

Claiming Mount Tahoma

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In the summer of 1872 the Northern Pacific railroad was nearing its long promised (and frequently deterred) goal of extending its tracks to the northwest corner of the United States. As the iron rails crept slowly towards the shores of Washington State's Puget Sound,¹ the citizens of each small city keenly hoped to be chosen as the terminus of the Northern Pacific — a situation which promised seemingly unlimited opportunities to the inhabitants of these “last wests” and would secure one township's future as the principle and most important urban center of the region. A committee representing the interests of the Northern Pacific traveled to the Puget Sound where they toured four prospective sites for locating of the northwest terminus: Mukilteo, Olympia, Seattle and Tacoma. Seattle, formally established in 1869, was the clear favorite. With 1142 residents, the town had the largest population in the region, and in 1873 pledged 700,000 in cash, bonds and waterfront real estate to the railroad in exchange for Seattle's selection as terminus.² In his history of Seattle entitled *Northwest Gateway*, Archie Binns narrates Seattle's hopes:

The citizens of Seattle had expected their town to win the terminus on its merits... Tacoma, on Commencement Bay, was a few cabins and a sawmill in the wilderness, and Mukilteo was still less. Olympia was the only rival Seattle had feared, and Olympia was ruled out, Seattle waited confidently, and Tacoma and Mukilteo waited.

The Northern Pacific kept them in suspense for another year, and then Arthur Denny received a telegram from the company's town on the Columbia:

Kalama, July 14, 1873

A.A. Denny, Seattle,

We have located the terminus in Commencement Bay

R.D. Rice

J.C. Aisnworth

Commissioners

This staggering disappointment instigated a marked rivalry between the two cities which would last nearly fifty years, reaching its boiling point in the aggressive and slanderous booster campaigns of each city in the 1890s, and did not finally simmer down until in the mid-1920s. The selection of Tacoma as Puget Sound's first terminus (Seattle would eventually secure a railway terminus of its own in 1884) was

¹Washington was admitted into the Union in 1889.

² Archie Binns, *Northwest Gateway: The Story of the Port of Seattle* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1941), 203.

monumental to the sawmill town who would for the remainder of the 20th century and well into the 21st would vigorously strive to retain a competitive edge over her sister city and northern rival. This paper will explore the boom Tacoma experienced between the years of 1873 and 1924 –a boom both cultural and economic that was instrumental in the development of Tacoma, which still today remains the Puget Sound second largest port city, where rails meet sails.

In order to further narrow the scope of study and provide a context for Tacoma’s turn-of-the-century self-promotion, this paper will focus its attention on a geographic entity of the Puget Sound which predates all human inhabitation of the region by uncountable years. Located to the southeast of Tacoma and visible on a clear day from one hundred miles away in every direction, lies the highest mountain in the coastal Cascade Range and one of the most prominent natural features of the North American continent. This magnificent eminence, “which the Indians called ‘Tacoma’ but which is officially named ‘Rainier,’”³ commands the admiration of all who observe it, and quickly attracted the attention of both cities. Perhaps because of its beauty or perhaps because of economic worth, the Mountain became yet another source of contention between Seattle and Tacoma.

In this paper, I seek to examine the ways, both culturally and economically, that the peoples of Tacoma claimed figurative ownership of Mount Rainier. I say figurative possession because Mount Rainier legally became federal property in 1899, when it became the United State’s fifth National Park. However, Tacoma eagerly entered into the debate over which city was better entitled to harness the Mountain’s resources or incorporate of the Mountain’s qualities into the city’s developing identity. Absorbing or annexing the Mountain became a significant ambition of Tacoma, and “claiming” the Mountain was regarded as means for the city to market itself as the supreme municipality of the Puget Sound. This tactic can be observed firsthand in the copious amount of dramatic booster material that Tacoma circulated in an effort to boast of her attributes, attract tourism, and slander her rival. This paper also seeks to be mindful of and explore at length the

³ John H. Williams, *“The Mountain that was “God””: Being a little Book About the Great Peak Which the Indians Called “Tacoma” but which is Officially Named “Rainier”* (Tacoma: published by the Author, 1910), title.

glaring absence of an indigenous voice in much of Mount Rainier historiography and scholarship; it will argue that Northwest whites purposefully sought to disenfranchise Native American ownership of the Mountain in order to justify claiming it as their own. Ironically, by 1924, the animosities between Seattle and Tacoma were beginning to be set aside in favor of a tentative peace, as a regional northwest identity became more relevant to the Puget Sound than the continuation of a competition which had lost most of its initial aggression. In its conclusion, this paper will explore the hotly contested debate over the mountain's name and its aftermath.

In a turn of the century rivalry that was both cultural and economic, Tacoma and Seattle strove to establish supremacy over the geography of the Puget Sound. By claiming and conquering “the Mountain in its Dooryard,”⁴ Tacoma began to develop a distinct regional and metropolitan Northwest identity, as the Gateway City to Mount Rainier. “No book will ever be large enough to tell the whole story. That must be learned by summers of severe though profitable toil,” writes John H. Williams in his illustrated history titled, *The Mountain that Was God*.⁵ But by investigating the vested interest of the citizenship of Tacoma in procuring Rainier-Tahoma for themselves, historians might gain insight into how north-westerners from The City of Destiny conceptualized their regional, local, and personal identities in relation to the imposing landscape of the Puget Sound. Only by dismissing Seattle's pretenses and ignoring the previous claims of Native Americans indigenous to the Puget Sound, could Tacoma truly claim this Mountain as it its own.

⁴ Tacoma Commercial Club and Chamber of Commerce, *Tacoma, the city with a snow-capped mountain in its dooryard*, (Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma Commercial Club and Chamber of Commerce, 1912), title.

⁵ Williams, 7.

BOOSTERISM:

So blatant was the competitiveness between these two metropolises that historians examining the issue as early as the 1920's acknowledged booster literature as an essential and enormously popular tactic of attracting population and eliciting tourism from other regions of the U.S. Jeanette Paddock Nichols, writing in 1922, claimed that: "any means of diverting the flow of travel and trade from opposing cities was good business and permissible ethics from the point of view of the competing metropolis."⁶ Author Murray Morgan includes a dramatic example of such espionage in his book *Puget's Sound Narrative of early Tacoma and the South Sound*: "Seattle, Seattle! Death Rattle, Death Rattle!" chanted Tacoma school children. Businessmen, too, at luncheon meetings."⁷ This phrase, the second part of which celebrates the delicious "Tacoma, Tacoma! Aroma, Aroma!," was instigated by George Francis Train, a charismatic American personage and promoter of the Northern Pacific Railroad who is sometimes credited as giving Tacoma her nickname, "The City of Destiny."⁸ Train's eccentric taunt is a confirmation of the turn of the century dialogue of opposition between the modern day sister cities.

The power of booster rhetoric can be observed in an 1889 edition of *The Northwest Magazine* in which two real estate firms advertise the superior situation and amenities of their perspective municipality. Describing Seattle as "The Most Aggressive and Prosperous City in America," Eshelman, Llewellyn & Co. invite the readers of their "tons upon tons" of similar circulation to come and investigate for themselves the business and residence opportunities of this booming "New York of the Pacific."⁹ In his own advertisement, directly above, J.H. Hall had rejected such classification, declaring, "Tacoma is not a 'boom city' but a rapidly growing mercantile manufacturing center."¹⁰ Tacoma was distasteful of

⁶ Jeannette Paddock Nichols, "Advertising the Klondike," *The Washington Historical Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (Jan 1922), 20.

⁷ Murray Morgan, *Puget's Sound: A Narrative of Early Tacoma and the Southern Sound*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1979), 272.

⁸ Bill Radke, "Spokane, Tacoma Duke It Out to Come in Second," *The Seattle Post Intelligencer*, July 12, 2003, <http://www.lexis-nexis.com/> (accessed December 12, 2011).

⁹ Eshelman, Llewellyn & CO., "SEATTLE, the New York of the Pacific," *Northwest Magazine*, (1899), 39.

¹⁰ J.H. Hall, "TACOMA, Washington Territory, Western Terminus Northern Pacific Railroad," *Northwest Magazine*, 1899, 39.

the interim association of a boomtown in its desire to eventually secure a future classification as a *city*. Competition, rather than cooperation, seemed the natural outcome of the relationship between the two metropolises who each labeled itself as a bellicose center of manufacturing.

Ads like those above were profuse within booster publications that intended to educate Americans outside of the region about “the terminus on tidewater.”¹¹ Essential in the consideration of such published materials is an understanding of the term boosterism and its significance to western scholarship. As western historian David Wrobel explains,

Boosters were, almost invariably, optimistic fortune-tellers who told present and prospective residents what they wanted and needed to hear about western places. They placed the clear, bright future in the cloudier, less certain present and in doing so they tried to brush away the concerns of potential settlers... often present[ing] desolate frontiers as settled regions, rich in culture and infrastructure, blessed with commercial and agricultural advantages, and devoid of danger and privation.¹²

Wrobel’s 2002 book, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West*, delves into the promotional circulation of western boosters to piece together a dualist history of imagined futures and pasts of the American West. Quick to acknowledge the stigmas attached to such powerful yet problematic sources, Wrobel structures his thesis not around the truthfulness of these sources but their ability to convey something “genuine about the West’s sense of itself and America’s sense of the West.”¹³ Referencing the U.S.’s rich history of imagining its own identity, Wrobel’s perspective is easily applied to promotional literature published and circulated by Tacoma. As a community in transition and preoccupied with foresight, its promotional literature reflects this city’s state of mind during its turn of the century passage into modernity. Tacoma boosters were anxious to metamorphose a muddy, stump-ridden, sawmill town into an enviable, regional metropolis; seeking to exercise an authority in the Northwest similar to that which New York wielded on the East Coast or Chicago exerted in the Midwest. To assuage

¹¹ J.H. Hall, “TACOMA, Washington Territory, Western Terminus Northern Pacific Railroad,” *Northwest Magazine*, 1899, 39.

¹² Wrobel, David M. *Promised Land: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 2.

¹³ Gendzel, Glen, review of *Promised Land: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West*, by David Wrobel. *Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (Dec 2003): 1046.

and disguise the uncertainties of such a future, Tacoma boosters often affected a triumphant and self-assured tone in their writing, championing the prospects of Tacoma as well as her many virtues.

Intended to persuade future resident to relocate to Tacoma, an article which appeared in an 1889 issue of *The Northwest Magazine* appeals to its readership, and future citizenship, by boasting of the natural amenities Tacoma offers individuals from all walks of life. The author laundry-lists the delights experienced by “men of all sorts of tastes” who would find something to suit them in the rapidly expanding “New Seaport City of the Northwest.”¹⁴ The lumberman, for example, is “amazed at the size of the firs, spruce and cedars” and the “magnitude of the operations of his special industry.” At the nearby port, the sailor “sees with delight the big, square rigged ships that come sailing up the sound” and the “steamboat man discovers opportunities” alongside the merchant and mechanic who “soon find good openings for their energies” in the bustling Tacoma marketplace.¹⁵ After such a congenial and carefully contrived depiction of Tacoma’s enterprising economic scene, the author concludes, appropriately self-importantly and poetically, “Thus, as Washington grows Tacoma grows, by the working of the natural laws of trade which build up cities as markets and transportation centers for the tributary country.”¹⁶ Despite the disinclination of some residents to classify Tacoma as a booming city, rapid growth, and more specifically sustained growth, is celebrated by this article’s author; progress is also promised to its intended audience. Recalling recent large-scale immigration to California, *The Northwest Magazine* criticizes such movement as “a climactic craze of people who wanted to go where winter was unknown and who poured into a desert with only a few strips of irrigable valleys.” Instead, the article firmly promised that no such disappointment awaited immigrants to the Tacoma vicinity, and soothed the fears of Midwest farmers in particular with a description of the green and fertile valleys of Puyallup.¹⁷ In contrast, when the same rush of western immigration yielded a beautiful and bustling metropolitan center, Tacoma was quick to predict similar results in the South Puget Sound, “Nothing seems more certain,” the

¹⁴ Hall, 12.

¹⁵ Hall, 12.

¹⁶ Hall, 12.

¹⁷ Hall, 12.

article claims, “than that Tacoma will be to the North Pacific coast ... what San Francisco is to California and adjacent territories”¹⁸

The promises of booster texts such as those above often contrasted strongly and occasionally comically with the actual contexts, settings, and “advantages” of the place they sought to promote.

Tacoma was no exception. When popular foreign author Rudyard Kipling visited Tacoma in 1889, he penned a description of Tacoma which he would later publish in his travelling narrative, *Coast to Coast*:

We passed down ungraded streets that ended abruptly in a fifteen foot drop and a nest of brambles; along pavements that beginning in pine-plank ended in the living tree... the hotel walls bore a flaming panorama of Tacoma in which by the eye of faith I saw a faint resemblance to the real town. The hotel stationary advertised that Tacoma bore on its face all the real advantages of the highest civilization, and the newspapers sang the same tune in a louder key. The real estate agents were selling house-lots on unmade streets miles away for thousands of dollars.¹⁹

Kipling comes to his own conclusions in regards to Tacoma’s prosperity, “Tacoma was literally staggering under a boom of the boomiest,” he diagnoses.²⁰ Historian Carl Abbot, who early on in his book *How Cities Won the West* includes Tacoma in a list of cities who had “begged, blackmailed, and dug deep into their community pockets to get a rail connection,”²¹ argues that despite such articulate claims by boosters of the highest cultural prospects and the omnipresence of sophistication in their city, neighborhoods “behind the opera house and the salon district”²² were less invested in an elegant Tacoma future. Despite its sublime situation on the lapping waters of the Sound and in the lap of Mount Rainier, Abbott deduces that Tacoma was a “lunch pail city” full of working class families.²³ It is important to note that boosters, although they claimed to speak for the city and all who resided there, were but a small set of the Tacoma citizenship. Furthermore, those who “boosted” Tacoma and rhapsodized over the infinite charms of Mount Rainier typically fell into two types: real estate boosters, men like Train who sought economic gain in their promotion of Tacoma, and those of the peculiar western aristocracy who

¹⁸ Hall, 12.

¹⁹ Morgan, 271.

²⁰ Rudyard Kipling, *Coast to Coast* in Murray Morgan, *Puget’s Sound: A Narrative of Early Tacoma and the Southern Sound*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1979), 271.

²¹ Carl, Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 33.

²² Abbott, 103.

²³ Abbott, 104.

were eager to imbibe Tacoma with a cultural background similar in gentility the other “great” cities of America while simultaneously declaring her unequalled in all the world.

Booster literature which boasted of Tacoma as a peer to Great cities such as New York, Chicago and San Francisco appeared in pamphlets and magazines, books, posters, editorials and advertisements. In one such promotion, a Tacoma businessman took it upon himself to defend his place of habitation, even as he dismissed that of her northern rival,

Tacoma has a better foundation for permanent, material prosperity than any city in the United States and the sickly whine which comes from some of her jealous neighbors will develop into a wail of despair as they note Tacoma’s daily growing supremacy by virtue of inherent merit and determination to utilize her advantages.²⁴

Such a method of advertising falls directly within booster tracks. J.H. Hall’s advertisement includes no pictures, and this bold statement, assuredly declaring Tacoma the supreme capital of Washington State, is the last of six similarly structured statements. In classic booster fashion, he confidently asserts the “inherent merit” of his western place and simultaneously belittles the claims of Seattle, which is depicted here as whining in jealousy, bested by her southern rival. Hall is not without a vested interest in Tacoma’s success; he is, after all, a real estate agent, but by signing this ad, “yours truly” and including his name, this Tacoma citizen places himself in a position to defend the attributes of the place he inhabits.

The direct nature of Hall’s words contrasts stupendously with an essay written by C.E. Stevens, whose superfluous and dramatic prose does justice to one historian’s description of booster literature as “tendentious tracts brimming with ballyhoo and balderdash.”²⁵ The essay simply titled “Tacoma” by C.E. Stevens appears in a hybrid book-magazine-pamphlet published by the city’s Chamber of Commerce and is clearly dedicated to extolling the cities merits, as evidenced by its title: *Tacoma Invites You*.²⁶ Stevens, similarly to Hall, addresses Tacoma’s superior merit, but far exceeds Hall in his exuberant and often superfluous praise of this “Empire of colossal magnitude, wealth and influence... destined to outrank the greatest [cities] on earth.” Stevens depicts Tacoma, “mistress of the West,” as a “paradise regained”

²⁴ Hall, 39.

²⁵ Gendzel, Glen, review of *Promised Land: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West*, by David Wrobel. *Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (Dec 2003): 1046.

²⁶C.E. Stevens, “Tacoma,” in *Tacoma Invites You* (Tacoma: Chamber of Commerce, 1920?), 15-29.

which offers her population an opportunity to live in a setting that is unique in America. Inspired by the beauty that surrounds them, her inhabitants live their lives with robust enthusiasm and are rewarded in their enterprises by the intense productivity of their efforts in industry, agriculture and commerce, “thankful to a kind providence which has placed them in the midst of such a delightful spot.”²⁷ Tacoma’s potential, then, exists in her very youth. “Behold! Then, Tacoma!” Steven’s exclaims, “Favored of the Gods; as yet but in her swaddling clothes, an infant!” The elements of language at work in Stevens Arcadian portrayal of Tacoma²⁸ give nod to a claim made western historian Carl Abbott that “one distinguishing characteristic of western cities is the presence of their natural settings and landscape as an active physical and cultural force.”²⁹ Katherine Morrissey furthers this discussion, of the influence of landscape on regionalist identities, in her book, *Mental Territories*. In her consideration of the interior Pacific Northwest, self-dubbed by its inhabitants as the Inland Empire, Morrissey identifies an organically created regionalism that is inseparable from the territories geography. Inhabitants of the Inland Empire describe it most commonly in terms of its physical terrain – “separated from the great prairies by the Rocky Mountains, from the Pacific Coast region by the Cascades, on the north by the Selkirk mountains and extending south as far as the Blue Mountains of Oregon.” Morrissey discovers that his “mental image of a round bowl, emphasizing the mountains that rim the region” is understood by inhabitants as a satisfactory definition of their Inland Empire.³⁰ Tacoma boosterism is an example of how In its booster texts Tacoma conceptualized its local identity and regional importance in similar geographic terms. The peak topographic expression of Tacoma’s superlative situation on the Sound was the mountain which the city was named after. From the 1880s onward, Tahoma would promote herself as the gateway city to this terrestrial and monumental peak.

²⁷ Stevens, 17.

²⁸ Stevens, 16.

²⁹ Abbott, 275.

³⁰ Katherine G. Morrissey, *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire*, (Ithaca, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), preface.

The seal of the Tacoma Department of Utilities indicates the consideration of Mount Tacoma as economic property of the city.³¹ On the left hand side a drawing of the seaport and its factories represents her Industrial aspects, on the right her Commercial aspects are depicted by a sketch of Tacoma's downtown skyline, looming above both is Mount Tahoma, representing a third major source of potential revenue for Tacoma: tourism. Using this image of Mount Rainier, or better yet Mount Tahoma, as a front piece established Tacoma as the starting point to the mountain.³² This association was mentioned again and again in booster texts and affirmed by visual advertisements to the point of exhaustion. As Stevens articulated, "No picture of Tacoma, either word or brush, is complete without the Mountain, lying in its dooryard."³³

"To miss seeing Tacoma would mean to miss the Venice of America. To omit a trip to Mt. Tacoma would mean overlooking the Mount Blanc of America" asserted a booster pamphlet published in 1917 by the *Tacoma Daily News* intended to educate Americans of on the "epitome of its resources and its special attractions to tourists."³⁴ Efforts to promote the National Park, and Tacoma as the gateway city to the park, were part of a larger popular campaign by the U.S. Parks Department titled "See America First" which recruited a generation of upper to middle class Americans to bypass a pilgrimage to Europe and to embark on pleasure tours of the North American Continent instead.³⁵ "Takoma is the starting point to the mountain" the pamphlet continues, and the terminus of a "superb mountain highway... passing through virgin timber for many miles."³⁶ In 1917, this roadway was boasted of as the only accessible entrance to the park. Advertisements reconfirmed Tacoma as the city with privileged access to the Mountain; the cover image of a booklet published by the Rainier National Park committee, dynamically

³¹ Ruth Kirk, *Sunrise to Paradise: The Story of Mount Rainier National Park* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1999), 5.

³² Theodore, Catton, *National Park, City Playground: Mount Rainier in the Twentieth Century*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2006), 7.

³³ Stevens, 23.

³⁴ Tacoma Daily News. *Tacoma Washington -1917: An Epitome of its Resources and its Special Attractions to Tourists*. (Tacoma: Published by the Tacoma Dailey News, printed by Pioneer Bindery & Printing Co., 1917), 4.

³⁵ Marguerite S. Schaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1920*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2011), entire.

³⁶ Tacoma Daily News, 5.

foreshortened the view of the Mountain from Tacoma.³⁷ In this image, a road winds from Tacoma, which appears situated at the base of the mountain itself, ever upwards through lush Northwest forests, until it reaches the snow-covered regions of the mountains top. “Four Hours from Tacoma to the Glacier” reads the accompanying text. “The tourist in haste,” the *Tacoma Daily News* promised, “may step from the steamboat or train into a waiting automobile and be whisked in four hours from seal level to snow field canyons and fields of alpine flowers.”³⁸ After a gorgeous, comfortable motor to the top of the Mountain along a deliberately planned route with showcased the parks breathtaking scenery, all sorts of activities awaited tourists. Hiking, floral and faunal appreciation, and even “Snow-balling and sliding in midsummer on Mt. Tahoma”³⁹ were advertised as awaiting the visitor to the Mountain. And flock to the Mountain tourists did. The nations fifth national park, and the first to provide automobile access to its many amenities, Mount Rainier received its fair share of visitation by residents of either American Coast. An article in a 1924 edition of the *Los Angeles Times* extolled the Mountain as a magnet for “thousands of vacation seekers from the Southland who venture into the Northwest each year [to] worship at the shrine of Mount Rainier.”⁴⁰

Another essential tactic of Tacoma in claiming the Mountain as its own was its very proximity to the great cone. Compare, for instance, a photo taken of the Mountain from Lake Union to one taken from Tacoma’s north side. [Figures 1 & 2] In the former, a UW crew team practices on a gorgeous lake, in the distance a beautiful, and smallish, Mount Rainier is visible. Contrast this image with one taken of the Mountain from Tacoma. In *this* image, the Mountain *looms* in the near distance over the city named after it.

³⁷ Kirk, 23.

³⁸ Tacoma Daily News, 5.

³⁹ “Railroad Service to Mount Rainier National Park,” advertisement (Tacoma Eastern Railroad), from University of Washington Libraries, *Washington Magazine*: Vol 2, JPEG http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/advert&CISOPTR=82&CISOBX=1&REC=20 (accessed December 7, 2011).

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[Fig. 1]⁴¹



Property of MSCUA, University of Washington Libraries. Photo Coll 700

[Fig. 2]⁴²



The immediacy of this lonely sentinel and its closeness to the Tacoma allowed for a melding of landscape and cityscape. Not unreasonably, did Tacoma residents refer to this edifice as “the snow-capped Mountain in their dooryard.” When Seattle, in its 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, dubbed the central axis of its fairgrounds Rainier Vista, a promenade which framed a gorgeous view of the Mountain in the distance, attempted to image the Mountain as part of its skyline, it enjoyed only limited success. Seattle was incapable of boasting such immediate access to the Mountain or such a harmonious

⁴¹ “Crew team rowing on Lake Washington, University of Washington, 1924,” University of Washington Digital Archives, University of Washington Campus Photographs.

⁴² “Mount Rainier, Tacoma, Washington, 1906,” University of Washington Digital Archives, Albert Henry Barnes Photographs.

incorporation of Rainier into its cityscape. In a photograph taken at Seattle's 1909 Exhibition, the attempt of Seattle to claim a Tacoma-like proximity to the Mountain is unintentionally humorous. [Fig. 3]



[Fig. 3]⁴³

It requires a second glance and a closer inspection of a photo of Rainier Vista to realize that the Mountain in the background is in fact a fake – an amateur drawing penciled, larger than life, over the grey, foggy sky which completely obstructs the Mountain from Seattle's view on those all-too-common, dreary Northwest days. Claiming ownership of the Mount Olympus of the Pacific Northwest would be a way for both Seattle and Tacoma to legitimize their status as the most important city on the Sound; but firstly, ownership of the mountain would have to transfer hands, from the red to the white man.

⁴³ "Formal Gardens along Rainier Vista, Alaska-Yukon-Pacific-Exposition, Seattle, Washington, 1909," University of Washington Digital Archives, Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition.

DISMISSING NATIVE CLAIMS OF THE MOUNTAIN:

When Mount Rainier was established as a National Park in 1899, the traditional pilgrimage to and usage of the Mountain by the region's indigenous tribes became a hindrance to those who sought to market the Mountain as an unoccupied *wilderness*. Puget Sound's relatively new population – a population consisting of the first generation children of the region's original pioneers and the continuing influx of more recent immigrants – came into less and less contact with the Native Americans who had once been plentiful along the rocky beaches and valleys of the South Sound. By perpetuating Natives as irrational or “less than” beings, Tacoma writers and the administration of the park itself successfully derailed any Native claims of ownership, literal or figurative, of Mount Rainier.

Treaties with Puget Sound's Native Americans dating back to 1854 and 1855, which were intended to keep Native Americans separate from encroaching white civilization were challenged by the creation of a national park in 1899. The “language of the law,” that established Mount Rainier as a park was far “less obtuse” than language from previous treaties which had allowed Native Americans to continue their traditional cultural and economic practices on all “open or unclaimed lands.” After establishment of the park, spaces that still appeared “open and unclaimed” to indigenous tribes were under exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government.⁴⁴ “Administrative ignorance towards Puget Sound tribes reveals a very undemocratic picture” of national park stewardship and is the focus of Laura Stevenson's thesis “Nature and Neglect” which examines the all-too-common practice of dispossession of traditional native American lands by the Parks Department in the creation of wilderness preservations.⁴⁵ Mount Rainier literature published by the park itself continued to portray Indians not as an intrinsic part of the Mountain's landscape habitat but as “simpleminded interlopers” or the parks “first visitors.”⁴⁶ Such common perceptions served to further delegitimize and de-politicize native tribes. By portraying Native Americans as visitors to this landscape, whites were better positioned to regard Indians as flighty tourists

⁴⁴ Laura Stevenson, “Nature and Neglect: Mount Rainier National Park and Native American Relations” (US History thesis, University of Puget Sound, 2004), 4-5.

⁴⁵ Stevenson, 5.

⁴⁶ Stevenson, 5-6.

and not as rightful landowners. “The movement to set aside national parks and wilderness preserves ... simultaneous with the movement of Indian tribes onto reservations”⁴⁷ has been recognized only recently, in a new wave of scholarship by western historians.

Identifying the problematic tendency of Mount Rainier scholarship to “oversimplify Native people’s participation in the history of the mountain,”⁴⁸ economic historian Lisa Blee article revisits past historiography concerning the landmark that was cooperatively shared by five Native American tribes prior to the arrival of whites to the southern Puget Sound.⁴⁹ Her article, “Mount Rainier and Indian Economies of Place” consciously revises Mount Rainier historiography to include a Native American voice, seeking to create a “more holistic and dynamic system of value and interests at play in colonial space throughout the uncertainties of history.”⁵⁰ Coll Thrush, another contemporary historian, shares Blee’s goal of revisionist history; in his book, *Native Seattle*, Thrush examines the cost of urban development and attempts to “reorient Seattle’s urban story by placing Native histories at the center.”⁵¹

In keeping with the work of Blee and Thrush, this portion of my thesis addresses the absence of a Native American perspective concerning ownership of Mount Rainier. Native people’s participation in Mount Rainier history has too often been absent, devalued, or oversimplified. A revision of such scholarship is particularly necessary because whites’ writing at the turn of the century was consciously seeking to usurp the mountain. Intent on claiming the Mountain as their own, and proclaiming Tacoma as the gateway city to Mount Rainier, white residents of Tacoma had to first undermine legitimate Indian claims to the Mountain. Their racially charged texts had to firstly deny any previous indigenous claims of ownership over the Mountain, and instead present it as a wilderness devoid of any legitimate Native American presence.

⁴⁷ Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), IX.

⁴⁸ Blee, Lisa, “Mount Rainier and Indian Economies of Place, 1850-1925,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, (Winter 2009): 443.

⁴⁹ These tribes are the: Nisqually, Yakima, Puyallup, Muckleshoot, and Upper Cowlitz.

⁵⁰ Blee, 421.

⁵¹ Thrush, 16.

Much common sentiment about the relationship of native people to the peak can be found in the account of P.B. Van Trump, who, along with General “Hazard” Stevens, successfully attained the “first” summit of the Mountain in 1870. Trump spoke publicly on many occasions of his ascent to the Mountain’s peak; the importance of his accomplishment is recognized by Herbert Hunt, who includes an 1897 retelling of the story in his autobiographical history of Tacoma. In his oration, Trump briefly recognizes native myths of previous summits of Tahoma by indigenous peoples, citing Theodore Winthrop’s classic text, “Canoe and Saddle” which discussed Indian accounts of climbing to the Mountain’s top. However, Van Trump quickly dismisses such a tradition, stating that it is “difficult to tell just where the Indian legend ends and this paleface author’s creative fancy begins.”⁵² Van Trump’s account reserves successful conquests of the Mountain’s summit, and the summits of all mountains for that matter, for white, male, adventurers like himself. It is the “bold and indomitable Caucasian,” Van Trump declared, “who down throughout history has conquered or successfully braved Nature in her angriest moods and most difficult forms... climbing to heights where eternal winter reigns, and where no living creature, save this bold invader, has dared to intrude.”⁵³ Accounts of mountaineers conquering Tahoma by summiting it set the tone for a profusion of scholarship by whites, which would legitimize new *white* histories and mythologies. By 1900, “It [was] pretty well established by the absence of Indian testimony, and even tradition on the subject, as well as the well-known deterring superstition of the aborigines, that no Indian has ever made a true ascent of Mount Rainier,”⁵⁴ assured the confident Van Trump. Under indigenous stewardship, he suggested, not a soul had ever climbed to its top!

Subtly or not, whites created a mythology of their own which belittled indigenous peoples by creating and perpetuating the stereotype of Indians as fearful worshippers of the mountain. “Hazard” Stevens, Van Trump’s climbing partner in 1870, describes how their guide Sluskin would “start from his blankets” at the sound of a rock slide “and repeat a dismal, dirge-like song as though he would appease

⁵² Van Trump account of summiting in Herbert Hunt, *Tacoma: Its History and Its Builders, A Half Century of Activity*. (Chicago, S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1916), 149.

⁵³ Hunt, 149.

⁵⁴ Hunt, 149.

the mountain spirit.”⁵⁵ According to Hazard, Sluskin believed the “hoary summit” of Rainier to be the refuge of the mountains spirit “who would visit dire vengeance on any mortal who would dare to invade (if that were possible) his dread abode.”⁵⁶ Another summiteer of Rainier, the reverend Myron Eells, describes a similar reluctance in his own indigenous guide. “Even Henry,” Eells writes, “who is intelligent and much more of a philosopher than the rest of his tribe, associates the sublime summit of Tahoma with ‘awe, danger, and mystery.’”⁵⁷ In these white legends, Indian guides transferred their awe of the Mountain to awe of the white man who climbed and conquered it. Van Trump describes Sluskin’s reaction to their successful summit as a complete change in regard to his white companions: “entirely vanished now was his lightsome and satirical vein, and his countenance took on a serious and apprehensive respect.”⁵⁸ Referencing a vague, naive fear that was allegedly common among all Indians, mountaineering accounts again and again called into question and ultimately denied Indian’s rights to the Mountain by virtue of their unwillingness to “conquer” it.

Other writers invented descriptions of the relationship between native peoples and the Mountain they had co-inhabited the Puget Sound with for centuries. John H. Williams, a self declared “knowledgeable resident of Tacoma,” discusses the “rituals of the Indians” in extensive detail in his “nonfiction” book, *The Mountain that was God*.⁵⁹ This text accounts little for diversity among the five tribes but instead establishing bold generalizations which would come to pass as fact amongst a white audience. Natives regarded the snow mountain, Williams writes, as a “king of the primeval wild... They dreaded its anger, seen in the storms above its head... and the volcanic flashes of which their traditions told... They courted its favor, symbolized by the wild flowers that bloomed on its slope.”⁶⁰ No wonder then, Williams muses, “that this mountain of changing moods... answered the idea of God to the simple,

⁵⁵ Justice to the Mountain Committee, submitted to the United States Geographic Board. *The Mountain: The Mountain – Fifty Miles from Puget Sound*. (Tacoma: Justice to the Mountain Committee, 1917), 52

⁵⁶ Justice to the Mountain Committee, 52.

⁵⁷ Justice to the Mountain Committee, 53

⁵⁸ Hunt, 158.

⁵⁹ John H. Williams, “*The Mountain that was “God”*: Being a little Book About the Great Peak Which the Indians Called “Tacoma” but which is Officially Named “Rainier” (Tacoma: published by the Author, 1910).

⁶⁰ Williams, 25.

imaginative minds of the Indians.” What might have been a quiet or internalized respect towards the mountain is interpreted by Williams as “superstitious reverence— an awe that still has power to silence their ‘civilized’ and very unromantic descendants.”⁶¹ Silence, reverence and awe, rather than verbose exclamations in praise of the Mountain’s sublime façade, would not do in the newly civilized Puget Sound. If Williams was to be taken as a model for appropriate appreciation of the peak, all cultured visitors to the mountain should be able to gush for several minutes at least of the unparalleled attributes of “as comely and symmetrical a cone as ever graced the galaxy of volcanic peaks.”⁶² Williams is a champion at patronizing the natives of the South Sound. For not speaking or writing poetically enough about the mountain, he suggests, natives could only appreciate the mountain savagely or simply, and were therefore unworthy of any ownership of it.

Perhaps one of the most interesting phenomena of the mountain is the frequent personification of it by human beings seeking to understand the lonely sentinel which captivated, and admittedly still captivates, all who behold it. Ironically, and hypocritically, white writers like Williams were quick to mock native personification of the mountain as an angry god or a milk-giving mother, yet often adopted such imagery in their own prose. Patronizing the “aborigine” who believed the mountain to be alive, Williams adopts a similar rhetoric in the introduction to his book, in which he rhapsodizes about,

The daily, hourly change of distance, size, and aspect tricks which the Indian’s mountain god plays with the puny creatures swarming more and more about his foot, his days of frank neighborliness, his swift transformations from smiles to anger, his fits of sullenness and withdrawal, all baffle study.⁶³

The Mountain was perceived as a God when it suited the literary purpose of authors like Williams. Whites from both cities convinced themselves and their high browed citizenship that they were better able to appreciate the grandeur of such a sublime peak. In this context, appreciation of the mountain esthetically supersedes Indian claims which were far more legitimate, for example, coexisting with Rainier for generations.

⁶¹ Williams, 23.

⁶² Williams, 68.

⁶³ Williams, 15.

A recent study undertaken by cultural anthropologists, *Tahoma: Ethnography of Mount Rainier National Park*, seeks to create a better understanding of how Native Americans utilized the Mountain and its resources.⁶⁴ Conducting interviews during which contemporary tribes-people recalled and dictated a “living memory” of their past histories, these cultural scientists concluded that “group boundaries were by no means inviolate to members of neighboring tribes.” Instead, bonds of trade, intermarriage, kinship, and even friendship generated fluid cultural mobility between the five cultures who inhabited the Mountain in addition to physical mobility on and around the mountain.⁶⁵ This frequent usage of the mountain’s resources by the natives whose lands surrounded it is hardly present in the bulk of turn of the century texts concerning Mount Rainier.

By examining a traditional native narrative about Mount Tahoma, one may witness the ways in which Native People mythologized the Mountain for themselves. In this narration by Tom Milroy, a member of the Upper Puyallup, the Mountain is personified as an angry female spirit:

Long ago T’qobed was a person. She always knew when anyone was traveling near and used to suck in her breath and devour such a one. She drew in cougars and all kinds of animals.

Xode found out about it. He thought, “It will be bad if she keeps on devouring people in the future age; it will not do for her to eat people. I shall kill her and turn her into a harmless rock.” Xode made three ropes.

He crept up to the mountain (and fastened himself with the three ropes). He tied one (to a tree) to the right of him, one to his left and one straight behind him. He sat up so that T’qobed could see him.

T’qobed said, “Oh, a man is sitting there. He must be the zegwa stobc (Transformer).” She asked, “What do you want?” Xode said, “Oh, I am coiming to draw breath (with you and see which is the stronger). But first let us vomit and see what each one of us ate.”

T’qobed said, “[Very well], I shall vomit first, you afterwards.” Xode said, “Very well, we shall have our eyes closed. When we are through we shall both open our eyes and see what each one has eaten and thrown up.” T’qobed vomited first. She threw up bones of the people she had eaten, nothing but bones. Xode drew the bones towards his side. Xode vomited a handful of the red seed pods of the little wild rose and shoved it towards T’qobed. “Now open your eyes and you will see, said Xode. T’qobed opened her eyes. “When was I eating these things?” She wondered. “Oh, that man is a zegwa (ogre).”

“Now we shall draw each other; get ready. I shall be the first to draw,” said Xode. Xode drew; he raised T’qobed a little from the ground.

T’qobed drew. One of Xodes ropes broke.

Xode drew a second time. He raised T’qobed a little higher this time. She was frightened.

T’qobed drew a second time. Another rope broke. Xode had only one rope left.

Xode drew a third time. He raised T’qobed still higher than before.

T’qobed drew a third and last time. She drew and drew him inside and smothered him. Xode was inside the mountain among the cougars. He said, “Get away; give me room to start a fire.” Xode got his fire drill ready and made a fire.

⁶⁴ Allan H. Smith, *Tahoma: Ethnography of Mount Rainier National Park* (Washington: Washington State University Press, 2006), 169.

⁶⁵ Smith, 168.

When the fire got good and hot the grease began to drip and drip. As the grease dripped on the fire it got warm and smokey inside. As the fire grew hotter the ogress began to squirm about and ache. After a time, she ceased to move. Xode thought, "She is dead now." Then he walked out and looked at her. "She is dead."

[Xode pronounced judgement], "You shall not do thus any more. You shall not suck people in. You shall be a [mere] rock. There shall be water running out from you; there shall be water inside you. People shall step over your legs and you shall not molest them."⁶⁶

This story, passed down orally for generations, suggests an intimate, sustaining Indian knowledge of the mountain. In multiple ways it legitimizes Indian claims of true ownership of Mount Tahoma. Firstly, the narrative's protagonist is a heroic figure who acts with complete agency. Secondly, Xode is not fearful worshipper but behaves both courageously and intelligently, character traits that white authors and mountaineers reserved for members of their own race. Engaged on an adventurous, in addition to spiritual, mission, Xode violently tricks and kills his enemy, subdues the mountain, and exploits its resources for profit. This seems exactly the sort of conquest story which would appeal to white, conquering values, which is precisely what makes it so threatening. The story "Transformer and the Mountain," and others like it, disprove the notion that no Indian of the Southern Puget Sound had climbed to the top of the Mountain before the arrival of white man. Furthermore, Xode kills a demon, making her lifeless and useful to his tribe-members. Providing for his people in the "future age," T'qobed is transformed from a fire-belching monster into a giver of life and sustenance. Such a narrative was not eagerly accepted by white authors. Ignoring the more fantastical aspects of the story, Xode embodies all of the traits of men like Van Trump or Stevens. He is hardly the cowering, superstitious, incapable Indian prototype created by Williams.

Another tale, "The Young Man's Ascent of Mount Rainier," relates the story of an Indian man, who upon summiting the Mountain, pockets some shells and pearls. On his descent, a blizzard appears out of nowhere and recalling "the saying one should never take any curiosities... he left the shell right there."⁶⁷ Once again an Indian man behavior is in keeping with the spiritual traditions of his people, but

⁶⁶ Arthur C. Ballard, "Transformer and the Mountain", *The University of Washington Publications in Anthropology* vol. 3, (December 1929), 143.

⁶⁷ Arthur C. Ballard, "A Young Man's Ascent of Mount Rainier." *The University of Washington Publications in Anthropology* vol. 3, (December 1929), 120.

he also acts rationally, leaving the shells behind after angering the Mountain's spirit. Knowledge of the mountain's geology is also apparent in these texts. There is no denying that Native Americans of the Yakima, Nisqually, Puyallup, Upper Cowlitz and Muckleshoot tribes had inhabited the region centuries before the arrival of whites, as is evidenced by their intimate knowledge of the Mountain and the presence of a rich mythology surrounding it, unacknowledged or purposefully denied by whites. Once whites obtained this knowledge for their own purposes, they were eager to claim it, and the mountain, as their own. Turn of the century literature on the subject by white authors depicted Native Americans as irrational beings – both economically irrational (imagine! cooperatively sharing a mountain!) and also as socially irrational (fearful of the Mountain and by no means worthy or capable of “owning it” in the capitalist sense of the word). As Native Americans were “made to vanish from the American wilderness as a self-fulfilling prophecy of its unpeopled nature”⁶⁸ white people entered the scene, willing to believe with all their hearts they had fortuitously stumbled upon paradise, their own Evergreen Playground.⁶⁹

The University of Washington Library has a terrific online archive of photographs called the “Rainier National Park Mountain-Glacier Wonderland Album.” This collection documents the introduction of white people to the Mount Rainier landscape and the repurposing of the outdoor wilderness space. Tourists, and their automobile, interact with one native resident permitted to remain at the park, as they lean out of a driving car to feed a bear on one of the Parks many scenic drives. [Fig. 4] This sort of hand-on interaction with nature drew thousands upon thousands of visitors to the park every year. Ephemera sent to friends and family attracted even more American's to Rainier, such as one postcard which depicts two woman breakfasting at the Camp of the Clouds, In long skirts and blouses, these two women have ventured to the breathtaking heights of the Mountain, with the help of the Stampfler & Greer Guiding Company (indicated by a sign strategically placed on an eye-catching striped tent behind them. [Fig. 5]

⁶⁸ Thrush, VII.

⁶⁹ “The Evergreen Playground,” advertisement (National Parks), from *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times*, 1925.



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*Camp of the Clouds Mt Rainier*⁷¹

Women are pictured enjoying a different sort of fun in a photo taken by Ranapar studios. In this picture, three women in turn of the century bikini equivalents are shown immediately after a tumble sledding down the mountain’s slope. [Fig. 6] This photograph, and the series it is a part of, all of which depict scantily clad young women, sometimes dressed in swimsuits sometimes as goddesses, engaged in acts of uninhibited exhilaration. The array of activities available at the park, as well as the freedom of the ladies who partake in them, showcase the unrestricted character of the American wilderness. Geared towards women specifically, tourists were attracted to the park by its promise of new experiences and

⁷⁰ “Visitors being transported in auto stages, or tour buses, feeding a bear alongside a road, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington ca. 1925.” University of Washington Digital Collections, Rainier National Park Mountain-Glacier Wonderland Photograph Album.

⁷¹ “Camp of the Clouds, Mount Rainier, Washington, July 5, 1914,” University of Washington Digital Collections, Rainier National Park Mountain-Glacier Wonderland Photograph Album.

cultural progress. In another of Ranapar's images, young woman poses for a photograph before diving into one of the park's freezing glacial streams. The text on the verso of the images reads: "A warm blooded mermaid who prefers her dip in the ice caves of Paradise Glacier." [Fig.7]



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⁷² "Staged toboggan accident involving three women in bathing suits, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington, ca. 1925," University of Washington, Digital Collections: Rainier National Park Mountain-Glacier Wonderland Photograph Album.

⁷³ "Woman in bathing suit at the edge of a stream near one of the ice caves in Paradise Glacier, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington, ca. 1925." University of Washington, Digital Collections: Rainier National Park Mountain-Glacier Wonderland Photograph Album.

When regional power shifted from the hands of Indians to that of whites, they began to mythologize the Indians as belonging to the past and not the present. This Myth of the Vanishing Race is traced back in time by Thrush, “its oldest ideological purpose” was to “help forgive the invaders their invasion – by implying that whatever intentions on either side, an “uncivilized” people could not survive their encounter with the “civilized” people who would replace them.⁷⁴ The idea that Indians were a “quickly disappearing” race was successful in transforming them into a people to be remembered, not encountered. In this type of myth-making, Indians were occasionally idealized and often racially stereotyped. The Yakima for example, the tribe which inhabited the lands southeast of the mountain, are described “great horseman and famous runners, a breed of lithe, upstanding, handsome men.”⁷⁵ The coastal “digger” tribes, by contrast, are racially stereotyped:

Contrasting their heavy bodies with their feeble legs, which grew shorter with disuse, a Tacoma humorist last summer gravely proved to a party of English visitors, that in a few generations more, had not the white man seized their fishing grounds, the Siwashes would have had no legs at all.⁷⁶

Congratulating themselves on “seizing” the fishing grounds of these Indians, who “downcast eyes and low mentality”⁷⁷ are carefully constructed, whites speaking from positions of power fashioned collective identities for Indians which suited their purposes of disenfranchisement, idealizing the Indians unseen on the other side of the mountain and reducing their neighbors into the butt of a cruel joke.

However, when a Native American was consistent with white’s construction of the indigenous race, he or she was made famous by the whites as an example of an ideal native. Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon is the Duwamish chief whose name Seattle adopted for their own city. “Friend to the whites... the Daniel Webster of his race,” a photograph of Chief Seattle appears in the forward of a 1936 schoolbook *This City of Ours*⁷⁸. Below his photo, this dubious quote:

⁷⁴ Thrush, VIII.

⁷⁵ Williams, 23.

⁷⁶ Williams, 23.

⁷⁷ Williams, 23.

⁷⁸ Sayre, J. Willis., “*This City of Ours.*” (Seattle: Published by Authority of the Board of Directors—Seattle School District No. 1., 1936), forward.

Why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe and nation follows nation, like the waves if the sea. It is the order of nature and regret is useless. Your time of decay may be distant – but it will surely come, for even the White Man... cannot be exempt from the common destiny.⁷⁹

In this case, an Indian is credited with oration skills “seldom surpassed in beauty of thought and diction.” This textbook reminds Seattle that their city’s namesake graciously granted white settlers dominance over his tribes land. The benevolence of this man is reflected in the city’s willingness to adopt the name of an Indian chief as the name of their metropolis even as they resented Tacoma doing the same in regards to Mount Tahoma. Later in the “textbook,” there appears a photograph of Princess Angeline,⁸⁰ daughter of Seattle. The image of the princess “seen on the front portico of her palace on the beach” is of poor quality, but the accompanying words beneath are just as telling. Angeline, who “did housework for many of the early families,” occupies a bizarre place in the mythology of Native Americans: princess maid of the Village named after her father. Angeline’s conformation to the status quo of her conquerors was rewarded by the capitalist system of her generous new neighbors who “saw that she wanted for nothing in her old age. If she walked into a pioneer store and saw anything there that she fancied, it was hers.”⁸¹ The audience of both of these texts is significant. Schoolchildren reading this “factual” textbook were familiarized to a regional identity that taught them about a compliant indigenous royalty who graciously stepped aside and gave over their land to white settlers.

The ironies of this transference of geography, from red to within white man is described in *Native Seattle*, “even as totem poles and northwest coast Indian artworks were coming to symbolize Seattle’s special regional identity, native inhabitants were being assigned their traditional roles in the narrative of the vanishing race; as poignant icons of a lot past, as lost images of timeless beauty, but not as living residents.”⁸² This assignment of Indians to specific roles is perfectly depicted in the conclusion of Van Trumps narrative, who describes the native Sluskin’s exit from the his story:

⁷⁹ Sayre, forward.

⁸⁰ Sayre, 167.

⁸¹ Sayre, 167.

⁸² Thrush, IX.

When the weather cleared Sluskin was paid for his services and discharged. When shaking hands with the Englishman he thus addressed him, after indulging in one of his Natty Bumpo laughs: 'Wake skookum oly King George man. Pehalo klatawa copa le tete Tacoma. Quanasum tikky milite copa camp,' which may be translated: 'not a strong man nor a successful climber is our elderly English friend for he failed to reach Tahoma's summit, preferring the while to tarry in camp.' With this parting shot in his old vein Sluskin turned his steps in the direction of his own distant camp, his faithful spouse submissively following after, bearing on her patient back her lord and master's youthful heir.⁸³

Sluskin thus usefully disappears from the narrative "to his distant camp" and into white man's mythology.

Like Seattle and Angelie he was accommodating and nonthreatening. For doing what he dared not and summiting the dreaded peak, Van Trump and Stevens earn (or, perhaps more importantly, believe themselves to earn) Sluskin's respect. He is rewarded in turn with a patient submissive squaw and a male heir, (although what will happen to the heir is unclear) as this race is disappearing. Van Trump likes, even admires, Sluskin, certainly, but reminds his white audience of their inherent superiority over Sluskin with his racist mention of his "Natty Bumpo laugh." Laughingly then, Sluskin concedes the peak of his people's mountain to the white man, specifically the American white male. He even flatteringly looks down upon the Englishman, before disappearing into the mist of American legend, rewarded with a legendary heritage as a beautiful poignant icon. In similarly complicated logic, Tacoma citizens anxious for Native Americans to disappear from their landscape would go to great lengths to name rename the Mountain in honor of this vanishing race.

⁸³ Hunt, 152.

NOMENCLATURE:

Three times during the first part of the twentieth century the citizens of Tacoma attempted to repeal the name Rainier from the mountain in their door-yard, and to reinstate instead the Mountain's name they argued was commonly shared by all of five southern tribes of the Puget Sound. The initial controversy over the mountain's nomenclature began soon after the United States Board of Geographic (BGN) Names formally dubbed the peak Rainier in 1890. Then, in 1917 and again in 1924, Tacoma appeared before a judge well equipped with a small library of references made towards the Mountain using its indigenous name – Tahoma. These collections of “courtroom evidence,” published in neat little pamphlets, were made readily available to interested parties. Ultimately, such testimony did not impress the Geological Board, which firmly, and in the end impatiently, rejected the name change. However, in these anthologies, citizens of Tacoma appeared to overwhelmingly agree that their own beloved city shared the same name as “the mountain in its dooryard.”⁸⁴

Literature debating the nomenclature of the mountain was printed and circulated as early as 1893. In February of that same year, The Honorable Judge James Wickersham presented a paper to the Tacoma Academy of Science. In his opening remarks, Wickersham uttered a manifesto of sorts to the Academy. Aware that the mountain and surrounding land would before the turn of the century be made into a National Park, Wickersham declared that the city of Tacoma had a vested interest in “a proper and fitting name for this great cone.” “What name shall be forever perpetuated by being thus officially attached to this mountain peak?” Wickersham mused. “What do honesty, empathy, simplicity, poetry, tradition, history and patriotism require of us? Let us view the facts, try the cause, hear the evidence, and then decide.”⁸⁵ With these formidable goals in mind, Wickersham's arguments and research, printed in a thirty-four paged pamphlet, supported the name Tahoma by citing accounts of the region's earliest explorers and pioneers, conversations with Native Americans, and pleas written by “distinguished”

⁸⁴ Tacoma Commercial Club and Chamber of Commerce, *Tacoma, the city with a snow-capped mountain in its dooryard*, (Tacoma, Wash., Tacoma Commercial Club and Chamber of Commerce, 1912), title.

⁸⁵ James Wickersham, *Proceedings of the Tacoma Academy of Science: Is it Mount Tacoma, or Rainier?* (Tacoma: News Publishing Company, 1893).

experts on the mountain. The arguments made in favor of adopting Tahoma as the proper name of the Mountain are both overwhelming and varied. Naturally, C.E. Stevens had something to add to the debate, “Lack of correct apprehension of historical fact, with some, and with others a narrow, selfish prejudice, sometimes prompts the use of another name for our Mountain. But what care we! To Tacomans, in whose dooryard lies this wondrous work of nature, it will ever be Mount Tacoma.”⁸⁶

“Tahoma,” writes Helen Hunt Jackson for the *Atlantic Monthly*:

One catches a glimpse through the clumsy English phrase a subtly beautiful idea, and a sentiment worthy of the mountain and of the reverential Indian nature. It is a shame to abandon the name. Retaining it for the town is a small atonement for stealing it from the mountain. There seems a perverse injustice in substituting the names of wandering foreigners.... For the old names born of love, and inspired by poetry we know not how many centuries ago; names sacred, moreover, as the only mementos which, soon, will be left of a race that has died at our hands.⁸⁷

Appealing to sentiment, Hunt suggests that a feeling of duty and sensitivity towards their Indian neighbors, rather than self-promotion, guides Tacoma’s motives for the name change. Helen Hunt Jackson defends Native American’s ability to convey a “primitive” but nonetheless reverential and appropriate sentiment in the name Tahoma. Before concluding with a guiltily mentioning of inevitable demise of the Native Americans, Hunt patriotically questions the propriety of such an American monument being named after a British soldier.

Even when attempting to be sensitive to Indian place names, whites had a hard time not turning the naming debate into another opportunity reiterate their claims on the peak. Often their literature gushed as much as the streams which trickled down from the Mother of White Waters. “Literally translated,” the Tacoma *Morning Globe* stated, the name Tahoma meant “‘a woman’s breast that feeds’ ... How aptly is expressed that conical pile of eternal snow, which by genial heat from heaven’s own luminary sends down the waters which feed and enrich so vast a region.”⁸⁸In booster prose like this, Tacoma was less

⁸⁶ Stevens, 23.

⁸⁷ *The Mountain*, 54

⁸⁸ *The Tacoma Globe* in *Proceedings of the Tacoma Academy of Science: Is it Mount Tacoma, or Rainier?* (Tacoma: News Publishing Company, 1893), 9.

convincing in its denial that the name change was an attempt to capitalize on the association between the city and its sentinel.

The question of patriotism was a popular argument among advocates for the indigenous name change. Defaming the British explorer Vancouver for “recklessly fl[inging]the names of his unknown friends” upon the grandest features of the Puget Sound, including the name Puget Sound itself, Tacoma writers were appalled that the mountain was casually christened Rainier after a man who not only never beheld the mountain but “never saw the continent upon which it sat so conspicuous a landmark.”⁸⁹ Attempting to rally their countryman, national and local, contributors to *The Mountain*⁹⁰, *Is it Mount Tacoma, or Rainier*⁹¹, and *The Name of Mount Tacoma*⁹² mused over just who was Admiral Rainier, and why he was honored with the name of Washington State’s (and the world’s) favorite mountain Henry Fink, whose letters to the editor of the *New York Times* appear in both 1911 and 1924⁹³ grew increasingly impatient with the debate over the nomenclature of Mount Rainier. Willing to compromise in 1911 (by keeping the name of the park Rainier but calling the mountain Tacoma), Fink in 1924 called Mount Rainier absurd.⁹⁴ In strong language and a flair for the dramatic (keep in mind Fink is a resident booster of Tacoma) *The New Yorker* published his cause and its support: “It is the unspeakable audacity of calling the state Washington and its big mountain—the most sublime snow peak in the United States—after his enemy, who fought hard to prevent our country from having a Fourth of July, that has created a strong feeling in the West which is growing like an avalanche.” The author goes on to namedrop Teddy Roosevelt in his tirade against the “ludicrously unpatriotic” name Rainier and concludes with the assertion that even former British Ambassador to the U.S. James Bryce, “a great lover of

⁸⁹ Wickersham, 7.

⁹⁰ Justice to the Mountain Committee, submitted to the United States Geographic Board. *The Mountain: The Mountain – Fifty Miles from Puget Sound*. (Tacoma: Justice to the Mountain Committee, 1917).

⁹¹ James Wickersham, *Proceedings of the Tacoma Academy of Science: Is it Mount Tacoma, or Rainier?* (Tacoma: News Publishing Company, 1893).

⁹² Denman, A.H. *The Name of Mount Tacoma*. (Tacoma: Rotary, Kiwanis, The Lions Club, & Gyro Clubs, 1924).

⁹³ Fink, Henry T. “Calls ‘Mount Rainier’ Absurd: H.T. Fink Objects to Naming Mountain for Washington’s Enemy.” *New York Times*, April 26, 1924, 14. and “Mount Tacoma: Reasons Why That Should Be the Name of the Mountain Called Rainier.” *New York Times*, Oct 12, 1911, 8.

⁹⁴ Fink, 1924.

mountains...referred to the use of the name Mount Rainier as ‘stupid.’”⁹⁵ Less verbosely, Scribner’s magazine simply stated “obviously the grandest mountain in all America should be all-American.”⁹⁶ Eventually and unexpectedly, this fervor of support succeeded in gaining Tacoma an unexpected ally in the nomenclature debate, her once bitter rival, Seattle.

“Why not call it Mount Tacoma? The glorious old mountain would look just the same and, so far as mere humans can tell, would feel just the same”⁹⁷ begins an article which appeared in the *Seattle Times* and which was reprinted in the 1924 pamphlet *The Name of Mount Tacoma*. “Seattle doesn’t care whether the Great White Sentinel bears the Indian name or a British patronymic,” the article continues, “But Seattle does care for the friendship of Tacoma. We do care to have the Puget Sound district unified, belligerent, mutually self-supporting and loyal to its own.”⁹⁸ Was the rivalry coming to a close? Nearly forty years had passed since the first publication of a similar Tacoma pamphlet which “Urg[ed] the Official Removal from America’s most Sublime Mountain of the Name Mount Rainier and the Perpetuation by Official Adoption of the Original Indian Name Therefore in Its Most Appropriate, Euphonious and Generally Accepted Form— Tacoma.”⁹⁹ Would the cities make amends? It seemed so. In December of 1923, Seattle Mayor, Edwin J. Brown wired the following telegram to Mayor Fawcett of Tacoma,

Am sending the following wire to C.C. Dill urging the name of Mt. Rainier be changed to Mt. Tacoma: Seattle and Northwest behind movement to change Rainier to Mt. Tacoma. Means much to the people of Tacoma and identifies location. Change will end continual bickering and make Tacoma citizens happy. Success to your resolution.¹⁰⁰

Crucial in this telegram to Senator Dill is Mayor Brown’s usage of the term *northwest*.

By 1924 the debate over the mountain’s name *had* attracted the attention of the nation, and several articles which appear in newspapers outside the Pacific Northwest, including the *New York Times*,

⁹⁵ Fink, 1924.

⁹⁶ Wickersham, 50.

⁹⁷ Denman, A.H. *The Name of Mount Tacoma*. Tacoma: Rotary, Kiwanis, The Lions Club, & Gyro Clubs, 1924.

⁹⁸ Denman, 71.

⁹⁹ Denman, 71.

¹⁰⁰ Denman, 72.

published articles on the subject. Unhappily for Tacoma, such articles did not offer support, but rather slandered the young metropolis, criticizing Tacoma's obstinacy on the matter. "Tacoma" one author sneered, "seems to exist mainly for the purpose of changing the name of Mount Rainier."¹⁰¹ In their arguments against the name change, east coast writers of *The New Yorker* and *The Nation* sided with the federal government, represented by the United States Geographic Board. Defending the British nomenclature of the mountain, these writers dismissed the idea that the name of the mountain was unpatriotic. Rather, they reversed such accusations by questioning Tacoma's own patriotism. In authoritative and condescending language, these east coast papers chided Tacoma for challenging the bureaucracy of the United States. In this case of nomenclature, national and traditional identities superseded the regional northwest identity that was emerging (and converging) in the cities of Tacoma and Seattle.

With thinly veiled condescension, the *New York Times* depicted the debate as a moot point. "It would appear, therefore, that the name Rainier is well established, both by an Executive order and by act of Congress" one article jibed.¹⁰² The ability of one town to change the name of a singular mountain, no matter what the local sentiment, was laudable. "No attempt has ever been made to change the name of Mount Vernon, New York, Baltimore, Virginia, and a score of other towns and cities named after British officers who fought against Americans"¹⁰³ sneers the east coast to this rash upstart western town, a newcomer to the Union in comparison. Citizens of the east coast, it seemed, did not see the point in questioning British names, and instead defended Colonel Rainier as valiant officer. Sympathy for Native American justification, or making amends for the wrongs done to such tribes seemed a trivial matter to the National Geographic Board, who issued this final statement to one of its newest territories:

No geographic feature in any part of the world can claim a name more firmly fixed than that of Mount Rainier, fixed by right of discover, by right of priority, by right of international usage and

¹⁰¹ Editorials, "Mount Rainier by All Means," *The Nation*, January 21, 1925, 60.

¹⁰² Editorials, "Rainier or Tacoma," *The New York Times*, April 23, 1924, 20.

¹⁰³ Josiah Collins, "Seattle States Its Case: Denies that the Indians ever Called Mount Rainier "Mount Tahoma." *New York Times*, Jun 4, 1924, 20.

by the conspicuous place it holds in literature, atlases, and official charts of the civilized nations of the world.

That the agitation begun and so persistently carried on by this one city – as against the rest of the world –Threatens one of the most firmly established names on the face of the earth and if successful would deal a death-blow to the stability of international geographic nomenclature.¹⁰⁴

“Even the United States Geographic Board loses its scientific calm in that last sentence,” laughed a writer for *The Nation*.¹⁰⁵ And indeed they had. In the above statement the NGB, representing the vested interest of American government, threatens to brand Tacoma as uncivilized, a cutting insult to a city who constantly trumpets their urbane enlightened status. More troublesome, the verdict affirms an imperialist geographic nomenclature that will continue to uphold white place names, however irrelevant to the nation or disrespectful to the prior claims of Native Americans. The Board even employs Tacoma’s favorite tactic of grandiose absolutes, pitting Tacoma against the rest of the nation, and the world. As for *The New Yorker*, it is quick to jab at the upstart city who once sought to be the New York of the west coast: “It has been observed by those who remained calm during the great Washington controversy that if the American people decide to change English names of places all over the States they will cruelly embarrass the Post Office Department.”¹⁰⁶ Imagine the paperwork! Place naming meant something different to Tacoma, a younger fresher city and far removed from the aristocratic mentalities of the east and still in contact with a visible population of Native Americans. In any case, the board’s decision directly opposed the manifesto made by Judge Wickersham nearly thirty years prior. In the American tradition of place naming, discovery overruled honesty, priority overruled poetry, and “the conspicuous place Mount Rainier holds on the atlases and charts of the civilized nations of the world” overruled the “sonorous name of Tahoma.”

¹⁰⁴ “Mount Rainier by All Means,” 60.

¹⁰⁵ “Mount Rainier by All Means,” 60.

¹⁰⁶ “Rainier or Tacoma,”20.

CONCLUSIONS:

There is in the development of American cities during the twentieth century a common theme, the notion that Nature had intervened in the creation of cities and that consequently, these places were geographically determined to be great. After the conquest and subsequent place-naming, settlement, development, and eventual industrial boom of American cities, comes a celebration of its virtues by those who inhabit it. I would not deem this phenomenon to be solely American in nature, although we are a nation rich with imagining our North American landscapes, cities, and civilization to be among the greatest on earth. There is a similarly rich Historiographic tradition that studies and dissects American cities' beliefs in their places of habitation and as amongst the greatest in the world. One of these histories is William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis*.¹⁰⁷ In this text, Cronon uses Chicago as a case study—“a city that represented the geographical antithesis of the lands around it, and the historical prophecy of what America might become if it escaped its rural past.”¹⁰⁸

In its examination of the unique relationship between the city of Chicago and its geographic situation, Cronon's thesis dissects the complicated paradox of Chicago's “victory” over nature, the metropolis' thirty year boom that made it the American city second in importance only to New York. “Nature was a nonhuman power who had called this place into being and enabled its heroic inhabitants to perform their extraordinary feats,” Cronon writes. Some celebrated Chicago as nature transformed, “reworked by an inspired human imagination” it became a vehicle for the expression of “human spirit.” Others decreed that this “one city [which] had declared its independence from nature” symbolized a sacrilege towards nature, “a self-created place opened the doorway to human achievement but finally denied any other creator, be it Nature or God.”¹⁰⁹ In complicated yet profound thinking, Cronon ultimately concludes with a discussion of human and natural relationships, determining that urban history cannot be understood “apart from the natural history of the vast North American region to which it

¹⁰⁷ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991)

¹⁰⁸ Cronon, 9.

¹⁰⁹ Cronon, 17.

became connected: Nature's Metropolis and the Great West are in fact different labels for a single region."¹¹⁰

At the turn of the last century, Tacoma made every effort to create and fix for itself an identity inspired by and as imposing as the landscape of the Puget Sound. Tacoma sought to become a contender in the Great West and believed itself able to do so because of its surrounding nature. In the dramatic language of his essay *Tacoma*, Stevens had portrayed Tacoma as an Arcadian, Pacific-Northwest paradise, an otherworldly place in the American landscape. Despite his affinity for exaggerated absolutes, Stevens was largely successful in his purposes; conceptualizing Tacoma as an infant favored by the Gods, Stevens championed a future of divinely ordained greatness for his city. Stevens wrote and others believed that Nature has predestined Tacoma for greatness. Unlike Chicago, this city would not forgo nature, but rather it would seek to imbibe the Puget Sound landscape in the identity it creates for itself. The City with the Snow Capped Mountain in its Dooryard, the Gateway City to Mount Rainier, Tacoma was determined to utilize its connection to the Mountain to its advantage and resolute in its desire to become the supreme metropolis in North America, in imitation of the noble Peak. Williams comment on the façade of the Mountain is also a suiting description of Tacoma's desired place in the world— "while still young compared with the obelisk crags of the old Alps, it has already taken on the venerable and deeply scarred physiognomy of a veteran... and is fast assuming the dignity and interest of a patriarch of the mountains."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Cronon, 19.

¹¹¹ Williams, 68.

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IMAGES

- [Figure 1] "Crew team rowing on Lake Washington, University of Washington, 1924,"
<http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/uwcampus&CISOPTR=270&CISOBBOX=1&REC=13>
- [Fig. 2] "Mount Rainier, Tacoma, Washington, 1906
<http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/barnes&CISOPTR=237&CISOBBOX=1&REC=17>
- [Fig. 3] "Formal Gardens along Rainier Vista, Alaska-Yukon-Pacific-Exposition, Seattle, Washington, 1909,"
<http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/ayp&CISOPTR=1021&CISOBBOX=1&REC=10>
- [Fig. 4] "Visitors being transported in auto stages, or tour buses, feeding a bear alongside a road, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington ca. 1925."
<http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/glacier&CISOPTR=6&CISOBBOX=1&REC=20>
- [Fig. 5] "Camp of the Clouds, Mount Rainier, Washington, July 5, 1914,"
<http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/wastate&CISOPTR=432&CISOBBOX=1&REC=16>
- [Fig. 6] "Staged toboggan accident involving three women in bathing suits, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington, ca. 1925,"
<http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/glacier&CISOPTR=4&CISOBBOX=1&REC=12>
- [Fig. 7] ¹"Woman in bathing suit at the edge of a stream near one of the ice caves in Paradise Glacier, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington, ca. 1925."
<http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=%2Fglacier&CISOPTR=26&DMSCALE=100&DMWIDTH=802&DMHEIGHT=640.13802083333&DMMODE=viewer&DMFULL=1&DMX=0&DMY=0&DMTEXT=&DMTHUMB=0&REC=3&DMROTATE=0&x=213&y=366>