

“IT WAS TWO DIFFERENT
TIMES OF THE DAY,
BUT IN THE SAME PLACE”:

*Coast Salish High School Experience
in the 1970s*

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THE CROSSING BETWEEN CHILDHOOD and adulthood, the teenage years, is a perilous journey as one learns to chart the cultural and political realities that lie beyond the world of home and family. For First Nations students, high school involves an intense encounter with the themes of ethnicity, power, and history that define adult relations between the reserve and the surrounding dominant society. Aboriginal people's high school memories are charged with struggles to assert cultural identity in an institutional landscape that has pushed their reality to the margins. They have had to navigate a delicate terrain that has been indifferent, or hostile, to their own communities' values and beliefs. Some Aboriginal teenagers found ways to cope with the schools' institutional racism. Most just tried to survive; a few graduated, but often without the academic or technical skills to compete in the white man's frantic, unbalanced world. More recently, with increased postsecondary access and with the advent of First Nations control of education, Aboriginal youth have had some new choices and have taken advantage of opportunities to invigorate their own communities' economic and cultural renewal. Conditions *have* changed; the social and political landscape for Aboriginal peoples has evolved, with unanticipated layers of complexity. Globalization has created new challenges for self-determining indigenous communities and for youth attempting to resurrect and understand Aboriginal identity in a modern and postmodern context.

In advancing the work of healing and revitalizing First Nations communities, we need to understand the present conditions for Aboriginal teenagers and their families. We also must come to understand how these conditions have evolved from the political climate of the recent past. Residential schools left a potent legacy of language and culture

loss, sexual abuse, disruption of parenting knowledge, and erosion of self-esteem. However, we need to explore other stories as well, including those pertaining to the Aboriginal experience of public schools.

In writing this article, I revisited a chapter from my PhD dissertation that examined stories from Lummi adults who had been students at the local public high school in Ferndale, Washington, during the 1970s. The backdrop is the 1974 *Boldt* decision, a profound victory for Puget Sound tribes, which reallocated the salmon fishery. The *Boldt* decision, as Daniel Boxberger points out, “was the culmination of dozens of state and federal court cases that dealt with isolated aspects of the treaty fishing rights controversy.”¹ The backlash from white fishers and those opposed to treaties was intensely felt by Native teenagers in the region’s high schools. Most of the high school teachers either fished or came from families that fished. I interviewed thirty people: half were former teachers or administrators at Ferndale High School and half were members of the Lummi community who had been students there during the 1970s. I collected stories from both the Native and the non-Native community concerning the high school and the interethnic tensions for Coast Salish teenagers at that time. No informant was identified by name, and throughout the writing process, I consulted with those involved in the project concerning the accuracy of their words and of my interpretations. I finished the study in 1995 but have continued to conduct research that compares Aboriginal school and community experiences across the British Columbia–Washington State border. In describing the often violent, ethnically divided world of the high school, one Lummi man told me, “it was two different times of the day, but in the same place.”

Since that time, ten years ago, I developed a teacher education program for the tribal college at Lummi and have been director of a graduate studies program in First Nations education in British Columbia. I have had many conversations with Coast Salish educators and community members on both sides of the BC–Washington border. When I was conducting research, I thought that the Lummi situation was simply an extreme version of experiences and themes common to Aboriginal adolescents throughout the Coast Salish region in the 1970s. While there are deep similarities in the ways that colonialism has defined and confined the Indigenous Other, my study of racism in a small town high school delineates some differences between the

¹ Daniel L. Boxberger, *To Fish in Common: The Ethnohistory of Lummi Indian Salmon Fishing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 155.

experiences of Aboriginal youth in British Columbia and Aboriginal youth in Washington State. In the concluding section of this article, I discuss some differences between Canadian and American policies as well as the challenges of making cross-border comparisons. I also posit questions that the Lummi setting raises for Coast Salish educational history in British Columbia.

While the Lummi story should be distinguished from that of Aboriginal youth in British Columbia, it should also be placed in the context of the cross-border Coast Salish region. Coast Salish adolescents from Nooksack, Swinomish, and other Aboriginal communities attended Ferndale High School in the 1970s. The Lummi formed the largest group, but there is much intermarriage among Coast Salish peoples and the structure of the extended family system meant that students might be living with grandparents or other relatives for a time while attending school and then later move to another household in another Coast Salish community (which could be on either side of the border). This story is set in the Lummi community, but it includes the experience of other Coast Salish youth.

Both Canada and the United States had assimilationist policies that led to the removal of Aboriginal children from their traditional communities. After 1928² and the publication of the Miriam Report, which exposed the deplorable conditions in the boarding schools, the two countries took divergent approaches to Aboriginal education. In the 1930s most, but not all, of the federal Indian boarding schools in the United States were closed. Canada continued to utilize church-operated residential schools as late as the 1980s, even though integration became official policy after 1951.

Policies evolved from mission schools to industrial schools and then to what were called *residential schools* in Canada and *boarding schools* in the United States. Hence, the term “residential school” refers to the Canadian context while the term “boarding school” refers to the American context. When the American Indian boarding schools were closed down, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) maintained some reservation day schools. However, the majority of American Indian students were forced into local public schools where they often encountered sharp racism. While the residential schools in Canada aimed to assimilate

² In 1928 the Miriam Report (*The Problem of Indian Administration*) condemned the inadequate curricula and deplorable living conditions in the boarding schools. This led to the closure of most of the federal Indian boarding schools. The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act furthered the process of closing the boarding schools, encouraging culturally responsive education in public schools and reservation day schools.

Aboriginal people by eradicating their language and culture, the public high school in the United States treated Aboriginal culture more as a residue than as a reality. Lummi students withstood attacks on their validity, their very existence as Aboriginal. High school experiences are wide-ranging. It must be said that not all First Nations people experienced nothing but racism and marginalization during their high school days, but many of the themes of colonialism and social injustice that are macrostructural realities for Aboriginal communities were and are built into the scripts of high school life.

The Coast Salish region of southwestern British Columbia and northwest Washington State offers one of the most potent examples of how persistent, adaptive, and innovative Aboriginal communities can be in the midst of the overwhelming forces of modernity. In the past decade, several anthropologists and historians have examined the changing socioeconomic and cultural conditions of the 1960s and 1970s that led to self-determination for Coast Salish communities.³ In 1948 anthropologist Marion K. Smith wrote that “no other Indians of the whole continent have been similarly engulfed by the sudden growth of city populations, have been exposed to the full impact of twentieth century urban society.”⁴ Throughout the 1970s Lummi and other Coast Salish adolescents were caught up in the transformations brought on by urbanization as well as by the Vietnam War, the Environmental Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Red Power Movement. This era and this region have the potential to help us to understand the effects of emerging globalization, the media, and the struggle for Aboriginal self-determination. For example, an examination of the politics of cultural reclamation at Coqualeetza in the 1970s provides a sketch of how both the Sto:lo in British Columbia and the Nooksack in Washington State merged Halq’eme’ylem language revitalization with

³ Crisca Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999); Bruce Miller, *The Problem of Justice: Tradition and Law in the Coast Salish World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Boxberger, *To Fish in Common*; Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities in and around Puget Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); S. Michelle Rasmus, “Repatriating Words: Local Knowledge in a Global Context,” *American Indian Quarterly* 26, 2 (2002): 286-307; Susan Roy, “Performing Musqueam Culture and History at British Columbia’s 1966 Centennial Celebrations,” *BC Studies* 135 (2002): 55-90.

⁴ Marion K. Smith, *Indians of the Urban Northwest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 6.

⁵ See Brent Galloway, “The Upriver Halkomelem Language Program at Coqualeetza,” *Human Organization* 47, 4 (1988): 291-7; and Jody R. Woods, “Coqualeetza: Legacies of Land Use,” in *A Sto:lo Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith T. Carlson and Sonny McHalsie (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001), 74.

indigenous knowledge in expressions of protest and activism.⁵ In these histories of struggle for Aboriginal self-determination, “education” was identified as both an assimilative force to be resisted and as an indigenous force to be reclaimed.

ASSIMILATION, INTEGRATION, AND ABUSE

While historical studies of First Nations education have focused primarily on residential schooling, we need to turn more attention to the recent past and to sites where the school served as a dress rehearsal for the inequalities and scripted adult roles that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth were to occupy after graduation. The educational problems for First Nations were not only located in the policies and realities of residential schools. In many respects, and for many Aboriginal teenagers, going to a mainstream high school was worse than going to a residential school. In an integrated public high school, like the one Lummi teenagers attended in the 1970s, even the most culturally responsive policies, administrators, and teachers were unable to resist adopting stereotyped, racist views of Indians. Moreover, they could not mediate the violence that erupted in the classrooms and halls of the school and that was directed at Lummi students. White families, who demanded that the schools serve *their* teenagers’ interests, resisted cultural and/or academic opportunities that might have benefited Coast Salish families. Cole Harris points out that “people of good will,” who attempted to negotiate a more equitable “Native space,” continually encountered the inertia of the settler group’s desires for land and resources mixed with conventional assumptions about race and progress. Such populist pressures tended to dismantle efforts to advance a fair and just engagement with Aboriginal people. The high school landscape that Lummi students traversed in the 1970s was dominated by those same core settler values and beliefs: Native space was created and enforced by powerful economic, political, and cultural pressures from the white community.

I first began hearing accounts of life at Ferndale High School in 1991, when I was a faculty member at the tribal college on the Lummi reservation. Elders and parents, trying to explain some of the educational attitudes and expectations of the tribe, told me the stories of how they survived in a politically explosive school and community. My research, which involved interviewing people and examining documents from the 1970s, enabled me to understand the students, their families, and the political forces that constricted their educational opportunities. White

narratives about Lummi people included both racist and ideological justifications for acts of oppression and for exerting control over a politically awakened Aboriginal group. The Lummi community was, along with other Coast Salish communities, engaged in what Linda Smith refers to as “attempts to escape the penetration and surveillance of that [Colonial] gaze whilst simultaneously reordering and reconstituting ourselves as indigenous human beings in a state of ongoing crisis.”⁶

One chapter in my dissertation sketched what life was like for Aboriginal teenagers in the Lummi community in the 1970s. These people are now the parents, grandparents, and community leaders of the present Coast Salish communities. Just as the stories from residential schools in British Columbia show aspects of a legacy that became embedded in family and community life, so the stories from high schools in Washington state reveal a turbulent time of struggle for Aboriginal identity, laying the psychological and political groundwork for attitudes and strategies towards self-determination. I agree with Cole Harris that history informs the present, that “contexts change, that issues, therefore, are never quite the same at different times, and that the lessons of the past, such as they may be, are to be discerned cautiously.”⁷ I would add that lessons and stories from across the border are also to be discerned with caution. Nevertheless, these stories of school experiences and the lessons that emerge from them require analysis and reflection.

FISHING RIGHTS AND SCHOOLING

The Supreme Court of Canada’s *Sparrow* decision gave limited definition to Aboriginal fishing rights, although it “does not protect Aboriginal rights so much as it establishes a system of priorities in dealing with them.”⁸ In contrast, the *Boldt* decision, which is one of the most controversial and potent decisions in the history of American Indian law, *affirmed* the Coast Salish tribes’ treaty right to an opportunity to catch half the salmon at their usual and accustomed fishing sites throughout Puget Sound. It has had an enormous economic and symbolic impact on the Puget Sound region, producing outrage from white communities and tension for Aboriginal teenagers. The unique circumstances of the

⁶ Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 39.

⁷ Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), xxvi.

⁸ Dan Russell, *A People’s Dream: Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 148.

salmon fishery in Washington State brought the anti-Indian backlash into the classroom. A large number of teachers were fishers who, before the *Boldt* decision, were noted for making good money in the salmon fishery. They resented the fact that Coast Salish high school students and their families were benefiting economically and culturally from *Boldt*. Commercial fishers even blamed “moonlighting school teachers who took a share of the catch for supplemental income”⁹ for the decline of the runs. Throughout this era of the fishing wars, the high school was a place where Aboriginal cultural expressions were always interpreted as both political and contentious. In October 1978 a federal civil rights hearing was held in Seattle after a Ferndale teacher kicked a Lummi teenage girl in the back. This was one of several reports of violence being directed at Lummi students.

One former principal made a comment that illuminated the attitudes of the time. I asked him to tell me what it was like to mediate political tensions in this kind of cross-cultural environment. He said, “I never really thought of our school as a cross-cultural school, we just tried to treat all kids the same.” The school was focused on serving the predominantly white community of Ferndale, and Lummi were seen as outsiders. Lummi students represented approximately 15 per cent of the school population during the 1970s. A former teacher explained that, “in those days, it was just Indians and whites at the school; they didn’t have other ethnic groups like now.”

GROWING UP LUMMI

For the Lummi teenager, the tribal world was, in most respects, the opposite of the world of the school. At school Native students were placed at the bottom of the pecking order by both white students and white teachers. But at home, and within the reservation community, young adults found themselves holding a position of rising status and responsibility. An adolescent male Lummi often operated a fishing boat and was often beginning to take charge of other adult activities in the household and the tribe. His elders paid him much attention as they prepared him for his leadership role in the family and the community.

Whereas at school Lummi students were made to feel insignificant, at home they were held in high regard, watched closely, and given all

⁹ Daniel Jack Chasan, *The Water Link: A History of Puget Sound as a Resource* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 127.

the assistance the family could provide. The adolescent female Lummi was being prepared not only for her role as wife and mother but also for her role as the conveyor of traditional knowledge and as a vital link in the fishing economy (in which women were responsible for working with the nets and preparing and selling fish). Little children were not given nearly the attention as were adolescent and adult children. Wayne Suttles noted the way Lummi childhood was balanced:

It is my impression that the white attitude toward little children is “nothing is too good for them,” but toward the marriage of a grown child, “well, if you think you’re old enough to get married, go ahead, but don’t expect any help from us; you’re on your own.” But the Lummi attitude may rather be, toward little children, “Let big sister take care of little brother, and don’t worry about big sister; she can take care of herself,” and toward the marriage of a grown child, “We’d better give them part of the place or a new car; what will people think of us if our children are poor?” The difference, if this impression is correct, is probably one of identification of parents and children; white parents may feel that they are judged by their small children, but after these have reached maturity they can no longer be held responsible for them, while Lummi parents may feel that small children are not yet important enough to add anything to the family prestige but that grown children are.¹⁰

Aspects of social and family rank were forms of cultural structuring that persisted from precontact times, and Coast Salish teenagers were taught that they lived in a hereditary class society. “All children were thoroughly taught who were their social equals, who were their inferiors.”¹¹ These cultural learnings were still a vibrant and present part of family life and reality in the 1970s. Protocols and traditional values added layers of complexity to teenage identity and experience.

How Coast Salish childhood experiences contrasted with those of white students was either not understood or misunderstood by non-Natives at the high school. Teachers, especially, did not understand how the conditions of life for the Lummi students differed from those of their white counterparts – even in the most obvious and ordinary ways. One Lummi woman recalled that teachers could not understand why she did so poorly on intelligence tests:

¹⁰ Wayne Suttles, “Post-Contact Culture Change among the Lummi Indians,” *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 18, 1 and 2 (1954): 91–2.

¹¹ Wilson Duff, *The Upper Stalo Indians of the Fraser Valley*, *British Columbia* (Victoria, BC: British Columbia Provincial Museum, Department of Education, 1952), 80.

There were pictures we were supposed to identify, but they were pictures of things we didn't have in our houses. Like, there were pictures of a kitchen sink and a tap. Well, we didn't have a tap in our house. There were other pictures; there was one of a heater, well, we had a wood stove and I had never seen a heater like that – or an air conditioner, well, I didn't know what an air conditioner was. I knew what a pump was; I knew what a well was; we had kerosene lamps, I knew what those were. We lived on the north side of the Nooksack at the old village then. We didn't have plumbing. We didn't have electricity. We used the water from the river to wash our clothes and take baths in and we used to go to the church to haul our drinking water. A lot of people still hauled water at that time. I remember taking that test and not knowing what a lot of stuff was. I did terrible on those tests.

In the 1970s, when most non-Native families in Ferndale lived in comfortable homes with central heating, washing machines, and an assortment of conveniences, many Lummi homes lacked plumbing or electricity. There was deep poverty on the reservation, and Lummi families often rented houses from whites who had purchased reservation land. One Lummi woman reported that her family lived in a house rented from a lawyer who had bought it and the land on which it stood as an allotment.¹² “We lived in that house for many years and finally, the year I graduated from Ferndale, that lawyer paid for a toilet to be installed.”

The federal government's Community Action Programs and Office of Economic Opportunity Programs of the 1970s¹³ helped with housing projects and with the setting up of sewer and water districts. These programs provided some of the first full-time jobs the reservation had ever had. Some of this federal grant money helped to get a few people out of poverty, and, thanks to the *Boldt* decision, the fishing was getting better for some purse seining families. However, as Boxberger points out, “even though the Lummis are the strongest fishing tribe in western

¹² The Dawes Act, 1887, divided tribal lands into individual allotments distributed to tribal members. After the trust period limitations expired, a tribal member could be declared “competent” and the parcels could be sold, often to local white business people and real estate speculators. Many reservations, like that of the Lummi, are now a checkerboard of Native and non-Native land ownership.

¹³ Federal Indian policy in the 1960s shifted towards an emphasis on self-determination and economic development. Community Action Programs (CAPs) were developed out of the Office of Economic Opportunity and were linked to the “war on poverty” goals of the Democrats. This trend continued into the 1970s but was dismantled by the Reagan administration in the 1980s.

Washington, nearly 90 percent of their fishers earn a net income below the federally established 'poverty level.'¹⁴ The conditions of poverty have continued without interruption. In 1993 the Department of Health and Human Services, Indian Health Services, reported that American Indian children are three times as likely to be in poverty as are children in the general population.¹⁵ One Lummi man recalled that, "for most of the time my parents had no car, and at times when they did have a car, they had no money for gas anyway." Even students who came from families that were prosperous by reservation standards found themselves in the low socioeconomic status group when they arrived at high school. Indian students often experienced severe identity crises as they struggled for acceptance. One woman spoke for many in telling of her efforts to be accepted: "My dad went fishing. He used to fish in the river and Lummi Bay all by himself. He caught enough that we always had good clothes. I took pains to dress like everyone else, but I still didn't fit in. I remember wanting to fit in, to be like everyone else, but I couldn't do it. I could never be like the white kids." Lummi teenagers struggled with wanting to be "like everyone else" and, at the same time, with needing to claim their Aboriginal identity.

John Dewhirst, in examining Salish festivals in British Columbia and Washington State, noted the mixture of public and private performances of identity during the 1968 Lummi Stommish water festival, where a teenage girl, chosen Stommish princess, received an Indian name. The public speeches that accompanied this event included references to fishing rights and the need to prove one's identity to both the Indian and white worlds.¹⁶ The teenager needed to braid together an identity that could both respond to white conceptions of normativeness and be genuinely Native. Coast Salish teenagers grew up in a world that was invaded by white judgments concerning both authenticity and respectability. In British Columbia the "Indian Baby Show," partly initiated by the Department of Indian Affairs health nurse, was set up to judge which Coast Salish baby was the "healthiest." Performed in the 1960s at summer festivals in the region, it provided small prizes to winning parents and reinforced the white belief that "Indian children in particular suffer from poor nutrition, inadequate clothing and poor hygiene."¹⁷ The Indian Baby Show was designed to upgrade Aboriginal

¹⁴ Boxberger, *To Fish in Common*, 173.

¹⁵ Report developed for the Lummi Indian Business Council for grant no. ISPOO09000-01, Indian Health Services under Tribal Management, 1993.

¹⁶ John Dewhirst, "Coast Salish Summer Festivals: Rituals for Upgrading Social Identity," *Anthropologica* 18 (1976): 256.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

social identity according to white standards. Coast Salish teenagers grew up pressured by missionaries, teachers, and the dominant mainstream community to adopt white, middle-class norms. Aboriginal parents were usually blamed for the delinquency of teenagers. R. Scott Sheffield gives examples of Indian agents who “deemed Indian parents irresponsible and unreliable ... even if they were not viewed as willfully negligent, Native parents were still viewed as unhelpful in the effort to turn their older children into the type of ‘Indian’ the IAB [Indian Affairs Branch] wanted to see.”¹⁸

SPORTS AND CULTURAL ACCEPTANCE

The Ferndale community recalls the 1970s as a decade when Lummiis began to be a significant presence on Ferndale’s sports teams. One of the reasons that Lummi students began to turn out for football, baseball, basketball, wrestling, and track is that a few boys from successful fishing families (especially purse seining families) had acquired cars that they used to transport themselves and Lummi teammates to practices and games. “One of the main problems,” as one man reflected, “was that there wasn’t any bus – not like they have now. There was no transportation to get home after school if you stayed for sports. The white kids had cars or their parents would come to get them. The first year I played football, I didn’t have any transportation. I walked home from practice every night that first week [5 miles]. I didn’t get home in time to do my chores and that wasn’t good. So, I had to quit.”

As a result of their visibility on teams, Lummi students gained a more favourable image in the community. Plainly, the economic benefits acquired as a result of the *Boldt* decision created the opportunity for Lummi students to give a good showing as athletes. Ironically, the same parents who were hostile to Native fishing treaties were often the ones who were most pleased to see Lummi students help the Ferndale teams win games.

Along with transportation problems, Lummi players often lacked the proper sports equipment. One man reported that he “couldn’t afford shoes for running in so I ran barefoot on the gravel track. My feet were tough and once I got started I couldn’t quit.” Another man explained how some sports were more accessible to Lummiis than were others: “Baseball was too white. In football we got to mix it up and make contact. The

¹⁸ R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the Indian and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 21.

baseball players kind of pushed me out. They'd say, 'go stand over there.' I never got a chance to show anyone how I could play."

Playing on a team constituted an important contribution to a small town high school like Ferndale, and it was recognized as such. But Lummi players were given only an absent-minded and perfunctory show of appreciation: they were not recognized in the same way as were white players. One man remembered that "on game days there would be posters on my locker, but they didn't connect the name and the face. People at the school knew the name, but they didn't know me."

Some Lummi teenagers decided to attend Chemawa Indian Boarding School in Salem, Oregon, during the 1970s. In this case, rather than serving the state's policies of assimilation, the segregated government boarding school functioned to provide Aboriginal people with a safe haven from the racism of the public schools. An administrator at Chemawa recalled that time very well:

Lummis came to Chemawa then because of the *Boldt* decision.

Students used to talk about the prejudice they faced at Ferndale High School. It was a different time than now. The Lummis who came during that period quickly became the leaders of the school. They weren't kids from broken families or caught up with alcohol abuse.

Almost all of the Lummi students graduated. I would say that they were extraordinary students who had a different profile from the other students then and now. As a group they were outstanding athletes and they became leaders in all facets of school life.

Alarmed by the anti-Indian backlash in the public schools as a consequence of the fishing wars, tribes from the Pacific Northwest demanded that more of their students be permitted to attend Chemawa. According to Szasz, "these demands showed that Indians were not necessarily opposed to boarding schools; in many cases they preferred to send their children to a school attended only by Indians."¹⁹ Chemawa, which began as a coercive institution of assimilation, ended up providing 1970s Coast Salish students with a safe haven from the oppression and racism of integrated public schools.

¹⁹ Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 166.

FIGHTS

Naturally, in a terrain as divided by inter-ethnic tensions as was Ferndale in the 1970s, there were numerous stories of fights. With rare exceptions, the fights were between Indians and whites. There were some conflicts between Lummi families – usually centred around the factionalism brought about by the federal development programs. But these skirmishes are not relevant to the context of high school life. At Ferndale High School, it was clearly a matter of whites against Indians and Indians against whites – whether individually or in groups. Fights usually occurred at school, on the school grounds, or at Pioneer Park on the west edge of town proceeding towards Lummi.

From the Lummi perspective, most of the fights were started by whites who were venting racist hostility towards Indians. One man remembered a white student who “punched me one time. He was a real racist talker. He hated Indians. He came up to me and said, ‘you son-of-a-bitch,’ and then hit me. I laid into him; it was around the lockers. He didn’t come after me anymore after that.”

Lummi boys were outnumbered in the halls and were often quickly surrounded and engulfed by white students. Lummi girls recognized the danger and usually tried to keep fights from happening. A Lummi man recalled the “time a friend and I saw an Indian girl get pushed down a stairway. We were going to see who did it and try to do something about it, but she said it was a bunch of white guys and that there were too many of them. She was trying to protect us.”

Some conflicts between Indians and whites escalated until they became gang fights, which were usually staged at nearby Pioneer Park. These “rumbles” between groups of white and Lummi teenagers were much talked about (although never in the newspapers). As one Lummi man summarized it: “It was, ‘I’ll get a bunch of my guys together, you get a bunch of your guys together, and we’ll meet at Pioneer Park for a rumble.’ That was the way it was.” Another man remembered that “once there were twelve of us Indians and seventy white guys showed up; I remember getting our asses kicked.”

Fights often happened after the high school dances. One man remembered a fight that escalated: “Once both sides agreed that it would be a fair fight between this one Lummi and this one white guy. Well, Bones was tough and he was beating this white guy pretty good. I made a comment about it and this other white guy just sucker-punched me. The whole thing just blew up after that.”

From the Lummi point of view the fights were unavoidable: Aboriginal teenagers were under constant assault from belligerent white students who often parroted the anti-Indian biases of their parents. The *Boldt* decision gave more than enough justification to whites for venting feelings of resentment and spite towards Indians. In this strained climate, teachers often blamed Lummi for starting trouble in the classroom.

INDIANS AND HIPPIES:

RED POWER AND THE COUNTER-CULTURE

Lummi students, like other high school students, were affected by the anti-war movement, the questioning of governmental authority, and the experimentation with moral boundaries. The 1960s and 1970s brought Native students an Indian renaissance that interacted with the larger mainstream counter-culture but also had a unique quality and direction. This Indian counter-culture movement of the 1970s is usually referred to as the Red Power Movement. It includes the Indian occupation of Alcatraz; the Trail of Broken Treaties March to Washington, DC; the takeover of the town of Wounded Knee; and other milestones of recent Indian history. Lummi students, like their white counterparts, were affected by the sweep of new ideas and fashions, but being “alternative” was not as novel for the former as it was for the latter. To the extent that Aboriginal values were presented to teenagers as the opposite of the mainstream values of individualism, personal ambition, and accumulation of commodities, the Lummi students had grown up in a well-established “counter-culture.”

Along with the flurry of activity instigated by federal development programs, traditional ceremonies revived, and a refined sense of what it meant to be a Lummi developed. Teenagers, studying under elders, played a central role in the renaissance of such Coast Salish arts as carving and basketry. One of the most outstanding of these programs was entitled “Master Carvers of the Lummi and Their Apprentices.” Funded by the Ford Foundation in 1971, the project funded master carvers Morrie Alexander and Al Charles to train four adolescent Lummi boys. One of the students, the late Dale James, became one of the most distinguished carvers in the region, selling his works worldwide while teaching at Northwest Indian College at Lummi.²⁰ The opportunity

²⁰ No author listed, grant report #700-241, Mary Randlett [photographer], *A Report: Master Carvers of the Lummi and Their Apprentices* (Bellingham, WA: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, 1971).

to work with elders was a lifeboat for students who were dropping out, or being pushed out, of high school. Moreover, there was a revival of youth participation in the traditions of canoe racing, which required rigorous training and an orientation towards Indian values. This revival of Coast Salish culture was occurring in tandem with the escalation of violence on the water as a result of white backlash against the *Boldt* decision. Boxberger writes that “the blame, of course, was laid on the Indians, and shortly several violent altercations ensued, with Lummi fishers shot at by snipers on at least three occasions. In one case the target was a fourteen year old boy.”²¹

The counter-culture of the 1970s caused many people to examine their values and ways of dealing with problems. One Lummi man recalled how he began to rethink his approach towards racial tensions at Ferndale: “Guys have a way of settling these sorts of things by sizing up the next guy; if you had a problem with what some guy said to you you would just tell him to meet you after school. But, I was beginning to question the idea of strength settling arguments. I was then reading Aldous Huxley who said that the man who uses his fists has run out of ideas.”

In many respects the counter-culture movement brought Indians and whites together: “American Indians provided the counterculture with a living identity base. In turn the popular counterculture encouraged respect and support for traditional Indian ways among young Indians.” The environmental movement, which was advancing in the 1970s, began pointing to American Indians as examples of human societies that lived in harmony with the Earth. Many urban white youth were attracted to images of Native people as keepers of wisdom; traditional Indian ways were seen as an avenue out of the alienation of a materialistic and self-destructive United States of America.

A number of students from Western Washington University worked on federal grant programs at the reservation. Lummis recall the community refrain from that time: “Here come the hippies.” They saw some of these white college students as simply going “Native” without contributing or gaining much from the experience, but they saw others as offering a great deal. One Lummi woman remembered that “VISTA [Volunteers In Service to America] workers played a major role in helping Lummi kids during that period. The VISTA volunteers were providing a crucial transportation link to get teenagers to high school events.”

²¹ Boxberger, *To Fish in Common*, 154.

At the same time that more whites were coming to the reservation to take part in cultural and political events, Lummi teenagers were participating in activities that brought them into contact with the counter-culture of the dominant society. One man recalled an important trip to California: I attended “an Indian youth leadership conference ... in San Francisco. That changed my thinking about everything. I saw Timothy Leary speak; he was talking about free love and freeing your mind. I got hooked on all that stuff.”

Some Lummi students believed that the spirit of the times, which emphasized cultural diversity and pluralism, might improve Indian-white tensions. Some hoped for an increase in mutual respect and a shared understanding of lifeways and values – even treaties. One man reflected on his optimism at the time and how it clashed with the reality of high school: “I thought things would change; there was this new society on the horizon. I had hopes that racism could be cured. All you needed to do was examine the evidence and ... I was really naive. At the high school you would always run up against the reality.”

LONGHOUSE HEALING AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE

In the 1970s anthropologists produced several studies of longhouse healing practices. Winter spirit dancing was being revived throughout the Coast Salish region. Some of these works are now viewed as disrespectful in that they appropriate the Aboriginal voice and misinterpret its context and authority. Wolfgang Jilek’s book on spirit dancing, for example, quotes dancers and discusses ritual practices that many Coast Salish families consider private and personal knowledge – knowledge that is not for publication.²² A central theme of these studies is that particular forms of sickness derive from losing one’s identity as an Aboriginal person. During this time ceremonial practices were, among other things, used to reorient Coast Salish teenagers towards traditional cultural values. For many Lummi teenagers, the physical and psychic trauma of being at the high school produced symptoms that elders and parents thought could be addressed with traditional healing practices. Ferndale High School had become, for Lummis, a kind of battleground, where they struggled both to protect their integrity and identity and to be accepted in the school system. For most Lummis, the experience of attending Ferndale was traumatic. Tribal elders, parents, and others

²² Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 122–5.

noted the increase in chronic depression and distress among teenagers, and they attributed much of this trouble to pressures experienced at Ferndale. When I conducted interviews with former Lummi students, I did not ask about the role of the smokehouse rituals in helping young people deal with trauma and racism. I understood that this was both private and personal knowledge and, besides, I did not see winter spirit dancing as having a direct connection to the cross-cultural tensions experienced in the high school. It was the former teachers, not the students, who talked about Lummi teenagers being away at ceremonies and about how this affected their academic achievement and participation in school life. I recognize that, for both residential school survivors and for the survivors of institutional racism in public schools, the stories of healing need to be told alongside the stories of trauma. Sto:lo author Ernie Crey described his experience of travelling across the border to the Nooksack reserve to receive treatment for spiritual sickness:

In our society when you are ill or feeling discomfort, you are described as being, "Indian sick," which means that spiritual forces are at work in your life. In order to understand these forces, you must return to spiritual teachers. The elders believe the voices and spirits that non-native medical experts might diagnose as a profound mental illness are in fact an expression of the cultural estrangement so many of us have suffered.²³

The focus of the winter dancing evolved to reaffirm Coast Salish identity; this stood in contrast to the goals and purposes of the school, which were to assimilate Native students into the mainstream. The work of initiating adolescent Lummis into the syowen – spiritual and ceremonial practices – took on a new sense of purpose for families and students in the 1970s. A number of teachers with whom I spoke noted the increase in absenteeism among Lummi students, who insisted upon attending smokehouse ceremonies, but none of them offered any explanation as to why such attendance might have been increasing. It was certainly the case that, as Bierwert claims, longhouse healing had a direct connection to "the importance of white people's influence on repressing Indian ways."²⁴

Students who had been away from class to attend smokehouse ceremonies returned to school with a renewed sense of identity and

²³ Ernie Crey, "The Perpetual Stranger: Four Generations in My Sto:lo Family," in *Stolen from Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1997), 44.

²⁴ Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 177.

self-esteem. However, teachers noted that these same students were now more detached than ever from the activities of the classroom. According to one teacher, "When they came back they were in a different mode. And they didn't come back and say, 'What did I miss? I want to make it up,' not in the least. It was quite difficult to know how to handle that. And I had not a clue about what they had been through and they weren't going to tell me; I don't even know if they could articulate it."

It was very hard to return to school after being away for a month undergoing traditional training. Ferndale High School was a culturally hostile environment for all Lummis, especially those who had gone through a transformative experience. One administrator reported that some teachers refused to allow Lummis to wear hats in the classroom – something that tradition required them to do during initiation times.

For Lummi students, one of the results of the increase in spirit dancing was that it fortified an oppositional identity at the same time that it reaffirmed a genuine Indian identity. As anthropologist Claudia Lewis observed: "not only are the Indians carrying on their own ceremonies – so totally at variance with the life of the White community at their doorstep – but in other aspects of their personal lives very divergent standards are operating."²⁵ Wayne Suttles asserted that, "perhaps most importantly, being a dancer is the most unequivocal symbol of being Indian."²⁶ The goal of the ceremonies was not only to build up the self-worth of young Indians but also to identify the forces that were attempting to tear it down. The school was consistently pointed out as a force that must be opposed. As anthropologist Pamela Amoss maintained, the dances oriented the Coast Salish student towards the "preservation of the Indian group against the threat of assimilation by the social and economic system of the dominant culture."²⁷ Speeches made at the smokehouses outlined the need to resist the white erosion of Indian identity: "The white people have taken away our land, our game, our fish, but this [identity] is something they cannot take away."²⁸

Just as the fishing wars shifted white perspectives about Indians in an extreme direction, so the evolution of the winter spirit dancing ceremonies shifted Aboriginal perspectives about white people in an

²⁵ Claudia Lewis, *Indian Families of the Northwest Coast: The Impact of Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 217.

²⁶ Suttles, "Post Contact Culture Change," 672.

²⁷ Pamela Amoss, "The Persistence of Aboriginal Beliefs and Practices among the Nooksack Coast Salish" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1972), 208.

²⁸ Wayne Suttles, "The Persistence of Intervillage Ties among the Coast Salish," in *The Emergent Native Americans: A Reader in Culture Contact*, ed. Deward E. Walker (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1972), 674.

extreme direction. Traditional values were moulded in the adolescent spirit dancer and stood in opposition to the egregious anti-Indian behavior of far too many white teachers and students. Lummi students who came back to school after experiencing the spirit dancing ceremonials were unsuitable with regard to what the school expected of them. They had experienced a complete realignment of their worldview. Teachers either ignored them or, if they attempted to reintegrate them into classroom life, were bewildered by their detachment. Even the most thoughtful teachers “had not a clue about what they had been through.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Lummi adolescent experience of thirty years ago offers a case study of Aboriginal identity under assault by white teachers and students who are intent on maintaining both economic and cultural privilege. In the Lummi case, we see that the Coast Salish community faced a whole clutch of problems as their youth were forced to integrate into unfriendly public classrooms. The situation was exacerbated by the backlash arising out of the *Boldt* decision. While each place has its own local story, the Lummi story is applicable to Canadian as well as American contexts. Elizabeth Furniss, in describing the cross-cultural tensions in Williams Lake, British Columbia, gives an account that would sound familiar to Lummis who attended high school in the 1970s:

These different perspectives on racism were clearly evident in a 1992 assessment of the needs of Aboriginal students in the Cariboo-Chilcotin School District. An educational consultant surveyed Aboriginal students, their families, district educational staff, principals, teachers, and counsellors. Students and their families reported that racial discrimination – ranging in expression from direct racial taunts to more subtle forms of being excluded or being expected to be low achievers – was among the most important problems that Aboriginal students faced. In contrast, few of the teachers, and none of the administrators, identified racial discrimination as an issue facing Aboriginal students.²⁹

In the 1970s the majority of Aboriginal children in British Columbia were attending public schools rather than residential schools. However, there is an absence of research describing the Aboriginal experience

²⁹ Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 125-6.

of negotiating these integrated schooling environments. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, anthropologists published hundreds of books and journal articles on the cross-cultural reality faced by American Indian high school students.³⁰ There are virtually no comparable studies in Canada, and none in British Columbia. One exception is Yngve Georg Lithman's description of high school life for a Manitoba reserve community in the early 1980s.³¹ Lithman described the same kinds of interethnic tensions experienced by Lummi during the 1970s: racist teachers, an integrated school with segregated realities for Native and non-Native students, and an institutional refusal to acknowledge Aboriginal cultural perspectives.

Clearly, the extremes of political/ethnic conflict from the *Boldt* decision backlash intensified the climate of racism and violence for Lummi teenagers. In this sense, Coast Salish high school experience in Washington State was much more riddled with a caustic, public, racist violence than was the Coast Salish high school experience in British Columbia. Many Lummi community members felt that the fishing rights controversies were used to justify and reinforce deeper and less rational expressions of resentment towards Aboriginal self-determination in general. One of the important questions raised by the Lummi story for British Columbia concerns how the present political struggles over unresolved land claims, fishing rights, and the backlash against Aboriginal self-determination are being felt by Coast Salish students in integrated public classrooms.

We need to examine how BC Aboriginal students consolidated identity and resistance in integrated schools that perpetuated the assimilationist legacy of the residential schools. Burns points out that, "although the federal government moved away from a policy of segregation toward a policy of integration of Aboriginal children in the regular provincial school during the 1950s, the overall approach to education was also notably paternalistic, coercive, racist, discriminatory,

³⁰ See Rosalie Wax, "The Warrior Dropouts," in *Native Americans Today: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Howard M. Bahr, Bruce Chadwick, and Robert C. Day, 146-55 (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Donna Deyhle, "Break Dancing and Breaking Out: Anglos, Utes, and Navajos in a Border Reservation High School," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 17 (1986): 111-27; and Fred Gearing, *The Face of the Fox: A Book about American Indians, White Men, the Cultural Traditions That Separate Them, and What Can Be Done About Their Estrangement* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970) for just a few noteworthy examples.

³¹ Yngve Georg Lithman, *The Community Apart: A Case Study of a Canadian Indian Reserve Community* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1984).

³² George E. Burns, "Factors and Themes in Native Education and School Boards/First Nations Tuition Negotiations and Tuition Agreement Schooling," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 22, 1 (1998): 53-66.

and assimilative.”³² We need more analyses of integration discourse in British Columbia in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Among other things, this research should examine the developments of master tuition agreements between bands and the province.

Coast Salish people cross the BC-Washington border often and are aware of conditions on either side of it. One Sto:lo parent and educator told me that she had foster boys from Lummi who told her that “things are tough; there were physical fights [at the school] and some stuff like that; here [in British Columbia], it’s like students are trying to melt into nothingness so that nobody will notice them. There’s a lot of the cousins that were my age who went to school from Lummi and Nooksack ... I think the students at Lummi and Nooksack experienced more overt racism and blame for stuff that was going on where here students felt invisible or wanted to be invisible ... racism in BC was more covert.”

The problem in doing comparative research across the Canada/US border is the dizzying complexity of factors related to policy and local response. At one moment conditions appear very different in Canada than they are in the United States, and you begin to think in contrasts. Then you hear a community story that could be told on either side of the line. For example, you may view a church or federal document that, in-so-far as its tone is concerned, could come from either Canadian or American officials. Particularly in the Coast Salish region of British Columbia and Washington State, where tribal people are connected across the border by long established kinship and ceremonial relationships, “local knowledge,” in Clifford Geertz’s³³ sense, troubles comparative analysis. The elusiveness of this comparative viewpoint has caused me to refrain from making too many generalizations about stories and settings. I have come to think of each setting as being simultaneously both resonant and dissonant with the experiences of other communities in the region. The Lummi story of attending public high school in the 1970s shows the effects of federal Indian education policies as well as the texture of cross-cultural tensions between Lummis and the local white community of Ferndale. Both of these factors, along with the local context and the discourse of government motives and goals, differ from the problems faced by the Coast Salish communities in British Columbia. At the same time, the underlying themes of colonialism (e.g., marginalizing, confining, and defining the Indigenous Other) are similar on both sides

³³ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). Geertz points out that “the shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements. One may veil this fact with ecumenical rhetoric or blur it with strenuous theory, but one cannot really make it go away” (4).

of the border, as are the ways in which most Aboriginal people describe their experiences with mainstream educational institutions.

Presently, there is a primary emphasis on the needs of Aboriginal youth. Former residential schools, such as Blue Quills in Alberta and St. Mary's in Mission, British Columbia, have been converted to Native-controlled educational and cultural centres. Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon is an Aboriginal survival school, which has focused on healing and cultural revitalization.³⁴ The emphasis is on helping youth to heal from both the trans-generational legacy of residential school and the more recent legacies of cultural assault and racism in integrated high schools. I think one of the important lessons of the 1970s is the knowledge that the healing and cultural regeneration of youth can only go a short distance without paying attention to the cultural needs of their parents and grandparents. It was their strong connection to elders and traditional teachers that enabled Coast Salish students of the 1970s to reclaim lost cultural space. The most successful programs, like "Master Carvers of the Lummi and Their Apprentices," provided support for *both* elders and youth. The hearings of Canada's Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Round Three, confirmed this connection as Tobias Provost, of the Peigan First Nation, spoke of what he had learned from his grandfather: "You have to know your history, you have to know your ceremonies. You have to know your language. You have to understand the relationship between the European and the Indian people, what they have done."³⁵ Integrated public schools do not help Aboriginal youth make the all-important connections to elders and community. One might argue that non-Aboriginal youth would also benefit from an education that affirms place-based knowledge and traditional forms of respect for elders.

While conditions directly related to the *Boldt* decision have been muted by time, the narratives from this troubled era still form the template for contemporary Lummi discourse on the tribe's educational and political problems. Lummi leaders speak about the trauma of going to Ferndale High School in the same fashion as other Coast Salish leaders in British Columbia speak about the legacy of residential school. Memories of high school continue to frame the identity boundaries when it comes to making distinctions between the Aboriginal growing-up

³⁴ Robert Regnier, "The Sacred Circle: An Aboriginal Approach to Healing Education at an Urban High School," in *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, ed. Marie Battiste and Jean Barman, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 313-29.

³⁵ Public Hearings, *Exploring the Options: Overview of the Third Round*, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1993), 13.

experience and the white growing-up experience. Aboriginal adolescents still struggle for cultural and political acceptance as they make their way through Canadian society. The stories of the 1970s give us insights into the perennial themes of culture clash. Like their parents and grandparents before them, Aboriginal teenagers continue to feel, as Homi Bhabha puts it, “the effects of a disavowal that denies the differences of the Other but produces in its stead forms of authority and multiple belief that alienate the assumptions of ‘civil’ discourse.”³⁶ Considering how Lummi students traversed the acidic, divided landscape of the high school, one Lummi man’s assessment of the time appears to be an understatement: “it was two different times of the day, but in the same place.”

³⁶ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 158.