

# UNDERSTANDING CLIVEN BUNDY: USING NARRATIVE, GEOGRAPHIC, AND VISUAL EMPATHY IN PUBLIC LANDS HISTORY

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In April of 2014, Cliven Bundy's story broke on the national news. For those unfamiliar with the Nevada rancher's name, he is the patriarch of the Bundy family that featured prominently in the armed resistance against federal officials at Bunkerville, Nevada, in 2014, and in the armed occupation of Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016. Federal law enforcement brought charges after these incidents against Bundy and several other members of his family, and they were tried in federal court where an Oregon jury acquitted them and a Nevada federal judge ruled a mistrial. Bundy and his family embody, though to a much greater degree than the norm, ongoing tensions between traditional users of public lands, such as ranchers, and federal land managers tasked with their care.

Several renowned journalists have written books and produced television shows and podcasts about the actions of Bundy and his family, including *Frontline's* "American Patriot"; Leah Sotille's *Bundyville: Season 1*; James Pogue's *Chosen Country: A Rebellion in the West*; John Temple's *Up in Arms: How the Bundy Family Hijacked Public Lands, Outfoxed the Federal Government, and Ignited America's Patriot Militia Movement*; Anthony McCann's *Shadowlands: Fear and Freedom at the Oregon Stand-off*; and Christopher Ketchum's *This Land: How Cowboys, Capitalism, and Corruption are Ruining the American West*. Most of these are serious attempts to understand Bundy and his family's perspective and offer some explanation of his actions. But all of these authors struggled to understand the Bundy family's political and religious legal perspectives on public lands and their governance. They also offer, understandably, unsympathetic judgment of his actions and those of his family.

In the spring of 2014, before the release of any of these studies, I wrote a blog post that tried to make sense of Cliven Bundy and his family. Titled "Understanding Cliven Bundy," the piece was an attempt to move past