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The Press, the Boldt Decision, and Indian-White Relations

BRUCE G. MILLER

This article examines newspaper coverage of Indians in the Skagit Valley of northwest Washington State. Many Indian people there have expressed unease towards the local newspapers and have suggested that the papers have damaged relations between Indian and non-Indian people over a long period, but especially during a treaty-related battle over salmon fishing which led to the so-called Boldt decision (*U. S. v. Washington*, 384 F. Supp. 312, 1974).¹ Such unease is understandable: This study of local newspapers shows that the nature of contemporary reporting and the historical context of reporting are important to understanding the region's intergroup relations. A content analysis of all articles concerning local Indians in the two most significant community newspapers, the *Concrete Herald* and the *Skagit Valley Herald*, going back to the early part of the century shows that reporting changed during and following the controversial court hearings.² Specifically, the nature and volume of reporting about Indians and Indian issues changed significantly during periods of intense interethnic group competition over salmon resources. Relatedly, the volume of reporting about tribes that are not federally recognized as political units (and therefore are ineffective competitors for resources) was less than that of acknowledged tribes.

Newspaper reporting in this location helped protect the interests of the dominant ethnic group and affect public attitudes by

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providing particular perspectives on the issues.³ This is not to suggest, however, that the management or staff of either newspaper acted conspiratorially. Indeed, the reporting simply may have reflected unexamined biases of the white reporters and an internalization of prevalent images of Indians. The goal here is to determine what images of Indians were encountered by readers of the local newspapers and how these images varied over time, independent of any motives on the part of newspaper personnel.

Although this article presents the results of a case study, the circumstances for Indians of the Skagit Valley were similar to those faced by Indians throughout the United States and Canada who are struggling for control of valuable resources, especially fishing, hunting, mining, water, and gambling (important examples include conflict over the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en land claim in British Columbia and Chippewyan fishing, hunting, and timber rights in Wisconsin). The value of the Skagit Valley case, then, is that although it does not provide a broad database for establishing general rules of newspaper behavior, the study does show that examining the role of the local media (and the use of content analysis methodology) may help in understanding the actions of participants in Indian-white disputes over resources. There are good reasons to believe the Skagit Valley reporting has much in common with the coverage of Indians by local newspapers elsewhere. A significant body of research, discussed below, has found media coverage of Indians (and other minorities) to be considerably different from coverage of the majority population and commonly to fail to provide an image of routine life. Instead, the focus is frequently on conflict and deviance. The approach taken here is informed by this literature, but understanding of how the media affects Indian-white relations can be refined by specifically comparing the coverage of Indians in resource-extraction areas during times when Indians are largely powerless and when they are serious claimants to vital resources.

INDIAN-WHITE RELATIONS AND THE BOLDT DECISION

The Boldt decision in 1974 ended almost a century of illegal obstruction by Washington State of treaty-based Indian access to salmon fishing,⁴ a resource central to Coast Salish Indian identity, spiritual life, and livelihood.⁵ The federal court affirmed Indian treaty rights to fish in off-reservation locations and allocated half

the Washington salmon catch to Indian fishers. The Indian share of the salmon harvest thereby increased about tenfold, a staggering windfall and a huge surprise to both Indians and whites.⁶ The importance of the decision for the affected Indian and white communities can hardly be overstated.

The decision stands in contrast to a long history of alienation of Indian control over the resources of the Skagit Valley and a decline in Indian political fortunes, a process that began shortly after the United States gained clear title to the Oregon Country, including the Skagit Valley, in 1846. Governor Stevens negotiated treaties with Indians in order to open the area quickly, and pioneer settlement, mining, trading, and missionary activities started promptly. In 1855, Skagit Valley Indians signed the Treaty of Point Elliott, thereby ceding lands to the federal government. Congress ratified the treaty in 1859 and created the Swinomish Reservation in 1873. However, most Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle avoided settling on the reservation, stayed out of regular contact with whites until after 1875, and eventually became known as "landless Indians." Subsequently, conditions deteriorated for both reservation and landless Indians. By the early twentieth century, with the loss of lands, fishing areas, and gathering sites, with populations diminished, and with control resting with Indian agents, Indians faced serious economic and political difficulties. Some gradually drifted out of the Skagit Valley in search of employment.⁷

The relative powerlessness of the Indian communities left non-Indians unprepared for the sudden turn of events brought about by the Boldt decision, and the shocked white community reacted immediately. Non-Indians, who had long since come to regard the salmon harvest as virtually their own, were suddenly faced with the possible prospect of being forced out of the fishing industry or facing large reductions in their catch.⁸ Hostility became so serious that Indians armed their fish camps after enduring attacks on themselves and their equipment.⁹ Many whites displayed their reaction to the decision with bumper stickers proclaiming "Can Judge Boldt" on their cars. A widely held view was that the Boldt decision had given an unfair advantage to Indians in the fisheries.

The reactions in the Indian communities were equally profound, but the consequences were not felt immediately. The symbolic dimension of the decision was apparent right away: Fishers with a deeply felt tie to the Skagit River and the salmon

were relieved to be able to openly carry on an activity so central to their identity. The economic transformations created by the decision were just as significant. The Boldt ruling was vitally important to Indian fishing communities,¹⁰ in part because the local economies were so weak and employment opportunities limited.¹¹ The direct impact of the decision is exemplified in Boxberger's study of the Lummi Nation, a group located northwest of Bellingham, thirty miles from the Skagit Valley.¹² Since the late nineteenth century, the Lummi fishing fleet had fluctuated in size in response to the needs of the non-Indian community. After the Boldt decision, the Lummi fleet expanded independently and rapidly, as was the case in the nearby Indian communities of Skagit County. Today, some members of the Lummi, Swinomish, Tulalip, and other tribes operate highly profitable purse-seine operations. The Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle, however, are limited to treaty-fishing on the Skagit River and therefore have developed less profitable gill-netting fleets. Still another important effect of the Boldt decision was the consequent return migration to the reservation. Many Indians of the Skagit Valley and elsewhere have been able to return to their ancestral lands, increasing populations on reservations and ending what one tribal leader called a "brain-drain."¹³

The Boldt decision affected the several Indian communities in different ways. Although the decision is of great benefit to the recognized tribes, it led to the complete severing of relationships between the federal government and the landless tribes and to the elimination of landless tribes from the salmon harvest. Some tribes, including the Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle, gained official recognition in 1974, and are included in the salmon harvest. The Samish and Snohomish were excluded, and other tribes took over their traditional fishing areas during a long and sometimes acrimonious process of dividing fishing areas and allocations between eligible tribes, a continuing process known as the "fish wars."

The Boldt decision has varying significance to non-Indian communities as well. Gaasholt and Cohen found that Indian-white relations in Seattle center around the controversy over Indian fishing rights but that public attitudes of Seattleites toward Native Americans did not appreciably deteriorate after the Boldt decision.¹⁴ Small, white fishing communities, on the other hand, are more heavily dependent on fishing income, and therefore treaty rights issues are relatively more important to ethnic relations. The

reporting in urban Seattle, with its more diversified economy, appears to be qualitatively different from that in the resource procurement areas, just as it varies between Vancouver and outlying areas in British Columbia.¹⁵ This study, therefore, is concerned with reporting in the areas where the most heated battles over resources take place.

THE STUDY

Research for this study included a thorough search of all the extant issues of two local newspapers for articles referring to local Indian people and tribes. The papers have been published continuously since the early part of the century and have circulated in areas with both federally recognized and nonrecognized tribes. Back copies of the weekly *Concrete Herald* are available since 1914. The circulation in 1988 was approximately 1,500, and the population of the town was 580 within city limits.¹⁶ This newspaper serves the upper reaches of the Skagit Valley, including the community of Concrete. The *Skagit Valley Herald* is based in Sedro-Woolley, Washington, and began publication as a daily in 1888, but back copies prior to 1911 are not available. In 1956, the previous name, *Mount Vernon Herald*, was dropped, and the present name came into use. Circulation was 16,500 in 1988. Sedro-Woolley had a population of only 6,290, but Skagit County, the target area of the newspaper, had a population of 68,200 in 1985. Whites comprised 94.6 percent of the population in 1984, and Indians were reported at 1,407, or 2.1 percent, although this undoubtedly is an undercount.¹⁷

This study uses thematic analysis rather than other indicators of reporting such as headline, key word, placement in the paper by page, orientation, or attention (space) analysis. Fedler reported that minority groups, contrary to expectations, receive a proportional share of the space in the newspapers he surveyed.¹⁸ This is simply not the case for Indians of the Skagit Valley, especially before the 1960s. For example, Indians received only a handful of mentions in either paper between 1911 and 1961; consequently, there is no utility in studying the coverage from this angle. Both newspapers devoted only the front page to hard news for decades, reserving other pages for sports, gossip, advertising, comics, and other categories, so the great majority of articles about Indians are from the front page.¹⁹

Procedures

Articles are classified according to the dominant single theme and grouped by period. The formal analysis does not include editorials and letters to the editor. In the case of the *Skagit Valley Herald*, the six themes are as follows: (1) lore, which includes discussions of precontact Indian technology, stories, legends, and pioneer accounts, with an implicit assumption that Indian life as so depicted is now gone; (2) Indian antisocial actions that involve arrests, drinking, and violence (these articles may imply an anti-Indian sentiment); (3) politics, including treaty rights, especially fishing, hunting, and land claims, and Indian political organizations; (4) civic affairs, including white interventions on behalf of Indians, such as the construction of hospitals, schools, roads, or the bestowal of awards on Indians as Indians; (5) obituaries; and (6) other, a residual category. The analysis of the *Concrete Herald* employs the same categories, except that the civic theme did not arise.

Several examples illustrate the nature of the reporting. A 1923 *Mount Vernon Daily Herald* piece under the headline "Shaker Religion Queer Orientation" emphasized antisocial behavior. The accompanying text emphasized the violent shaking supposedly associated with the Shaker religion and claimed that this Salish Indian religion is "one of the strangest in the land." A 1915 front-page lore article on the annual hops harvest, formerly a major local industry, noted that "the sound of the merry Indians and the sight of the long rows of boxes, Indian baskets, barrels, dinner pails, Indian babies . . . brought back memories." The accompanying photo was captioned,

Remnants of a pioneer industry and a race of people, both of which once flourished in the Valley of the Skagit. Indians no longer dodge the picture man. This young brave and his family posed for *The Herald* camera.

A 1927 front-page lore piece in the *Mount Vernon Herald* entitled "Characteristics of Early Skagit Indians Are Told" recounted that "[s]uperstition was formerly among the Indian's most conspicuous infirmities." A 1936 front-page obituary entitled "Aged Indian's Death Recalls Early Day Skagit Slaying" combined qualities of both lore reporting and Indian violence:

Paul Jesus, one of the Skagit's colorful Indian characters, died Saturday at the advanced age of 99 The passing of Paul

Jesus recalls an Indian murder case in the early court records of Skagit county. In July 1897, four Indians were arrested for murder

The article concluded with a discussion of how drinking and witchcraft contributed to the murder.

The *Mount Vernon Daily Herald* of 23 September 1937 contained two front-page stories concerning Indian antisocial behavior: One was entitled "Indian Shoots Self While 'Showing Off' with Rifle at Party," the other, "Indians Buy Wine; Two Men Are Arrested." A characteristic *Concrete Herald* piece of the same period, April 1933, recounted the death by drowning of two Indian ferrymen related to an episode of drinking.

A 1946 front-page article described an Indian gathering held to discuss state violations of treaty rights:

In the light of the three huge bonfires which glaringly lit the center of the large room and threw weird shadows into the corners, bizarrely painted and costumed dancers performed the ceremonials to the rhythm of drums and the accompaniment of wailing chants.

A 22 February 1974 piece in the *Skagit Valley Herald* exemplified reporting on contentious treaty issues in the ten days immediately after the Boldt decision and suggested that the Indians might already have ruined the fish run. The front-page headline read "Loss of fishing, hunting controls told by official," and the text reads,

A recent court ruling highly favorable to Indian fishing rights could affect "every citizen in the state," a Washington State Game official told Sedro-Woolley Rotary members at a meeting Tuesday Wallace Kramer informed the local group that the . . . Indians have the potential to bankrupt local citizens We don't know if they [Indians] have decimated the run yet.

Hypotheses

The study uses significant local events to partition the data and highlight trends in reporting. The first period is 1911 to 1929. The second is 1930–60, beginning with the onset of the Great Depres-

sion, an event that shifted attention from Indian issues nationally. The third period is 1961–64, when Skagit Valley Indians publicly challenged state restrictions placed on treaty fishing rights. The final periods are 1965–71, a relatively quiet period in the Skagit Valley, and 1971–present, the start of the court proceedings leading up to the Boldt decision, and a period of active conflict over fishing, hunting, and the establishment of the Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle reservations.

TABLE 1
Periodization of Reporting in the Skagit Valley Newspapers,
1911–Present

1911–29	predepression
1930–60	depression, World War II, and period prior to publicized arrests for fishing
1961–64	heightened struggle over fishing rights
1965–70	quiet period before further struggle over treaty rights
1971–present	ongoing struggle over fishing, hunting, and control of tribal land

The volume of reporting dramatically increased during times of overt conflict and competition between whites and Indians over land, fishing, hunting, and political and legal jurisdiction. In addition, the nature of reporting, by volume and by type, changed during these periods of active competition, as demonstrated in two ways. The hypothesis states that variation in types of reporting is unlikely to be due to chance. When the news is divided into those articles addressing or not addressing resource competition and when articles are partitioned into periods of contention and noncontention, a chi-square test gives statistically significant results ($>.001$) for the *Concrete Herald* and the *Skagit Valley Herald*, and for the two taken together. Second, a test of the variation of volume of reporting can be made by comparing the volume in these periods. Because both of these newspapers have gradually increased in size and coverage and because the contentious issues fall generally into recent times, this test would be biased. A more accurate test is to compare the volume of reporting immediately before and after the advent of heightened competition between ethnic groups. The clearest test is the comparison of the immediate pre-1961 (1959–60) reporting and the

reporting of 1961–62, since serious conflict continues in the post-Boldt decision years (1974 onward). In the case of the *Skagit Valley Herald*, reporting on Indians is five times greater in the years 1961–62 compared to 1959–60, and for the *Concrete Herald* the increase is 2.7 times.

ANALYSIS OF REPORTING

There is very little reporting of any sort about Indians prior to the 1930s in the *Skagit Valley Herald*, despite the fact that the Indian population was still considerable. The 1,475 or so Indians at the time of the treaty in 1855 had been reduced,²⁰ but a Bureau of Indian Affairs census of 1921 showed 177 Upper Skagit and 200 in 1925.²¹ There were a reported 208 Swinomish in 1909 and 285 in 1937.²²

Skagit Valley Herald

TABLE 2
Incidence of Reporting on Indians within Six Categories
in the *Skagit Valley Herald*, 1911–83

Period	Obituaries	Lore	Antisocial	Pol.	Civic	Other
1911–29	2	10	1	12	0	8
%	6	30	3	36	0	24
1930–60	5	25	32	38	20	6
%	4	20	25	30	16	5
1961–64	0	7	18	31	1	1
%	0	12	31	53	2	2
1965–70	0	6	2	12	8	2
%	0	20	7	40	27	7
1971–83	4	7	29	181	4	50
%	1	3	11	66	1	18
Totals	11	55	82	274	33	67
(522)	2	11	16	52	6	13

Table 2 reports raw counts of articles within each category and, immediately below, the percent of the total for each period.

Although local Indian activities scarcely showed up in reporting before 1930, some articles appeared about Indians living elsewhere. There was coverage of local *powwow* and *potlatch* events, terms used by the Indians to refer to their own important gatherings, but the newspaper reports did not refer to these. Instead, the articles dealt with large annual community festivals that had usurped the Indian terms in the 1910s. During the 1930s, reporting on Indians increased but then slowed down and almost disappeared during the years of World War II.

In 1961, the year Indian fish protests and fish-ins began, the pace of reporting about Indians quickened. This was, in part, a response to a court ruling that opened the way for off-reservation fishing by Indians without state regulation. In 1961–62, thirty-one articles on fisheries and the treaty and eighteen articles on antisocial Indian behavior appeared. There are no civic articles in either year, and they do not appear again until 1965, after the fishing controversy had died down. Civic articles, which had a heyday in the years 1930–60, occurred in small numbers during contentious periods. The paper published eight lore articles in those years, no obituaries, and one “other.” Altogether, 84 percent of articles in the years 1961–62 depicted Indians engaged in activities that potentially threatened the welfare of the community. The predominant media images were of Indians who were antisocial or who challenged the status quo by bringing up treaty issues (which inherently are litigious, having to do with the legally binding division of resources within the region); these evidently were regarded as reportable, public issues only when Indian claims to a greater share appeared. Twelve percent more articles concern precontact life treated as quaint. Only one article addressed any other aspect of the lives of Indian people or of Indian tribal government.

With the start of court proceedings came a tremendous outpouring of articles on the fisheries issues. One hundred eighty-one articles appeared on this topic between 1971 and 1983, dwarfing all other categories reporting on Indians. Twenty-nine articles concerning antisocial Indian behavior appeared in the *Skagit Valley Herald* after 1971 and, again, only a few other articles (4 obituaries, 7 lore articles, and 50 “other” articles). Editorial policy condemned the Boldt decision in 1974 (“The Treaty Shouldn’t Apply”). Other parts of the paper supported this view: A front-page query posed the question, “Should the State Control Fishing?”; a full-page spread claimed, “Observers Say Enforce-

ment Is One Sided" (the text asserted that Indian enforcement of Indian fishing quotas was lax), and accompanying photos showed happy Indian fishermen "making up to \$600 a drift." This was contrasted with photos of whites who were forced out of fishing.

As with the earlier 1961–62 period, the great bulk of reporting (77 percent) in the years 1971–83 concerned either antisocial Indians or litigious Indians. There was another development as well. By 1978, after the Supreme Court had rejected an appeal of the Boldt decision and the matter was effectively closed legally, the paper regularly printed the opinions of the Indians about fisheries and treaty matters and published photos and interviews with Indians. The articles that fall into the "other" category are predominantly from the 1980s and are varied in content. One, for example, described the dedication of the new tribal center in 1982; a 1986 piece described a smoked fish business operated by the former Upper Skagit tribal chair; several in the early 1980s described zoning issues relevant to the Upper Skagit; and several in 1979 dealt with tribal efforts to intervene in the construction of a nuclear energy facility in the Skagit Valley. A 1978 article described the results of a nutritional study showing poor diets among Indians of the Skagit Valley, and a 1977 article described training given members of tribal police forces.

Nonacknowledged Tribes

The *Skagit Valley Herald* and its predecessor did not identify by name a formerly unrecognized tribe, the Upper Skagit, or the Upper Skagit tribal government, until 1924, when an article misidentified the chief who signed the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855. The next report concerned a 1926 tribal meeting at the Shaker Church. Articles in the 1930s and early 1950s mentioned Upper Skagit racing canoes several times. Other than this, coverage of the Upper Skagit was almost nonexistent until the 1970s. The Sauk-Suiattle were treated as an Upper Skagit subgroup, receiving little separate attention.

The paper gave little coverage to the two tribes that achieved federal recognition in 1974. However, after 1977, the paper began reporting Upper Skagit Council viewpoints. Even in 1988, however, the newspaper did not routinely cover tribal events such as

elections, although such coverage occurred sporadically, and a new city editor attempted to initiate a policy of covering tribal events. The paper gave considerable coverage to the effort to establish a reservation, an action hotly contested by the county and city governments. The choice to devote space to coverage of the proposed reservation can be understood within the ethnic resource competition framework, since reservation status took the land off the tax rolls and deprived the local white authorities of legal control over Indian populations. After tribal lands achieved reservation status, the council became free to write and apply their own code for tribal land and to police their own population. Coverage of the Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle, then, did not seriously begin until after official governmental recognition. Newspaper coverage reflected the intentions of United States policy in giving attention primarily to Indians with a recognizable political status (and with the associated policymaking, corporate, political capacity), rather than to members of groups who are Indian as a matter of identity and descent.

Concrete Herald

The second paper, the *Concrete Herald*, went through several long periods of little reporting. What reporting there was prior to 1961 emphasized obituaries, antisocial actions, and lore (78.6 percent of all articles). It is noteworthy that, through 1976, the only photos of Upper Skagit people or events were of canoe-racing or of people standing by canoes; as of 1986, five of the nine photos have included canoes, symbols of the past. From 1961 on, the focus was on treaty rights, especially fishing (66.7 percent). Obituaries, lore, and antisocial reporting diminished significantly.

TABLE 3
Incidence of Reporting on Indians Within Five Categories,
Concrete Herald, 1914–88

Period	Obituary	Lore	Antisocial	Pol.	Other
1914–29	5	1	5	1	4
%	31	6	31	6	25
(no Indian reporting 1923–32)					
1930–60	9	16	7	3	5
%	23	40	18	8	13
1961–64	1	1	6	12	1
%	5	5	29	57	5
1965–71	2	0	0	2	0
%	50	0	0	50	0
1971–88	1	3	0	24	5
%	3	9	0	73	15
Totals	18	21	18	42	16
(114)	16	18	16	37	14

Table 3 reports the raw count of items of reporting in each category and, immediately below, the percentage within the period.

As is the case with the *Skagit Valley Herald*, the early response to open conflict with Indians was a partisan white position. During the fish trouble of 1962, the front page announced “the gloomy conclusion that everything that could be done was done [to halt Indian fishing]. . . . Indians have the law in their favor. The only hope now is for Congressional action.” Several articles in 1962 assigned full blame to the Indians for the decline of the fish run, even though the scientific community took a different view. For example, one headline read, “Net Fishing Kills Fish Runs.” *Herald* articles assigned no part of the blame to the substantial white fishing fleet and white sportfishers, nor did it point out that, for several decades, Indians, including Upper Skagit, had been all but removed from fishing.²³ In a similar vein, the settlement in 1968 of a century-old conflict over payments for lands ceded under terms of the Point Elliot Treaty of 1855 produced a headline of “Skagit Tribe Offered Grant.” This headline implied that payment for lands was a gift of the government offered in the form of a grant, reinforcing the idea that Indians were unfairly taking advantage of their unique status. After 1977, the tone of the paper slowly shifted, and Upper Skagit views began to be aired. Reporting of

antisocial behavior ceased, and an editorial of 1987 supported the right of the Upper Skagit to fish in cooperation with whites, albeit long after Washington State and the tribes had reached cooperative agreements on fishing and management programs.

Nonacknowledged Tribes

The *Concrete Herald* was very slow to recognize the Upper Skagit Indians whose aboriginal base was Concrete and who maintained the Shaker Church, their ceremonial center and tribal meeting place, in that town. The first specific mention of the tribe as a contemporary group was in 1918. The newspaper mentioned the tribe several times again in the thirties and fifties in stories on canoe-racing. Reporting increased dramatically after the emergence of the fishing issue in 1961–62, when nonacknowledged tribes were permitted to participate in the salmon fisheries, and again in the mid-1970s, after the Boldt decision heated up the fishing issue.

DISCUSSION

Accounts of Indians in newspaper reporting have attracted some attention from social scientists and journalists, and generally the Skagit County findings are in line with earlier work. Most notably, other studies have shown an emphasis on conflict and Indian antisocial behavior in newspapers and have demonstrated the significance of the manipulation of Indian images by the press.²⁴ Research indicates that newspaper representations of minority people play a role in the development of both public images and the self-image of minority groups.²⁵ Significant themes in the analysis of reporting are the limited repertory of storylines and the emphasis on Indian dependency on the government.²⁶ In addition, some work questions the accuracy of information presented about Indians. *Wassaja*, a newspaper with nationwide circulation, written by Indians about issues in Indian Country, reported that non-Indian reporters and columnists for newspapers of British Columbia "have attacked Indian fishing rights, misleading the public, and peddling misinformation."²⁷ A 1975 analysis of reporting about Indian issues in non-Indian newspapers in New Mexico "found such coverage to be little short of a disgrace . . ." ²⁸ This

study examined seven newspapers, including the *Gallup Independent*, and found that only one newspaper employed an Indian reporter.

The type of coverage of minorities is different from that of the white population, as Fedler notes.²⁹ The newspapers that he studied did not often run articles on routine aspects of the lives of minority people, such as meetings or community and individual honors, as they did about whites. Other newspapers have also neglected to report on routine life, and perhaps this is a persistent feature of reporting about Indians. Knack noted,

Just as biases become evidence, so too does the systematic failure of the newspapers to report certain events and information which was available to them. Omissions included the total absence of articles on the day-to-day home life of native families. There was no sense of the structure of the Indian community or of social or political relationships within it.³⁰

Knack showed not only that newspaper reporting mirrored the subordination of Indians within the dominant hierarchy of southern Nevada, but that newspapers were an instrument in establishing this relationship.³¹ One might add that reporting reinforces the ethnic dominance hierarchy through its effects within the Indian communities as well. Some tribal members (especially members living off reservation) have internalized a negative impression of tribal life similar to that typically presented by newspapers. Newspaper reporting is the major source of information for many tribal members about Indian affairs; it influences their interest in participating in tribal events and in interacting with other tribal members.³²

Additionally, other analyses focus on the generally conservative nature of the media. The content of editorial and "op-ed" pages are said to be "determined by the sense of purpose vis-à-vis the target audience: Enemies singled out for attack are always outside the social and political boundaries occupied by the significant gate-keepers . . ." ³³ Further, most newspapers, in one view, are protective of entrenched interests and positions and are cautious because they depend on the routine assistance of politicians and organizations.³⁴ Not all newspapers operate to protect entrenched interests, however, nor are they all engaged in similar relationships with the political structure; an example is the *Observer*, a newspaper published in the Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia.³⁵ Nevertheless, as was the

case in another study of reporting about Indians, both Skagit Valley papers show an overwhelming tendency to depict Indians as "individuals whose relationships to . . . society are essentially mediated by dependence on government and by presumably aggressive . . . claims. The second major image component presented is that of conflict-deviance."³⁶

Altogether, exactly 50 percent of the reporting over the last seventy-five years concerned fishing, hunting, and other treaty rights. Another 15.8 percent of reporting depicted antisocial Indian behavior. Nearly two-thirds (65.8 percent) of all reporting fell into these two categories. Little attention was given to routine reporting of Indian lives and governance, such as participation in ceremonies, episodes of intergovernmental cooperation, school events, or economic development planning.

The failure of these two newspapers to report about Indians' lives during noncontentious periods supports the premise of this work. Whole years passed without any reference to Indians who were unable to oppose state of Washington fisheries regulations effectively. It is worth noting that the Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle themselves may not have been interested in being the subjects of reporting, especially since they were then nonreservation Indians otherwise out of the view of white authorities.³⁷

The nature of reporting has special relevance for non-acknowledged tribes. The *Skagit Valley Herald*, which ran under the motto, "News Without Prejudice," sporadically supported the treaty rights of Indians, as in an editorial in 1922 and an article in 1924. The 1920s was a decade in which nonacknowledged, landless tribes attempted to receive cash compensation for lands and property surrendered under treaties of the previous century. These claims did not place local Indians and non-Indians in direct competition, however; no land would change hands, and any potential payment would have been made by the federal government and likely would have filtered into the white communities and businesses. The Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle began to have a visible presence in the community newspapers only after federal acknowledgment in the 1970s.

At present, there are some two hundred nonacknowledged tribes in the United States,³⁸ and the Skagit County data suggest that these tribes may have difficulty obtaining local recognition of tribal activities and using the newspapers as a means of maintaining communication between members, as is the case with the Snohomish tribe of Washington State.³⁹ Although the Samish, also

of Skagit County, have been notably successful in recruiting coverage from the *Anacortes American*, a local paper, their success is a result of sophisticated and unusual attempts to gain media attention, such as “declaring war on the United States” and declaring the Samish an endangered species.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

Newspapers must be regarded as participants in the sometimes heated competition between whites and Indians over the resources of the Skagit Valley. Just as the size of the Indian fishing fleet was altered by government regulation to serve white interests, the changing image of Indians systematically served white interests. The finding that the attitudes of non-Indian people in Seattle toward Indians did not deteriorate after the Boldt decision can be understood in view of localized differences in the importance of the contested resources.⁴¹ More than fifteen years later, repercussions of the Boldt decision continue to influence attitudes in the Skagit Valley, and these attitudes still create regular difficulties for members of Indian communities.⁴²

Just why were Skagit Indians distrustful of the local newspapers? The Skagit county newspapers, whether by conscious policy or not, managed the image of Indian people in a variety of ways, particularly by failing to report routine events, by helping in the usurpation of Indian symbols, and by emphasizing negative and contentious behavior. These two newspapers manipulated the image of Indians by responding directly and immediately to the demands of the non-Indian community in times of serious conflict and providing the majority culture a highly abstract view of Indian culture. These newspaper practices left the white community inadequately informed about details of federal Indian-white relations that would have broadened understanding of local events such as the sudden increase of Indian fishing or the establishment of the Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle reservations. The failure over the years to report Indian events and accomplishments routinely perhaps contributed to the present-day conflict experienced by many Upper Skagit and white residents of the Skagit Valley. The “invisible” Indians, particularly those from nonacknowledged tribes who pressed for their treaty rights in the 1960s, surprised the white inhabitants who believed there was little real Indian presence in their area.⁴³

This study suggests that tribal media-management strategies might take into account the long-term imagery of Indian people created by the local media. Since newspapers are predisposed to report in already-established categories, press releases and news creation efforts will be more likely to succeed if they work within this context.⁴⁴ An effort to establish an image of routine Indian life may help mitigate contentious reporting during episodic, treaty-related periods of heightened antagonism and may produce public relations benefits with regard to tribal members living away from the reservation.⁴⁵

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NOTES

1. Members of several Indian communities expressed these opinions to me during a period of fieldwork, 1986–89, in which I studied political processes on reservations of northern Puget Sound, especially in Skagit County. Several of these people made sure I understood the importance they attached to the issue of newspaper coverage of Indian communities, and the Upper Skagit summer youth program provided several teenagers to help in the laborious examination of back issues. Andy Fernando, former Upper Skagit Council chair, remarked in 1986 that he left his job as a reporter for the *Bellingham Herald*, published about twenty-five miles north of the Skagit Valley, in part because of anti-Indian bias at the newspaper.

2. The methodology of content analysis does not provide a direct sense of the effects of reporting or of the Boldt decision on individuals. Depicting the human side of the story is not the aim of this article. Accounts of the Indian experience in Skagit County can be found in the works of Chief Martin J. Sampson, *Indians of Skagit County* (Anacortes, WA: Skagit County Historical Society, 1972); Natalie A. Roberts, "A History of the Swinomish Tribal Community" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1975); Andres Fernando, "Introduction," in *Treaties on Trial*, ed. Fay G. Cohen (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1986): xv–xxvi; Bruce G. Miller, "After the F.A.P.: Tribal Reorganization after Federal Recognition," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 17:2 (1989): 89–100.

3. Martha C. Knack detailed the role of the press in protecting white interests in "Newspaper Accounts of Indian Women in Southern Nevada Mining

Towns," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8 (1986): 83–96. Many other social institutions and processes influence public attitudes and the outcomes of struggles over land and resources, of course, but the focus here is on the press. The related issues are beyond the scope of this work. Nonetheless, Altheide and Snow emphasize that understanding the behavior of the media, including the response to pressures on the media from the outside, is crucial for several reasons (see David L. Altheide and Robert P. Snow, *Media Logic* [Beverly Hills, CA: Volume 89, Sage Library of Social Research, 1979]; Altheide, "The Mass Media as a Total Institution," *Communications* 16:1 [1991]: 63–71; idem, "Ethnographic Content Analysis," *Qualitative Sociology* 10:1 [1987]: 65–77). Altheide and Snow describe what they call "media logic" in arguing that the media cannot be understood as just another variable in the process of social change. The format (style, focus, and grammar of communication) creates a perspective for presenting as well as interpreting phenomena and is integrated by individuals as a form of logic. This logic influences how people perceive, interpret, and act. Consequently, media function to determine what subjects will be discussed and will be deemed relevant for the community. Media coverage becomes the source of official and unofficial information and historical accounts, and legitimizes current practices (Altheide and Snow, *Media Logic*, 237–38).

4. See Daniel L. Boxberger, *To Fish in Common: The Ethnohistory of Lummi Indian Salmon Fishing* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) for a history of state intervention.

5. Northwest Coast Indians, including Coast Salish, have sometimes been called the "Salmon People," referring to a spiritual link to the fish and to the importance of salmon to the economy and diet.

6. Peter Knutson notes that Indian fishers took only 5 percent of the catch in the early 1970s. "The Unintended Consequences of the Boldt Decision," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 11:2 (1987): 43–47.

7. For histories of the postcontact period, see Roberts, "A History of the Swinomish Community"; Cohen, *Treaties on Trial*; Miller, "After the F.A.P."; Sampson, *Indians of Skagit County*; and June McC. Collins, *Valley of the Spirits: The Upper Skagit Indians of Western Washington* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1974).

8. Knutson, "The Unintended Consequences."

9. Some Indian fish camps are still armed and fishers alert to intrusion by outsiders. This aspect of the events surrounding the Boldt decision did not appear in newspaper coverage. Many whites left the salmon fishing industry, some under a fishing boat buy-back program established by the state.

10. The Boldt decision is important to Indian communities located elsewhere as well. Despite the hostility it generated, the decision is notable in creating the basis for successful cooperative management of the fisheries resource by the state, Indian tribes, and white fishing interests. The decision is a model for the resolution of other claims to resources based on treaty or aboriginal rights in the United States and Canada. See Frank Cassidy and Norman Dale, *After Native Claims: The Implications of Comprehensive Claims Settlements for Natural Resources in B. C.* (Port Renfrew, BC: Oolichan Publishing, 1988).

11. Two of the major sources of employment in the Skagit Valley, logging and agricultural work, significantly diminished in the 1980s, and few Indian laborers have found employment in the skilled labor positions. See Judy Roberts, "Low-Income Needs and Community Resources Assessment" (Document prepared for the Skagit County Community Action Council, 1987), 10.

12. Boxberger, *To Fish in Common*.
13. Miller, "An Ethnographic View: Positive Consequences of the War on Poverty," *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 4 (1990): 55-71
14. Oystein Gaasholt and Fay Cohen, "In the Wake of the Boldt Decision: A Sociological Study," *American Indian Journal* 9 (1980): 9-17.
15. A 1990 study by Nels Pedersen, a Danish graduate student, tentatively suggests variation in reporting between Vancouver and outlying areas (manuscript in author's possession). Reporters for the urban *Vancouver Sun* are far more likely than those in outlying areas to represent views sympathetic to Indians or to attempt to print Indian viewpoints. *Sun* reporters are assigned full-time to the "Indian beat." However, there may be limits to accurate treatment of the Indian community. One well-informed reporter, Terry Glavin, claimed disapprovingly in a public lecture at the University of British Columbia that he was removed from covering Indian issues in 1991 because his editors felt he was "burnt out," meaning he was too close to the Indian communities and his work lacked objectivity.
16. Roberts, "Low Income Needs."
17. *Ibid.*, 9.
18. Fred Fedler, "The Media and Minority Groups: A Study of Adequacy of Access," *Journalism Quarterly* 50 (1973): 109-117.
19. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider in detail the history of editorial policy, ownership, and overall political tone of the two newspapers. Both papers have consistently focused primarily on local events and from a conservative perspective. For example, the *Skagit Valley Herald* ran a series of articles entitled "Silly Wives of History," starting immediately after women won the right to vote. During the years 1913 to 1919, front-page articles encouraged participation at Ku Klux Klan events held locally. Editorial policy opposed the formation of the United Nations, and the paper completely omitted reports on the Russian Revolution until after the fact.
20. Robert B. Lane and Barbara Lane, "Indians and Indian Fisheries of the Skagit River System" (Ms. in Upper Skagit Archives, 1977).
21. Tulalip Indian Agency records. Offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Everett, Washington, no record number given.
22. Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of the Pacific Northwest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986).
23. Boxberger, *To Fish in Common*; Knutson, "The Unintended Consequences." There is an interesting parallel between events in British Columbia in the summer of 1992 and the accusations that Skagit Valley Indians had fished out the Skagit River within days of regaining treaty rights to fish in usual and accustomed locations. Shortly after bands received an allocation for commercial fishing on the Fraser River for the first time ever, the *Vancouver Sun* reported that the Fisheries Council of B. C. and the United Fishermen and Allied Worker's Union charged the Indians were responsible for the disappearance of one million salmon.
24. Charles R. Wilson, "Racial Reservations: Indians and Blacks in American Magazines, 1865-1900," *Journal of Popular Culture* 10:1 (1976): 70-79; James E. Murphy and Donald R. Avery, "A Comparison of Alaskan Native and Non-Native Newspaper Content," *Journalism Quarterly* 60 (1983): 316-22; Sharon Murphy, "American Indians and the Media: Neglect and Stereotype," *Journalism History* 6 (1979): 39-43; Richard A. Pride, "Race Relations in TV News: A Content Analysis of the Networks," *Journalism Quarterly* 50 (1973); Joseph Scanlon, "The

Sikhs in Vancouver: A Case Study in the Role of the Media in Ethnic Relations," *Ethnicity and the Media—An Analysis of Media Reporting in the U. S., Canada, and Ireland* (UNESCO, 1977); Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); Ronald Graham Haycock, *The Image of the Indian* (Waterloo, ON: Waterloo Lutheran Press, 1971); Rayna Green, "The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," *Massachusetts Review* 16 (1975): 698–714; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

25. Andrew Osler, "An Analysis of Some News-flow Patterns and Influences in Ontario," *Reports of the Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry*, vol. 7, *The Media Industries: From Here to Where?* (Queens Park, ON: Publication Centre, Ministries of Government Services, 1974): 47–70; Benjamin D. Singer, "Minorities and the Media: A Content Analysis of Native Canadians in the Daily Press," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 19:3 (1985): 348–59; M. J. Lerner and C. H. Simmons, "Observer's Reaction to the Innocent Victim: Compassion or Rejection?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 4 (1966): 203–210.

26. Singer, "Minorities and the Media."

27. *Wassaja* 7:2 (1979): 16.

28. *Ibid.* 3:6 (1975): 10.

29. Fedler, "The Media and Minority Groups."

30. Knack, "Newspaper Accounts," 91.

31. *Ibid.*, 92.

32. Tribal members who have internalized a negative impression of their own tribe have not rejected their tribal identity but may be dissatisfied with tribal political leadership and reservation lifestyle. One off-reservation man, for example, rejected the "welfare mentality" of the reservation, a complaint voiced in the local newspapers. Many off-reservation tribal members, even those living nearby, reported that their major source of information about tribal activities, other than activities of their relatives, is the local newspapers (fieldnotes, 1986).

33. Altheide and Snow, *Media Logic*, 237.

34. It is likely that the media will grow in importance as a factor in the competition over resources between Indians and non-Indians. In British Columbia in 1990, for example, Indian, federal, and provincial authorities attempted to use the media to provoke public opinion prior to negotiations over land claims and sovereignty. The federal Indian affairs minister talked of a "multibillion-dollar" cost for settling the land claims (*Vancouver Sun*, 5 December 1990). In response, one Indian leader, then chairman of the First Nations Congress, claimed in a widely reported public address that Indians should have killed the first white settlers and that delaying the land claims would increase the cost one hundred times (*Vancouver Sun*, 12 December 1990). Efforts to use the press are not new, but such scenarios may multiply as the economy remains weak and treaty issues remain unresolved. Pressure began to build in the 1970s, a decade characterized by a resurgent demand for Indian resources, including coal, uranium, fish, and water, by the non-Indian community in both the United States and Canada. (See Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988].) This was also a period of a dramatic nationwide increase of Indian political activity and of a substantial reorganization of Indian-white relations more directly influenced by the actions of Indians themselves than in earlier periods (*ibid.*, 12). Meanwhile,

governmental controls over Indian people and resources are less direct under the present United States policy of Indian self-determination and under new Canadian policy initiatives than it was in earlier periods (*ibid.*). Consequently, influence over political and legal processes will depend more on the mobilization of public opinion than on the authoritarian, coercive measures of the past.

35. The relationship between the people of the Queen Charlotte Islands and the only newspaper, the *Observer*, is quite different from that in Skagit County. The Queen Charlotte Islands stand variously 50 to 75 miles off the coast of British Columbia and are home to small populations of native and nonnative people. There are some 5,470 residents of the islands, including 867 Haida (Statistics Canada: 1986 Canadian census). The circumstances are similar to those in Skagit County in several ways (Mary Lee Stearns, "Haida Since 1960," *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 7, *Indians of the Northwest Coast* [Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990], 261–66). Both areas are rural and depend heavily on fishing and logging, industries in decline. What is different is the relatively greater percentage of Indian population on the islands and a shared Indian and white interest in preservation of some of the islands' lands, which culminated in the creation of a national park on Moresby Island in 1989.

The *Observer* is a weekly that sometimes has no reporting staff, instead relying on unsolicited letters, press releases, and articles; therefore, it reflects public opinion, including Indian opinion, more directly than do the Skagit County papers. Pinkerton, an anthropologist specializing in resource management, analyzed the newspaper coverage ("Taking the Minister to Court: Changes in Public Opinion about Forestry Management and Their Expression in Haida Land Claims," *BC Studies* 57 [1983]: 68–85). During the years 1971–73, there was little discussion in the paper of forestry issues or Haida land claims, the British Columbia equivalent of treaty issues in Washington State. But starting 1974–76, a debate arose concerning the use of island land and the relationship of the issues to Haida land claims. There was a fivefold increase in the mentions of forest management issues in the *Observer* during this period, and an elevenfold increase in discussions of Haida land claims. The majority of letters were critical of forest management practices and policies, which largely were determined off the Islands. As the issue of Haida land claims developed, the nature and volume of reporting changed. In Pinkerton's words,

Observer coverage of forest management, in letters, editorials, and articles, increased from a middle high period of 35 mentions a year, in 1975, to 126 mentions in 1979 [T]he percentage of mentions criticizing the companies or government . . . exceeded 50% The percentage of mentions which were hostile reactions to the criticism remained at about 30%. By 1980, however, none of this hostile criticism was coming from local residents. All of it was coming from the companies and the government.

The power level of respondents to the newspaper rose, and higher authorities began to write as the stakes increased. By the time the minister of forests was taken to court in 1979, the newspaper had helped create crucial changes in public opinion on the islands, which placed the role of the logging companies and the government under scrutiny.

Several observations may be made concerning this case. As with the two Skagit County papers, coverage of treaty or aboriginal rights-related issues dramatically increased as these issues became more salient. Elements of the

nonnative power structure attempted to use the paper to sway public opinion, but, unlike in Skagit County, hostile opinion came only from off-island, and the small populations of Indians and non-Indians found common cause in opposition to off-islanders. As was the case in Skagit County, the newspaper reflected local interests. A land claim issue not centered around local resource competition did not inspire a racially polarized response in the press, even though the volume of reporting about treaty-related issues increased. In sum, the Queen Charlotte Islands case is a counter-example, and shows conditions under which a paper does not make life difficult for Indians, as the Skagit County papers have. It is notable that the *Observer* ran articles on routine elements of Indian life before the land claim issues arose.

36. Singer, "Minorities and the Media," 357.

37. Because of their landless status, the Upper Skagit and Sauk-Suiattle were largely free of the restraints on ceremonial events, such as Spirit Dancing, that were imposed on reservation residents by Indian agents.

38. Miller, "The Forgotten Indians and Federal Recognition, *Friends Journal* 37 (1991): 22-24.

39. This is a conclusion in a study by Daniel L. Boxberger and Bruce G. Miller, "Snohomish Social Organization: 1930s-1950s" (Unpublished ms.).

40. Ken Hansen, former tribal chair, personal communication.

41. Gaasholt and Cohen, "In the Wake of the Boldt Decision."

42. For example, school children face regular harassment because of the fisheries situation.

43. The major history of the region, JoAnn Roe, *The North Cascadians* (Seattle, WA: Madrona Publishers, 1980), makes scant reference to Indians of the area and fails to mention many tribes altogether. Long-time residents of the upper Skagit Valley, where the nonrecognized tribes are located, frequently report that they were unaware that any Indians still exist in these locations (fieldnotes, 1989).

44. Altheide and Snow, *Media Logic*.

45. The Samish management of the press is an example of a successful effort by a tribe to enlist support from the local media. Routine events are reported, and the *Anacortes American* supports Samish efforts to obtain federal recognition. The town of Anacortes stands to benefit from Samish recognition through the flow of money to the Samish from federal programs. The Samish are not direct competitors with white fishers, though. Under the terms of the Boldt decision, the Samish, if recognized, would potentially be included in the (Indian) treaty share of the salmon harvest.