

H-Net Reviews

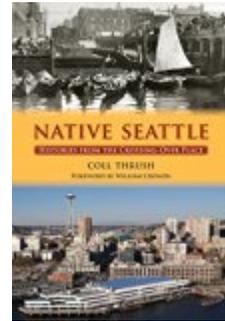
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Coll Thrush. *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007. Maps, illustrations. x + 326 pp. \$28.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98700-2; \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-98812-2.

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“Re-storying” Native People into Seattle’s Place-Story

In 2006, Ralph Forquera, executive director of the Seattle Indian Health Board, wrote an opinion piece in the local newspaper condemning an attempt by the Bush administration to cut funding for urban Indian health programs for use on the reservations. Forquera argued that this was part of a continuing attempt to erode support for urban natives while pitting them against reservation communities. He added that tribal governments generally did not support the health care cuts to urban Indians, for “[t]ribes, too, recognize that urban Indians are their tribal members, their family, their friends.”^[1] It is a recognition of something that too many non-natives reject - the presence of urban Indians and the fact that they are connected to their counterparts on the reservations.

Urban Indians occupy contested spaces. People tend to view them as less “Indian” when compared to those who live on reservations (never mind that more native people live off the reservation than on it). Outsiders see them as existing only in the past and not in the present, and if they note their presence in the city at all, it is often as a caricature of their experiences. The refusal to see urban Indians and their stories occurs even when Native Americans are seemingly central to a city’s identity, as in Seattle, Washington. At the outset of *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* Coll Thrush writes that while “Seattle, it seems, is a city in love with its Native American heritage” (p. 3), the stories that give Seattle its rich and distinctive history with a native flair are actu-

ally divorced from the experiences of most native people. Instead, these stories actively promote the myth of the vanishing Indian. By explicitly writing about the symbiotic relationship between histories of native people and the growth of Seattle, Thrush reconnects native people to the landscape of urban Seattle and highlights how natives and non-natives share in the story of the city. Throughout *Native Seattle*, Thrush also effectively highlights the ways in which native people have resisted the dominant story of their demise in the city, in effect continuing to make Seattle their own place as well.

A central part of Thrush’s analysis lies in the concept of “place-story,” or the stories disseminated from Seattle’s emergence as a city. A significant part of the place-story of Seattle relies on an assumption that the urban promise of Seattle depended on the dispossession of its Indigenous population. Seattle, Thrush argues, is haunted by Native Americans even though the stories non-natives tell are more of imaginary Indians than a reflection of the experiences of the local and broader native community. The many totem poles that dot Seattle’s landscape and mark it as “exotic” are often more visible to non-natives than the communities from which they have come, and certainly more visible than the local Indigenous population that existed in the pre-urban area.

Thrush’s analysis builds on excellent work by Paige Raibmon and Alexandra Harmon by discussing the ways the histories and agency of native people have been

obscured by the images of colonialism.[2] Importantly, Thrush provides an alternative reading of a place-based history that includes a perceptive link between the early and the contemporary native community in Seattle. In this story, native people have always inhabited Seattle and continue to do so, even in the face of severe dislocation and oppression. Too many histories of urban Indian communities do not effectively relate the ways in which local Indigenous communities changed and mingled with a mobile, broader native population. It is as if the history of native people in urban communities started with mid twentieth-century federal policies (such as relocation) and steadily grew into activism focused on socioeconomic and political issues. While not ignoring these stories, *Native Seattle* asks how native people are connected to the landscape of urban areas. This analysis is well worth reading the book alone, particularly for Thrush's analysis of the early twentieth century.

Implicit within such an analysis is a delineation of the boundaries (permeable boundaries to be sure) between the "Indigenous" and "Indian" population of Seattle. Local native communities such as the Duwamish, Shilsholes, and Snoqualmie called the area that would become Seattle "Little Crossing-Over Place," a designation and recognition of a place that did not cease to exist with the coming of non-natives. Seattle could continue to exist as Little Crossing-Over Place because the city existed as a site of seasonal labor, and thus accommodated the mobility of native people. Even as industry vastly changed the environment and the natural resources on which the native people relied, there were still areas where native people lived and engaged in everyday relationships with the non-native urban community. Thrush offers several poignant portraits of individuals who resisted the attempts of federal authorities to remove them from towns to reservations. Many of these individuals, such as Kikisebloo ("Princess Angeline"), the daughter of Duwamish/Suquamish leader Seeathl (name-sake for Seattle), were listed as evidence in the dominant place-stories of Seattle to mark the ending of an active native presence in Seattle. Read another way, these individuals and their residency in the area represent acts of native continuance (p. 96).

One of the strengths of *Native Seattle* lies in its analysis of the ways the place-story of Seattle alternately romanticizes and degrades its native inhabitants. Thrush takes pains to note that these images say more about non-natives than native people themselves, as he deconstructs the ways in which a continuous and contemporary Indian presence in Seattle is seen as a marker of urban

disorder. These stories invariably say that native people cannot continue to reside in urban spaces—a byproduct of "progress" that is either celebrated or mourned by non-natives, but always accepted as inevitable. Thrush contrasts these images with the romanticized ways that Seattle's civic leaders built a reputation and marketed the city to outsiders based on the idea of "urban America with an Indian edge" (p. 120). Other scholars have critically evaluated these images, but by centering them on a specific place throughout an extended period of time, Thrush makes the case even more effectively that these images did not portray the reality of native lives in Seattle, even as the stories threatened to overwhelm them.

One critical mode of resistance for native people in Seattle continued to be in their communities. Natives formed organizations that lent support to both newcomers and established residents, and many actively sought better living conditions for native people. Thrush does not miss the importance of Red Power activism in Seattle during the 1960s and 1970s, drawing attention to the emerging political tactics of the fish-ins of the Puget Sound area as well as the takeover of Fort Lawton in 1970 that led to the creation of the Daybreak Star Cultural Center. This activism incorporated both indigenous Seattle and Indian Seattle, but Thrush does not point this out explicitly. There is an opportunity to incorporate this more recent history into *Native Seattle*, particularly the ways in which native communities in Seattle are at times divided and at others are in support of one another.

Though Thrush touches on the continuing struggle of the Duwamish to achieve federal recognition (and the subsequent objections by the neighboring Muckleshoot), he could do more to highlight how historical and contemporary political dynamics have affected the ways native people construct their own place-stories of Seattle. It may be that it is not his primary objective to point out the myriad and complicated ways that native communities coexist in Seattle today. However, Thrush does draw attention to these dynamics cogently during the early twentieth century, and he provides a path for other scholars to take for the later time period.

The final part of the text, "An Atlas of Indigenous Seattle" includes information on the physical landscape and place-names. It includes both geographic and linguistic research on the area in a comprehensive and clear fashion that links the pre-urban landscape to that of the contemporary one. Building mainly on the early twentieth-century research of two non-native scholars, Thrush and linguist Nile Thompson present a compre-

hensive listing of places, many of which have been made indistinguishable by non-native settlement over the years. It would have been even more interesting to have a stronger sense of what these places (and the atlas itself) might mean to the contemporary native communities in the area.

Thrush's conclusion comes full circle by asking what happened *here* (p. 206). While he focuses equally on what happened, I believe the strength of the text lies in its emphasis on the "here," on this place. Within that focus, our understanding of how Little Crossing-Over Place became Seattle, how the landscape was claimed and changed by non-natives, and how native people continued to remake ("re-story" as Thrush might call it) this place one to call their own is given rich detail and thoughtful, comprehensive study. Thrush examines the ways in which different populations inhabited the place of Seattle, arguing that both knowing and sharing the ways that these different histories intersect can lead to greater acknowledgement

of the missed opportunities for cooperation and common ground, and "imagining what might have been different" (p. 206). With these thoughts, Thrush demonstrates how Seattle's native and non-native population are related, and how agency continues to exist in communities circumscribed by the dominant population. In this sense, *Native Seattle* is a model that deserves attention.

Notes

[1]. Ralph Forquera, "Urban Indians in Bush's Sights," Seattle Post-Intelligencer (February 22, 2006), http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/opinion/260306_urbanindian.html, retrieved May 1, 2008.

[2]. Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

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