8 / On the Cusp of Past and Future

Marian Wesley Smith, an anthropologist at Columbia University, spent much of the 1930s conducting research among the Native peoples of Puget Sound. Her travels brought her into contact with the descendants of the indigenous people of Seattle, and the urbanized landscape of the pre–Second World War maritime Northwest shaped much of what she had to say about the state of Indians in the region. Native people on Puget Sound, Smith argued, had "come through remarkably well" considering the "rigorous mushroom development" of places like Seattle. "No other Indians of the whole continent have been similarly engulfed by the sudden growth of city populations [or] have been exposed to the full impact of twentieth-century urban society," she wrote in the 1940s. To Smith, the successful adaptation of Puget Sound's Native peoples was "certainly better than that of many Indians classified as less primitive." In fact, she wrote, "it is this sort of dilemma that throws doubt upon classification schemes." Despite the near-total dispossession of indigenous people from Seattle's urban landscape, surviving Native peoples' accommodation to urban change in Puget Sound seemed to challenge her discipline's very foundations.[1]

The conditions of Indian people in urban Puget Sound also threw doubt upon another kind of classification scheme: the boundaries between past, present, and future. Smith saw this just as clearly. "If today Salish life is mingled with, and sometimes indistinguishable from, modern American and Canadian life," she wrote, "so much the better. If the past and the present converge, and the future may be expected to partake of both, so much closer to reality is our picture of the Northwest." And for Indians in Seattle in the 1930s, the past, present, and

future did seem to converge. Like the years surrounding 1880, the 1930s were a transition between two periods in the city's urban and Indian histories, a hinge between one era and another. The years around 1880 had represented a transition between a strong indigenous presence in Seattle and indigenous dispossession, as well as the beginnings of a regional Indian hinterland. By the 1930s, Seattle had developed a complex interweaving of multiple Native histories: Duwamish descendants of the area's indigenous communities and Native people from far away shared a city studded with totem poles and explained by stories about Indians. Mr. Glover's bird's-eye panorama, the 1880 census, and other sources had offered glimpses of Native Seattle on the eve of a massive urban transformation. Sources from the 1930s show the results of that transformation and offer their own glimpses into a city that, unbeknownst to its residents (Indian or otherwise), was on the eve of yet another great change.[2]

In 1930, Seattle was a bona fide metropolis, a city of 350,000 people. Few vestiges of the indigenous landscape remained—the Duwamish River had been straightened, the waters of Lake Washington now flowed through the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks rather than the extinct Black River, and new neighborhoods of bungalows and apartments blanketed hills that had once been barriers to urban growth. It seemed that Seattle had made good on its urban promises. But instead of optimism, there was anxiety. Seattle was experiencing the first throes of the Great Depression and, as it had during the Panic of 1893, Seattle's boom-and-bust economy was suffering greatly. The crash of 1929 also changed the lives of Indian people in Seattle. Many of the small firms that had fueled annual migrations of Native men and women to Seattle—farms, sawmills, canneries—laid off their Indian workers first, then closed as banks failed. Layoffs and business failures slowed the widespread movements of Native people up and down the coast and from reservations in Puget Sound, where many of the descendants of Seattle's indigenous people now lived. The Depression also wreaked havoc on Indian attempts to establish a permanent presence in Seattle. For example, Ralph Young (or Looshkát), a Hoonah Raven Tlingit and founding member of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, found his for-

tunes changing in the 1930s. After helping discover the wildly successful Chichagof Mine in Alaska, Young and his uncle had traded their shares in the mine for property along the industrializing Duwamish. Soon after the market collapse, however, the men were forced to forfeit the profitable land (which would eventually be occupied by the Boeing Company) because of unpaid taxes and return to Alaska.[3]

Despite the dislocations of the Depression, however, Indian people had found ways to call Seattle home. The manuscript of the 1930 census offers insight into the lives of the city's Native men, women, and children. Their numbers were not great—less than 1 percent of the urban population—but their circumstances speak to the roots that Indian people from other places were putting down in Seattle's urban soil. Those roots, like the city itself, were often thoroughly working class. Across the city, Indian men and women could be found in Seattle's bungalow neighborhoods of modest income. On Beacon Hill, Choctaw pipe fitter Franklin Turner came home from long days at the oil plant to a neighborhood of mechanics and construction workers where his white wife, Ellen, kept house. On Capitol Hill, mixed-blood, Canadian-born Lily Lee lived with her white husband, Lorn, who helped build and maintain the city's bridges. Like that of the Turners, the Lees' neighborhood was mostly white and thoroughly working class, with neighbors working as bakers and seamstresses, cashiers and electricians. So was the Admiral neighborhood on Duwamish Head, where truck driver Robert Lee (no relation to Lorn) and his full-blood "Washington Indian" wife, Minnie, provided for their eight-year-old son, Eugene. And Admiral was much like South Park along the Duwamish, where the white-Inuit Ryner family lived off the money husband Homer earned as a stone polisher in a local factory. There was also a cluster of mixed-race families around Salmon Bay. Swedish immigrant Paul Peterson, a deckhand on a tug, lived with his Skagit wife, Clara, and their teenage sons, Bernard and Chester, on the flats near the western stretch of the Ship Canal. Nellie Wooley, an Alaskan Haida, kept house for her boatbuilder husband, John, in the industrial area that had sprung up on the now-filled estuary between Salmon Bay and Smith's Cove. On the south side of Salmon Bay, not far from the site of Hwelchteed's old place, the Scottish and

Stoney Indian Darling family got by on John Darling's earnings as a construction worker.[4]

Although the experiences of most of these families are lost to history, two mixed-race families living near Salmon Bay left some records behind, giving us a sense of their lives beyond the census enumerator's rows and columns and offering insights into what it meant to be Indian in Seattle. One family, the Youngbloods, lived in the Crown Hill area north of Salmon Bay. Bowhertta Ladder, the matriarch of the family, had been born among the Nuu-chah-nulth but raised by the Makah, and now made baskets and sold them downtown for up to ten dollars each. Her daughter Minnie worked as a domestic servant, and son-in-law John Youngblood ran a gas station. For all their seeming success, the family faced challenges. Barry Hawley, whose father married into the family, recalled that "Indians . . . were discriminated against in many bad ways. It was very hard for those young people." Meanwhile, Karl Peterson, a Swedish-born longshoreman, mourned the recent death of his Makah wife, Ann, and struggled to raise their daughter, Helen. Helen Peterson Schmitt described a city where "No Indians Allowed" signs hung in shop windows, leading her to hide her Makah ancestry. For Schmitt, the lutefisk, glögg, and hambos of her father's people were the ethnic traditions with which she identified, and only decades later would she reconnect with her Makah relatives. On the other hand, one of the few things Schmitt knew for sure about her mother was her visibility as an Indian. "When the police had a little lost Indian person who didn't speak English," she told an interviewer decades later, "they brought her to my mother, so she'd help with them." Despite the pressures to hide one's Native ancestry, then, the story of Ann Peterson suggests that Indians were recognized, and recognized each other, in the city.[5]

In the 1930s, Indianness could also shape white identities in Seattle. Poet and novelist Richard Hugo, for example, once described the death of an Indian first-grade classmate, who drowned after becoming trapped under a log boom on the Duwamish. ("His mother flipped and for years called him to dinner every evening in prolonged fits of scream," Hugo recalled.) But despite their role as friends and neigh-

bors, Native people in Hugo's neighborhood were also markers of the lower class. To kids like Hugo who grew up in poor Duwamish River neighborhoods like Youngstown and Riverside, middle-class West Seattle "towered over the sources of felt debasement, the filthy, loud belching steel mill, the oily slow river, the immigrants hanging on to their odd ways, Indians getting drunk in the unswept taverns, the commercial fishermen, tugboat workers, and mill workers with their coarse manners." For Hugo, Indian people were simultaneously neighbors and metaphors, members of the urban lower classes as well as symbols of urban poverty. He was not alone. In a 1935 master's thesis examining the social dynamics of Hooverville, the homeless encampment on the old Duwamish tideflats, sociologist Donald Roy described the residents as "natives," noted that their homes resembled those of "the Siberian Chuckchee," and described prostitutes who sometimes visited Hooverille as "squaws." Although only 4 out of Hooverville's 639 residents were Native according to Roy's count, he nonetheless used Native imagery to highlight the poverty of Seattle's homeless. We might wonder whether the "natives" on the tideflats were called that thanks to memories of Native migrants camped in those same places only a few years earlier.[6]

There was some truth to the connections made by Hugo and Roy between poverty and Indian identity. Beyond the working-class neighborhoods where some mixed-race families lived, Native people in 1930s Seattle were most likely to be found in places inhabited by the city's poorest people. One such place was the district of single-resident occupancy (SRO) hotels that made up much of downtown's landscape, including Pioneer Square and Chinatown, two dense neighborhoods that had grown up on the site of the old Lava Beds. There, Indian men and women found shelter among the flophouses and apartment buildings. Frank Griffey, an Indian railroad worker from Indiana, lived at the Interurban Hotel on Occidental Avenue, while Tlingit radio musician Jimmie Thomas rented a room in the Grant Hotel on Seventh Avenue South. Other Native people found slightly more reputable accommodations in apartment hotels further uptown: Estelle Hovland, a Métis waitress from North Dakota, lived in the "Newly Decorated and Refurbished" Hotel Rehan on Seventh and Union, while Greek immigrant

track layer George Ramos and his Blackfoot wife, Hazel, lived with their newborn son in the Yale Apartments at Sixth and Columbia. Hotels and apartments like the Yale and the Interurban often had their own reputations among Native people. Makah people told one anthropologist, for example, that some SRO hotels were quite notorious among their people:

> Those who make short trips to the cities stay in hotels patronized by whites, though the hotels most generally frequented would be regarded as third or fourth rate. One hotel popular with the Makah is over a noisy dance hall where incoming sailors gather. One of the hotel chambermaids swore that she would not stay in the place overnight, that it was bad enough to have to work there during the day. However, both white men and white women stay in the hotel which was once one of the good hotels in the city. Others from Neah Bay patronize hotels in quieter locations, which are said to have better reputations.

Just as the presence of Indians could be a marker of poor neighborhoods in the eyes of white observers, whiteness, as well as class distinctions, played a factor in Makah people's understandings of the city.[7]

Life in Seattle in the 1930s brought Native people into contact with more than just the city's white residents. Both the Interurban and Grant hotels—as well as the Hotel Marion, where Joseph Carrasco, a Chilean–Alaskan Indian steelworker, lived, and the Kenney Apartments on James Street, where widowed Tlingit domestic worker Mary Bezonoff roomed—were run by Japanese immigrants and their American-born children. Meanwhile, life in the SRO districts also meant that many Indian people had everyday encounters with Filipino sailors, agricultural workers, and laborers, who made up a significant—if often transient—part of Seattle's downtown population. Some of these men would also become the fathers of a generation of mixed-ancestry people. Diane Vendiola was one of these; her Swinomish mother met her Filipino father, a laborer and boxer, in Seattle in the 1930s. According to Vendiola, "it was natural for them to come together." Similar Indian-Filipino relationships resulted in the birth of a generation that would go on to shape Seattle's

politics in the decades to come: both Bernie Reyes Whitebear, founder of the United Indians of All Tribes, and Bob Santos, a leader in the city's Asian–Pacific Islander community, were what Santos called "Indipinos." In the working world of Depression-era Seattle, new kinds of Indian identities were being formed and the stage was being set for a new political landscape in the city.[8]

Finally, the 1930 census includes the institutionalized Indians of Seattle: the men, women, and children of the city's asylums. At the Sacred Heart Orphanage, four young children from Washington tribes, including the Makah and S'Klallam—James Henry, Angeline La Belle, and the siblings Bernice and Carl Kavanaugh—appear in the rosters among their majority white compatriots. At the King County Hospital, where full-blood Yakama Ernest Spencer worked as a truck driver, the list of Native patients and their tribes is like a directory to Seattle's Indian hinterland: Tlingit, Haida, Snohomish, Tsimshian, Canadian Métis. These were also perhaps some of Seattle's poorest Native people; ranging in age from twenty to nearly sixty, all but one of the hospital's Indian patients were listed as unemployed. This was also the case for Cherokee Harry Marshall and "Siwash" Dorothy Martin, the two Indian residents of the city jail. These were men and women for whom life in the city had not been easy, particularly in the lean years of the 1930s.

Census tables for the hospital and jail suggest that there were other Native people in Seattle in 1930, people the enumerators would have missed: the homeless, the transient, and the seasonally migrant. Surely, many of these harder-to-find (or easier-to-ignore) Indians existed, invisible to the census takers. And except for people like Ann Peterson, the Makah woman who opened her Ballard home to needy Indians, and the Native neighbors whose presence shaped Richard Hugo's class consciousness, Indian people were largely invisible in Seattle's urban landscape. Unlike the Seattle of the 1880s, where well-known Indian enclaves existed on the Lava Beds and the waterfront, in 1930 Native people were integrated into the city's poor and working-class districts but had little public presence. And unlike in 1878, when real Indians and their canoes appeared matter-of-factly in Mr. Glover's drawing of the city, living Indian people were largely absent from the city's self-

image. Indian images, however, were not. The urban landscape in which these Indian people lived had changed dramatically in only a few short decades. Through stories of Chief Seattle and doomed "last" Indians, and through the city's encounter with its Indian hinterland, Seattle had developed not only a new set of place-stories but also a new landscape that was marked by Indian symbols. By the late 1930s, Seattle had become a city of totems.

Indian images guarded most approaches to the city. On the west, a totem pole stood on an overlook offering views of the city from Duwamish Head, while others graced the ship canal locks and the downtown waterfront. On the north, tourist establishments—the Thunderbird Hotel, the Totem Pole Motel, and the Twin Teepees Lounge—used Indian images to attract travelers motoring on the new Pacific Highway. On the east, visitors plying the state-of-the-art floating bridge across Lake Washington entered a tunnel under the city's hills by passing through a portal surrounded by Northwest Coast–style designs and text that read "Seattle: Portal to the Pacific." Along with the Potlatches, Founders Day events, busts and seals and statues of Chief Seattle, and other urban place-stories, the urban landscape itself spoke to the importance of Indians as defining elements of Seattle's civic self-image.[9]

In Pioneer Place Park, at the heart of the city's oldest neighborhood, the Chief-of-All-Women pole that had been stolen from On the Cottonwood in 1899 remained the grandest and eldest of Seattle's Indian icons. But then, just after 10 P.M. on 22 October 1938, an unidentified man placed gasoline-soaked rags against the base of the pole, set the rags on fire, and disappeared into the darkness. To this day, no one knows why. But as Seattleites decided how best to replace the irreparably damaged artifact, a clear distinction was made between Indian imagery in the city and urban Indians themselves. At first, two local Suquamish men, accomplished lumbermen employed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), were asked to carve the new pole. However, many observers feared that Richard Temple and Lawrence Webster (the grandson of Wahalchoo, who had once dived for power off Alki Point) might introduce "some goofy innovations," and one reporter who visited their homes across Puget Sound was disturbed to find that they

spoke English fluently and even drove trucks. Ethnographer Melville Jacobs, for his part, argued that only his white colleague Viola Garfield could do the job right. Meanwhile, the *Times* solicited opinions from Native people at a baseball game in North Seattle, only to find that these Indians hardly seemed Indian at all: they were playing an "American" sport, one of the men was carving a pole with Teddy Roosevelt on it, and another suggested painting the pole with store-bought paint instead of traditional pigments. This was the standard kind of urban-versus-Indian history at work: Indians in the city were in fact no longer Indians, and Native truck-drivers and ballplayers were ignorant and undeserving of the Indianness the Chief-of-All-Women pole represented. In the end the job was given to carvers at Saxman in Alaska, some of whose ancestors had once lived in On the Cottonwood, in exchange for the remains of the original pole. Never mind that the carving of the replacement pole was sponsored by a federal agency, the Civilian Conservation Corps; these were real Indians, not only because they came from a "totem pole culture" but because of their perceived distance from urban life. Far-off Indians, exotic and abstract, were preferable to familiar ones who called Seattle home, and were the only ones deemed fit to hew "sixty feet of freshly-carved monsters ferocious enough to set a lady tourist tittupy with horror."[10]

Despite this tension between Seattle's Native imagery and its Indian residents, Native people were sometimes active participants in the creation of the city's Indian iconography. Enumerators of the 1930 census, for example, found a family from Ucluelet on Vancouver Island living along the Duwamish River, not far from where Seetoowathl and his wife had starved to death in 1920. Like many other Nuu-chah-nulth people, Simon Peter, his wife, Annie, their grown son, Solomon, and their younger children, Evelyn, Arthur, and Elsie, had come to Seattle in search of opportunity. For Solomon, that meant hard work as a general laborer on the docks and in the industrial areas of town. But for Simon, work in the city meant carving totem poles, which were then sold to places like Ye Olde Curiosity Shop. For Simon Peter, being urban and being Indian were not necessarily in conflict—in fact, one facilitated the other. This was also the case for Jimmy John, another Nuu-

chah-nulth. From the community of Mowachat on the west coast of Vancouver Island, John had traveled regularly to Seattle with his family and often sold items he carved from wood and silver to Ye Olde Curiosity Shop and other tourist outlets. One of his most lucrative opportunities, however, came in 1936, when he was hired by a curio-shop owner to carve a series of totem poles that would be incorporated into the design of a new building. By 1937, the misnamed Haida House was doing a brisk business in baskets, masks, model canoes, and miniature totem poles out of a building adorned with Thunderbirds, bears, and eagles carved by John in return for room and board. The Haida House—now the Totem House Fish and Chips shop—was part of a new 1930s vernacular that used totem poles, tipis, and other Indian images to capture the attention of tourists, but behind the seeming kitsch lay the labor and expertise of a Native artisan. For John, who lived in Seattle for ten years before returning to British Columbia to become a leader in the renaissance of Northwest Coast art, urban life provided not just economic opportunity but a chance to establish himself as a Native artist. And in doing so, he helped craft Seattle's Indian iconography.[11]

In the late 1930s, though, the shape of the city, and of urban history itself, was about to change. The lean years in the city of totems were about to end, as mobilization for global conflict dramatically transformed the city, its population, and its economy. In later decades, many of Seattle's older residents, as well as some of its historians, would come to see the 1930s as the last years of "old Seattle." In a series of interviews conducted at the beginning of the twenty-first century, for example, Seattle residents who remembered Depression-era Seattle—wealthy and poor, black and white, radical and conservative—described the traits that made Seattle of the 1930s so different from the city of later decades. For WPA artist Bill Cumming, broadcasting heiress Patsy Collins, unrepentant Wobbly Jesse Petrich, African American dietician Marian Valley-Lightner, and Puget Power technician Tom Sandry, seemingly intractable racial and social divisions, radical politics, and an economy still driven by extractive industries distinguished the 1930s. Their descriptions of "Old Seattle" are exercises in nostalgia, but they also reflect the very real transformations that took place during and after

the Second World War. As the lean years came to an end for many of Seattle's residents, so too did one era of the city's history.[12]

This was true for Seattle's Indian history as well. In the years surrounding 1880, Seattle had been on the cusp of an urban and Indian revolution. Back then, "Seattle Illahee"—a mixed-race town on the urban indigenous frontier—was about to give way to a modern city of the Changers that used Native imagery to explain itself to the world, that dispossessed local indigenous people, and that spawned an Indian hinterland. In the 1930s, that imagery, dispossession, and hinterland remained largely in place, but the beginnings of a new kind of urban Indian history were visible as well. Stoney and Choctaw women and men arriving from beyond the city's regional hinterland, a Makah woman helping lost Indian children, and a Hesquiaht carver using a job in the city to launch a Native renaissance each helped lay the foundations for a new chapter in Seattle's Indian and urban histories. But in the 1930s, on the cusp between past and present, Indian people were often overshadowed by Indian imagery. When Mac and Ike, the heroes of John Dos Passos's working-class epic *The 42nd Parallel,* arrived in Seattle, for example, their experiences there reflected not only the fears and aspirations of the Great Depression but the landscape of urban conquest:

> The next day was sunny; the Seattle waterfront was sparkling, smelt of lumberyards, was noisy with the rattle of carts and yells of drivers when they got off the boat. They went to the Y.M.C.A. for a room. They were through with being laborers and hobos. They were going to get clean jobs, live decently and go to school nights. They walked round the city all day, and in the evening met Olive and Gladys in front of the totempole [*sic*] on Pioneer Square.[13]

Of course they did.