveal the complexity of straddling these cultural barriers.

As I got older my foster mother decided I was going to be a secretary and needed to learn typing, shorthand—all the things that would give me a good job. When she was trying to prepare me those two years she didn't allow me to sit in the sun; I had to wear long sleeves outside in the summertime. I'd have to wear hats so that the sun didn't get on my face. She was trying to take away the Native American part of me so that I could be better than my people, I guess is how she wanted it. I would have to sit with my elbows in lemons to bleach out my elbows and knees. I wasn't allowed to wear any bright colors. I was allowed to wear dark subdued colors because the bright colors would let people know that I was Native American.

I just existed; just did whatever others told me to do.

Melinda Eagle Dunford
b. 1943-present

I know there was a lot of discrimination in the 1930s. The Indians just didn't blend well with the white society. The white society thought the Indians were a little subhuman; certainly not equal to them. We went on a church outing somewhere in Idaho and on the way back there was a group of us—my brother and I and three Indian boys—in 1930s. We stopped in Pocatello and decided to go to a picture show. Pretty soon the usher came

over and said, "You Indians have to go and sit over here in this corner." I'm sure they treated the reservation Indians the same way. That disgusted me. I was very angry…very disgusted.

Grant Parry
b. 1919-present

Son of Joseph Parry, bishop of Washakie 1930-1939
Married to Mae Timbimboo Parry

My father, Lee Neaman, was born in Washakie, Utah in 1925. He lived there until the start of World War II, among family and friends rich in the oral history of the Shoshone people. He went to war, as did many of the young men in this Indian community. He felt it important for him to defend his country because he was an Indian. This was his land; his ancestors' land. He joined with the same government that had massacred his people at the Battle of Bear River in 1863. He fought in the Philippines and at the end of the war he received a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star, and benefit of the G.I. Bill, which enabled him to enter Utah State University where he graduated in 1952.

Lorena Neaman Washines

Quoted in *The Bear River Massacre*, by Newell Hart

I mostly picked [Shoshone] up by listening. Parents and grandparents taught me. In the home they spoke English and Shoshone together. When talking to Indians we talked Shoshone. In school all English; if we talked Indian in the school, teacher put the persuader to you –"Don't talk Indian no more."

Leland Pubigee
b. 1930-present

The American Indian, believing he was a proud race, was humbled and put to shame. But like all growing things, he sprang up from the humiliation. He did not hang his head down, but he still looked up and forward.

Mae Timbimboo Parry
b. 1919-present