

## SUGGESTIONS AND DEBATES

### “These Indians Are Apparently Well to Do”: The Myth of Capitalism and Native American Labor

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**SUMMARY:** In many histories of Native Americans it seems that the original inhabitants of the Americas have become obscured in the national mythology of colonization. People who do not fit into the liberal capitalist notion of individualism and economic development simply vanish from the annals of history. Even histories focused specifically on Native Americans cover relatively little of Indian responses to capitalist development. Yet, in the Pacific north-west, the story is not written so simply; Native Americans responded creatively and eagerly to new economic systems through participation in wage labor and the development of business ventures. This response allowed indigenous people in the region to prosper while protecting culture and tradition.

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Once they were making a railroad through Coyote's place. "I don't want it. Take it away; take your tools and go away," he said. "Don't pay any attention to him," the people said, "Just go ahead and lay the tracks." The workers paid no attention to Coyote and laid the tracks. When Coyote saw it, he said, "Oh, there's a train going through my place now." "Stay right where you are," he said to the train. Then the train and all the people inside it turned into a rock right on the spot. "You stay there forever; you will never move again," Coyote said.<sup>1</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION: A REVISED LOOK AT NATIVE AMERICAN LABOR

As American settlers began to arrive in the Pacific north-west in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Native people of the region found a unique and culturally significant way to explain their changing

1. Related to Thelma Adamson and reproduced in Madronna Holden, "Making All the Crooked Ways Straight": The Satirical Portrait of Whites in Coast Salish Folklore", *Journal of American Folklore*, 89 (1976), pp. 271–293, 289.

world while, at the same time, incorporating these strangers into their lives. That method was through oral tales and folklore. Many traditional tales were reworked to incorporate these new people, so full of strange customs and behaviors. Transformer and trickster figures appear in stories taking on gifts and goods from strangers only later to regret the gifts and goods they have accepted. These narratives illustrate both the incorporation of Anglo goods into Native lifestyles and reveal Native protests against what the acceptance of those goods could often mean.<sup>2</sup>

The story of “Coyote and the Railroad” illustrates several of these themes. It reflects Native recognition and frustration that the world was changing in the second half of the nineteenth century, yet it also records Native peoples’ feeling that they retained the power to halt or reverse those changes. Native Americans attempted to turn the intrusion of non-Natives and their networks to their advantage with differing degrees of success, and to create balance between two not always competing or complimentary cultures and histories. Economics is one of the most often overlooked of those cultures and histories.

In this article, I propose to uncover a portion of this overlooked history in an attempt to demonstrate the significant role participation in migratory and wage labor played in developing the economy of the Pacific north-west as well as providing a tool for the preservation of culture and lifestyles for Native Americans of the region. Specifically, I build upon a recent movement in Native American history which attempts to reassess the views and perspectives of the indigenous people themselves towards the changing colonial economy in the nineteenth and twentieth century. I believe that it is important to reassess the often exclusive discourses in United States history which have divided the study of the past between classes and ethnicities as well as gender. This past exclusivity ensured that Native Americans who participated in wage labor would be viewed as no longer indigenous owing to their involvement in a non-indigenous economic system. But, as I hope to demonstrate, these laborers utilized their involvement in a non-indigenous economic system to preserve access to traditional lands and resources and preserve social, spiritual, and cultural practices which were fast becoming illegal.

I begin by looking at the broader United States history. In many United States histories it seems that the original inhabitants of the Americas become obscured in the national mythology of American history. People who do not fit into the liberal capitalist notion of individualism and economic development simply vanish from the annals of history, though all American labor histories should be complicated by the great ethnic and cultural diversity of the United States. Even histories focused specifically

2. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

on Native Americans cover relatively little of Indian responses to capitalist development. Rarely have Native American histories been included in the metanarrative of twentieth-century American economic history. It is rarer still for their own economic histories to be examined individually for growth and change. This limits our understanding of the costs and benefits of economic change. Much of this has to do with the focus on capitalism as the driving engine of historic economic development in the United States, as well as the cant of conquest, which justified the taking of Native American lands from poor unproductive Indians by superior productive Europeans.

Yet, in the Pacific Northwest the story is not written so simply; perhaps that is part of the reason why the history of the region has yet to be fully developed. The conundrum is that Native American inhabitants practiced many of the same ideologies of economic individualism as immigrating Europeans and Americans, though Native and European ideas on resource use differed greatly. For American Indians, acquiring rights to land and resources as well as wealth through trade was a powerful goal in life, similar to the goals of the new immigrants, though the reasons for acquisition were generally to represent spiritual powers and social status, not for capitalist gain. Production was for the security and subsistence of the group rather than for the marketplace. Economic incentives have long been at work in North America. Yet, general histories view Native American economic imperatives through the trope of the natural native, one trapped in a pristine pre-contact wilderness.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that the lack of Native American labor histories focused on the post-contact era has been rectified in the past decade, yet the historiography is still short. In this essay I attempt to build upon the excellent discourse shifting work growing over the past few decades. In 2011, Alexandra Harmon, Colleen O'Neill, and Paul C. Rosier offered a summary view of American economic histories and their lack of reference to Indian economic contributions.<sup>4</sup> The first major anthology of essays portraying the significant role wage labor played in the lives of Native Americans and thus on the development of American capitalism was compiled by Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack in 1996.<sup>5</sup>

3. See especially Herman Haerberlin and Erna Gunther, *The Indians of Puget Sound* (Seattle, WA, 1952); Wayne Suttles, *Coast Salish Essays* (Seattle, WA, 1987); Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities Around Puget Sound* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); and Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC, 2005).

4. For a further discussion and a historiography on the role of private property and economic incentives in pre-European North American life, see Alexandra Harmon, Colleen O'Neill, and Paul C. Rosier, "Interwoven Economic Histories: American Indians in a Capitalist America", *Journal of American History*, 98 (2011), pp. 698–722.

5. Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack (eds), *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives* (Norman, OK, 1996).

Brian Hosner, Colleen O'Neill, and Donald Fixico edited another series of important essays which introduced readers to the significant role of wage labor in the survival of American Indians in *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the 20th Century*.<sup>6</sup>

The two most groundbreaking works characterizing the ignorance of Indian wage labor in American historiography as part of the ideological foundations upon which social policy toward Native Americans was developed were written by Daniel Usner in 2009, and Alexandra Harmon in 2010. These historians recognize that in American society, one who did not work was not considered a productive member of society. So the myth of the unproductive Indian, relying on handouts from the Bureau of Indian Affairs instead of the sweat of his or her own brow was born. Both works address the key role wage labor played in the ability of Native Americans to retain integral portions of their culture in a colonial world.<sup>7</sup>

The ethnogenesis, or process of distinct cultural development and identity formation for Pacific north-west Native Americans was tied to the process of resisting Anglo encroachment. As they pushed to retain lands and traditions, Native Americans in the Pacific north-west defined themselves, not so much in opposition to colonial forces or immigrating whites, but in their ability to survive and adapt to changing circumstances. I believe one of the cornerstones of this successful resistance and ethnogenesis was based upon their ability to understand aspects of Anglo lifestyles. That knowledge was then used to retain significant spiritual relationships relating to economics and resources. In the words of Colleen O'Neill, "American Indians in the twentieth century blended their modern and traditional worlds as a matter of course and in the process redefined those categories in ways that made sense to them."<sup>8</sup>

Historian Coll Thrush illustrates this idea in his discussion of the foundations of the city of Seattle when he states, "Seattle was dominated by indigenous people, who made it their own, using the new proto-urban venue, with its connections to new trade networks, new forms of political and spiritual power, and new audiences, to enact and even enhance economic, political, religious, and social traditions."<sup>9</sup> In other words this story begins, "by recalling the intellectual history trend that for nearly a

6. Brian Hosner, Colleen O'Neill, and Donald Fixico, *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the Twentieth Century* (Boulder, CO, 2004).

7. For a thorough discussion of language, work and conquest, see Daniel H. Usner, Jr, *Indian Work: Language and Livelihood in Native American History* (Cambridge, MA, 2009). See also Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010).

8. Colleen O'Neill, "Rethinking Modernity and the Discourse of Development", in Hosner, O'Neill, and Fixico, *Native Pathways*, p. 3.

9. Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing Over Place* (Seattle, WA, 2007), p. 42.

century categorized Indians as subject for anthropologists, thus diverting historians' gaze from Indian economic activity and resources".<sup>10</sup>

#### PACIFIC NORTH-WEST NATIVE AMERICANS IN A CHANGING WORLD

The ability of Pacific north-west Native Americans to maintain their place in the Anglo-American wage economy while maintaining a land base allowed Native people to create a degree of visibility. Native Americans in the Pacific north-west remained a constant presence. The federal government and Bureau of Indian Affairs could not simply hope that Pacific north-west Native American people would fade away on distant reservations or become completely acculturated into urban Anglo-American society. Working for pay did not mean that Pacific north-west Native Americans were giving up their culture; in reality, the wages allowed them to retain cultural practices and opportunities for social interaction. Often wage work was a measure of how much access Native people had lost to traditional land- and water-based resources, but it also created a financial supplement that helped maintain traditional lifestyles while surviving in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The nineteenth-century debate about wage slavery focused on the loss of land and resources, which in turn forced artisans to become wage earners.<sup>11</sup> While that was certainly a process for Native American people, many tribes retained title to lands and chose to participate in wage labor to strengthen their access to resources. Working for wages was not the path to slavery and entrapment that eighteenth-century American society believed, but instead a path to freedom. The jobs taken by Native Americans were varied and broad. They did not afford wealth in the Anglo sense, but they afforded a wage, freedom from reservations and Indian agents, and the ability to maintain traditional social status through the generation of wealth and goods and the continuation of the potlatch, a significant gathering in which goods and wealth were ritually redistributed among guests to mark weddings, religious holidays, or simply a gathering of friends and family. Jerry Meeker, a local Native American of mixed tribal heritage is a good example of the broad range of jobs Native Americans found themselves employed in. Beginning in 1882, he worked as a farmer, carpenter, policeman, school employee, and real estate broker.<sup>12</sup>

The fur trade, begun in the early 1800s, introduced the initial changes to the Native American economy and lifestyle of the Pacific Northwest.

10. Harmon, O'Neill, and Rosier, "Interwoven Economic Histories", p. 700.

11. See Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (New York, 1997).

12. Harmon, *Indians in the Making*, p. 170.

The earliest fur traders from the British Hudson's Bay Company and the American Pacific Fur Company simply integrated themselves into the Native trade networks already in place. However, a major shift in the fur trade came with the establishment of permanent forts twenty years later. By the 1820s the Hudson's Bay Company was building several forts in the Region, opening Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River in 1824 as its western headquarters.<sup>13</sup> In 1827, Fort Langley was built about 300 miles north of Fort Vancouver.<sup>14</sup> And in 1833 Fort Nisqually was built near the terminal point of Puget Sound.<sup>15</sup> Over the years more forts were added to the web of trade in the region and a permanent Anglo presence in the Pacific north-west was established with the forts.

The forts brought distant tribes together, sometimes with positive and sometimes negative results. As Native traders waited for their turn with the Hudson's Bay Company traders, they socialized with other men and took up games or gambled in their free time.<sup>16</sup> Old scores might be settled as well, and the tribes whose homelands were nearest to the forts were often wary of the distant tribes they were forced to host on their lands.<sup>17</sup> The fur trade also modified village life, with entire social and village units moving closer to the forts that supplied them with the desired trade goods.<sup>18</sup> Wage employment became more important with the development of the forts as well. Native Americans were employed as guides, mail messengers, and canoeists. At Fort Nisqually, Native men were employed as construction workers, and both men and women were employed as farm hands. These jobs were generally paid in cash wages but could also be paid in goods.<sup>19</sup>

The first non-trading settlement established above the Columbia River was Simon Plomondon's farm. Plomondon had established a nearby farm for the Hudson's Bay Company and settled his own lands in the 1820s.<sup>20</sup> He maintained good relations with local Native Americans and employed many of them on his farm. In 1844 the first overland party of American immigrants reached the Puget Sound from Missouri and, with the help of the Hudson's Bay Company and local Native Americans, survived their

13. Ruth Kirk, *Tradition and Change on the Northwest Coast: The Makah, Nuu-chah-nulth, Southern Kwakiutl and Nuxalk* (Seattle, WA, 1986), p. 214.

14. Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, *Fort Nisqually: A Documented History of Indian and British Interaction* (Tacoma, WA, 1986), p. 26.

15. W.P. Bonney, *History of Pierce County Washington* (Chicago, IL, 1927), p. 12.

16. Carpenter, *Fort Nisqually*, p. 57.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

18. Wayne Suttles, in Morag MacLachlan (ed.) with contributions by Wayne Suttles, *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827–30* (Vancouver, 1998), p. 170.

19. Carpenter, *Fort Nisqually*, p. 44.

20. Robert E. Ficken and Charles P. LeWarne, *Washington: A Centennial History* (Seattle, WA, 1988), p. 21.

first harsh years.<sup>21</sup> The first major party of American settlers to come to the Puget Sound was the Denny party in 1851. Arthur Denny and his family and friends diverted their migration from the Oregon Valley to the Puget Sound region on the advice of a local settler who told Denny that, “the indigenous inhabitants [...] were ‘friendly and they were glad to have the Bostons – as they called the Americans – to come’”.<sup>22</sup> And indeed it seemed they were quite welcome when they finally arrived on 25 September. On the shores of Low Point in the Sound, Denny and his companions were met by Chief Seathl (Seattle) and his men from the Suquamish and Duwamish who greeted the migrants and began helping them to build their lodgings for the price of food and bread.<sup>23</sup>

The Denny settlers soon moved their group to a new site, the place they called New York-Alki, Alki meaning “eventually” or “by and by” in Chinook Jargon – the local trade language made up of several Salish languages, Chinook, French, and English.<sup>24</sup> As the settlers built cabins and worked on creating homes and lives, a town sprang up around them, not of other Anglo settlers, but of local Native Americans who moved to participate in the exciting new venture being created at Alki. As immigration increased, Native Americans found they had to continue to adopt further capitalist ventures to protect their access to land and resources.

One reason Pacific north-west Native Americans were able to navigate the difficult system of state and federal governments and create relationships with officials who worked to protect treaty rights or help in the purchase of land, was due to their continued connection to, and involvement with, the growing Anglo population in the state. As Robert Williams points out in *Linking Arms Together*, indigenous people in the region were not passively waiting for white settlers to appear, instead they were “active, sophisticated facilitators on a multicultural frontier”.<sup>25</sup> Throughout Washington, the presence of the indigenous inhabitants of the region was felt everywhere. In 1862 Seathl and several hundred of his people attended the wedding of Jane Maple and Henry Van Asselt, early Anglo settlers, in Seattle.<sup>26</sup> According to Jane’s mother, Mary Ann Maple, “The greatest of all our greetings came when Chief Seattle [...] with his fifty paddlers came round the bend and sang one of their songs of friendship upon landing in front of the house.”<sup>27</sup> In 1866 an American settler recorded a dance for the display of

21. *Ibid.*

22. Thomas Chambers to Arthur Denny in Thrush, *Native Seattle*, p. 27.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

24. The region is still known as Alki Point today.

25. Robert A. Williams, *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of Law and Peace, 1600–1800* (New York, 1997), p. 29.

26. Thrush, *Native Seattle*, p. 42.

27. Albert Furtwangler, *Answering Chief Seattle* (Seattle, WA, 1997), p. 146.

spirit power songs near Seattle that drew residents of the city and far flung relatives together.<sup>28</sup> Native American groups like the Duwamish, as the founders of the urban places of the region, saw no reason why they should be excluded from those growing towns. The cities were their homelands, and contained opportunities for jobs and wages.

Native Americans of the Pacific north-west refused to be confined to reservations, and federal agents seemed to have had little ability to confine them there.<sup>29</sup> Even after the signing of the treaties and the creation of the reservations in the 1850s, most Pacific north-west Native Americans still followed seasonal migrations, from city to country to reservation in order to find supplemental wage labor. In a report to Congress on the conditions in Indian country in the Washington Territory in 1858, Special Agent for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, J. Ross Browne admitted that, “the Sound Indians cannot be made to understand why government should take their country away from them and then compel them to work for a living. They say government deprived them of their natural heritage [...]. If they work, they must be paid for it.”<sup>30</sup>

Local Indians preserved the old practices of migrating to follow productive labor areas rather than farming, ranching, or remaining on reservation lands.<sup>31</sup> And trade was conducted as usual, much to Browne’s chagrin, since it meant that the Puget Sound Indians were not confined to reservations and were in regular contact with their old British trading partners and local Americans.<sup>32</sup> By the 1860s, working for wages had become a regular part of the Indian economy.<sup>33</sup> Other methods of incorporating wage labor with traditional patterns of movement included selling baskets, chopped wood, and other goods by canoe and in various settlements; employment as hunting guides and farm laborers; and work as managers or foremen at mills and lumber yards.<sup>34</sup>

While many Pacific north-west Native Americans removed to the various reservations, many more remained on their traditional off-reservation

28. Caroline Leighton, quoted in Thrush, *Native Seattle*, p. 43.

29. See especially Kenneth D. Tollefson, “The Political Survival of Landless Puget Sound Indians”, *American Indian Quarterly*, 16 (1992), pp. 213–235; Russell Lawrence Barsh, “Puget Sound Indian Demography, 1900–1920: Migration and Economic Integration”, *Ethnohistory*, 43 (1996), pp. 65–97; and Brad Asher, *Beyond the Reservation: Indians, Settlers, and the Law in Washington Territory, 1853–1889* (Norman, OK, 1999).

30. J. Ross Browne, *Letter from the Secretary of the Interior, Transmitting, in Compliance with the Resolution of the House of Representatives of the 19th Instant, the Report of J. Ross Brown, Special Agent, on the Subject of Indian Affairs in the Territories of Oregon and Washington*, 35th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, Ex. Doc. #39, 23 January 1858, p. 6.

31. The Yakima and Lummi reservations both contained productive agricultural lands.

32. J. Ross Browne, *Letter from the Secretary of the Interior*, p. 14.

33. Tollefson, “The Political Survival of Landless Puget Sound Indians”.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 217.



homelands. In the 1850s and 1860s, as Anglo settlers arrived in greater numbers in Washington Territory, American Indian communities worked to incorporate them into their kinship and economic networks. For some of the first settlers, the draw to become part of this network was for wives, both for companionship and for the access to resources that their wives brought with them. Anglo settlers like John Wilson, William Kayton, and Jim Abbott all married into the Skagit Indian community in order to become part of the family, and through becoming part of the family, gaining land rights structures in the community.<sup>35</sup> Because they were accepted as family, they were granted large tracts of land in Puget Sound and their farms and lumber mills were allowed to exist in a community that had never practiced those industries before.

As a result, the lumber and farming industries were the first introduction to working for wages that many Pacific north-west Native Americans had. These small farms and businesses became places of employment for Indians who gathered there to visit family and friends. In the 1850s lumber mills were the main source of employment in the region for Anglo and Native alike.<sup>36</sup> For instance, around Seattle, Henry Yesler built a sawmill where, “white men, Indians, Chinamen, and Kanaks (Hawaiians) worked side by side and boarded at the Company’s cook-house”.<sup>37</sup>

John Fornsby, a Skagit born in 1855, remembered his time working at the lumber camp of his Anglo namesake, John Fornsby. He did not need the employment, but he liked to learn new skills and he enjoyed the company of his employer. While working for wages, he still spent much of his time traveling in his canoe, visiting friends and potlatches, as well as gathering fish. Fornsby viewed his employment at the mill camp as just one more stop on his migratory routes and the people at the camp as members of his extended family. According to historian Russell Lawrence Barsh, “Coast Salish did not have to choose between cultures; they could work in a sawmill during the week and go to a longhouse on the weekend, just hours away by boat or train.”<sup>38</sup> Wage-earning Indians did not abandon traditional fishing and gathering methods, they retained them. John Fornsby recalled, “Working in a camp with my cousin in Tulalip. Then I went with his folks to dig clams near Coupeville. Then we went to [...] the place where the fishermen stay.”<sup>39</sup> Fornsby also cut

35. Harmon, *Indians in the Making*, p. 307.

36. See Henry Pennier, *Chiefly Indian: The Warm and Witty Story of a British Columbia Half Breed Logger*, Herbert L. McDonald (ed.) (Vancouver, 1972).

37. Edith Redfield in Thrush, *Native Seattle*, p. 47.

38. Barsh, “Puget Sound Indian Demography”, p. 89.

39. John Fornsby, quoted in Marian W. Smith (ed.), *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, (New York, 1949), p. 314.

timber on his own account and traveled by boat selling his wood to the highest bidder.<sup>40</sup>

Many traditional Native industries were strengthened by the Anglo presence, even becoming new wage-earning opportunities. Duwamish men served as hunting guides around the Seattle area, retaining family knowledge about the best areas for game to the present day.<sup>41</sup> They represent the ability of Native people to adapt their traditional economic activities to the new reality of the American settlers' lifestyle. Another example involves rendering dogfish oil. This had been a family or sometimes village task and Native peoples used the oil as flavoring for foods and for fires. In the 1870s dogfish oil became an important source of lamp oil, substituting for whale oil, which was fast becoming over-hunted, and production rose to meet the demands. Many of the factories that sprang up to produce oil were Anglo owned, but employed almost all Native workers.<sup>42</sup> Clamming and the collecting of oysters were also growing businesses in the Pacific north-west and once again they employed largely Native labor.<sup>43</sup>

Some Native individuals, families and tribes created their own commercial entities in response to new economic opportunities. These entities were not "derivatives of a culture-corrupting capitalist model", but were "ventures shaped by Indian cultural heritage".<sup>44</sup> New types of fishing and hunting were developed or expanded to draw in more dollars. The Makahs began sealing operations in the 1860s. By 1887 the business was so successful that they could purchase five schooners.<sup>45</sup> By 1894 the Makah fleet was reported as having taken more than 2,203 seals.<sup>46</sup> In addition to sealing, the Makahs continued to make a profit from whaling, while respecting their ancient whaling traditions through the continuation of specific whaling ceremonies and rituals. Indians, like the Quileute from Gray's Harbor, began catching sea otter around the 1860s for the fur market.<sup>47</sup> Other tribes like the Klallams also purchased

40. John Fornsby, quoted in Smith, *Indians in the Making*, p. 320.

41. Tollefson, "The Political Survival of Landless Puget Sound Indians", p. 217.

42. Kirk, *Tradition and Change on the Northwest Coast*, p. 218.

43. Daniel Boxberger, "In and Out of the Labor Force: The Lummi Indians and the Development of the Commercial Salmon Fishery of North Puget Sound, 1880-1900", *Ethnohistory*, 35 (1988), pp. 161-190, 166.

44. Harmon, O'Neill, and Rosier, "Interwoven Economic History", p. 714.

45. Sealing was already greatly affected by the early fur trade. Firms began to request and trade for seal furs, and commercial sealing boats began plying the waters and employing Native deck hands. These new ships traveled far and wide and brought together diverse Native employees from all over the region and from various tribes together to one place; Tollefson, "The Political Survival of Landless Puget Sound Indians", p. 179.

46. "Indian Seal Hunters", in *The Northwest Magazine*, July 1894.

47. John Brown and Robert Ruby, *Indians of the Pacific Northwest* (Norman, OK, 1981), p. 177.



Figure 1. An Indian whale hunter, Lighthouse Joe, with whale hunting canoe, harpoon, and seal floats, 1910.

Photograph: Asabel Curtis. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Curtis 19217, NA568. Used with permission.

schooners in order to compete in the new seal fur industry.<sup>48</sup> These tribes stood their ground against encroaching Anglos in the market for otter furs.<sup>49</sup> Native men who could not afford their own ships could find employment on the sealing, whaling, and otter ships owned by other Natives and by Anglos. The men worked as deck hands and seal, whale, or otter hunters, and became expert navigators on those ships.<sup>50</sup> And as Native Americans worked on ships for longer and longer, they worked their way up the ladder to higher paying skilled positions.<sup>51</sup>

In the Pacific north-west, because labor performed by Native Americans was generally physical or manual, their lives were viewed by whites as on the margins of capitalist society and thus seemed to reiterate stereotypes of the idle savage. Owing to racism, manual labor was often the only employment field open to Native Americans, or it was the preferred method of employment because it allowed for the retention and practice

48. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

50. *Report of the Governor of Washington Territory* (Washington DC, 1878–1889), p. 35.

51. Barsh, “Puget Sound Indian Demography”, p. 83.

of traditional migratory patterns and lifestyles.<sup>52</sup> Yet, in the Pacific north-west, Anglo-Americans seemed to admire the work ethic of Native Americans. The superintendent of Indian Affairs wrote in 1872 that Indians working in canneries, mills, homes, and other industries were, “getting the highest wages paid to whites”, and had “an abundance of the necessaries of life”.<sup>53</sup> According to anthropologist Marian Smith, one reason Pacific north-west Native Americans were able to adapt and thrive in the new labor market brought to the region by foreigners was, “that they already possessed a high degree of specialization. Faced with specialization in the new economy they were able, therefore, to make the relatively minor adjustments required.”<sup>54</sup> Puget Sound Indians adapted to the wage economy introduced by Anglos in part due to their use of the currency of dentalium shells for trade before contact. Greenbacks, nineteenth-century slang for United States currency, were just a new form of currency in a society that had been utilizing currency for centuries.<sup>55</sup>

While some forms of labor were traditional, like fishing, the settlers brought with them new types of employment. Wealthier settlers like the Dennys employed local Native American women in their homes as domestic servants. Often both the employees and the employers considered themselves to be close friends, as in the case of a Native housekeeper named Janey Davis, who was employed by one of Seattle’s leading residents, the early settler, David Denny.<sup>56</sup> Janey’s parents, John and Madeline, were good friends with David’s nephew, Orion O. Denny. Domestic labor was an important source of income for Native American women, granting them independence in the wage labor market.<sup>57</sup>

Logging also presented a good wage opportunity in the Pacific north-west. According to mixed-race logger Henry Pennier, “The logging business can mean a really good life and good pay for an Indian who wants to spend his life at it”.<sup>58</sup> Logging employed numerous Native American men, and it fuelled the mining operations in eastern Washington, which also employed many Indian men. Tribes also ran their own logging businesses on reservation lands. In the post-treaty decades of the 1860s and 1870s both the Tulalip and Skokomish reservations had opened profitable logging operations. However, in 1873 the Secretary of the Interior ordered the

52. See especially Thrush, *Native Seattle*, and Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*.

53. Harmon, *Indians in the Making*, p. 106.

54. Smith, *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, p. 9.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

56. Newspaper clipping from the scrapbook of Clarence Bagdley, University of Washington Special Collections.

57. Thrush, *Native Seattle*, p. 73.

58. Pennier, *Chiefly Indian*, p. 90.

operations shut down due to the federal government's desire to make all business contracts involving natural resources on reservation lands. The order was revoked after Tulalip and Skokomish tribal leaders protested in Washington DC that the government had ordered them to improve reservation lands and that logging was doing just that.<sup>59</sup>

Logging and mill work were two of the most popular wage jobs in the Pacific north-west. Native Americans also worked, "not only as unskilled laborers but as expert fisherman and lumbermen, as foremen, and in other positions of responsibility".<sup>60</sup> Construction was another popular job on both private and public works, including the lighthouse at LaPush. Trips aboard American and British trading, lumber, and fishing vessels as sailors and crew gave local Native Americans the ability to earn cash and to see the world. Not only did Native Americans work as laborers and craftsmen, but they were also employed in law enforcement in the region. In August 1877, *The Daily Pacific Tribune* reported the case of several stage robbers being apprehended by Deputy Sheriff Hendricks and "two Indians". While the Indian employees are not named, the article goes on to explain how the Indians found and apprehended the robbers by chasing them down at gunpoint and taking them into custody.<sup>61</sup> Native men also worked as mail carriers before the mail service became formalized in the region, carrying mail from one town to the next via canoe. In later years Native Americans also filled the official posts of mail carrier. A local Salish man, Jimmie Jackson, became famous in his own time for having survived his trip into the Yukon in 1877 to carry mail to the miners during a terrible winter storm. On his return to Seattle he was widely praised and wined and dined as the "bravest" mail carrier and as "quite a hero".<sup>62</sup>

#### TRADITIONAL RESOURCE - NEW ECONOMIC ROLE

But by far, the largest economic resource for Pacific north-west Native Americans remained in the oceans and rivers. Throughout the nineteenth century, fishing remained of central importance to the economy and culture of Pacific north-west Native Americans.<sup>63</sup> Tribes like the Makah, on the Pacific Ocean, and the Puyallup, on the Puget Sound, still utilized traditional methods of catching fish with nets and spears. They also retained traditional rituals, like the first salmon ceremony to bless the harvest of fish. Fish were still utilized as a trade commodity. Fish also

59. Asher, *Beyond the Reservation*, pp. 46-47.

60. John Fornsby, quoted in Smith, *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, p. 6.

61. *The Daily Pacific Tribune*, 8 February 1877, p. 3.

62. *The Seattle Post Intelligencer*, 1896, taken from the scrapbooks of Clarence Bagdley.

63. Boxberger, "In and Out of the Labor Force", p. 169.

became important as an item for sale. From the 1870s on Pacific north-west Native American fishermen and women sold their catch to the canneries, which had sprung up across the region. Canneries also hired mainly American Indian laborers and so became prime wage-earning locations as well as social networking spots where Native people from different tribes and from all across the region came together. Native American fishermen were not only producers in the fishing industry – they were consumers as well. The fishing economy was a place where all cultures came together, and John Fornsby recalled buying inexpensive fish from white fishermen.<sup>64</sup> The fishing industry in the Pacific Northwest allowed Native Americans to retain a traditional way of life in a changing world.

The cannery best exemplifies the unification of traditional Indian labor practices and the Anglo market economy. The first salmon cannery on the Columbia River was opened in 1866 by the Hume brothers with partner Andrew Hapgood at Eagle Cliff.<sup>65</sup> From that point on, salmon canneries sprang up all across the Puget Sound, spreading to Blaine, Friday Harbor, and Bellingham.<sup>66</sup> In 1877 one of the largest salmon canneries in the region was built at Muckilteo by Jackson, Meyers and Company. By 1878 the demand for Columbia River salmon was so large across the globe that the number of canneries on the river had jumped to over five. While much of the “difficult and dirty” work at the canneries was done by Chinese employees, who could be employed for less, local Native Americans remained the majority of the workforce at the canneries. After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, their employment numbers increased.<sup>67</sup>

These canneries relied almost exclusively on Indian labor in their first decades and continued to utilize Indian labor until their decline in the 1950s. Indians both supplied the canneries with the fish they needed and worked at processing and packing fish in the plants themselves. This integration into a commercial fishing and canning industry created financial as well as social benefits for Native Americans. The wages were generally good and, because fishing was a traditional lifestyle, the ability to fish and make money from it allowed Pacific north-west Indians to participate in the new economy introduced by Anglo settlers without having to give up traditional lifestyles. The constant movement required for salmon fishing gave many Puget Sound Indians a level of freedom and independence from Indian agents not enjoyed by people on reservations. Fishermen could visit friends and family on their migrations. One agent

64. John Fornsby, quoted in Smith, *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, p. 326.

65. Kit Oldham on HistoryLink.org [www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=8036](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=8036); last accessed 2 August 2007.

66. Boxberger, “In and Out of the Labor Force”, p. 169.

67. Kit Oldham on HistoryLink.org.

noted the fishermen and women were, “more independent and show less inclination to cultivate their land”.<sup>68</sup> Another draw for working in the canneries was the higher wages they offered. While Native Americans generally received the same wages as Anglos in the Pacific north-west, they sometimes received more. At Blaine, a cannery owned by the Alaska Packers Association employed a workforce of about one-third Native Americans from the Pacific north-west. It paid its Native workers more than the Anglos they worked with.<sup>69</sup>

Puget Sound Native people found many employment opportunities based near where they lived. For urban Indians, domestic labor for both men and women was practical and easy to find. For coastal tribes, fishing or cannery work still predominated. In places where mills were built, like the city of Everett, Washington, Indians from the Tulalip reservation found easy commutes to and from work. Native Americans east of the Cascades, most notably around Colville, were also noted for their mining activities.<sup>70</sup> And as new Anglo-American institutions were created, like the Navy yards in Bremerton, founded in 1891, Native Americans migrated to those areas to find employment there.<sup>71</sup> In 1890, BIA field Inspector Gardner stated in an official report,

These Indians are workers and not lazy or leading lives of idleness and dependency. Numbers of them are working in the woods, and at the various saw-mills on the Sound, and as they are good workers they receive the same compensation as white laborers [...]. These Indians are apparently well to do. They dress well, have an abundance to eat, and the majority of them have more or less money.<sup>72</sup>

Pacific Northwest Native Americans found jobs and utilized wage labor in order to maintain their independence and to make the best of a changing world. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Puget Sound Native Americans faced an Anglo-American population who pressured the federal and state governments to move Native Americans on to reservations – a move that would force Pacific north-west Native Americans to become dependent on government handouts and would destroy their freedom and independence. Many newer settlers were uncomfortable with the presence of the original inhabitants of the land in their midst. They were conflicted in their desire to retain Native American wage laborers in their homes and their mills, with

68. Lummi Indian Agent, 1891, quoted in Boxberger, “In and Out of the Labor Force”, p. 171.

69. 1918–1920 records of the Alaska Packers’ Association, in Barsh, “Puget Sound Indian Demography”, p. 68.

70. Asher, *Beyond the Reservation*, p. 55.

71. Barsh, “Puget Sound Indian Demography”, p. 77.

72. Inspector Gardner in Harmon, *Indians in the Making*, pp. 169–170.

their desire to see cities like Seattle become more like cities to the east. They wanted to make Seattle into an Anglo city. In 1865 an ordinance was passed which banned Native Americans from Seattle. The ordinance was not enforced, but it increased racial tensions and illustrated the changing nature of Anglo-American attitudes toward Native Americans.<sup>73</sup>

Native American communities struggled to retain their lands in the growing cities and to maintain farms and fishing sites. In an effort to hold on to lands, some secured Anglo-American-style title to their lands through the Indian Homestead Act of 1875. But even holding title did little to save Native Americans from greedy Anglos. Because homestead holders often worked hard to clear their lands and raise crops, they created profitable farms. Incoming Anglo-American settlers who had little desire to do the hard labor of clearing and planting simply rounded up like-minded men and, with the blessing of the Indian Department, violently chased Native landholders from their homes.<sup>74</sup> Where the Anglo-American population managed to push them off their lands, Native Americans moved to more remote areas and maintained independence by creating new communities centered around traditional and newly introduced economic endeavors.

Tribes such as the Klallams, who remained on their traditional lands, made social and economic adaptations in order to survive. In 1874 James Balch and twelve other Klallam families purchased the town site of Jamestown.<sup>75</sup> The town soon became quite prosperous as individuals and families worked on farming and trading enterprises. Houses were built in traditional Klallam fashion with a single row of structures facing the water, yet individual families farmed their own plots of land.<sup>76</sup> Jamestown became home to the first church in the county and was attended by a mixed group of Klallams, Makahs, and Anglos, even though many of the Klallams did not consider themselves Christian.<sup>77</sup> By the 1880s the federal government had agreed to provide the Jamestown community with a school and teacher.<sup>78</sup> Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century, Jamestown remained a model of economic success and cultural survival for Pacific north-west Native Americans. Farming went hand in hand with fishing and other new industries sprang up, such as crabbing. Native residents found employment in local sawmills and on friends' fishing boats and enjoyed comfort

73. Raimbon, *Authentic Indians*, p. 94.

74. Ficken and LeWarne, *Washington: A Centennial History*, p. 54.

75. L. L. Langness in Jay Miller and Carol M. Eastman, *The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors on the North Pacific Coast* (Seattle, WA, 1984), p. 264.

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 267.



and respect in their community. Potlatching and secret societies existed side by side with Christianity and the Shaker Church, an innovative Native religion that combined practices of Christianity with traditional Salish spiritual elements.<sup>79</sup>

#### STRUGGLES OVER LAND AND RESOURCES

Tensions between Anglo and Native American land holders continued to grow – both in the cities and in rural areas. In the 1890s, racist Anglos in Seattle burned down the dwellings of the Duwamish still living in the city, scattering the population throughout the Puget Sound. After the burning and loss of their homes and their forcible expulsion from Seattle, one group of Duwamish migrated to the less populated Bremerton area and set up a logging operation.<sup>80</sup> From 1890 to 1940, the Sackman community, named for its founder, combined traditional fishing and shellfish gathering with logging and outside seasonal wage labor to create a stable, self-sufficient, and tradition-oriented society. The colony was founded by Daniel Sackman and Maria Sanchos and was made up of intermarried Anglos and Duwamish. Eventually Daniel and Maria's son Isaac felt that there was too much white influence in the colony and so he moved with several other members to a new neighborhood where they felt they could celebrate their culture in peace.<sup>81</sup>

Another Duwamish community was formed by Asa Fowler and Sclochsted, or Susan Jacobs, a daughter of Chief Seealth. The couple was forced to move out of the city of Seattle owing to their being ostracized for their interracial marriage. The changing attitudes toward interracial marriage in the Pacific north-west in the 1880s and 1890s illustrate the hardening of Anglo racial attitudes during that era. In order to escape, Asa and Susan moved to Bainbridge Island with several friends and family members and began a logging operation.<sup>82</sup> In 1919, most of these non-reservations Indians had managed to maintain most of their traditional

79. Though the Shaker Church is a significant creation in Pacific Northwest Native American history, thanks to its combined use as protest and accommodation, other anthropologists (Wayne Suttles, Erna Gunther) have written quite extensively on the subject. The study of the Shaker Church is outside the purview of this work. The Shaker Church could be found in Native American communities all across Washington and became an institution that helped foster tradition and maintain culture and spirituality in an ever-changing environment. The Shaker Church was founded in 1882 by John Shaker who “died” and was reborn more than once. The Church combined both traditional spiritual and Christian practices in the form of seeking the help of spirits through ceremony and living a clean honest life. Shakers could be found healing and curing people much like traditional shamans. The religion quickly spread across the Puget Sound through family members and migratory labor.

80. Tollefson, “The Political Survival of Landless Puget Sound Indians”, p. 214.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

lifestyles. They were described as “still living under true Indian conditions”,<sup>83</sup> practicing the potlatch, celebrating the first salmon ceremony, passing on ancient songs and stories, and living with large extended families in one house.

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, Puget Sound Native Americans began to rely more heavily on wage-earning jobs, as they found it more difficult to gain access to natural resources. But, wages were not just for the basics of life; cash wages helped buy land and maintain personal choices in lifestyles. According to Jim Lightner, who wrote a letter to a friend on the Tulalip reservation in 1873,

I have got a \$100 job of grubbing stumps that will take me about one month to finish. I have bargained for a lot in Swantown for \$80, and am going to improve it and live on it like a white man. Susan gets plenty of washing to do and we are getting along very well.<sup>84</sup>

Cash was not just associated with wage labor either. Many Native Americans earned money in more traditional pursuits. John Fornsby's father earned good money selling skins from deer and bears to the mills which used them for equipment.<sup>85</sup> Wages also came in non-cash form. John Fornsby helped build a dike at La Conner and while working on the dike was paid in “land, clothing”. And at the end of the 100 days he worked, he was paid in, “twenty acres of timber-land and tide lands”.<sup>86</sup>

In Indian communities wage-earners became the core of larger distribution units. Wages came back to the family core and from there, traveled though and strengthened important tribal and familial alliances. Capitalism and accumulation of wealth was encouraged, though it was balanced with older notions of reciprocity and social responsibility. Native Americans in the Pacific north-west became incorporated into the growing wage economy of the late nineteenth century as laborers. They also incorporated the wage economy into their traditional social and economic activities in innovative ways. Native shamans and healers worked for wages, incorporating cash into traditional social activities. John Fornsby made over \$100 for singing one guarding power song to help heal a sick man.<sup>87</sup> He recalled another shaman working in the hop fields, who “made money fast”<sup>88</sup> by healing hop pickers.

The new widespread Native American participation in the cash economy and wage labor of the 1890s supported and augmented older traditions such as the potlatch. Fornsby recalled his father's potlatches near the end of the

83. From the 1919 Roblin enrollment data in *ibid.*, p. 223.

84. Jim Lightner, quoted in Harmon, *Indians in the Making*, p. 106.

85. John Fornsby, quoted in Smith, *Urban Indians of the Pacific Northwest*, p. 295.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 330.

nineteenth century. Instead of giving away gifts at his potlatches, he gave away cash, transforming an old tradition into part of the cash economy. Between himself and his brothers, Fornsby's father gave away \$600 at one time.<sup>89</sup> In the words of historian Colin Calloway, "Indians were [...] not passive recipients of European goods. They used European goods to elaborate traditional objects and complicate traditional crafts; unbound by European custom, they devised new meanings and uses for them."<sup>90</sup>

*The Seattle Post Intelligencer* celebrated the size of a potlatch in 1907 held in Auburn to honor one of Chief Sealth's descendents. According to the paper, over 200 friends and family gathered on "John Seattle's" farm to honor the memory of his son in traditional fashion.<sup>91</sup> The paper lauded another potlatch in the same year near Olympia. The potlatch was hosted by "Mud Bay Sam", and drew Native Americans from all over the Pacific north-west, including such notables as Alice Bill James, who recently had hosted a large potlatch of her own, and Jim Tobin, identified as the "oyster baron" of Mud Bay.<sup>92</sup> Money obtained through wage work and channeled into potlatch celebrations merged traditional and capitalist values of independent achievement with social responsibility and group cohesion.

In 1915 Indian farmer-in-charge Joe Shell wrote to Superintendent Charles Buchanan summing up the role of the wage economy in the lives of reservation Indians:

It seems that soon after the first of June, the majority, in fact nearly all of these Indians, will leave the reservation to work in the canneries or hopfields [...]. I am not surprised that the Indian consigns his garden patch to oblivion and goes to the cannery or hopfield where he is assured of fair pay; where he knows he will meet his friends and relatives; and where he has actual monetary evidence of the results of his week's work.<sup>93</sup>

The most popular form of employment that took Native Americans from reservations into the heart of the capitalist economy was picking hops. The Pacific north-west's rich soil was perfect for growing hops – a key ingredient in making beer. In 1882, the Hops Growers' Association was incorporated in Seattle.<sup>94</sup> They would later own and cultivate over 300 acres of land. In 1883 the first brewery was built in the Duwamish region by John Claussen and Edward Sweeny. Their Rainer Beer was

89. John Fornsby, quoted in Smith, *Urban Indians of the Pacific Northwest*, p. 316.

90. Colin Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore, MD, 1998), quoted in Harmon, O'Neill, and Rosier, "Interwoven Economic Histories", p. 707.

91. *The Seattle Post Intelligencer*, 1907; taken from the personal notebooks of Clarence Bagley, University of Washington Special Collections.

92. *Ibid.*

93. Joe L. Shell in Barsh, "Puget Sound Indian Demography", p. 69.

94. Ada S. Hill, *A History of the Snoqualmie Valley*, (North Bend, WA, 1970), p. 56.



Figure 2. Hop-pickers with baskets and hop boxes, on an unidentified farm, probably Puget Sound region, Washington, c.1900. On the left are a small group of Indian hop-pickers.

Photograph: Wilhelm Hester. *University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Hester [10126]. Used with permission.*

instantly popular and relied on hops grown in local fields.<sup>95</sup> Farms spread all around the Sound initially, and later into eastern Washington. The main marketing center was Puyallup, where Ezra Meeker built his farm – the Puyallup Hop Company. And by the 1880s he and his fellow farm owners were employing around 3,000 Native Americans a season.<sup>96</sup> Hops cultivation soon spread east of the Cascades into the Yakima region and by 1888 over 2,000 acres of lands in Washington were being cultivated.<sup>97</sup>

Hop-picking became an important source of employment for Pacific north-west Native Americans in years when salmon runs were lean or resources hard to come by. Wages from picking hops could support a family for almost an entire year. Indians gathered and socialized in the hop fields with far-flung family and friends every fall and earned cash.<sup>98</sup> Hop-picking gave them freedom which facilitated the traditional social fluidity and interaction that had marked their earlier history. As Native Americans from across the region migrated to and from fields to work, they stopped in cities along the way to sell crafts and wares. They also visited various traditional fishing and hunting grounds.<sup>99</sup> Marriages were

95. HistoryLink.org, The Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History, “Turning Point 15: Seattle’s Other Birthplace: From Hop Field to Boeing Field”: [http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=3579](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=3579); last accessed 2 August 2007.

96. Michael A. Tomlan, *Tinged With Gold: Hop Culture in the United States* (Athens, GA, 1992), p. 34.

97. Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, p. 76.

98. Boxberger, “In and Out of the Labor Force”, p. 171.

99. Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, p. 99.

celebrated across tribal lines and new “alliances” were celebrated as, “all, little and big, young and old, go to the hop fields”.<sup>100</sup> The famous Klallam leader, Prince of Wales, recalled the hop-picking season and the vast number of Native Americans who arrived from all over. “Their canoes [...] were hauled up on the beaches below Point Hudson by the hundreds, and for several weeks our people made good money picking hops.”<sup>101</sup> In 1878 so many Native American pickers turned out in Sumner, Washington for the picking season, that nervous Anglos ordered a military company of sixty-four men to the area to “preserve the peace”.<sup>102</sup> (No conflicts ever broke out between the military and the hop-pickers.)

It was in the canneries and the hop fields and at the continuing potlatches that the new Pan-Indianism of the Pacific north-west had its origin. People from all over the region came together at places such as canneries and potlatches and created a new, shared identity that was broader than traditional kinship or natural resource access. This new identity was based on survival and a Native culture that was very different from Anglo culture. Native Americans of the Pacific north-west had been segregated and sequestered, lumped together as one whole in the minds of their Anglo-American neighbors and in the policies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, instead of as the individual communities they were. The loss of their lands and assaults on their culture brought enormous trauma to Native peoples, but ironically, the newly imposed identity of simply “Indian” (or the derogatory “siwash,” as the Anglo-American settlers dubbed Native Americans), fostered a new kind of identity. On the hop fields and in the canneries Native Americans from all over the state of Washington, and eventually from Alaska, British Columbia, and Oregon as well came together as a people who had survived enormous odds and who would continue fighting for their rights and their culture. While some of these struggles were more successful than others, they all illustrate the aspect of cultural survival and pride that marks the history of Native Americans in the Pacific north-west.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Native Americans of the Pacific north-west continued to do what they had done for centuries. They retained their culture and traditions through selective integration of Anglo ways and by adapting their own cultures as well. However, the early twentieth century also saw these earlier adaptive methods and survival techniques losing their strength. Capitalism developed monopolies and small business owners were forced out of the market.<sup>103</sup> As historian

100. Lummi Indian Agent, 1895, in Boxberger, “In and Out of the Labor Force”, p. 171.

101. Prince of Wales interview in Jerry Gorsline (ed.), *Shadows of Our Ancestors: Readings in the History of Klallam-White Relations* (Port Townsend, WA, 1992), p. 216.

102. *Washington Standard*, 17 August 1878, p. 4.

103. See James A. McDonald, “Social Change and the Creation of Underdevelopment: A Northwest Coast Cast”, *American Ethnologist*, 12 (1994), pp. 152–175.

Alexandra Harmon notes, wealth was a means to keep the larger group together:

It was not a taste for wealth that Indians had to develop in order to be more like enterprising Whites; it was the habit of amassing property, and either retaining it or putting it to use in the generation of additional wealth that would stay within the limited family cycle.<sup>104</sup>

Jobs were diminishing as natural resources like lumber dwindled. Hops lice blighted the fields and effectively stifled the hops industry. The Washington State Department of Fish and Game began to impose severe restrictions on Indian fishing, and increasingly expensive fishing technology meant large corporations could access more of the fishing resource. Native families lost more and more of their land as the tide of Anglo immigrants increased. At the same time, circumstances forced Anglo settlers to adapt to Native ways.<sup>105</sup> Change was a constant for people who relied on fluctuating salmon runs; and cultures in the region had been incorporating one another into their societies for trade, marriage, and alliances for centuries. Indigenous people developed new traditions in modern contexts. The ebb and flow of migratory wage labor mirrored the pre-contact seasonal fishing cycles. The devastating effects of disease that arrived with Anglo contact hastened the otherwise natural process of change, along with the voracious Anglo attitudes toward land acquisition and racism toward Native culture and peoples. But many communities around the Puget Sound today can easily trace their ancestry and heritage back thousands of years, thanks to their creative strategies for survival within a growing capitalist, global world order.<sup>106</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In 1991, historian Richard White published his seminal work *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815*. The book challenged old notions of the dichotomies of Native American and colonial cultures. Instead of viewing American history through the simple lens of Indian/white and conquest/assimilation, his research paints a complex story of cultural persistence through accommodation and the need for common ground between two distinct societies. As groundbreaking as his work was, White concludes, much like most historians, that the pressures of continued encroachment and land loss would force Native Americans to accommodate to the point of near cultural destruction.

104. Harmon, *Rich Indians*, p. 106.

105. Coll Thrush discusses the integration of settler and Native communities in the early Pacific Northwest in his introduction to *Native Seattle*.

106. Harmon, *Indians in the Making*, pp. 2–3.

Like Richard White, I see a middle ground of conflict and compromise in the Pacific north-west that allowed the original inhabitants of the land to deal with incoming settlers. But unlike White, I do not feel that the process of change and compromise dismantled Pacific north-west Native cultures.<sup>107</sup> Wage-earning and labor did not define Native Americans. It did not transform them into a class-conscious society. Instead, it defined their identity as tribal members and protected their independence. New studies of wage laborers with specific ethnic identities, which have been growing since the 1960s, can and should move beyond the idea of class divisions and focus on the complex axis of subjectivities which defined individual workers.

Milton Cantor began to define these new complexities in labor studies when he stated in 1979, "The different strata and subcultures immensely complicate the task of detecting cultural factors and make it impossible to regard workingclass culture holistically."<sup>108</sup> His ideology was born out of the new social history movement of the 1960s, which reflected more diverse concerns about gender, race, and ethnicity. The new social history was distinct from, yet built upon, the older view in the United States of labor as economic history, as illustrated by John Commons (*History of Labor in the United States* and *History of Labor*) and Selig Perlman (*A Theory of the Labor Movement*). When David Brody, Herbert G. Gutman, and David Montgomery arrived on the scene, these new social historians began to call for the representation of workers' voices and histories from the bottom up in order to present a fuller picture of labor history.

David Brody has argued that the new labor history began falling apart in the 1980s with a return to economic history.<sup>109</sup> With that return came the desire for labor history to redefine itself. I believe the new labor history is not yet done. We must write the histories of internationally marginalized workers, such as indigenous people in the Americas, Australia, and the Pacific, and explore the significant role they have played in the development of capitalism in settler colonial societies before we can announce that the new labor history is dead. We must continually challenge the field so as not to remain locked in a comfortable consensus, a hegemonic norm. How can we discuss and debate labor history without a fuller picture of the laborers themselves? The working classes are not just those who organized or maintained a class consciousness. They are all those who worked. As labor historian Eric Arnesen has pointed out, "many radical academics have carried

107. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York, 1991). Susan Sleeper-Smith does an admirable job of praising and refuting White's theory in *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst, MA, 2001), pp. 2–3.

108. Milton Cantor, *American Working Class Culture: Explorations in American Labor and Social History* (Westport, CT, 1979), p. 3.

109. David Brody, *Labor Embattled: History, Power, Rights* (Urbana, IL [etc.], 2005).

out their work with the hope and expectation that their findings would be important, in some indirect way, to current politics".<sup>110</sup> A better understanding of the history of Native American labor will provide a greater foundation upon which to build an economic future for many financially embattled Native Americans.

New social history has opened the door to a more diverse and complex understanding of the intersections between labor, ethnicity, history, and class in the US, though I believe that new histories must still advance through that door. The twentieth century was a time of dramatic change in the United States. Industrialism swept across the continent and whole societies were transformed into workers, who later became pioneers in the struggle for workers' rights. Like the broader US, the Pacific north-west was part of a historically changing economic and social field. The region was a rapidly developing economy in the twentieth century, and a space where division rested not on ethnicity, race, or class, but on power: power over the land and production as well as individual autonomy. Native American workers were free to come and go and they were judged on the quality of their work, not on their race. Though, as with most migrant and wage laborers, this did not necessarily translate into power. As the global economy shifted from capitalism to a competitive capitalism which relied on imperialism to expand, industries dominated by Native American laborers moved overseas or their labor was replaced by imported temporary workers.<sup>111</sup> By the twenty-first century, Native American survival methods in the Pacific north-west transitioned to political struggles over fishing rights and land.

In my opinion, excluding Native Americans' own economic history as well as engagement with a broader US and world economic history continues to marginalize the significance of Native American histories. It "flattens local and cultural distinctions and portrays Indian peoples as passive victims".<sup>112</sup> Including Indians in the broader economic story may also change how we understand the development of capitalism by illustrating overlooked factors that shaped its growth in the United States. It can also overturn the old notion that Native Americans were and are passive beneficiaries of government assistance instead of producers of goods or owners of resources. Ethnologist Albert Gallatin once declared that "the Indian" disappeared in the presence of "the white man" because he would not work.<sup>113</sup> It is now readily apparent that Native Americans have neither disappeared nor did they ever refuse to work. It is time to acknowledge the importance of economic viability in the protection and revival of cultural identities.

110. Eric Arnesen, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 12.

111. See Harry M. Makler, Alberto Martinelli, and Neil J. Smelser (eds), *The New International Economy* (London, 1982), Introduction, for an analysis of the expansion of global economic systems.

112. Hosmer, O'Neill, and Fixico, *Native Pathways*, p. 331.

113. Usner, *Indian Work*, p. 143.