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A bronze monument in downtown's Portland's Chapman Square installed in 1993 commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail by depicting a white pioneer family - father, mother, and son - at the end of their journey. Author Cynthia Culver Prescott says it also enshrines white cultural superiority as well as gender stereotypes.

The Promised Land?

Author traces monuments enshrining stereotypes

In the early 20th century, Portland residents erected public monuments celebrating Sacajawea, the Coming of the White Man, and Oregon Territory's white pioneer mothers.

Similar sculptures soon decorated the University of Oregon campus and the state capitol in Salem. But efforts to mark the 1993 Oregon Trail sesquicentennial with a similar pioneer family monument sparked controversy. Outspoken Portlanders resisted honoring white settlers who took native lands.

Twenty-five years later, as many Americans debate the fate of Confeder-

ate monuments, The Promised Land statue stands hidden in plain sight in Portland's Chapman Square.

Cynthia Culver Prescott, author of the new book *Pioneer Mother Monuments: Constructing Cultural Memory*, will trace shifting public reactions to Portland's pioneer monuments over the past century during a special visit to Portland on Sunday with a free and open to the public discussion at 2 p.m. at the Oregon Historical Society, downtown.

Prescott argues that these pioneer memorials also enshrine white cultural superiority—as well as gender stereotypes.



Cynthia Culver Prescott

Only a few communities have reexamined these values and erected statues with more inclusive imagery.

Oregon Historic Trails Advisory Council member Wendell Baskins, historian Marc Carpenter, along with Prescott will lead a discussion of these monuments' future. Participants will then be invited to walk with the presenters to Chapman Square to view the Promised Land statue with new eyes.

Prescott is associate professor of history at the University of North Dakota. She is the author of *Pioneer Mother Monuments: Constructing Cultural Memory* (2019) and *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (2007).