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Lines in Sand: Shifting Boundaries between Indians and Non-Indians in the Puget Sound Region

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LINES IN SAND:  
SHIFTING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN INDIANS  
AND NON-INDIANS IN THE PUGET SOUND REGION

ALEXANDRA HARMON

ON 10 MAY 1792, Captain George Vancouver and men under his command stopped for breakfast near the entrance of a narrow inlet on America's northwest coast. Seventeen people followed Vancouver's boat in canoes, pulled their crafts onto the beach, set down their bows and arrows, and approached with apparent confidence. Afterwards, Vancouver referred to these people as "[o]ur friends the Indians," but at the time he saw them as potentially dangerous strangers. "On a line being drawn with a stick on the sand between the two parties," he wrote, "[the Indians] immediately sat down, and no one attempted to pass it, without previously making signs, requesting permission for so doing." During a month of exploring the two saltwater passages south and east of this anchorage, Vancouver and his crew met many more inhabitants. Although most made unmistakable demonstrations of hospitality, the explorers never felt sure of the local people's purpose. On another occasion, when a survey group encountered armed native men on a beach, Vancouver's lieutenant again drew a line "to divide the two Parties, the Intent of which the Indians perfectly understood."<sup>1</sup>

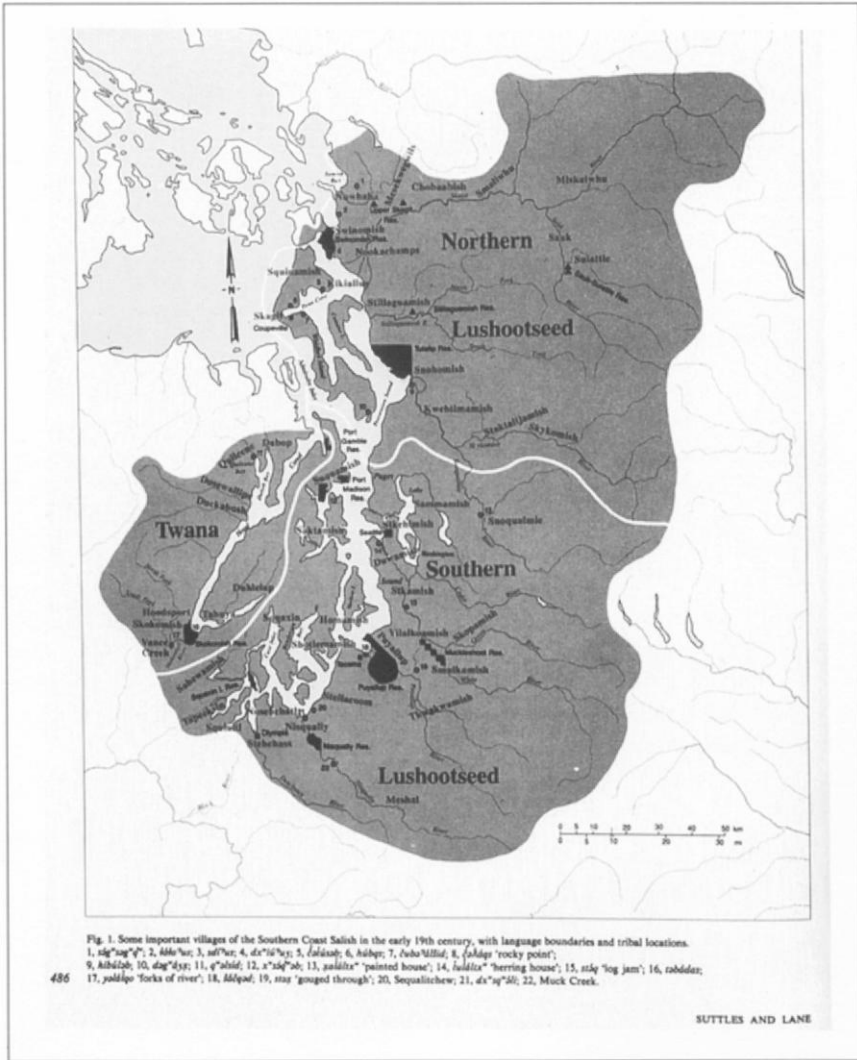
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Limitations of publishing space have compelled the author to reduce drastically the number of citations to sources that she originally included in these notes. She will provide additional citations upon request.

<sup>1</sup> George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Around the World, 1791-1795*, vol. 2 (London, 1801), 524; Peter Puget, "The Vancouver Expedition: Peter Puget's Journal of the Exploration of Puget Sound, May 7-June 11, 1792," ed. Bern Anderson, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 30 (April 1939): 199.

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To illustrate an entry on the Southern Coast Salish, authored by Barbara Lane and Wayne Suttles, the Smithsonian Institution's *Handbook on North American Indians* (1984 edition, Vol. 7, 486) used this map of the many interlinked peoples around Puget Sound, saying that it shows early nineteenth-century villages, language areas, and "tribal locations." Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

The Vancouver expedition produced the first documented encounters between Europeans and aboriginal inhabitants of the Puget Sound basin.<sup>2</sup> Since then, many people have tried in various ways to separate so-called Indians from non-Indians—to mark a boundary across which distinct peoples might conduct limited, orderly relations. These efforts reflect a common human impulse to understand and to manage social experiences by simplifying them, yet efforts to simplify relations by separating Indians from non-Indians have entailed a process far from simple.<sup>3</sup> Especially in the Puget Sound region, where the peoples have had extensive and intimate contacts for almost two hundred years, separating them has been a continuous challenge. Relations have been so tangled, and persons with a basis for claiming Indian identity have been so diverse and so mobile, that lines of demarcation have never been clear or enduring. People from both sides of the proposed racial or ethnic boundaries have disputed, trampled, and moved the boundaries. More than Vancouver could have foreseen, dividing Indians and non-Indians has been like drawing in sand. No sooner has someone traced a line of demarcation, it seems, than rising historical tides have obscured or erased it.

No one has yet published a quality history of the ethnic relations that followed the encounters of 1792. To scholars who venture to fill this regrettable void, the image of lines in shifting sand will seem uncomfortably apt. When identifying their subjects, historians will necessarily conceive of the same broad categories that Vancouver did, drawing distinctions between “Indians” and other people, albeit with ethnic labels rather than tangible lines. However, commonly accepted distinctions and available labels will seem barely more useful than sticks and sand, because the very developments that historians describe have repeatedly blurred the distinctions between peoples and altered the content of the category “Indian.”

Whether we write about “Indians” or substitute more fashionable terms such as “Native American,” historians should recognize that these terms themselves are a legitimate, even an essential subject of investigation. Their meanings, never static or indisputable, have changed as relations with non-Indians have changed.<sup>4</sup> Having to use such imprecise and unreliable words is uncomfortable, but the best antidote for our discomfort is to focus historical inquiry on the words and their meanings. Our task necessarily includes describing the conceptualization and subsequent definitions of classes of people known to themselves and to others as Indians.

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<sup>2</sup> Spanish and British ships had previously entered the Strait of Juan de Fuca. William H. Goetzmann, *New Lands, New Men: America and the Second Great Age of Discovery* (New York, 1986), 107; Erna Gunther, “Vancouver and the Indians of Puget Sound,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 51 (January 1960): 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Manning Nash, *The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World* (Chicago, 1989), 10.

<sup>4</sup> James A. Clifton, *Being and Becoming Indian* (Chicago, 1989), 22; Peggy Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” *Frontiers* 12, no. 1 (1991): 10.

Records regarding Indians in the Puget Sound region teach this lesson well. With illustrations from those records, this essay shows why it is important to conceive of Indians' history as the history of the meanings of "Indian," "Indian tribe," and their synonyms. After demonstrating that those terms have had uncertain and changing connotations in western Washington, the essay considers three common bases for distinguishing Indians from non-Indians—biological ancestry, culture, and social-political affiliation. It describes how evolving intergroup relations and other historical developments have undermined each distinction, forcing everyone repeatedly to re-define the terms that indicate their perceptions of difference.

Vancouver and his crew did not doubt that Englishmen and indigenous Americans constituted distinct, alien classes of people. They not only knew where to draw the lines separating the two groups, but they also had a single, ready-made label for everyone on the other side. Previous European voyagers had furnished them with a convenient category for all natives of the western hemisphere, and the tour of Puget Sound did not disturb their preconception.<sup>5</sup> Although they saw indigenous people at a dozen or more locations, Vancouver and his lieutenant made no documented effort to learn what the area's inhabitants called themselves or whether they felt a common identity. To the Englishmen these were all "Indians."

Until recently, historians have accepted the explorers' conceptual categories with few apparent misgivings. In regional histories, Vancouver's arrival has commonly been an opening scene of a drama in which one kind of people wrests control of the area from another. On one side of the stage stand the explorers, traders, missionaries, settlers, and government officials who eventually determined the region's destiny. On the other side, stepping into history's spotlight only to star in the story of their own subordination and culture loss (and often then to be pushed into the wings), are the Indians. Even chroniclers who have pointed out that the residents of Puget Sound were neither a political nor a linguistic unit in 1792 have adopted "Indian" as a self-explanatory classification for them.<sup>6</sup>

For the people Vancouver dubbed Indians, however, the name had no meaning; and even after their children and grandchildren learned to identify themselves as Indians, the term was not self-defining. A century after English ships appeared in Puget Sound, a bureaucrat charged with enumerating Indians there had to ask his superior for definitions. "Who and what is an Indian? What is a tribe?" he wrote. Could a

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<sup>5</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian* (New York, 1978), 23-25.

<sup>6</sup> A sampling of the chroniclers is: Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest* (New York, 1957), 6-20, 53-55; Lucille McDonald, *Washington's Yesterdays (Before there was a Territory): 1775-1853* (Portland, Oregon, 1953); Robert E. Ficken and Charles P. LeWarne, *Washington, A Centennial History* (Seattle, 1988), 18-28; Frank W. Porter III, *The Coast Salish Peoples* (New York, 1989), 31.

person simultaneously maintain status as a Yakima Indian, a Snohomish Indian, and a white person? Sixty years later yet, Washington State fish and game officers complained that they could not honor Indians' treaty-guaranteed rights when they could not tell who the Indians were.<sup>7</sup>

Government officials' uncertainty both reflected and fostered uncertainty among people with reason to think of themselves as Indians. For instance, in 1954 the Intertribal Council of Western Washington Indians met to consider a federal plan to give Indians the same legal status as other citizens. A delegate of the landless Samish Tribe, unsure whether the proposal applied to his group, announced, "[W]e are white people. Yes, that's right. We are mostly white. But we do take our Indian blood from our ancestors. . . ." As a tribe, he added, the Samish supported the other tribes at the meeting. Among those listening was chairman Wilfred Steve, who had no reason to doubt his own Indian identity. He had been raised on a reservation, where government personnel and residents recognized his parents as Indians. On the other hand, the nature of the group Steve represented was in dispute. A federal official had recently confused Steve and other members of the federally chartered Tulalip government by declaring, "There is no Tulalip tribe and never has been."<sup>8</sup>

Many scholars now acknowledge that "Indian" and other terms for New World peoples are problematic, and they often trace the problems to Europeans who imposed names inconsistent with native categories.<sup>9</sup> Some historians have tried to counteract the ethnocentrism of the prevailing terminology by explaining that indigenous peoples sorted humans into categories of their own and by employing those categories in narratives of intercultural relations. Greg Dening does this in his history of the Marquesas Islands in the South Pacific, using "Enata" for islanders and "Aoe" for outsiders.<sup>10</sup> This technique, however, does not obviate the dilemma I refer to; indeed, it illustrates it. Historians must still use crude, static terms for complex social groupings whose memberships have continually changed.

A brief history of some group names that Puget Sound's indigenous people have favored affords a look at the dilemma. Indigenous inhabitants of Puget Sound, who

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<sup>7</sup> Charles M. Buchanan to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 19 August 1901, National Archives, Pacific Northwest Region, Seattle, WA, Record Group 75 (hereafter abbreviated as NA, PNR, RG 75), Tulalip Agency, Box 123; House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Indian Fishing Rights*, Statements of Walter Neubrech, Mike Johnston, 88th Cong., 2d sess., 5-6 August 1964, S.Rept. 1641-8, 32, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes, Intertribal Council of Western Washington Indians, 15-16 January 1954, NA, PNR, RG 75, Western Washington Agency, Decimal File 103.31 (Box 15); Indian Census Rolls (1910), Tulalip, NA microfilm M-595, Roll 584; Raymond H. Bitney to Commissioner, 28 November 1953, Exhibit 0082, Petition for Federal Acknowledgment, Snohomish Tribe of Indians, (copy in the office of Snohomish Tribe of Indians, Arlington, WA).

<sup>9</sup> Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, 1982), 380.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Deutsch, "Landscape of Enclaves: Race Relations in the West, 1865-1990" in *Under Open Skies: Rethinking America's Western Past*, ed. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, (New York, 1992), 112; Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas 1774-1880* (Honolulu, 1980).

spoke several languages, did not have one name either for themselves or for people from outside the region in 1792. Since they did not know and could not conceive of Europeans' national designations, they initially drew on various familiar concepts to name and explain early explorers and traders. Some called them birds or animal people. Others equated the extraordinary looking strangers with a super-human being called the Changer or Transformer. It was not long, however, before natives throughout the region had grouped the unmistakably human foreigners into two broad categories. By words that some early traders must have used to explain themselves—"King George men" and "Bostons"—indigenous people designated all Britons and Americans respectively. After Americans established hegemony in the region, "Bostons" served for virtually all immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the region's immigrant population diversified. Nationals of Sweden, Finland, Greece, and other European countries joined the colonists from the United States. Not all the newcomers had white skins and round eyes. Early immigrants also included Hawaiians and descendants of Africans; later ones came from China, Japan, the Philippines, and Latin America. Eventually the "Indians" called most of these people "Bostons." To follow suit would encourage readers to think about past ethnic relations simplistically. It would make as little sense as the Hudson's Bay Company officer who urged 60 men—most of them Hawaiians, Iroquois, Canadian métis, and Chinook slaves—to avenge an Indian attack because "the honor of the whites was at stake."<sup>12</sup>

Around Puget Sound the term "Indians" has designated populations nearly as diverse and changeable as has "Bostons." In common parlance, "Indian" has long carried a connotation of descent from authentic American aborigines. For Indians however, the descent has been variously conceived of in biological, cultural, or political terms, or a combination of the three. In the Puget Sound area, as elsewhere, each type of descent has at times been a basis for identifying Indians; but historical developments have also generated doubts about each basis. By forging links between communities, people have repeatedly undermined distinctions—whether based on biological descent, cultural heritage, or political and social affiliation—and simultaneously rekindled desires to explain and preserve distinctions between Indians and non-Indians. By isolating in turn each criterion of Indian identity and by noting some of the developments that have subverted that criterion's utility, we can see why a history of

<sup>11</sup> Marian W. Smith, *The Puyallup-Nisqually* (1940; reprint, New York, 1969), 29; Papers of John Peabody Harrington at the Smithsonian Institution, 1907-1957, University of Washington Library Microfilm, Seattle, WA (hereafter WTSIA), A-6952, Roll 10, vol. 9, 817 (hereafter Harrington Papers); June McCormick Collins, *Valley of the Spirits: The Upper Skagit Indians of Western Washington* (Seattle, 1974), 31; Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838-1842*, vol. 2 (London, 1852), 178; James G. Swan, *The Northwest Coast: or Three Years Residence in Washington Territory* (1857; reprint, Seattle, 1972), 196; W. S. Phillips, *The Chinook Book* (Seattle, 1913), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Ermatinger, "Earliest Expedition against Puget Sound Indians," ed. Eva Emery Dye, *Washington Historical Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1907): 17; Charles Miles and O. B. Sperlin, eds., *Building a State: Washington, 1889-1939* (Tacoma, WA, 1940), 217.

Indians in the Puget Sound region must continually reexamine and revise the way it defines its subject.

To avoid implications that the original inhabitants of western Washington knew themselves as Indians or claimed a common identity before Vancouver arrived, a historical account might initially refer to them as native or indigenous people. It is common to extend this kind of designation to Indians in later periods by referring to them as "indigenous people and their descendants." However, events in the Puget Sound region would make this designation problematic before a historical narrative could gather momentum. Shortly after Britons, Canadians, Hawaiians, Americans and other foreigners took up residence, some of them fathered children by native women. Not all such biological descendants of bi-cultural couples belong in a history of Puget Sound's Indians, because not all have been called or have called themselves Indians. Moreover, as early as the 1830s, there were residents in the area whom Europeans and Americans regarded as Indians but who had immigrated from distant lands such as eastern Canada and Alaska.<sup>13</sup>

Hudson's Bay Company employees stationed on Puget Sound from the 1820s through the 1850s often found mates among women they knew as Indians. Many, though not all, of the women were native to the region. Numerous early American and European settlers—males who were single or separated by thousands of miles from their wives—also married or had liaisons with native women.<sup>14</sup> The children of such unions and their progeny are descendants of indigenous people, but they have not always assumed an Indian identity.

The significance attributed to their ancestry has varied with individual and family circumstances and with general conditions and ideological trends. In the 1930s, Louisa Sinclair, whose mother was from an indigenous village, proudly described herself for a collection of pioneer reminiscences as the first child of a white parent born in Snohomish County. She felt superior, she said, to her "full blood" Indian neighbors. In 1969, on the other hand, when a reporter noted that Tulalip tribal leader Wayne Williams had a "full-blood" Indian mother but the physical features of his white grandfather's people, Williams said, "I am not part Indian but an Indian who is part white."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> J. Ross Browne, *Indian Affairs in the Territories of Oregon and Washington*, House Exec. Doc. 39, 35th Cong., 1st sess., 1857, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Charles E. Roblin, "Schedule of Unenrolled Indians," NA, PNR, Microfilm 1343 (hereafter Roblin Schedule); Papers of William DeShaw, University of Washington Library, Seattle, WA, Manuscripts (hereafter UW Manuscripts), No. 387; "Lummi Elders Speak" (Lummi Communications Project, 1982), 5, University of Washington Library, Special Collections, 5. Many Hudson's Bay Company employees were the descendants of other indigenous Americans whom they also called Indians. Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870*, (Norman, 1980); Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> Works Progress Administration, *Told By the Pioneers*, ed. F. I. Trotter, F. H. Loutzenhiser, and J. R. Loutzenhiser (Olympia, WA, 1938), vol. 2, 179; *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 24 November 1969, 2.



Ambiguities of biological heritage have prompted not only the descendants of aboriginal people and immigrants but also their relatives and neighbors to apply ethnic labels erratically. In the nineteenth century, both native and settler societies at different times claimed and rejected mixed-heritage individuals. For instance, the appropriate legal status of so-called half-breeds was one of the most thoroughly debated issues of Washington's first territorial legislature in 1854. A lawmaker who favored awarding them the privileges of citizenship argued that they might be half-breed Indians but they were also half-breed white men. Half their blood, he declared, was as good as any white citizen's. That year the legislature granted the male offspring of native women and American men a right to vote not afforded to their Indian kin. The next year, however, lawmakers voided the marriages that produced half-breeds; and in 1866, they limited the material inheritance that mixed-ancestry children could expect from their non-native relatives.<sup>16</sup>

During the same period, a spokesman for Indians indicated that his people saw the children of native-immigrant unions analogously—as a distinct class that was nevertheless intimately connected to aboriginal society. In 1860, at a distribution of treaty payments, John Hyton told government agents, “The Indians say . . . the reason why they want the school-house here is, that there will be some half-breeds after awhile, and they want all both Indian children and half-breeds to learn to speak English, so that they can talk together.” An indigenous contemporary of Hyton seemed less sure that his mixed-ancestry descendants would associate with Indians. He reportedly urged Indians to renounce the killing of whites, saying, “You may be spilling my grandson's blood.” In later years, acknowledged Indians occasionally appeared to begrudge their mixed-ancestry cousins any claim to Indian status.<sup>17</sup>

The first generation of Puget Sound residents with both native and immigrant ancestry, born in the fourth and fifth decades of the nineteenth century, lived in an era that brought important shifts in popular beliefs about human races. Americans increasingly thought of race as an inherent, immutable trait that determines character as well as physiognomy. Today, in part because of this ideological legacy, the notion of Indian blood plays a powerful role in the determination of a person's status as an

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<sup>16</sup> Olympia (WA) Pioneer and Democrat, 29 April, 18 March, 25 March, and 22 April, 1854; Greg Russell Hubbard, “The Indian Under White Man's Law in Washington Territory, 1853-1889” (Master's thesis, University of Washington, 1972), 44-48.

<sup>17</sup> U. S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report (Washington, DC, 1860), 199 (hereafter ARCIA); *Told By the Pioneers*, vol. 3, 24; Chief George Nelson et al. to Charles Buchanan, 20 November 1903, NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Box 100; Memorandum Decision, 23 October 1907, *Spithill et al. v. McLean et al.*, U. S. Circuit Court for District of Washington, 9th Circuit, Case 1194 (1907), NA, PNR, RG 21, Box 184; House Committee on Indian Affairs, *Recommendations of Lummi Council, Investigate Indian Affairs*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 1 October 1944, H.Rept. 1051-0, 686. Compare the Nisqually council's decision in 1930 to enroll as members of the tribe 210 mixed-ancestry people, many of whom had always lived apart from the tribe. Peter Kalama to N. O. Nicholson, 17 June 1935, NA, RG 75, Central Classified Files, Taholah Agency, 45991-1935-053.

Indian. Yet there is no better illustration of the fact that race is a social and historical category than the existence and the varied fates of the so-called mixed-blood descendants of Puget Sound's indigenous peoples.<sup>18</sup> By the early twentieth century, many such descendants had blended into the general population, marrying non-Indians and raising children who had little or no sense that their aboriginal ancestry made them different from their neighbors.<sup>19</sup> Often their physical appearance did not mark mixed-bloods as Indian. In the census of 1900, many either identified themselves as, or were counted as, white. (On the other hand, the same census listed many people with comparable family trees as Indians.)<sup>20</sup>

Ancestry proved an unreliable indicator of Indian identity in part because people were using cultural as well as biological descent as a basis for classifying each other. Christian reformers of the late nineteenth century even wanted to use culture instead of ancestry. They proposed, in effect, to classify as Indians only those descendants who lived as Indians. By educating Indians, converting them to Christianity, subjecting them to general laws, and giving them individual ownership of land, the reformers expected to eradicate the habits that set Indians apart and thus to eliminate Indians as a distinct class.<sup>21</sup>

Emphasis on cultural marks of difference was not peculiar to the late nineteenth century or to a limited social circle. Vancouver and his lieutenant also seemed to focus more on disparities in culture than on the phenotypic differences Americans now associate with racial categories. In describing Indians, the explorers stressed clothing and ornamentation, manners, technology, language, and other patterns of conduct. For the lieutenant, it was the elaborate and diverse face-painting styles of the people in one village that "Conveyed a Stronger Force of the Savageness of the Native inhabitants, than any other Circumstances we had hitherto met with. . . ."<sup>22</sup>

In the 1960s, such a stress on culture over descent evidently prompted the

<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York, 1965), 369; Stow Persons, *American Minds, A History of Ideas* (2d ed., rev.; Malabar, FL, 1983), 297. By 1910, census schedules included each person's degrees of Indian and non-Indian "blood." Indian Census Rolls, NA, microfilm M-595, Roll 93.

<sup>19</sup> The voluminous evidence of absorption includes the Roblin schedule, censuses, contemporary observations—such as, DeShaw Papers, Box 1, File 4—and local histories—such as, Sequim Bicentennial Committee, *Dungeness: The Lure of River* (Port Angeles, WA, 1976), which identifies some pioneers' wives as native but does not attribute Indian identity to their descendants.

<sup>20</sup> Transcript, *Spithill v. McLean*, 14, 20; Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, *Survey of Condition of the Indians in the United States*, comments of Senator Frazier, 71st Cong., 3d sess. 1 June 1931, S.Rept. 545-8-A, 11784; ARCIA (1880), 164; "Twana of the Skokomish Reservation, 1880-81," Tribal Census Rolls, NA, PNR, RG 75, Puyallup Agency, Box 70. I am indebted to Russel Barsh of the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, who shared the data he culled from the 1900 census.

<sup>21</sup> Alexandra Harmon, "When Is an Indian Not an Indian?: 'Friends of the Indian' and the Problems of Indian Identity," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 18 (Summer 1990): 95-123.

<sup>22</sup> Puget, "The Vancouver Expedition," 204; Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery*, 506, 517.

Suquamish tribe to extend membership to people with less than one fourth "Indian blood." Lawrence Webster, recalling the proposal to enroll people only one-eighth Indian ancestry, said that he objected, but those favoring the move argued that some white people make better Indians than the Indians do. Webster himself survived a challenge to his eligibility for enrollment, despite his lack of "Suquamish blood," apparently because other tribe members considered him Suquamish by culture. His Makah Indian father had no role in his upbringing; but his mother, an orphaned African-American, had been raised from infancy by a culturally conservative Suquamish patriarch.<sup>23</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Christian reformers' hopes for a purely cultural definition of Indian status were fruitless. Culture has been a poor criterion for identifying Indians not just because any culture, however defined, changes with time, but also because people of several cultural persuasions have insisted on counting themselves, or each other, as Indians.<sup>24</sup> Had Vancouver revisited Puget Sound a century later, he would have found many people labeled Indians whose language, dress, religion, manners, social relations, and civic status seemed the same as their non-Indian neighbors. With somewhat more effort, he could also have found people generally considered non-Indians who were immersed in the society and culture of people called Indians.

Intermarriage, predictably, played a role in obscuring cultural boundaries. Catherine Blaine, who immigrated with her minister husband to Seattle in 1853, provided a poignant example of the confusion that bi-cultural unions could cause. An aboriginal woman, evidently married according to her people's customs to a white settler, committed suicide. In a letter characterizing the marriage as a purchase, Blaine related subsequent events:

[The man] was left in rather a peculiar position, the indians claiming the body to bury among their own people with their own ceremonies and he unwilling to let it go, but uncertain whether the whites would allow her to be buried in their ground. There was some opposition to it, but they consented, then came the trouble of getting the coffin because she was a squaw, but he got the coffin at last. He came up here this morning to see if Mr. B. would be willing to officiate at the funeral, but Mr. B. told him if they were not married he could not consent to sanction their past manner of living by burying her like other people. He saw the propriety of Mr. B.'s position and did not urge the matter. So they buried her without any service. Indians carried the coffin covered with a blue indian blanket, the man who had owned her, accompanied by one or two squaw

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<sup>23</sup> Summary of interview of Lawrence Webster, interview by Marilyn Jonas, 9 March 1982, interview W.1.06, Suquamish Tribal Oral History Project, Suquamish Tribal Archives, Suquamish, WA.

<sup>24</sup> Historians have not agreed on a definition of culture. Pascoe, "Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations," 12. I offer no definition here because I conclude that none would enable historians to use culture as a criterion for identifying Indians for a study covering two centuries.

men (as we call those who live with the squaws) and a number of indians followed to the grave, and this afternoon as Mr. B. was passing his house the indians were in it howling and bewailing, as they are accustomed to do. Now what a situation he is in, with his little half breed child, and despised by the whites and hated by the indians who would kill him if they could get a chance in revenge for her death.<sup>25</sup>

There is evidence from the nineteenth century both of native women who conformed to once-alien customs of their settler husbands and of white, black, and Chinese men who joined and learned the ways of native women's peoples.<sup>26</sup> Half-breed children who knew both of their parents or the parents' kin might learn and adopt aspects of either culture or of both. Annie Taylor was apparently at one extreme of the cultural continuum. When a special government enrolling-agent wrote to ask whether she wished to be listed as Indian, Taylor answered:

I was rather surprised to receive that notice from you as I have no claim against the government, when mother married father, she never had anything more to do with the Indians. . . . I dont believe she ever was on a resavation, she belonged to the Clallam tribe, was an only child, I dont know any thing at all about her relatives. . . . My father was from England, and he raised his family just as if he was married to an english girl I dont even know my mothers indian name as I never heard it, and as for me I have none I have two brothers and one sister and they have lived just as I have among the white race and dont no any more bout the Indians than my self.<sup>27</sup>

Toward the other end of the spectrum were the children of settler Ezra Hatch. When he died, after twenty years of marriage to a Snohomish woman, Hatch's widow still spoke no English and was unsure of his first name. She and her children communicated only in the Snohomish language and Chinook jargon. In a lawsuit claiming that savvy speculators had swindled them out of Hatch's homestead, widow and children said they were untutored Indians, dependent on white benefactors for guidance

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<sup>25</sup> Catherine Blaine to unnamed family members, 14 November 1854, Blaine Family Papers, University of Washington Manuscripts.

<sup>26</sup> *Spithill v. McLean*; Charles Buchanan to D. C. Govan, 26 November 1901, NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Box 123; Roblin Schedule and attached report; Frances Kautz, ed., "Extracts from the Diary of Gen. A. V. Kautz," *Washington Historian* 2, no. 1 (1901): 14; A. A. Bartow to Charles Buchanan, 27 October 1908, NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Box 103; June McCormick Collins, "John Fornsby: The Personal Document of a Coast Salish Indian," in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, ed. Marian Smith (New York, 1949), 321; Notes from interview of Annie Whitener, Mason County, WA, Works Progress Administration records for *Told By the Pioneers*, Washington State Library, Olympia, WA.

<sup>27</sup> Annie Taylor to Charles Roblin, Applications for Enrollment and Allotment of Washington Indians, 28 June 1918, NA microfilm M-1343. Misspellings appear in the original text.

when they ventured into settler society.<sup>28</sup> In sum, the cultural repercussions of bi-cultural unions could be nearly as numerous as bi-cultural families themselves.

Even people outside mixed families changed their practices as American settlement altered conditions in the Puget Sound area. Newcomers as well as natives adjusted their habits to take the others into account. Particularly when and where they were outnumbered, settlers often conformed to indigenous people's expectations. One pioneer provided a vivid example. He wrote that a man named John Allen returned from a trip to find his native wife slain. Allen blamed local Indians and shot one in revenge. As agitated indigenous villagers assembled across the river from armed white men, interracial conflict seemed imminent. However, Allen and his compatriots settled the matter peacefully according to native custom: by making payments to the relatives of Allen's victim.<sup>29</sup>

To most observers the convergence of radically different culture groups seemed to work more extensive and long-lasting changes among indigenous peoples than among the newcomers. Not long after Americans installed a government in the region, they thought they detected an eagerness among Indians to imitate white habits.<sup>30</sup> Since then, commentators by the score have noted the Indians' rapid assumption of American ways. On the eve of statehood in 1889, the federal agent for the Puyallup Reservation told Washington's governor, "Our Indians seem to us very much like white people." By the mid-twentieth century, some ethnographers were declaring the aboriginal cultures of Puget Sound extinct.<sup>31</sup>

Although no one could equate Indian and non-Indian practices without overlooking or downplaying some persistent aboriginal customs, claims that Indians had become like whites disclosed a genuine uncertainty about the location or continuing existence of boundaries between cultures. There was reason to wonder whether some

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<sup>28</sup> Transcript, *Josephine Hatch v. E. C. Ferguson et al.*, Civil and Criminal Case Files, NA, PNR, RG 21, Box 20, Case 151. That Josephine Hatch sued in federal court suggests greater acculturation than she admitted to at trial; however, a Portland lawyer solicited her business and managed all her affairs during the pendency of the case.

<sup>29</sup> Allen Weir, "Roughing It on Puget Sound in the Early Sixties," *Washington Historian* 3, no. 3 (1902): 120; Collins, "John Fornsby," 312, 338. Contemporary claims that some non-Indians "went Indian" appear in Charles Prosch, *Reminiscences of Washington Territory: Scenes, Incidents and Reflections of the Pioneer Period on Puget Sound* (Seattle, 1904), 27; Swan, *The Northwest Coast*, 372; E. C. Fitzhugh to Isaac Stevens, 7 March 1856, Records of the Washington Superintendency of Indian Affairs, WTSIA A-171, Roll 10, Reel 20.

<sup>30</sup> *Indian Affairs on the Pacific*, House Exec. Doc. 76, 34th Cong., 3d sess., serial 906, 1857, 9; E. C. Chirouse to W. B. Gosnell, 1 July 1861, WTSIA, Roll 9, Reel 19; ARCIA (1864, 1871, 1874), 461-2, 291, 336.

<sup>31</sup> Edwin Eells to Governor Miles C. Moore, 29 August 1889, Washington State Archives, Olympia, WA, Record Group 1/P-1, Box 2; ARCIA (1886), 244; H. A. Smith, "Our Aborigines," *Seattle Weekly Intelligencer*, 30 August 1873, 1; O. C. Upchurch, "The Swinomish People and Their State," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1936): 292, 294; *Recommendations of the Lummi Council*, Testimony of Wilfred Steve, 1 October 1944, H.Rept. 1051-0, 702; *Seattle Times*, 28 November 1954, Magazine sec. 10; Smith, *The Puyallup-Nisqually*, xi; William W. Elmendorf, "An Almost Lost Culture," *Washington State Review* 2, no. 2 (1958): 2-4

of the people called Indians still differed sufficiently from other people to be considered distinct. A joke retold by Swinomish historian Martin Sampson poked fun at the way Indians' apparent acculturation disturbed accepted classifications. When asked whether he was Indian or white, a man replied, "When I came on this reservation I was Indian, but the many years that the Great White Father and his hired people have spent in trying to make a white man out of me must have made some change. I must now be at least a half-breed."<sup>32</sup>

As the physical and cultural markers differentiating Indians from non-Indians grew harder to discern, people relied increasingly on a third attribute—group affiliation—to explain their sense that a meaningful distinction remained. They thought of Indians as members of groups that had historical continuity with aboriginal societies. Such thinking underlay an Indian agency superintendent's description of "half-breed" Charles Wilbur in 1922. Wilbur and his wife, the agent reported, skillfully farmed his stepfather's land and had an excellent house and an auto. "While they speak the English language and live like white people," he added, "yet they are clannish and Charles Wilbur is a general favorite among the Swinomish Indians." Accepting without question the Swinomish community's historically Indian character, the superintendent regarded Wilbur's relationship to that community as proof that he was Indian.<sup>33</sup>

Histories that focus on tribes, nations, or confederacies of Indians are common. A few, by treating tribal or national existence itself as a historical phenomenon, avoid the mistake of assuming that individual Indian identity requires direct biological or cultural ties to an aboriginal society. The sophisticated studies of James Merrell and J. Leitch Wright show that relations with outsiders have prompted heterogeneous populations in the Southeast to reconstitute themselves as Indian tribes called Catawbas, Creeks, and Seminoles, for example.<sup>34</sup>

Although it is tempting to think that a comparably framed history could avoid the pitfalls of defining Puget Sound Indians by ancestry or culture, the thought is better resisted. Political or social associations have been as unstable a basis for distin-

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<sup>32</sup> Martin J. Sampson, *Indians of Skagit County* (Mt. Vernon, WA, 1972), 64.

<sup>33</sup> Walter F. Dickens, *Industrial Surveys, Tulalip Agency, 1922-23*, NA, RG 75, Records of Industries Section. Wilbur later identified himself as Lower Skagit, using the name ascribed to people who had moved to the Swinomish Reservation from Whidbey Island. Deposition of Charles Wilbur, *Duwamish Tribe of Indians, et al. v. United States*, United States Court of Claims Docket F-275, WTSIA A-7348, 327.

<sup>34</sup> James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1989); J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Creeks & Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Miscogulge People* (Lincoln, 1986); 1-4; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York, 1991), 19.

guishing Indians from non-Indians as have biological and cultural heritage. Indeed, in western Washington, tribal affiliation has been the most chronically controversial of the three criteria of Indian identity. The reasons for the controversy lie not only in post-colonization changes, but also in habits of association that pre-date Europeans' arrival.

Many Europeans and Americans who came after Vancouver thought they had entered a region where the inhabitants grouped themselves into definite political or ethnic divisions. Early traders, priests, and settlers usually identified native peoples by names that purportedly designated tribes or nations. John Work, the first man after Vancouver to write of visiting Puget Sound, described an expedition along its eastern shore in 1824. He referred to populations he encountered en route by names such as "Nisqually nation," "Sanahomis," "Sannahamis," "Soquamis," and "Skaadchet tribe." When Work's Hudson's Bay Company colleagues set up posts in the region shortly thereafter, they also pinned tribal names on their customers with apparent ease. (They found spelling those names more difficult.)<sup>35</sup>

A historian who attempts to follow the traders' lead, however, will not find a clear trail. There is no obvious point of departure because tribal names in the early historical record cannot be accepted at face value. We cannot confidently determine who, if anyone, used the names before 1824. Traders rarely documented how they learned the names they used. An officer of the 1841 U. S. Exploring Expedition said he heard directly from the Indians that "they belonged to different tribes. One party called themselves Squamish, another Socomish, and a third party Toandos." After two decades of regular contact with traders, however, it is possible that natives were identifying themselves in ways they thought the foreigners expected.<sup>36</sup>

Based on Indian statements, linguistic data, and archival sources, ethnographers have concluded that some tribal names gained currency with non-Indians even though they were not names that the designated peoples used for themselves. Some were labels conferred by outsiders. In other instances, when asked where they were from, natives probably gave the name of a geographical feature and found themselves

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<sup>35</sup> John Work, "The Journal of John Work, November and December, 1824," ed. T. C. Elliott, *Washington Historical Quarterly* 3 (July 1912): 198-228; Dr. John Scouler, "Journal of a Voyage to N. W. America," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 6 (June 1905): 196, 202; "Journal of Occurrences at Fort Nisqually," Records of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company, UW Manuscripts; William Fraser Tolmie, *The Journals of William Fraser Tolmie: Physician and Fur Trader* (Vancouver, 1963), 216.

<sup>36</sup> George M. Colvocoresses, *Four Years in a Government Exploring Expedition to . . . the Northwest Coast* (New York, 1852), 234-35. The first missionaries and American officials on the scene relied in part on Hudson's Bay Company help when they compiled lists of tribes. Francis Norbert Blanchet, *Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon During the Past Forty Years* (Portland, 1878), 87; *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (1850), Report of Joseph Lane, Sen. Exec. Doc. 1, Paper E, Serial 587, 162; ARCI (1851), 215.

labeled accordingly. Other naming accidents attest to the language barrier between natives and immigrants.<sup>37</sup>

Even when Europeans and Americans ascertained genuine group names, ethnographers say, they took little care to determine the names' proper applications. In some instances, they learned the name for people in a large village and assumed that all persons residing along the same waterway could be tagged the same way; in other instances, they extended one group's name for itself to that group's language, then classified all persons who spoke the same language as a tribe or nation with that name.<sup>38</sup>

Early censuses verify that non-Indians had trouble matching people with purported tribal names. A U. S. agent complained in 1852 that he could not compile an accurate census of tribes when members of the tribes did not know their own numbers and were seldom together. In reports such as his, the numbers, names, and populations of tribes vary so much from year to year that this complaint is a striking understatement. Purported tribal names sometimes appear only once, or appear, disappear, and reappear on censuses. A group listed in one report as a subdivision of a certain tribe is lumped in another report with a different tribe. George Gibbs, who produced an inventory of tribes for Washington Territory's first governor, also cast doubt on the validity of the tribal names when he noted that names were divided into families with no clear connections to each other.<sup>39</sup>

Sorting Puget Sound's peoples into aboriginal tribal groups has been doubly difficult because the first non-Indians on the scene found a population whose configuration was far from stable. Although there is no reason to think that the organization of the native population was static before Europeans arrived, we know that the rate of change escalated after marine-based traders appeared in the North Pacific during the eighteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Well before most Puget Sound inhabitants had seen the new-

<sup>37</sup> Edward S. Curtis, *The Salishan Tribes of the Coast*, vol. 9 of *The North American Indian*, ed. Frederick Webb Hodge (1907-1930; reprint, New York, 1970), 12, 30-31; George Gibbs, "Tribes of Western Washington and Northwestern Oregon," *Contributions to North American Ethnology* 1 (1877): 172; Harrington Papers, WTSIA Reel 10, 133, 138, 142; T. T. Waterman, "Puget Sound Geography," undated manuscript, ca. 1920, copy of Smithsonian Institution manuscript no. 1864, in Special Collections Library, University of Washington, 84, 101; Marian W. Smith, "The Coast Salish of Puget Sound," *American Anthropologist* 43 (1941): 199; Findings and Opinions of Indian Claims Commission, in *Coast Salish and Western Washington Indians*, vol. 5 of Garland American Indian Ethnohistory Series, ed. and comp. David Agee Horr (New York, 1974), 155, 616.

<sup>38</sup> Edwin J. Allen, Jr., "Intergroup Ties and Exogamy among the Northern Coast Salish," *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 10, no. 2 (1976): 168; Gibbs, "Tribes of Western Washington," 172; Thom Hess and Vi Hilbert, *Lushootseed: The Language of the Skagit, Nisqually, and other Tribes of Puget Sound* (Seattle, 1980), i.

<sup>39</sup> ARCIA (1852), 169; Gibbs, "Tribes of Western Washington," 163, 169; *Coast Salish and Western Washington Indians*, 185, 196, 273, 307, 537, 632.

<sup>40</sup> Indians passed down stories of groups in ancient times displacing each other or splitting into separate groups. Curtis, *The Salishan Tribes*, 20, 26; Clarence B. Bagley, "Chief Seattle and Angelina," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 22 (October 1931): 243-44; George Gibbs, *Indian Tribes of Washington Territory* (1855; reprint, Fairfield, WA, 1967), 37; Erna Gunther, "Klallam Ethnography," *University of Washington Publications in Anthropology* 1, no. 5 (1927): 179.



comers, their social structures had felt drastic consequences of Europeans' presence on the coast. Deadly pathogens introduced by Europeans reduced local populations by one-third to four-fifths. Northern peoples newly armed with guns descended with increasing frequency on Puget Sound villages, carrying off slaves as well as booty. Both these developments necessitated new living arrangements and associations.<sup>41</sup> Indian agent Michael Simmons probably had such dislocations in mind when he said in 1858 that many south Sound groups were but remnants of once-powerful tribes. Simmons, present in the country since 1845, may also have been aware that some natives had altered patterns of residence and association in order to trade or to carry on other relations with the Hudson's Bay Company and American settlers.<sup>42</sup>

In 1854, the territorial governor gave Simmons the task of combining supposed remnant bands into larger units and identifying or appointing for each unit chiefs who could act on a U. S. proposal to acquire their lands.<sup>43</sup> Simmons's assignment points to a third complication that confronted early colonists and would bedevil any historian who discussed Puget Sound Indians as members of tribes: Many people have questioned the nature and the very existence of aboriginal groupings in the area. Early observers, Indians, and anthropologists have doubted not only whether particular names belong in an inventory of aboriginal tribes, but even whether the first peoples of the region lived in and identified with groups that should be called tribes.

Ezra Meeker, who settled in the area in 1853, declared that local tribes hardly deserved the label, because they were so fluid and lacked political cohesion. Photographer-ethnographer Edward Curtis agreed, describing Puget Sound's alleged tribes as mere loose aggregations of culturally related peoples. After reviewing the anthropological literature on this issue, Colin Twedell and Kenneth Tollefson concluded that most of it favors characterizing the supposedly aboriginal tribes as figments of white imagination.<sup>44</sup>

The question whether there were tribes in 1792 or in 1854 has arisen in part because observers and scholars have measured indigenous peoples' organization against varying standards. Michael Simmons and his superiors were looking for territory-holding political entities with accountable leadership. Anthropologists, on the other

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<sup>41</sup> George M. Guilmet et al., "The Legacy of Introduced Disease: The Southern Coast Salish," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 15, no. 4 (1991): 7, 9-10; Collins, "John Fornsby," 300; Bernhard J. Stern, *The Lummi Indians of Northwest Washington* (1934; reprint, New York, 1969), 7.

<sup>42</sup> ARCIA (1858, 1852), x, 452-3; "Journal of Occurrences," 2 September 1835, 3 December 1836, and 2 January 1837; Washington Centennial Association, 1845-1945, *A Washington Centennial Commemoration* (Olympia, WA, 1945), 21, 38.

<sup>43</sup> ARCIA (1854-55), 456.

<sup>44</sup> Ezra Meeker, *Pioneer Reminiscences of Puget Sound* (Seattle, 1905), 231; Curtis, *The Salishan Tribes*, 14, 67; Thomas W. Prosch, "Seattle and the Indians of the Puget Sound," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1908): 306; Colin E. Twedell, "A Componential Analysis of the Criteria Defining an Indian 'Tribe' in Western Washington," in *Western Washington Indian Socio-Economics: Papers in Honor of Angelo Anastasio*, ed. Herbert C. Taylor, Jr. and Garland F. Grabert (Bellingham, WA, 1984), 61-80; Kenneth D. Tollefson, "Political Organization of the Duwamish," *Ethnology* 28 (April 1989): 135-144.

hand, say that characteristics besides political unity may have defined the region's tribes. They have grouped people variously by such features as the nature and range of their collective subsistence gathering, the geographical zones surrounding permanent villages, language or dialect, lineage lines, caste or class, culture traits, and ceremonial networks.<sup>45</sup> No set of criteria has satisfied a majority of analysts because all are too limiting. The data concerning Puget Sound peoples' associations in the early nineteenth century show systems of social organization so complex, subtle, and dynamic that every model for subdividing the region's population fails to account for important social ties and loyalties cutting across those subdivisions.

People throughout the region resided during the winter in villages that were cohesive and autonomous. In local dialects, villagers could identify the people they lived with by attaching a suffix to the village name; and few scholars would disagree with the assertion that early nineteenth-century villagers usually identified strongly with the group thus named. As John Fornsby said in the 1940s, referring to the settlement where he lived as a child, "[O]ne tribe liked to stay together. Our name is [sikwigwilt]."<sup>46</sup> Scholars cannot agree, however, when the question is whether and in what respects village residents also identified with one of the broader, presumably territorial population groups designated in historical records as Klallam, Nisqually, Suquamish, Twana, and so on. The question provoking sharpest disagreement is whether these larger groupings had political unity and leadership.<sup>47</sup> For a historian, proposing a resolution of this controversy is far less important than understanding why aboriginal practices have fueled the controversy and made it problematic to focus a history on tribes.

Even if Puget Sound villagers had reasons to identify and cooperate with certain neighbors, most also had compelling reasons to identify and cooperate with more distant peoples. A village or cluster of villages did have a core of residents who identified with each other when they dealt with outsiders. In some areas, or in some periods, the core members of several communities also had so much in common—language, joint subsistence activities, ceremonial practices, and other customs—that they thought of themselves as the same people. At the same time, many residents of a village had language, culture, or ancestry in common with people who were outside this comfortable circle. In one important respect, there were many small tribal groups in the Puget

<sup>45</sup> *Coast Salish and Western Washington Indians*, 94, 308; Tollefson, "Political Organization of the Duwamish"; Bruce G. Miller, "Centrality and Measures of Regional Structure in Aboriginal Western Washington," *Ethnology* 28 (July 1989): 265-76; Allen, "Intergroup Ties and Exogamy," 165.

<sup>46</sup> Collins, "John Fornsby," 292; Daniel Boxberger, *To Fish in Common: The Ethnohistory of Lummi Indian Salmon Fishing* (Lincoln, 1989), 12; William W. Elmendorf, "Coast Salish Status Ranking and Intergroup Ties," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 27 (Winter 1971): 358; Smith, "The Coast Salish of Puget Sound," 197.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth D. Tollefson, "The Snoqualmie: A Puget Sound Chiefdom," *Ethnology* 26 (April 1987): 121-36. According to Marian Smith, Puget Sound people had no names for social groups other than their villages. "The Coast Salish of Puget Sound," 199.

Sound region when Vancouver arrived, but in other respects the region's people were indivisible.<sup>48</sup>

The principal basis for this paradoxical statement is kinship relations. Ethnographic studies dating from different periods and focusing on different groupings have consistently described peoples who aspired to marry outside their villages and usually did, if they had the economic means. Because of this, most well-to-do villagers had a parent or grandparents who had come from other communities. In 1905, an elderly native tried to explain to a judge how ambiguous was the ancestry of a "high-class" Indian. Asked to name the tribe of a man whom the Americans called Chief Bonaparte, Charles Jules said, "Belongs to the Snohomish Tribe. Of course there is little different connected to some other nations of people. That is the custom of the Indians, they marry into each tribe and adjoining two different tribes." A census of the first and second generations to live on the Skokomish Reservation confirms that mixed ancestry was common. Only 20 of the 242 persons who identified themselves as Skokomish—that is, belonging to the extended village on the Skokomish River—had four grandparents they identified as Skokomish.<sup>49</sup>

Because they reckoned kinship bi-laterally and afforded couples the option of residing with either spouse's kin, Puget Sound's aboriginal people commonly had close relatives residing in numerous communities. Sometimes the relatives lived at a considerable distance or in villages where most residents spoke a different language. For the same reasons, nearly all nineteenth-century Puget Sound villages had culturally and linguistically heterogeneous populations.<sup>50</sup>

The reciprocal obligations of kinship when kin were so far-flung made it possible for individuals and families to travel safely and to use resources in other communities'

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<sup>48</sup> E. E. Rich, ed., *The Letters of John McLoughlin's from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee*, 1st series, 1825-38, (London, 1941), Appendix A, 261. Marian Smith says that Indians of south Puget Sound "were held to be one people" but she characterizes their unity as negligible and then resolves this contradiction as follows: "The society was one in which each individual and each aggregate of individuals recognized several affiliations, at variance the one with the other and often overlapping to form new sets of combinations. The village was fundamental to the social structure, but even within themselves the villages lacked political unity." *The Puyallup-Nisqually*, 3-4, 6, 23, 201. Ruth Underhill discusses as a unit an even broader population but asserts that no population of American Indians was more diverse. *Indians of the Pacific Northwest* (1945; reprint, New York, 1978), 10.

<sup>49</sup> Testimony of Charles Jules, *Spithill v. McLean*, 79-80; Myron Eells, "Census of the Clallam and Twana Indians of Washington Territory," *American Antiquarian* 6, no. 1 (1884): 37; Astrida R. Blukis Onat, "The Interaction of Kin, Class, Marriage, Property Ownership, and Residence with Respect to Resource Locations among the Coast Salish of the Sound Lowland," *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 18 (Spring 1984): 88, 94; June McCormick Collins, "Multilineal Descent: A Coast Salish Strategy," in *Currents in Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Sol Tax*, ed. Robert Hinshaw (New York, 1979), 244.

<sup>50</sup> Collins, "Multilineal Descent," 244; Sally Snyder, "Skagit Society and Its Existential Basis: An Ethnofolkloristic Reconstruction" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1964), x; Henry Johnson interview, Harrington Papers, WTSIA Reel 16, 1021; Elmendorf, "Coast Salish Status Ranking and Intergroup Ties," 358.

territories. This circulation of people promoted the circulation of technology, rituals, and ideas as well as food and other tangible items. With their dispersed kin, for instance, many people took part in other communities' ceremonial life.<sup>51</sup> Based on information from Indians born in the 1850s, William Elmendorf concluded that most villagers along the Hood Canal did conceive of themselves and their fellow Twana speakers as a distinct people with a single name; yet the elite in those villages also identified just as strongly with a class that transcended this Twana ethnicity—people with whom they maintained an extensive, well-ordered network of inter-community relations.<sup>52</sup>

While the proportion of exogamous marriages and the geographical range of residents' kinship ties varied from village to village, and probably from era to era, most people's links were to communities in contiguous territories, and some links followed patterns that persisted over generations. Everyone was mistrustful of and sometimes actively hostile toward outsiders who were no known relation. Yet a complete diagram of kinship links as of 1855 would catch all the region's villages in an unbroken web of overlapping lines extending from the Chehalis River in the south to the Nooksack River in the north and beyond those points in all directions.<sup>53</sup>

Many individuals in this roughly woven regional social fabric thus had multiple affiliations, multiple loyalties, and multiple ways to identify themselves to others. These circumstances made possible, even encouraged, relocation as well as travel. Someone born in one village might be raised in another and married successively into additional settlements. Early in this century, elderly Indians recalled leading men of their childhood days who maintained winter houses in more than one place. Persons born in the mid-nineteenth century thought it natural that they had moved several times during their lifetimes.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Coast Salish and Western Washington Indians*, 127, 591; Arthur C. Ballard, "Some Tales of the Southern Puget Sound Salish," *University of Washington Publications in Anthropology* 2, no. 3 (1927): 57-81. Erna Gunther thought the practice of exogamy both helped to standardize some practices throughout the region and introduced variations community to community. "The Shaker Religion of the Northwest," in *Indians of the Urban Northwest*, ed., Marian Smith, (New York, 1949), 57. Colin Twedell, however, said the presence of a few in-married foreigners reinforced villagers' group consciousness. Transcript, Indian Claims Commission Docket 125, 103, in Petition for Federal Acknowledgment, Snohomish Tribe of Indians, Reply Appendix L-2.

<sup>52</sup> Elmendorf, "Coast Salish Status Ranking and Intergroup Ties" and William W. Elmendorf, *The Structure of Twana Culture* (1960; reprint, Pullman, WA, 1992). Sally Snyder concurs: See Snyder, "Skagit Society and Its Existential Basis," 79.

<sup>53</sup> Meeker Family Papers, UW Manuscripts, Notebook 1, 73; Collins, "John Fornsby," 330; Laurence Rygg, "The Continuation of Upper Class Snohomish Coast Salish Attitudes and Department as Seen Through the Life History of a Snohomish Coast Salish Woman" (M.A. thesis, Western Washington State College, 1977), 332; testimony of Jimmie Dorsey, *Duwamish et al. v. U. S.*, 271.

<sup>54</sup> *Duwamish et al. v. U. S.*, 488; Meeker Family Papers, Notebook 1; Waterman, "Puget Sound Geography," 112; Collins, *Valley of the Spirits*, 86.

Some individuals or families not only relocated but even shifted allegiance. The man named Klakum who appears in an 1856 military log was not an oddity. Klakum, an American officer wrote, was a Nisqually married to a Snoqualmie and considered himself a member of the latter tribe. In the decades after Klakum lived, non-Indians' presence and activities gave people new reasons to consider changes of allegiance, while traditional social ties continued to influence the direction of most such moves.<sup>55</sup>

Region-wide family networks, and the mobility associated with them, have worked at cross-purposes with American authorities' desire to draw neat lines around tribal groups. When the indigenous people consented to sell their lands and concentrate their residences at a few reserved sites, U. S. officials thought they knew which villages and bands were allied and could comfortably co-exist. Almost immediately, however, administrators lost confidence in their ability to say who belonged on which reservation.

Nathan Hill—charged with locating on a temporary reserve Indians of the Snohomish, Snoqualmie, and associated bands—was one such official. In February 1856, he told Governor Isaac Stevens uncertainly, “The Sab-ab Indians I think are closely connected with the Snoqualomy tribe. I think some are now with me.” Two months later, he submitted rolls of the tribes under his care with the caveat that they were “imperfect.” In contrast to the roll for the mostly absent Snoqualmie, he noted, the Snohomish list was nearly correct except for 25 or 30 people who were “part Snohomish only.” The latter, Hill said, had left without permission for other tribes to whom they partly belonged. The next month Hill reported additions to his Indians from the different reservations up the Sound—people who “claim to be related to my charges.” Hill's experiences mirrored those of agents elsewhere in Stevens's jurisdiction.<sup>56</sup>

Even after they set up permanent reservations, officials had trouble sorting and counting people who would neither stay put nor confine their associations to well-defined Indian communities. Many people would not fit easily into tribal categories. In 1880, for example, census takers found the family of Si-a-palt (English name, Patsy) at the mouth of Hood Canal, miles from the nearest reservation. Although Patsy was in territory associated with people called Clallam, the enumerator identified him as half Twana, half Squakson, and identified his wife, Mil-a-kwi-a (Sally), as half Skagit, half Samish. In Patsy's household also lived a nineteen-year-old man of Duwamish and Snoqualmie parentage and two grandchildren, one half Nisqually and half white, the other half Skehwhamish and half white.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> U. S. Navy, “Log of the *Decatur*,” 12 November 1856, WTSIA no. 58; testimony of Little Joe and Little George, Hearing (1923), NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Box 96, Folder 60; *Survey of Conditions*, testimony of Peter James, S.Rept. 545-8-A, 11790-91.

<sup>56</sup> N. D. Hill to Isaac Stevens, 2 February, 20 April, and 28 May, 1856, WTSIA, Roll 10, Reel 21; ARCIA (1857, 1868), 340, 202; R. H. Milroy to E. C. Chirouse, 25 March 1873, NA, PNR, RG 75, microfilm M-2011, Roll 2.

<sup>57</sup> Census of Twana of the Skokomish Reservation, 1880-81, NA, PNR, RG 75, Puyallup Box 70.

Patsy worked at a sawmill. When he gave away the proceeds of his labor at an inter-community potlatch in 1891, a journalist called him chief of the Skokomish. Patsy's son, however, told a special enrolling agent in 1919 that his father had been from "the two tribes between Shelton and Twana." His mother Sally, Young Patsy added, was a Swinomish from LaConner. Young Patsy himself appeared on the roll of the Jamestown Clallam band in 1917, apparently because his wife Lucy was considered a Clallam. Yet the Tulalip Agency listed Young Patsy as Snohomish in 1930, and called him a full, unenrolled Swinomish in 1934.<sup>58</sup>

In the 1930s, Indian Office employees pondered the status of several hundred people not far from Old Patsy's home, also off reservation. Parents and grandparents of many so-called San Juan Island Indians had come not only from local indigenous bands but also from Indian communities as far away as the Columbia River and Alaska, and from several European nations. After 1914, some of these people applied for enrollment with several known tribes—Cowlitz, Clallam, Samish, and others. Other applicants simply called themselves Mitchell Bay or San Juan Islands Indians.

Administrators could not decide how to classify the San Juan "mixed-bloods." In 1925, the Tulalip agency superintendent who met with them reported that they had adopted the manner, dress, and language of whites. "Many show but little Indian blood," he added. Nevertheless, he concluded, "As a rule they were simple mannered uneducated people reared in an Indian environment and I believe, regardless of their parentage on either side of the family, that they should be recognized as Indians." The following decade, a new superintendent came to a different conclusion about the same people. "It seems that I should either take steps to enroll and organize these Indians of the San Juan tribe or that they should be dismissed as white citizens," wrote O. C. Upchurch. "I would favor the latter procedure."<sup>59</sup>

A historian who tried to account for the Indians of Puget Sound as members of tribal communities would have no easier task than have bureaucrats and census takers. Indeed, the bureaucrats' confusion or carelessness and their varying notions about tribes would add to the challenge; for those administrators produced many of the records upon which a scholar must rely—records replete with discrepancies in the tribal identities ascribed both to individuals and to groups.

The famous Chief Seattle provides one of many possible cases in point. Isaac Stevens had Seattle sign the Treaty of Point Elliott as chief of the Duwamish, Suquamish, and allied tribes. An advisor had told Stevens that Seattle belonged to the Suquamish but lived with and commanded the allegiance of the Duwamish. Many other sources, including people purporting to speak for the Duwamish tribe, have since identified him as affiliated with the Duwamish. Yet Charlie Satiacum, who was an adult at treaty time, swore as a representative of the Duwamish that Seattle was not

<sup>58</sup> By 1891, non-Indians and often Indians used the Chinook jargon word "potlatch" (meaning "give" or "gift") for a variety of Indian ceremonies in which hosts distributed property to guests. F. I. Vassault, "Patsy's Potlatch," *Overland Monthly* 19 (May 1892), 461; Roblin Schedule, Roll 5; Indian Census Rolls, NA, PNR, microfilm M-595: Roll 93 (Clallam, 1917), Roll 589 (Clallam public domain, 1930), and Roll 592 (Clallam 1934).

<sup>59</sup> Roblin Schedule; Superintendent to Commissioner, 27 June 1925, and O. C. Upchurch to Commissioner, 30 April 1938, both in NA, PNR, RG 75, Western Washington Boxes 259, 257.



Just before World War I, Susan Frances Baker gave a special federal enrolling agent this photo to support a claim that she and her children were Clallam Indians. She provided posterity with an illustration of the porous boundaries between Indians and non-Indians. Standing behind the children, she said, were her two aunts, her grandmother, and her mother. NA, RG 75, Entry 613, Applications for Allotments of Washington Indians. Photo courtesy of the National Archives.

Duwamish.<sup>60</sup> Satiacum did not state his reason for disavowing Seattle. It may have been that Seattle's father was from territory Satiacum considered Suquamish, that Satiacum did not extend the Duwamish name to the village where Seattle's mother was raised, or that Seattle resided principally in Suquamish territory during his later years.<sup>61</sup>

Many discrepancies in labels attached to individuals and groups appear to have their origin in similar ambiguities or changes of affiliation. People identified at one time by the name of a village or small band have in different contexts or at different

<sup>60</sup> Gibbs, *Indian Tribes of Washington Territory*, 37; Treaty with the D'Wamish et al., 12 U. S. Stat. 927 (1855); House Committee on Indian Affairs, *Indian Tribes of Washington*, affidavit of Charley Satiacum, 1916, 67th Cong., 2d sess., 24 May and 5 June 1922, H.Rept. 320-7, 26. Seattle is identified as Duwamish in *Coast Salish and Western Washington Indians*, 32; Rudolf Kaiser, "Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception," in *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (Berkeley, 1987), 505; *Investigate Indian Affairs*, H.Rept 1051-0, 709.

<sup>61</sup> D. H. Maynard to M. T. Simmons, 19 September 1856, WTSIA, Roll 10, Reel 20; Waterman, "Puget Sound Geography," 149; Harrington Papers, WTSIA Reel 15, 489; Testimony of Sam Tecumseh, *Duwamish et al.*, 682.

times fallen under a broader label.<sup>62</sup> Indians not living where they were raised have sometimes identified themselves by their childhood community and at other times embraced or acquiesced in identification with their new communities. Some individuals have cited a single lineage to support a claim of tribal affiliation, while others have claimed several lines of descent or adopted a spouse's tribe.<sup>63</sup>

Such variations in the ascription of tribal identities reflect options that native traditions of exogamy and mobility made possible, but they are also inextricably bound up with the impacts of non-Indians on native communities. Since U. S. representatives set out to identify or create tribes with whom they could negotiate, American law and policy have contributed to periodic changes in the form and membership of tribes in the Puget Sound region. Consider the history of the Puyallup Tribe.

By the 1870s, a reservation on the Puyallup River had attracted a heterogeneous population that organized, with the government's blessing, under the name Puyallup Indians. Residents and federal officials did not have to articulate what constituted membership in the Puyallup tribe of Indians until the 1890s, when whites who lusted after reservation land challenged the criteria government agents had used to determine eligibility for Puyallup lots. Real estate agent James Wickersham claimed that 68 of 98 Puyallup allottees were not true Puyallups but half-breeds, Indians of neighboring or distant tribes, Mexicans, and Hawaiians. Records of a hearing on Wickersham's charges reveal that officials expected Indians to help them determine which people belonged on the reservation. The Indians—unsure of the relationship between their various social affiliations and eligibility for federally administered Indian property—did not speak in unison. Some thought place of birth determined Puyallup identity; others believed the decisive criterion was residence or reputation on the reservation. One witness, noting that no one had told him what it meant to be a member of a tribe, seemed unconcerned about the lack of clear rules. "It is all worked by marrying and relations," he said.<sup>64</sup>

By 1903, federal law and policy brought about the Puyallup Tribe's official dissolution, and people once considered Puyallup Indians became ordinary American citi-

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<sup>62</sup> Roblin Schedule; Marian W. Smith, "The Puyallup of Washington," in *Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes*, ed. Ralph Linton (New York, 1940), 3. Elderly Indians have distinguished the "real Puyallups" or "real Clallams" from people included under such names for purposes of treaty agreements and censuses. *Coast Salish and Western Washington Indians*, 191; Papers of Erna Gunther, UW Manuscripts, Accession 614-70-20, Box 2, Folder 14 (Cook interview) and Book III (Johnny Johnston).

<sup>63</sup> Testimony of William Shelton, *Spithill v. McLean*; testimony of William Hicks and Eliza Smith, *Duwamish v. U. S.*, 229, 375, 525; "Narrative of George Swanaset," Field Notes of Paul Fetzer, Melville Jacobs Papers, UW Manuscripts; Meeker Family Papers, Notebook 1; interview with Sebastian William, *Seattle Times*, 28 November 1954, magazine section, 10; application of Eddie Beatty, Roblin Schedule.

<sup>64</sup> A Boston Tillicum, Esq. (pseud.), [James Wickersham], "Monograph on the Puyallup Indians of the State of Washington" (1892, Ms. in Special Collections Library, University of Washington), 21-41; *Daily Ledger* (Tacoma, WA), 11 March 1888, 10.



zens. In the 1920s, however, the Indian Bureau asked the former Puyallups to identify themselves; shortly thereafter it insisted that the Puyallups organize a tribal government again. Many people who came forward, however, could not convince federal officials or a government-appointed tribal committee of their Puyallup identity because they had exploited their ties with other communities to get land or benefits elsewhere. Esther Hicks Clark lost her bid for enrollment, though no one denied that her mother was “full Puyallup.” Her father, who identified himself as Snohomish, had taken his young daughter to the Nisqually Reservation. As an adult, Clark moved back to the Puyallup vicinity, but lived with men from other tribes. Saying that it was time to make Indians abide by whites’ laws, the enrolling agent remarked with apparently unconscious irony, “This applicant and her men seem to be of the type who pursue Indian benefits instead of taking their places in the community.”<sup>65</sup>

In part because of changes in government policies and in part because of Indians’ habits and changes in those habits, questions about what constitutes an Indian tribe and membership in a tribe have been topics of public debate in western Washington for 150 years. The debates have taken different turns and had varied results for the many groups and individuals whose identities have been at issue. As at the Intertribal Council in 1954, diverse groups calling themselves tribes have acted on dissimilar notions of what an Indian tribe is, even while acknowledging each other as tribes of Indians.

There have been tribes or tribe members whose descent from early nineteenth-century forebears has been easy to trace, but there have also been groups and individuals who released their holds on their aboriginal foundations and later constructed new foundations. For nearly every Henry Kwina—a man who could confidently describe his relationship to a Lummi treaty signator and his continuous association with the Lummi Reservation community—there have been people like Indian Toby. Toby testified at an 1882 murder trial that he stayed mostly in the town of Seattle, associating with Indians from nearby villages. But “I can’t tell my tribe,” he said. “I am related to Jack [the defendant].”<sup>66</sup>

Since the 1850s, significant numbers of people like Toby have lived scattered throughout the Puget Sound area, maintaining no obvious connection to tribes, yet

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<sup>65</sup> Records and Evidence Concerning Puyallup Enrollment, NA, RG 75, Hill Entry 615, Box 2; Files on Puyallup Reorganization, NA, PNR, RG 75, Western Washington Box 277; testimony of Thomas Lane, *Ross v. Eells et al.*, Case 266, U. S. Circuit Court of the Western District of Washington (1893), NA, PNR, RG 21, Box 38; Elizabeth Shackelford, “A History of the Puyallup Indian Reservation, Tacoma” (senior thesis, College of Puget Sound, 1918), 23, 33.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel L. Boxberger, “The Ethnohistory of Western Washington Indians in the Nineteenth Century” (unpublished manuscript, 1993, Evergreen Legal Services Native American Project, Seattle, WA), Appendix IV, 15; testimony of Toby, an Indian, *Territory v. Dr. Jack*, Case 2699 (1882), King County District Court, Records of Washington Territory District and Justice Courts, Washington State Archives, Olympia.

claiming or accepting identification as Indians.<sup>67</sup> The existence of such people confirms that it would be a mistake to focus a history of Indians in the region on one or more specific tribes. Not only have people on all sides of the various ethnic boundaries repeatedly questioned and redefined the nature and the composition of local Indian tribes, but also the definitions they have negotiated have not been broad enough to cover all who wished or were urged to use tribal names or the label "Indian." Many people have found themselves in the vaguely defined spaces between tribes or between their own social reference groups and the administrative categories for Indians.

To say that some people identified as Indians have had multiple, changing, or no tribal affiliations is not to argue that tribal affiliations have been arbitrary or unimportant. Likewise, to point out that many people have straddled the lines between races and cultures is not to suggest that the factors causing people to think of themselves as Indians have been spurious or unrelated to a genuine, non-European heritage. Most people at all periods have perceived a clear difference between Indians and non-Indians; and most, for widely accepted (although disputed and constantly mutating) reasons, have probably known in which category they and others belonged. Yet during the long public dialogue about how Indians and non-Indians should order their relations with each other, there have always been some people unsure where they belonged, some whose claims to a tribal or racial identity have met with skepticism or angry denials, and some who have resisted in various ways the pressures to package themselves as members of U. S.-sanctioned Indian groups.<sup>68</sup>

The people who have not been sure where to stand—with Indians or non-Indians, with the Duwamish or the Suquamish—are important, but not because they have been more numerous or more typical of Puget Sound Indians than people of less ambiguous identity. They are important because their existence and the social relations that brought them into existence have obliged those who would sort Indians from non-Indians to define and re-define their terms. Since Europeans first proposed the term "Indian," diverse candidates for the label have struggled both to understand its meaning and to give it their own meaning. Rather than discard terms that fit awkwardly over changing populations, people have revised their understandings of

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<sup>67</sup> Old Man Olie, Doctor Charlie, et al to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 15 February 1875, NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Agency, microfilm M-2011, Roll 3; Thomas G. Bishop, "An Appeal to the Government to Fulfill Sacred Promises Made 61 Years Ago" (1915, pamphlet in Special Collections Library, University of Washington); Memorandum Opinion, *State v. Tommy Santiago Howard*, 33 *Washington Reporter* (1903), 251 and following; D. C. Govan to Commissioner, 20 November 1895, NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Box 37; "Where Are Our Indian People?" *Tulalip Bulletin*, November 1917, NA, RG 75, microfilm M-1011.

<sup>68</sup> Annual Report, Tulalip Agency (1877), NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Box 311; Marriage Registers, 1907-1918, NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Box 472; *Survey of Conditions*, testimony of Wilfred Steve, S.Rept. 545-8-A, 11814; Seymour Alfred to F. A. Gross, May 1945, NA, PNR, RG 75, Tulalip Decimal File 620; Ellen Day to Raymond Bitney, 13 July 1951, Passport Division to Superintendent, 11 December 1944, both in NA, PNR, RG 75, Western Washington Box 257; applications of Sloan, Beale, Fowler in Roblin Schedule.

concepts such as “Indian” and “tribe.” Moreover, they have continuously communicated—in symbolic action, as well as verbally—the meanings they would assign to such terms. Communications about troublesome ethnic labels are a consolation for historians who chafe at having to use those labels, because such colloquies contains the valuable ore that historians hope to mine. In those colloquies is the story of ethnic relations that needs to be unearthed and presented.<sup>69</sup>

This essay affords only glimpses of the story that would emerge from dialogues about Indian identities in the Puget Sound area. Although limited in geographical scope, it is a saga with national implications. The fluidity and ambiguity of tribal affiliations among Puget Sound’s indigenous peoples may be unusual. The extent and intricacy of historic relations between Indians and others there may also be unusual. But the conceptual questions that have arisen during debates about how to classify peoples in Washington have been intertwined with national concerns. In the Puget Sound area, as elsewhere, federal policy and other forces of nationwide scope have influenced everyone’s ideas about Indians. On the other hand, in responding to those national forces, Puget Sound’s peoples have brought to bear their unique local historical legacy; and we would be wise to ask whether and how such regional legacies have informed the national discourse about Indian identity and Indians’ place in American society.

Efforts to define Indians have also been part of a larger process that historian Sarah Deutsch calls “the business of boundary maintenance.” Retracing those efforts in a region where so-called Indians have long mingled with other inhabitants should contribute to our understanding of a phenomenon historian Richard White described in 1986: In the American West, the relations of previously separate peoples has produced new racial groups.<sup>70</sup> Historians interested in “the business of boundary maintenance” will find the records for western Washington laden with the raw materials for a productive enterprise. Few settings offer a better view of the complex process by which modern ideas about Indians and their place in American society have evolved.

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<sup>69</sup> See Patricia Nelson Limerick’s argument for mining the West’s legacy of disputed words and verbal activity. “Making the Most of Words: Verbal Activity and Western America,” in *Under Open Skies*, 167-84.

<sup>70</sup> Deutsch, “Landscape of Enclaves,” 116; Richard White, “Race Relations in the American West,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1986): 397.