
RESEARCH

No Honor in Genocide: A Case Study of Street Renaming and Community Organizing in the Wake of National Decolonization Efforts

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The United States hosts countless streets, structures, and cities named after colonial and military leaders. Although many of these white historical figures, like Robert E. Lee, were revered in their own eras, modern history now acknowledges their involvement in immoral acts such as slavery and genocide. As they recognize that individuals responsible for such traumatic events should no longer be honored, the citizens of many towns and cities across the nation are attempting to rename their public properties. These efforts, however, rarely prove straightforward; the process of renaming a single road, for example, requires a thorough understanding of city ordinances and codes, coordination between various government entities, strong public support, and collaboration between multiple community stakeholders. This case study highlights and examines such critical components of the renaming of a road in the City of Spokane, Washington. Named after a mid-1800s U.S. military leader who contributed to the genocide of Native Americans and the slaughter of hundreds of their horses, Fort George Wright Drive had served as a mile-long arterial in Spokane for more than 34 years. Although both local Native Americans and other Spokane community members had attempted several times since the 1990s to change the name of the road, their efforts did not finally lead to success until December of 2020. This report also elucidates how Tribal community activism remains uniquely tied to Native culture. Tribal members from the surrounding reservations and Natives living in the City utilized Tribal art, oral history, as well as Tribal songs to advocate for change. These Indigenous songs have been passed down for the 168 years since the hanging of Tribal warriors by Colonel Wright in 1858. To change the name of the road, Natives and white allies also took more tangible actions: projecting messages on buildings, writing letters, organizing meetings, coordinating teach-ins, and staging rallies/marches. This study documents how extensive organizing between the Spokane Tribe, other local Tribes, the Spokane City Council, the Spokane City Plan Commission, and community activists ultimately led to the renaming of Fort George Wright Drive to “Whistalks Way.” Whis-talks was the daughter of Chief Polatkin and wife of Qualchan. She rode alongside her husband into battle and carried the medicine eagle feather staff into the U.S. military post to parley. The Spokane Tribe selected Whis-talks, later adapted to “Whistalks” without the hyphen, to not only honor women warriors of the battlefields of the 1800s, but to also honor the Spokane Tribal women of our families today. With this new name, the Spokane Tribe honors the female warriors who daily fight to protect and preserve our culture, our lifeways, our families, our lands, our environment, and our Tribe. Further, this report will illustrate the critical role that timing of elections and nationwide events can play in such efforts, particularly when coinciding with nationwide events.

Introduction

Across the nation, community efforts have intensified to dismantle commemorations of Civil War “heroes” and others responsible for immoral acts. Some contend such monuments record history, and yet others deem them racist symbols of America’s colonization. While many of these controversial monuments are now being removed, especially in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, the effort to change a street name here in Spokane, Washington, has been ongoing for more than 30 years by Native college students and faculty.

In this study, I provide an example of how the City of Spokane supported Tribal efforts to reclaim Indigenous place-names, protocols, and ancestral memories that have been placed under erasure by colonialism. Fort George Wright was constructed in 1896, and the mile-long Fort George Wright Drive (now Whistalks Way) had cut along the Spokane Falls Community College (SFCC) campus in Northwest Spokane. Whis-talks was a Spokane Indian warrior woman who rode alongside her husband Qualchan into the U.S. Cavalry camp in 1858. Colonel George Wright was the military leader who led the brutal attacks against the Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Palouse, and Yakama Indians. More recently, grassroots Native and non-Native community members and City officials demanded the change. The City of Spokane worked with the Spokane Tribe and other Tribes involved in the 1858 battle to effect the renaming. The City believed that maintaining the name of Fort George Wright Drive would prove a continual stain on the City by honoring a person who engaged in genocidal and terroristic acts toward the Native people who have always lived in Spokane.

To understand the complexity of the effort, readers must consider the collaboration between multiple stakeholder groups such as the Spokane Tribe, other local Tribes, Spokane City Council, Spokane Plan Commission, urban Native Americans, and non-Native allies. The national movement of Black Lives Matter and related rallies across the Pacific Northwest from Portland, Oregon, to Spokane, Washington, pressured elected officials to deal with issues of equity. In this article, I will bring to light what finally made this name change possible in Spokane. I will also delineate the important lessons learned in the renaming process.

Literature Review

The politics of place, the decolonization of race and culture and property, the decolonization of mapping, and the “protocol” of renaming and Indigenous place-naming are all key considerations in this case study. In their article, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang (2012) examine decolonization and “settler moves to innocence,” which they characterize as settler guilt and complicity and settler belief that reconciliation is easy (p. 3). Though Tuck and Yang cite a great number of ongoing discussions about decolonizing methods, they also note that they find little useful scholarly mention of Indigenous peoples' struggles for the recognition of their sovereignty, or of the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and decolonization activists. Overall, they propose that continued “settler colonialism” works to exploit the land to build colonizer wealth and further feed their insatiable appetites. Furthermore, “internal colonialism” controls modern-day people with schools, ghettos, policing, and prisons (Tuck & Yang, 2012, pp. 4–5). Colonization includes controlling both the land and the people; therefore, true decolonization will demand recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and relinquishing displays of dominance, to include naming city streets after military leaders who brutally killed Indigenous people.

Additional literature on place-name studies provides insight into the contrasting worldviews of the occupier and Indigenous communities. As put forward by Tucker and Rose-Redwood (2015), the field of place-name studies has evolved from the study of simple origins and meanings to critical analysis of the “power relations that underpin place[-]naming practices” (p. 197). The study of Indigenous place-naming tells the stories of the original inhabitants, and as suggested by Thornton (1997), operates at the intersection of language, thought, and the environment (p. 209). Indigenous people crafted and utilized complex, meaningful place-names that described their beliefs and experience with the land. Indigenous people have been separated from much of their traditional territories and must be provided space to allow for teachings and knowledge to return.

The renaming and mapping by European settlers have been important aspects of the appropriation of Native land. When locations are named after colonizers, traditional Indigenous knowledge of the territory is erased. In their article “Decolonizing the Map: Recentering Indigenous Mapping,” Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) argue that “as a political technology, mapping has long played a key role in the world-making practices of colonialism through the appropriation, demarcation, naming, and partitioning of territory as part of the process of colonization and the assertion of imperial rule” (p. 152). Naming a military fort, town, or street after a military leader is a common method of colonization. Across the U.S., we have numerous state and county names such as Washington, Grant, Custer, Jackson, and in the present case, Wright. An extreme example is the Colville Tribe: as a confederation of 12 Tribes with 10,000 members, the Tribe itself is now named after Fort Colville, which is named after a white male military leader that never even set foot in Washington State. Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) help frame an argument of Indigenous mapping within the broader struggle of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and recognizing the settler-colonial practices of mapping and place-naming.

Place-names shape the cultural landscape and can be entangled in the politics of defining what is historically valuable, and who gets to decide what is worth remembering. The politics of commemorating place-names often derives from the colonizer's view of history. Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) define decolonizing the map “as the ability to enact Indigenous spatial practices and knowledge in cartographic form” (p. 154). In other words, decolonizing the map means to once again discover the Indigenous names that provide important geographic and environmental knowledge of a location. For example, the Indigenous name for the town of Chewelah is “schawelah,” which means water snake. Is it any wonder that many residential homes experience a water table in which their basements flood? Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) write that “decolonial mapping...goes beyond the practice of anti-colonial mapping (which is characterized by its resistance to colonialism), and seeks

to reclaim place-based, ancestral, Indigenous knowledge while also enacting the contemporary world-making practices of Indigenous and colonized peoples in the present" (p. 152). Indeed, if contemporary society looked to Indigenous land-based knowledge, they would enjoy far better environmental planning for their communities. Decolonial spatial practices decenter colonialism as the primary pivot around which ways of knowing and being-in-the-world are conceived, imagined, and lived. Mapping provides the framework in the making of a city on both a micro and macro level. Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) further explain that "in many cases, map-making continues to be 'weaponized' against Indigenous peoples in the twenty-first century," thereby acknowledging Joe Bryan and Denis Wood's 2015 book, *Weaponizing Maps: Indigenous Peoples and Counterinsurgency in the Americas*. As in the present case in Spokane, military leaders who ruthlessly killed local Indigenous people are heralded and honored. At the most fundamental level, decolonizing geography involves "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). Finally, as noted by Rose-Redwood et al. (2010), while most of the studies on politics of place-naming have focused on questions of nationalism and ideology, we can also see an increased awareness of place-naming that includes "racialized, gendered, and commodified landscapes" (p. 457). The issue of gender adds yet another layer to be discussed later in this study.

As noted by Rose-Redwood et al. (2020), "One of the primary threads that binds together 'land and life' within Indigenous traditions is the ancestral knowledge embedded within Indigenous toponymies, or place-naming practices" (p. 153). In his 1996 landmark book, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, anthropologist Keith Basso calls attention to the importance of place-naming in the making of Indigenous "place-worlds" (p. 6). When we recognize Indigenous place-names, we not only unlock the traditional knowledge of the landscape, but also recognize the territory of the original inhabitants. In recent years, the reclamation of Indigenous place-names has been employed as a spatial strategy of Indigenous resurgence around the world (Gray & Rück, 2019; Rose-Redwood, 2016). Accordingly, this case study provides an example wherein Indigenous people have objected to a place-name that honors genocide and thus consequently employed strategies to change the name to one that reclaims the Indigenous narrative.

Protocols and processes that inform the mapping process are just as important as the name that is utilized. Is it Indigenous people who are following their Tribal protocol to determine the names on the map? Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) contend:

If a map replaces colonial place-names with Indigenous toponyms (place-names), or incorporates Indigenous content into an existing cartographic frame, such a mapping project can still have the effect of reinscribing colonial cartographic practices, despite the best intentions. This is particularly the case if the mapping process itself adheres to—and thus legitimizes—colonialist-statist procedures and protocols, thereby reaffirming the colonialist assertion of a monopoly over the power to map. (p. 153)

The decolonization process needs to include both content and process. Indigenous place-names include storytelling and songs. However, if colonial oppression persists, likewise, barriers to reclaiming Indigenous names, knowledge, or practices also persist. Place-name studies and toponyms are parts of a larger subdiscipline of linguistics called onomastics that includes all proper names. Onomastics, for example, would consider the word "Fort" in Fort George Wright to be an unwelcome militarization. The word "Fort" diminishes or reduces other important historical and geographical connotations.

Scholars, including me, in the field of place-name studies assert that we must critically analyze the power relations that underlie place-naming practices (Tucker & Rose-Redwood, 2015, p. 197). Renaming streets, and following Tribal protocol to select the new names, recognizes that these lands remain unquestionably the homelands of the Spokane Tribe. We consider the cultural politics of place-naming practices and determine whether to focus on the process or the isolated linguistic name. Tucker & Rose-Redwood (2015) examine the work of Douglas Herman (2009) and whether the naming process of the Salish Sea (in addition to Puget Sound) "romanticizes Indigenous culture while providing no actual exchange of power or opportunity for increased levels of self-determination" (p. 203). I agree with Tucker and Rose-Redwood (2015) in that if colonizing cultures are allowed to "romanticize" Indigenous culture, and without reconciliation, they risk failing to realize how dangerous colonizing acts remain.

Indeed, a prominent example of militarization in Washington toponyms is Puget Sound, which is named for Peter Puget, and officer in the Royal Navy. In the Salish Sea example, Tribal leaders supported the name change as acknowledging Indigenous presence, though not everyone agreed. One Indigenous Tsartlip master carver and teacher, Temosen, felt that if colonial names remained, the structures of colonial power would correspondingly remain. He said, "I feel it's just tokenism" (Tucker & Rose-Redwood, p. 203). Indigenous people do recognize the need to scrutinize the motivations of each name change and do not wish to participate in merely token name changes. In this present case, the City of Spokane actually recognized the self-determination of the Spokane Tribe and asked the Tribe itself to determine a name. Nevertheless, not everyone agrees on the new name, even after the fact. In selecting "Whis-talks Way," multiple disagreements occurred amongst Indigenous people. One cultural leader, although he liked the honoring of a woman warrior, wanted a street name to better memorialize the hanging of the warriors themselves. In an email to me, Barry "Sulustu" Moses wrote:

I just can't escape the feeling of disappointment and heartache for the warriors who were murdered. They were erased by George Wright, and now erased again in the very moment they could have risen up to take Wright's place. It is never wrong to honor women, but no justice has been done to our fallen warriors. (October 31, 2020)

Locally, we have long been engaged in a struggle to determine whether a location should be named accurately after historical events such as Hangman Creek or with more pleasant-sounding names such as Latah Creek. Scholar Paul Lindholdt notes that the stream where Qualchan was hanged appears as "Latah Creek" (from the Nez Perce word for fish), "but in the national registries it is known as Hangman. Federal cartographers will not let the state forget the treacherous bit of regional history" (2018, p. 4). In the same vein, some Indigenous people may feel that "Whis-talks" does not adequately represent the brutal colonialist acts perpetrated by the U.S. military. Nevertheless, the Tribal Council, Elders, and community selected "Whis-talks" themselves, exercising self-determination, and not that of City or other Anglo decision-makers.

Overall, many Indigenous people feel marginalized and powerless because colonizers still have all these names on their territories. In the Salish Sea case study, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people admitted that the proposal would likely not have been approved if the request were to officially remove the colonial names from the map (Tucker & Rose-Redwood, 2015). Therefore, although Indigenous communities have made some progress wherein many states, cities, and universities are beginning their events with land acknowledgements, and some offensive names are being changed, these developments actually indicate rather limited progress.

Research Methods

To address the issue of changing a street name and to record the progress of the Spokane renaming project, I began by compiling historical accounts of the battle, then proceeded to review contemporary and historical media coverage, scholarly publications, and online commentaries. I traveled with Tribal and non-Tribal historians on tours that recounted the battle locations, and while there, listened to Tribal leaders share their oral history. I worked with Tribal leaders, City leaders, educators, and activists to organize virtual meetings, collect historical accounts, craft emails, and assist Tribal Council members in informing Elders and responding to opposition. Advocates for the name change drafted letters, collected signatures from leading organizations, contacted church pastors, and planned the rally. The community then mobilized efforts to rally at the chosen location with art builds for signs and t-shirts. They also planned safety measures for the pandemic. Along with others, I contacted Tribal leaders from surrounding Tribes, urban Indian organizations, and media outlets to participate in the rally. We also worked together to plan safety routes. Furthermore, I participated in interviews with media and teach-ins at local universities. In this case study, I weave together a detailed account of the renaming movement's preparations with the oral history shared from Tribal leaders and descendants of warriors hanged by Colonel Wright.

Historical Context

The City of Spokane, located in Eastern Washington, gets its name from the Spóqínš (the Sun/Light People)—the Spokane Indigenous people, as does the river and the county. The City of Spokane is located on the ancestral territories of the Spóqínš, who have lived in this region for over 10,000 years. They have fished at the falls along the banks of the Spokane River since time immemorial. The Interior Salish engaged in subsistence patterns and maintained close relations with the ancestral homelands, following seasonal food sources throughout the region along the Spokane River. According to Johnny Arlee, Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribal Elder, whose Tribe is commonly known as "Flathead," in a cell-phone text exchange on August 11, 2021, the term "Bitterroot Salish" comes from an ancient word: "That's what the Bitterroot Salish called themselves, (selish) or another name was (t'at'a?ayqn), pertaining to the way the hair was tied on top of the head." The Okanogan call themselves a form of Salish that is written as "Syilk." In truth, we are not sure how we *all* came to be called Salish. Today many Western anthropologists use the term Salish to classify Indigenous language groups, but sometimes Tribal people will use it as an identifier.

In the 1800s, when the Tribal people were restricted to the reservation and lost the use and control of these traditional places, they became disconnected from the land. The traditional Tribal names of the river and locations are nearly lost. Barry Moses contends that despite the Spokane River's importance, the actual name of the river is "shrouded in conflict." Barry Moses traces the Tribal legends and historical written accounts, and then consults with fluent Salish-speaking Elders to determine the proper name. Tribal people may in fact have different names for any given location. Arlee, who is also a Salish language specialist for the Kalispel, says the river was called "sčicuwítkw," meaning "the waters of the found people" for the Coeur d'Alene waters (Lake Coeur d'Alene drains into Coeur d'Alene River). The Spokane people called it the "słxetkw," meaning "the fast water" (B. Moses, 2018, pp. 69–77). In August of 2021, Barry Moses also stated: "Spokane language is deeply relational. The names people have for a location may vary depending on their relationship to that place." Overall, traditional Tribal place-names show our sacred connection to the land and help us tell our stories. The Salish names we call ourselves are also equally significant.

Traditionally, the Salish-speaking Spóqínš have three bands referred to as the Upper, Middle, and Lower Spokane peoples. Historically, a mutual dependence on trading helped to maintain peaceful relations between Spóqínš, Crow, Blackfeet, and Shoshone-Bannock peoples. Spokane Tribal Chairwoman Carol Evans provided oral testimony during the Plan Commission

hearing, explaining that since they enjoyed such an abundance of fish, the Spokane people allowed neighboring Tribes to fish the Spokane territory. Archaeologists and anthropologists recognize the confluence of the Spokane River and the Latah Creek (near People's Park today) as an important fishing site that also served as a major trading site for the Coeur d'Alene, Colville, Nez Perce, Sanpoil, Nespelem, and Palouse Tribes, who congregated primarily to exchange goods and fish (Walker et al., 2018, pp. 157–167). Also, the Spokane River, particularly where Riverfront Park stands today, in conjunction with Little Falls at the entrance to the Spokane Indian Reservation, were recognized as important fishing and trading locations. Spokane people traded with the Blackfeet for horses, buffalo, and hides, meeting partway to ease the journey. Western Plains groups wanted to trade items such as wood bows and arrows, buckskin clothing, dried salmon, and eels with the Spóqínš. Tribes enjoyed vital economies and trading practices prior to European arrival. However, all that prosperity would dissipate with the arrival of colonizers looking to exploit resources and claim Indigenous lands.

The impact of white settlers on Indigenous people proved devastating. European settlers brought with them disease, alcohol, and a drastically different value system. John Allan Ross writes that while “the activities of the Euro-Americans were primarily exploitative, some trapper-traders felt a genuine concern for the welfare of the Indians” (2011, p. 57). The Indians may have enjoyed trade goods from the whites, but overall, trade weakened their independence and culture, and resulted in further exploitation of their natural resources. Moreover, the Natives not only received inadequate compensation, but also lost more than they realized (Ross, 2011). For example, the fur trappers often set up trading companies that brought in more settlers to claim land as homesteads. As more and more Euro-Americans settled in the Spokane area, negative relations accelerated.

Eventually, white settlers accused local Tribal people of stealing, and then killed them on the spot without trial. Yet, the accusations of white men raping Indian women or stealing from Indians were never investigated, let alone prosecuted. War broke out in 1855 in Yakama territory, and again in 1857 in Spokane territory with Colonel Steptoe, who led the first U.S. military campaign against the local Tribes. Although the combined forces of the Spokane, Yakama, Palouse, and Coeur d'Alene peoples initially defeated those of the U.S. military, more U.S. troops soon arrived. Wright's trained troops had superior weapons, long-range rifles, and new types of bullets.

Colonel Wright's History of Genocide

The atrocities of Colonel Wright went beyond what was required to subdue the Tribal warriors who brought arms against the United States. The Spokane City Council recognized this brutality and included in its application to the Plan Commission the following statement:

Colonel Wright embarked on a punitive expedition throughout Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho. Wright ordered the slaughter of horses near the Idaho border, destroying the [T]ribe's economy, causing great harm to the [T]ribe's culture, and causing food shortages and starvation. (2020)

Wright also ordered the burning of Native crops and food caches, as well as the execution by hanging of any Native person he suspected of having fought against him. At a camp on Latah Creek, Wright allowed some Native people to come into camp to make peace, but when they did so, Wright ordered sixteen of them arrested and summarily executed (Spokane Application Z20-153STNC, 2020). Today the Spokane City Council recognizes these actions as inhuman.

Nevertheless, Wright was viewed as a hero by white settlers and thus honored with a fort and a street named after him. As Colville Tribal member, Laurie Arnold, writes in her foreword to Donald Cutler's book, *“Hang Them All,”* “George Wright personifies an era in Pacific Northwest history. He led unnecessarily violent military actions against [T]ribes and Native peoples of the Columbia Plateau, and these attacks were heralded across the United States as both just and deserved” (2016, p. xi). For the Spokane, Colville, Yakama, and Coeur d'Alene Tribes, Wright and his brutal behavior served as an everlasting curse, but Wright's legacy of greatness on the Columbia Plateau has slowly degraded under the weight of time and as a result of a greater understanding of history. In *“Hang Them All,”* Cutler also illustrates the shocking inhumanity that Wright inflicted when he ordered the slaughter of 800 horses, as noted by Arnold. Wright terrorized the Indigenous people of the region, and he did so intentionally. Arnold writes, “Upon encountering the story of George Wright and the Plateau Indian Wars, Donald Cutler sought to make sense of it and to question why Spokane continues to honor Wright with street names and commemorative sites” (2016, p. xi). These many wartime atrocities are thoroughly documented by Cutler, who does not offer a glorified testament to Wright's actions.

Efforts to Change the Name with a Historical Perspective

As Fort George Wright was not being fully utilized as a military post, the government declared it surplus and put it up for sale in 1957. Spokane Falls Community College bought a portion of the land and leveled the original buildings. In 1963, the Sisters of the Holy Names purchased the remaining 76 acres for Holy Names College, later renamed Fort Wright College, which operated until 1982 (Reames, n.d.). In 1975, only six Native American students attended the college, including

Spokane Tribal citizen Charlene Teters. The Native American students lived in the old military barracks on the campus of what was then known as Fort Wright College. The Native students knew the history of the battles with the U.S. Cavalry and the atrocities committed by Colonel Wright, and thus tried to get the college to change the name. The Native students brought in American Indian Movement activists Clyde and Vernon Belcourt, as well as the late Floyd Redcrow Westerman, an actor and activist, to speak on campus and bring attention to the genocide committed by Wright. The students and activists maintained that Wright should not be honored by the college's name. However, as Teters recalled in August of 2021, the college administration did nothing.

The SFCC organization called Red Nations Student Association (aka Red Nations Club); along with Pam Austin, SFCC's former Native student advisor; and an adjunct professor, the aforementioned Barry Moses, the organization's faculty advisor, later worked to change the name but gained no traction for 30 years. Native students who recounted driving along Fort George Wright to attend classes at the college recalled feeling denigrated when they read the name that honored genocidal acts against their people. In 2020, the Spokane Tribe worked with the City of Spokane and other Tribes that were involved in the 1858 battle between the U.S. Cavalry and Plateau Tribes to change the name of Fort George Wright Drive. The renewed effort by the City to rename the street was led by City Council members Karen Stratton (descendant of Spokane Tribe) and Betsy Wilkerson (of African American descent), who both worked tirelessly to convince people to enact the name change.

As noted, the (now-former) Fort George Wright Drive, located in Northwest Spokane, was named after Fort George Wright in 1986, which in turn was originally named after U.S. Army Colonel George Wright in 1895. Cutler (2016) writes that Wright was promoted to full colonel in 1855 and was given the command of the newly formed Ninth Infantry Regiment, created to occupy the Pacific Northwest. Wright and his recruits boarded steamships for the journey north along the Pacific Coast. "They arrived at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, Washington Territory, on January 21, 1856" (Cutler, 2016, pp. 38–39). Wright, of course, was the key military leader who led the horrific attacks against the Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Palouse, and Yakama Indians.

For over two centuries, white settlers had named their towns and landforms as a function of the settler-colonial mentality, even though these places and landmarks already had established Indigenous names. Scholars on historical cartography, Daniel Clayton (2000) and J. B. Harley (2002), maintain that the renaming and remapping of places have been crucial to the political appropriation of territory as part of the imposition of colonial rule in North America. Tucker and Rose-Redwood (2015) rely on the work of G. Stewart from 1945/1967 when they contend that "pre-existing systems of Indigenous place[-] naming were selectively adopted, ignored, or systematically expunged from the colonial maps as places were renamed in European traditions of geographical nomenclature" (p. 198). Today, a number of towns and cities across the U.S. are reconsidering the names of towns and landforms and the honoring of individuals who have committed immoral acts such as genocide and slavery. As put forward by Christine Elsey (2013) and Keith Basso (1996), the "storyscapes" that accompany Indigenous names form the foundation for place-based identities of Indigenous people. For example, the Spóqínš place-name after an event: A hill that extends to the Spokane River on the south shore is named "Sn Chew iltn" in Salish dialect, which roughly translates to "hiding place" because Nez Perce scouts were found there. These place-name stories are systems of protection and remind our people to be aware. Other locations are known for the coming-of-age ceremony where young people climbed to the summit to seek their personal "sumesh" or medicine/spirit power. The young people were required to build a fire as proof that they reached the top of the peak. The name given to the summit became "Snkewar'qintn," meaning "fire place on mountain peak." The fire let grand/parents know that their young person arrived safely because the location and fire was visible for a long distance. Overall, these Indigenous place-names continue to provide invaluable knowledge, and Tribal people must be able to pass on this traditional cultural knowledge to future generations.

The Spóqínš have always lived on these lands and interacted with their environment. Their cultural knowledge and identity are part of the landscape. Indigenous people still maintain the inherent right to be free in our own lands. Tribal governments are sovereign nations and have an inherent right to self-determination. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird (2005) maintain, "These rights have been systematically stripped from [I]ndigenous people. When others invaded our lands and stole them from underneath our bodies, they destroyed our ways of life and they prevented us from living the way we were intended to live" (p. 1). However, when we utilize our Indigenous languages, we share the important knowledge of our ancestors that is still threatened by colonization. Moreover, since the colonizers intended to eradicate our Indigenous languages, our work to recover the language is a strong form of resistance.

To decolonize toponyms, we must first understand the Indigenous origins and meanings of place-names that predate colonization if we are to recenter the map for Indigenous cultures. Decolonization is the undoing of colonization in all its forms. "Colonization refers to both the formal and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economies) that maintain the subjugation of exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, lands[,] and resources" (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005, p. 2). Wilson and Yellow Bird also state that colonizers engage in these methods to both maintain and enhance their economic, political, and social power. This grasp for power is most often evidenced by territorial claims and maps of those territories. Colonization is therefore inherently and disastrously detrimental to Indigenous people because colonizer power comes at the cost of Indigenous lands, lives, resources, and self-determination. Not only has colonization resulted in

the erosion of Tribal sovereignty, “but most of our contemporary daily struggles (poverty, family violence, chemical dependency, suicide, and the deterioration of health) are also a direct consequence of colonization” (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005, p. 2). Wilson and Yellow Bird further contend that today’s institutions, as well as its social and legal systems, are designed to protect the privilege of the colonizer and continue the subjugation of the Indigenous people, and furthermore, to produce generations of people who are unlikely to question their position within this relationship. Thus, leaders of marginalized communities need to create a handbook to teach Indigenous people how to resist and challenge these oppressive structures in our everyday lives (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005). We need a written guide to inform our ongoing work.

This present case study can serve as a chapter in that handbook. Tribal communities worked with urban Native Americans, non-Native allies, and City Council to challenge oppressive structures and change a name that honored genocide. The 42 organizations, which included those such as the Spokane Falls Community College, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The NATIVE Project, American Indian Community Center, as well as the Peace and Justice Action League, urged City Council members to ensure the expedient renaming of Fort George Wright Drive. The letter signed by these organizations stated, “Wright should have been...convicted of his actions; instead, he was commended for his tactics and promoted. In modern-day, he should be memorialized as a perpetrator of genocide; instead, he continues to be commemorated as if a local hero” (2020). Community organizers sent a powerful message of social equity to City Hall and called into question the business-as-usual mentality of past leadership.

Colonizer messages and oppressive structures are apparent in our everyday lives, and yet many do not realize this form of continued oppression. However, marginalized communities are becoming “woke” and are standing up to make change. In the wake of social justice movements across the nation, movements toward the renaming of offensive place- and landform names have gained traction. According to a writer in *The Spokesman-Review*, three years ago, Stratton and then-City Council President Ben Stuckart pushed forth a proposal to rename the road, but ran into a backlog of projects at the Plan Commission (Vestal, 2020). In August of 2020, Spokane Tribal members and allies across the city began gathering signatures in a letter to Spokane City Council and Plan Commission calling for the name change. Grassroots organizers began to plan events and rally support to bring attention to erasure of Indigenous people. Tribal and cultural leaders, as well as descendants of warriors who were hanged by Wright and his troops, worked as part of this movement to challenge oppression. These activists are Indigenous people whose grandparents, in many cases, were removed from their lands, taken to boarding schools, and yet, have still been handed down stories through oral history. These leaders understand firsthand the history of erasure.

Erasure of Indigenous People in the City of Spokane

After Wright invaded and slaughtered the Indigenous people and their horses, the U.S. Government and state territory officials moved the Spóqínš 48 miles northwest to the Spokane Indian Reservation. Through the early 1900s and on up to the 1950s, Tribal people were clearly not welcome in the City of Spokane. The City enacted no official Sundown laws, but its original inhabitants were definitely not welcome after dark. For example, Indigenous grandmothers explain how they used to have to travel in their horse and buggies to the camp at the far side of town, where Drumheller Spring now stands, well before dark, in order to make a safe and speedy exit from the city, lest they be subject to ridicule, or worse, rape. This systematic exclusion of Indigenous people is still reflected in the demographics of Spokane today. This intentional erasure has led to the City consisting of predominantly white, Euro-Americans with 80% of the population Caucasian. (As a child, I remember my Native family being stared at when we ate at restaurants in Spokane, and sometimes my grandmother made faces at the gawkers.) The impact of intentional exclusion and erasure was keenly felt across our city, as well as our state, and is clearly reflected in settler-colonial place-naming practices throughout the twentieth century.

The Spóqínš and other Indigenous people across the state endured this erasure culture and oppression, which continues today with Eurocentric place-names like “Washington,” “Stevens,” and Lake “Roosevelt.” Moreover, westward colonization inspired the battles of 1857 and 1858, wherein Tribal families were slaughtered, warriors were hanged, food storages were burned, and hostages were taken. Many Americans are simply not aware of the brutal force by which these lands were obtained. As put forward by Tucker and Rose-Redwood (2015), communities should be “mindful of the symbolic violence that has accompanied the imposition of European naming practices as well as the erasure and expropriation of Indigenous place-names as part of ongoing processes of colonization and settlement” (p. 199). These lands of the Inland Northwest were not acquired in a peaceful manner, but rather as a brutal attack on Indigenous villages and families. As part of society’s movement toward social equity, we need to critically analyze the teaching of history and the power relations of place-naming. By gathering at sacred locations and teach-ins, we can share the history from an Indigenous perspective.

Even as Native children growing up on the Reservation, we are taught American History through a colonizer lens. On the other hand, “getting closer to the truth” is an integral part of the historical teachings espoused by our Tribal Elders. What is the *true* story of how these lands were settled in the Inland Northwest? In “*Hang Them All*,” Cutler (2016) tells the history of the battle between the U.S. military and Tribes of the Inland Northwest by citing Lieutenant Kip’s report. Kip wrote: “... at daybreak, three companies of dragoons were sent out, and destroyed seven lodges used by the Indians as storehouses... Smith reported...the force passed through an abandoned village, leaving ‘many of their lodges and property,’ which the

soldiers destroyed” (Cutler, p. 205). Furthermore, Kip recognizes that, if not for “the departure of the Army in September, there is no doubt that [additional] starvation would have added [even] more victims to Wright’s tally” (Cutler, 2016, p. 205). The official letter sent to Spokane City Council on September 29, 2020, by 42 organizations in Spokane cites Wright’s letter to his superiors, in which he accounts of his troop’s actions: “Nine hundred horses and...cattle have been killed or appropriated to our own use; many houses with...wheat and oats, also many caches of vegetables...have been destroyed. A blow has been struck which they will never forget.” With this documented account, the collective writers of the 2020 letter demonstrate how Wright’s brutal measures created a lasting impact on the local Tribes in the form of both devastation and starvation. Moreover, Wright’s illegal and immoral actions directly caused future degradations.

In an effort to educate City residents about the true history, we hosted teach-ins at local schools and universities. Dr. Larry Cebula, a history professor at Eastern Washington University, during a teach-in with the Spokane Tribe at North Central High School held on October 10, 2019, told the story of Indian lynchings from Spokane to Cheney throughout the early part of the twentieth century. Cebula (n.d.) provides a digital recounting of these lynchings of the Spokane and other Eastern Washington Tribes on his digital platform:

In 1884 a Spokane Indian man (his name is recorded only as “Indian Sam”) was accused of raping a white woman in Spokane Falls. He was arrested and brought to jail in Cheney. That night a group of Cheney residents took matters into their own hands. They busted down the door of the jail and dragged out the accused. Their first attempt to hang the man failed when the rope broke, but the second effort succeeded. The killers left their victim hanging in a tree. Within days, it became known that they had murdered the wrong man. The lynching of this man was no isolated incident however—it was a part of a larger movement in the 1880s and 90s to drive Indians off their traditional lands in Cheney and Spokane and to force them to relocate to the reservations.

Historically, countless such atrocities have been committed against the Indigenous peoples. Many examples show how Spokane Indians were not welcome in their own city. While not a lynching, the basic practice of buying a home was not possible for Spokane Tribal families in even more recent years. For example, in the 1940s, Ida Peone-Boyd, a bilingual *Spoqínš* and interpreter in the early 1900s for Chiefs like Sam Boyd, who then later worked tirelessly at the Davenport Hotel, attempted to buy a home in the City of Spokane. Neighbors saw her brown brothers moving her in and called the original owner of the house, who then cancelled the sale of the home. Although no longer always via guns, violence, and hangings, Indigenous people continued to experience mistreatment in the City of Spokane.

In truth, oral history from Tribal Elders illustrates mistreatment and criminalization of Indigenous peoples for merely being physically present in a given location. Jim Sijohn, former Spokane Tribal Council Vice Chairman and Tribal historian, explains that when our Tribal people gathered in Airway Heights to remember, in 1947 and 1948, they told the true history of this area: “In those days they could have been arrested for standing on the spot that we are standing on today” (J. Sijohn, 2018). Until the 1950s, Spokane Tribal members had been largely restricted to the Reservation. We cannot, and should not, conceal the erasure of Indigenous peoples within the settler-colonial nation-state. Nor should we attempt to rewrite history that moves Indigenous nations as “populations” to the margins of public discourse. Such erasure does not tell the true history of the colonial-settlers and the American Genocide they committed.

Decolonization of the Street-Naming Process

The reclaiming of a colonized name proves a difficult process. Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) recognize the significant barriers to decolonizing the content and process of mapping. They examine the forces at work to enable colonial mapping in historic-geographical contexts. They suggest that, in some cases, those seeking to reclaim Indigenous place-names have “strategically engaged with settler-colonial institutions and their colonialist protocols in order to secure a desired outcome of an official place-name change” (Rose-Redwood et al., 2020, p. 154). Rose-Redwood et al. also propose that if remapping and renaming efforts are “part of an Indigenous-led movement, combined with Indigenous protocols with colonial procedures, and resulted in the reclamation of Indigenous place-names,” then they could serve the purpose of decolonial mapping (2020, p. 154). The City of Spokane’s leadership recognized the sovereign territory and the importance of self-determination of renaming and thus asked the Spokane Tribe to lead the renaming process. However, as Tucker and Rose-Redwood (2015) duly note, some renaming processes “romanticize Indigenous culture while providing no actual exchange of power or opportunity for increased levels of self-determination” (p. 203). Recognizing the sovereign territory and self-determination of the Spokane Tribe constitutes decolonial mapping, which is exactly what transpired in Spokane. The City Council asked the Tribe to take the lead, and the Spokane Tribe followed traditional Indigenous protocol by consulting Tribal Elders, historians, and other Tribal leaders.

However, Natives living in the City did not appreciate the City deferring to the Spokane Tribe to select a name. Even in the face of severe criticism by those Natives living in the City who felt these elected leaders should listen to them instead, the Spokane City Council stayed courageous and challenged existing institutions of colonialism as well as questioned its own complicity in those institutions. The City maintained a pathway that led to decolonization, instead of using ideals of

democracy to supplant the Indigenous ways (of knowing and doing). The City respected Indigenous understanding of Tribal territories. Nevertheless, urban Indians wanted to apply Anglo-democratic notions of representation. The City Council was criticized and threatened by a few urban Indians as the renaming was perceived as an “exclusive” rather than inclusive process. Natives living within the City believed, as both citizens and voters, they should have a right to be involved in the naming process. Toni Lodge, CEO of The NATIVE Project, said, “We adamantly believe that representatives from the other impacted Tribes, as well as voices from our own urban community, must be included in the process for the renaming and rededication of the road” (2020). However, we must note that the federal government and states have a legal relationship and responsibility to federally recognized Tribes whose lands were exchanged for treaty rights and executive order recognition. Individual Indians and Tribal organizations do not have sovereignty or federally protected rights. Relationships with Tribal governments are not always understood by City officials. Federal Indian law is a complex area of the law, and the government-to-government relationships are not always clearly understood by all interested parties.

Tribal members across the nation and state understand territory and Tribal protocol. Chairwoman Carol Evans of the Spokane Tribe spoke for us at the Plan Commission hearing. She explained that, if there were Spokane Tribal members in Yakama lands trying to make movements, she would tell them to “stand down and let the Yakamas take the lead” (October 28, 2020). A traditional Tribal cultural practice is to respectfully recognize another Tribe’s territory. For example, during the Tribal canoe journey, “Protocol” is an official time of sharing our individual and common traditions and ceremonies. When acknowledging the territory of a Tribe, the skipper of the visiting Tribal canoe will ask permission to come ashore, offering a song and other gifts. The leader of the host Tribe will in turn offer a welcome proclamation, share food, and provide a place to stay. Drumming, singing, traditional dancing, and giveaways will ensue. In this same manner, the process that was followed by the Spokane City Council respected and aligned with Tribal culture and protocol, and not the “democratic” colonial structure. Following Tribal protocols strengthened the sense of credibility and legitimacy of the renaming process.

Ultimately, the renaming became an Indigenous-led movement that followed Indigenous protocols of Tribal leadership (formal and informal). The City Council deferred to the Tribe and understood that the renaming process should include Tribal Elders, historians, and intertribal consultation and agreement. Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) maintain that decolonial mapping should be understood as a process of “articulating Indigenous self-determination in relation to place” (p. 154). Furthermore, Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) believe action taken by Indigenous people to assert, engage, rebuild, or reclaim their connection to land, as well as how those relationships are conceptualized on maps, can be seen as decolonial mapping, regardless of the specific methods chosen. Self-determination empowers Tribes to make decisions that are best for their people and future generations. Deferring to the Spokane Tribe to work with other Tribes to determine the new street name asserts the Tribe’s connection to the land. The City of Spokane bears the name of original inhabitants, and the City’s recognition of the inherent sovereignty of Tribes is the key aspect of this current case study.

Spokane Municipal Code—Roadway Names

During the renaming effort, another issue arose regarding the Spokane Municipal Code (SMC) for street names. The proposed name change proved consistent with the policy for naming streets found in Chapter 17.D.050 of the SMC. The official intent of this chapter is to establish a uniform method for naming roadways and assigning addresses for real property and structures within the City of Spokane. The primary purpose of renaming this roadway is found in the SMC’s Section 17D.050A.060, Subsection B, which reads: “Roadway names shall not contain vulgarity or vulgar innuendo, nor insult to any person, group, or class of persons, or institution.” Given the clear intent of this subsection, the Spokane City Street Name Application included the following statement:

Fort George Wright Drive was named for U.S. Army Colonel George Wright, for whom the fort itself, established in 1895, was also named. Colonel Wright was stationed at Fort Walla Walla in Washington Territory in 1858 during the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and the Yakama, Palouse, Coeur d’Alene, and Spokane [T]ribes, triggered in large part by the continued encroachment of white settlers on [N]ative land. After the defeat of Colonel Edward Steptoe at the Battle of Tohotonimme (commonly called “Steptoe Butte”) near present day Rosalia, Washington, Steptoe and his soldiers were forced to retreat to Fort Walla Walla. We believe that maintaining the name of Fort George Wright Drive is a continual stain on our City by honoring a person who engaged in genocidal and terroristic actions toward the [N]ative people who have always lived here. We also believe that maintaining the existing name of Fort George Wright Drive undermines the intent of the City of Spokane’s strategic diversity plan, which has, as one of its goals, that the City of Spokane will “create a compassionate community so that all people can feel safe, empowered, and welcome.” This renaming process will give us all the opportunity to not only begin a healing process with the [T]ribes, but [also] have an insightful and deep conversation about the history of racism, violence, and discrimination which have been the hallmarks of the interactions between white settlers and [N]ative people in the Spokane area, not to assign blame, but to embark on a new shared future, together. (2020)

The acknowledgement of the encroachment by white settlers, and that the name of Fort George Wright is an honoring to genocide, is considered by some parties a rather monumental statement. The City of Spokane's strategic diversity plan demonstrates a welcomed change from racist behaviors that many Indigenous people have encountered throughout the past century. The City's application, with a stated desire for a healing process with local Tribes, led to greater community activism and hopefully, more future movement toward sincere truth and reconciliation. Truth and reconciliation constitute an official discovering and revealing of past wrongdoing by government in hope of resolving conflict left over from the past. This ideal is most commonly known as a commission in Canada, in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission creates a historical account of the residential schools where Indigenous children were placed for generations. Once an honest accounting has been made, much like in our present case study, participants make a call to action. The citizens, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, call on the City government to work together in an effort to repair harm caused by colonization, and to change policies to achieve social equity, assuring that the City of Spokane welcomes all people.

Community Activism

Tribal members, along with grassroots organizers from Spokane, members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, local educators, and City residents, began planning activities and a letter-writing campaign to change the name in June of 2020. Over the course of four weeks, seven community-based Zoom meetings were held to plan the rally. All safety precautions were taken into consideration for COVID-19. On August 15, 2020, an "art build" was held to make signs, t-shirts, and banners for the rally. The banners stated "No Honor in Genocide" and "End White Supremacy." These banners would later be shipped to Washington D.C., to another Indigenous decolonization rally in November, only to be forcibly taken down and stolen by members of the Proud Boys, the far-right, neo-fascist organization composed exclusively of males.

The Native community activism here in Spokane is uniquely connected to activism across the nation and has rippling effects around the region. We have Indigenous people who are recognized and called upon to support Indigenous causes like thwarting environmental pollution and stopping pipelines. As one Native activist recently said in a telephone interview, "It is our responsibility to raise awareness of racial injustice. People are occupying this land in a wrong way. It is important that we talk about the truth and acknowledge the genocide. It is our duty as human beings to do something" (Jacob Johns on June 14, 2021). Informal Tribal leaders like Jacob Johns are led by their heart and cultural teachings.

Many people in the City of Spokane do not even know that genocide was committed against local Indigenous Tribes. Progressive members of society may talk about racial injustice or social equity, but they do not know about the atrocities committed against Indigenous people in this very city. Many citizens do not understand that the land was obtained illegally through the hanging of warriors and the burning of Tribal villages. As Natives, we believe it is important to talk about the truth and acknowledge what really happened.

Thus, because community activists wanted to get the attention of the City leaders and citizens, a series of early events was planned to engage the community and create momentum. For example, on August 22, 2020, the slogan "No Honor in Genocide" was projected onto the Spokane County Courthouse as part of an art protest. Later, even after the rally, on August 27, 2020, as both congregation members and Spokane Tribal citizens, Jeff Ferguson and I met with Pastor Joe Wittwier of the Life Center Church, which is located along the (now former) Fort George Wright Drive. Wittwier had no idea of the true history of the genocide, or even who Colonel Wright had been. After meeting with us and hearing a Tribal perspective, Wittwier wrote in an email to City Council: "Imagine being Jewish and having to drive on Adolph Eichmann Blvd. It's time to change the name, and the proposed name is both beautiful and appropriate. I hope you'll vote in favor of this change" (December 6, 2020). Although many Americans do not acknowledge the American Holocaust, much has been taught about Nazi Germany and the Jewish Holocaust. Thus, Wittwier makes a truly powerful comparison. On October 7, 2020, Evans, Ferguson, and I also met with Spokane City Council members, Breean Beggs, Karen Stratton, and Betsy Wilkerson to share our deep desire for the name change. We were delightfully surprised that the City Council conference room displayed a Spokane Tribal flag. Our meetings with Spokane City Council members went well, and they were in support of the change. However, as noted, this name-change effort had stalled out multiple times before. Hence, we felt the rally in August necessary, even with ongoing City and community support.

The Rally and Oral Tradition

The focused efforts to change the street name did not encompass just a place-name on a map, or a street sign, but extended to include the continued representation of the genocide of Indigenous people. In the present case study, as a vital part of the Indigenous reclaiming of the colonial narrative, an in-person rally was held in Spokane on August 23, 2020, wherein organizers had to go to extra lengths for pandemic safety, like marking out the parking lot for social distancing. Despite the restrictions, Tribal leaders from Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Colville, and Yakama Nation all showed up to support the effort to change the name. Elders from many Tribes, Tribal members in regalia, and young people from the Spokane Tribal Language House also attended. The rally proved an opportunity for Indigenous sharing of oral history and songs. Spokane Tribal Elder Jim Sijohn stated that "we are getting closer to the truth" by telling what happened from a Tribal perspective. Truth-telling is a vital act of decolonization. Tribal Elders, Tribal leaders, and direct descendants of Tribal warriors in the battle all spoke at the rally.

As a common Tribal cultural practice, the rally began in a positive way with a prayer and a blessing by Spokane Tribal Elder Pat Moses, who is Barry's uncle. Pat Moses spoke in the Salish language and Josh Flett, Spokane Tribal member, interpreted. Pat Moses, a teacher at Wellpinit School District for many years, spoke about how the importance of the gathering was to remember that Spokane is the land of the Spóqínš:

This land was a gift from the creator and our ancestors respected the land. It's good that we are doing this work and this gathering is good medicine for our hearts. The land has a spirit and it welcomes us home. We speak from our hearts and we will sing our Chief's song. It will touch your heart if you know the story. The soldiers did a lot of bad things to our Tribal people. Killed our people and our horses. (August 23, 2020)

Our Tribal Elders guide our actions and remind us why we gather. As Indigenous people we are connected to the land, and not because we own it, but because it holds the stories and songs of our ancestors. When we tell our history, we are getting closer to the truth. As a Spokane Tribal citizen and on behalf of the other Indigenous organizers, I emceed the rally:

Today we are here to recognize the settler-colonial violence against the Spokane Tribe, the Coeur d'Alene, Palouse Tribes, and the Yakama Nation. This settler-colonial violence strikes at the very heart of our people. Colonel Wright attacked our villages, burned our food storages, slaughtered our horses, and hung [sic] our leaders. We gather today to say: There is no honor in genocide. This city was built and dispossessed the Indigenous people of their lands. These street signs are put up to honor the people that slaughtered our people. This history is not taught in our grade schools and we are here today to get closer to the truth. (August 23, 2020)

As part of the oral tradition, Indigenous people recall the history of the Tribe and provide our next generation opportunities for critical thinking. Our young people need to know that our ancestors fought to protect our way of life and that we once had songs, stories, and place-names for these locations. At the rally, many of our brothers and sisters from other Tribes joined us in our efforts to reclaim our narrative. In truth, the rally proved a quite difficult event to organize while also keeping people safe. Participants social distanced and masks were distributed at the entrance point. Tribal Elders could not be invited due to the pandemic, but many of them attended anyway. Tribal leaders and Elders came from all the local Tribes, as they found the event too important not to be there.

While some may think that changing a name on a street sign would be largely symbolic, for Indigenous people, the sign itself represented a constant reminder of the disregard of what happened to our people. Young Tribal people who attend college have to drive along this road every day to go to class to get an education. After seeing the rally on the news, college students messaged me to share their feelings: "It was hard, to go to school and be reminded of the man [who] killed our people." As you traveled along the drive, you read "Fort George Apartments," and Indigenous people cannot help but be reminded of the soldiers burning down our lodges.

Just seeing the "Fort George Wright Drive" sign had a negative effect. Many Tribal members go to church at Life Center and when they come out, they have a good heart, but the first thing they see is the street sign honoring the man who killed their people. Our minds travel to the time when our people watched from the hills as the U.S. Cavalry slaughtered our horses, when our people had been "shocked by the brutality towards defenseless creatures the Indians considered to be spiritual beings" (Cutler, p. 206). On one historical tour, Jim Sijohn recounted how his great-grandmother told him that when she was young, in the mornings when the sun would be coming up, if you looked down on this location (today near Liberty Lake), it looked like water, looked like the ground was moving. The ground, she said, was shimmering from the bleached bones of our horses that created a wave. Jim Sijohn spoke about the campsites, and if you looked into the eyes of any man, woman, or Elder, they would be looking at the horse bones with nothing but sadness in their eyes (August 28, 2018). The organizers of the rally wanted to make sure that the next generation of Tribal students who go to college do not travel on a road that honors the man who committed the genocide of our people.

The City of Spokane is occupying Indigenous land, and we are obligated to tell the stories that are connected to these places. The Spokane Indian people gathered here in Spokane and fished for 100-pound salmon. The Spokane people had economic vitality and traded their salmon clear to the plains for buffalo. When the U.S. Cavalry came, the Tribes were just trying to protect their families and their homes.

At the rally, Jim Sijohn also recounted the oral history of the battles of 1857 with Steptoe and 1858 with Wright. The story Jim Sijohn told had been handed down from his grandfather, Ignace Garry. Jim Sijohn first heard the story of the battles when he was a child in an encampment in Clark Fork, Idaho, in 1948. Jim Sijohn said:

The Spokane people began hearing rumors the U.S. soldiers were coming. I am going to speak to you in English because that's what I was forced to learn. When our people started getting ready in the encampments it was just a

buzz. Like bees buzzing. The women would run and get bows, arrows, lances, shields and bring them to the warriors and hook them on their horses to get the warriors ready for battle. (August 23, 2020)

Riding horseback, Jim Sijohn said, Coeur d'Alene warriors notified other villages. They prepared for battle and began putting on their paint and medicine from the campfire. They started out to face the U.S. soldiers, with the medicine men and women praying. They were preparing the medicines for wounded warriors and setting up a medic shelter. Jim Sijohn continued: "When the battle began the warriors fought fearlessly. It was not just men warriors, there were also women warriors who fought right alongside the men" (2020). The Spokane and Coeur d'Alene call these women warriors "šimnsčín" or "women who go into battle." The history that has been handed down includes the story of how one Native woman warrior rode bareback. When a warrior would go down, she would ride in and get that warrior, put him in front of her and ride back to the camp. She would let him off at the camp where the women would start working on him. Time after time she did this heroic act. Again and again, she rode out onto the battlefield and picked up wounded warriors, Jim Sijohn recounted. Then she got shot. A warrior picked her up, took her part of the way toward the camp. Another woman rode out and met them. He went back into battle; she took the woman to camp. They said when the brave šimnsčín died, she was singing her medicine song. The Tribal warriors had to go against rifles, cannons, and ended up fighting with their bare hands. They knew they were fighting to protect their families. When the battle settled, the Indians were marshalled to Hangman Creek and the soldiers lined them up. Wright walked through the line, pointing at the warriors. He said, "You, you, and you," as he went down the line selecting Indians to be killed. Once the Natives were lined up, the soldiers began to do their "justice," and one warrior sang his song. The warrior said to his people, "I give it to you. You're going to have hard times. This song will be medicine for you." Jim Sijohn stated that that song was not the only song sung that day: "All of the sudden you would hear women's voices. They weren't singing loud. Because they were afraid of George Wright. They lived in fear. They were singing the medicine songs and prayers songs" (2020). Jim Sijohn told the crowd gathered at the rally, "I hope that you remember those women who were standing there. They were praying for their people. Just think what his ancestors had to go through after that battle." Many of our own people did not know the history of the battle and the suffering of our ancestors. But on this day, we stood at the battle grounds, where the blood of our people was shed, and recounted the injustice of Wright and the U.S. Cavalry. It is through knowing our history that our people are reminded of the strength of our bloodlines and the courage it took to sing these songs.

Decolonizing the Map

Songs represent the Indigenous people's connection to place and provide another example of decolonial mapping and association. Today, the people of the Spokane Tribe sing songs that were sung hundreds of years ago. Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) write about southwestern bird songs that served as mapping of the O'odham to help Indigenous people navigate the desert landscape. These songs persisted from ancient times, even through the experience of colonization and assimilation. These songs were full of locational information and "ecological signposts" that connected across territories (p. 155). Similarly, the Spóqínš have let the songs of their ancestors guide them.

At the name-change rally, Jim Sijohn spoke of the song sung by the warrior before he was hanged. The warrior told his people it would be medicine and would help them in hard times. Our people have ties to our homelands, so we sing the songs and tell the stories of our mountains, waters, and our animals. Rose-Redwood et al. (2020) elaborate upon the 2013 work of Acserald, who maintains that Indigenous-led decolonial mapping projects can serve as a powerful political and legal tool in territorial struggles, and help to document the deep historical ties of Indigenous people to the lands they call home (p. 151). The time has come for Indigenous people to regain place-names and assert Tribal knowledge over traditional territories.

At the rally, additional Tribal leaders recounted the history that has been passed down. "Colonel George Wright was sent here to rain genocide and terror on our people," said CarylDene Swan, a Coeur d'Alene Tribal Council member as she spoke to the 200 people who had gathered. To Indigenous people, this name honors genocide, Swan reiterated. From an Indigenous perspective, Wright should have been prosecuted for war crimes, but instead, he was promoted and praised as a hero for his brutality. He inflicted irrevocable pain and punishment that haunted our people.

Although organizers worked diligently to have a safe event, in truth, the rally was met with some resistance. The organizers had planned to march on the main roadway and travel a safe route on the back side of the campus. The organizers released the safe route ahead of time. However, City police showed up and blocked all the entrances and roadways to the community college campus, which were going to be used for our safe return. The police took excessive measures to block access to the protest. Participants who were late to the event had a difficult time accessing the rally.

The organizers had planned in advance to have a white pastor serve as their liaison with law enforcement. One regular activist said he could see the attitude of police completely change with Anglo organizers. As part of a vulnerable population, activists know to never have people of color speak to the police. When Unitarian Universalist Church Pastor Todd Eklof talked to campus and City police, they said a threat had been made, and due to this alleged threat, the campus had to be blocked off to the rally. Yellow tape barred entrances to the college campus.

A street name is more than just a commemorative device, it is a direct reflection of a political viewpoint. Those organizations that knew the true history objected to the name Wright and joined organizing efforts. Eklof said at the rally, “Every piece of mail that comes to the church bears the name of the man [who] committed these atrocities. Our community comes together to demand change” (August 23, 2020). The Universal Unitarian Church’s mission statement outlines their purpose to champion justice, diversity, and environmental stewardship in the wider world. Having an address on their stationary as memoriam to genocide is counter to the church’s philosophy. Scholars consider street names as commemorative tools that socially construct consciousness of events and people. With respect to the use of “memorial devices,” Derek Alderman (2002) explains that

commemorative street[-]naming is an important vehicle for bringing the past into the present, helping weave history into the geographic fabric of everyday life. Named streets can become embroiled in the politics of defining what is historically significant or worthy of public remembrance. (p. 99)

The name change recognizes the Native perspective of history and allows for self-determination. As Eklof suggested, real change is needed for the Indigenous people who have been oppressed and suppressed for generations. Eklof believes we need more than a name change, that the community and country need change that will have an impact on the lives of people in poverty. Many Tribal people and other people of color working for minimum wage cannot afford home ownership in Spokane. To achieve true social equity in the City, greater change is necessary—such as equal access to education, employment, and housing.

Whis-talks vs. Wright—Politics of Commemoration

The Spokane Tribe decided to commemorate and honor the woman warrior Whis-talks. This commemoration not only honors the Indigenous women of the battlefields but also the women who fight for the environment and work to protect our families today. Alderman (2002) discusses the “legitimacy of commemoration,” or the politics of remembering the historical and political worth of one person or cause over another (p. 100). He also debates whether one commemorative figure can be relevant enough to resonate across social groups. Alderman writes about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and whether commemoration in honor of veterans is more widely accepted across all races and socioeconomic groups. In this case study, the name selected by the Spokane Tribe of “Whis-talks Way” (though we ultimately did have to drop the hyphen) received overwhelming support from City Council and urban Indians. The Spokane Tribal Council, the Tribal Elders, the Spokane City Council, Spokane Plan Commission, and even the urban Indians who objected to the renaming process itself approved of the final commemoration of Whis-talks with “Whistalks Way.” While one solitary historical society voiced an objection to the renaming, all other groups supported the actual name change.

The dominant culture has controlled the historical narrative and the street-naming process of cities and towns. One individual, speaking on behalf of this particular historical society group at the City Council hearing, objected to the street-name change and viewed it as an erasure of local history. However, the commemoration of “Whis-talks” is not “erasure culture,” but rather an inclusion of an Indigenous worldview and perspective. Robin Kerns and Lawrence Berg (2002) maintain that toponymic resistance can be seen as the politics of recognition brought forward by marginal groups, but may encounter objection by those who have always had the power to write the history (p. 286). In fact, during that hearing, the historical society representative objected to any time limit on his comments and furthermore stated that he was getting railroaded. This particular incident only served as a clear demonstration of resistance by white males who have always had the power to write the history.

Street Names and Memorial Arenas

Who we decide to memorialize, and perhaps thus name streets after, is reflective of political representation. Currently, in Spokane we have a City Council that favors social equity. According to geographer Maoz Azaryahu (1996), street-naming after figures and events in history is a significant part of modern politics because it “not only provides spatial and semiotic orientation but also naturalizes and legitimizes a selective vision of the past” (p. 321). Alderman (2002) contends that named streets are powerful commemorative spaces because their message is inscribed into our daily city life with road maps, sending and receiving mail, giving directions, and the road signs themselves. Many geographers agree that road signs contribute to the creation of a sense of place. In this study, organizations like the Unitarian Universalist Church and Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners (SNAP) objected to the “Fort George Wright Drive” name as their address on their stationary. Neither the Unitarian Church nor SNAP’s aim toward social equity can reconcile with commemorating Wright. Alderman explains that street names are unique and “potentially politicized memorials” due to their “geographic connectivity, their ability to touch diverse neighborhoods and social groups who may or may not identify with the person or event being memorialized” (2002, p. 101). Furthermore, street-renaming can be controversial because the commemoration of one version of the past often includes a decommemoration of another. In this case study, everyone loved the name of Whis-talks except one historical society. However, we must consider the legitimacy of commemoration or the politics of the historical

and political worth of remembering Wright versus Whis-talks—for the past 125 years, the name “Fort George Wright” has praised the brutal acts of the colonizer. Today, many activists are willing to demand social equity and thereby recognize the existence and contributions of Indigenous people. Moreover, they duly recognize the contributions of Indigenous women of the 1800s and today.

Tribal people did not forget the battles and recounted the history throughout the decades. The Coeur d’Alene Tribe used to do a reenactment of the battle with Steptoe on the Palouse Prairie. From the 1930s up to the 1980s, the Coeur d’Alene Tribe gathered and told the history of the battles with Steptoe and Wright. Jim Sijohn also talked about the reenactment of the battles that started at the Bureau of Indian Affairs Agency in Idaho and then traveled to the battle site. The Coeur d’Alenes and Spokanes, organized by Jim’s brother, Cliff Sijohn, would come over the hill to Rosalia on horseback. The reenactment proved difficult because of all the farmlands owned by non-Indians and getting the permission to pass through. In one area, the warriors had to sneak their horses through, just like the old days. When they finally got to Rosalia, where the teepees were already set up, they stopped and put on their regalia and then came over the hill. They all started giving the war whoops. One brave young Coeur d’Alene Tribal member wore just a breechcloth for the event. He would hang over the side of the horse’s mane and observers could not even see him. Then he would go over to the side and his feet would hit the ground and shoot up, just as if he were really being shot at. At the camp, women and children would also start war whooping and the drums would get going. They would have a small pow-wow there, and stories would be told. Our stories would always be told.

At the rally, Swan stood along the drive and reiterated, “We don’t forget the oral histories of our people” (August 23, 2020). She further explained, “Wright acted on hearsay and was a biased judge. The Coeur d’Alenes [only] fought to protect their people.” The truth of Wright’s actions is not easily forgotten by Tribal people and has been shared down through seven generations. Mahlon Kriebel, author and neuroscientist, later shared on a local historical tour: “You can match Tribal oral history to the military versions of what went on. That’s particularly true when you think of Steptoe’s battle with the [T]ribes” (August 28, 2018). Kriebel, a white ally, confirms that oral histories, such as those presented by Swan, do in fact tell the true story of these unlawful attacks on Tribal peoples.

While Wright should have been tried for war crimes, the Tribal Chiefs maintained honorable dealings. In 1858, Tribal Chiefs stood their ground in honor and kept their word. Chief Pete Wildshoe, Swan’s grandfather, said he would pay back what he took during the Steptoe Battle. He also expected to be paid back for his cattle that were lost and food storages that were burned down by Wright’s soldiers. During the battle, many of the Coeur d’Alenes scattered and hid in the mountains. They hid their cattle and horses in the mountains to save what they could. They lived in fear and were afraid of being taken. Several families were taken hostage and families that lived in the aftermath lived with the fear invoked by Wright. At the rally, Swan told those gathered:

Colonel Wright was sent here to kill [N]atives and he used every tactic to annihilate us and make us an extinct people. Wright’s cruelty left a horrific trail of bloodshed and suffering in his wake. But we are still here. We are stronger than ever. We have recovered and we are proud, strong, and can accomplish anything we put our minds to. We have and maintain our cultural base and oneness with respect for all creation. (August 23, 2020)

Swan’s inspirational words are daily demonstrated by our young people, who travel this road to attend college at SFCC. They now demonstrate the undying resilience of the Indigenous people. Swan also proclaimed that [in 1857]

the [I]ndigenous people stood as an army of great power and strength and rode forward to face the full military strength of the United States. Some were killed so we can stand here today. We can show future generations that there is redemption and forgiveness, survival and strength. It is time to change insensitive place-names and remove racist monuments that reflect racist attitudes. The Coeur d’Alene Tribe is here to support the name change.

Other descendants of warriors who fought in the battle against the U.S. Cavalry to protect their families came to Spokane to stand and participate in the rally for the name change. For example, Charlene BearCub and her sister Teresa Elisof and their families stood in front of the stage. BearCub spoke as a descendant of Yakama warrior Qualchan, who was hanged by Wright. Wright held Qualchan’s father Chief Owhi captive, and eventually, Wright hanged Qualchan along with other warriors. Qualchan and his wife Whis-talks had come into the U.S. military camp waiving a white flag of peace, but Wright showed no mercy. BearCub stated,

We are all here, and we are proof of their strength and their resiliency. We are survivors of his bloodline. From Charley Qualchan, Qualchan’s son, Sam Sauchula (our grandfather), to our mother, Matilda Sauchula BearCub, his blood flows strongly through our generations. We are the true living, breathing survivors. We want to stop this suppression and racism trying to smother out the lives of our people by eliminating everything we stand for. We

are a proud, [but] humble nation, and we walk and live among you. We have learned your ways. It is time for you to reflect and help us get back our ways. We come with our cousin Tribes: the Coeur d'Alene, Palouse, Spokane, Kalispels, Nez Perce, and Yakama Tribes. We dance by the sacred grounds of the Spokane people by the Falls of the Spokane. We are on that dance floor together in unity and love and compassion. (August 23, 2020)

As survivors of the warrior's bloodline of Qualchan, Bearcub's speech touched the hearts of people gathered at the rally. To many residents of the City of Spokane, Indigenous people are invisible, but this erasure is challenged when BearCub says, "We walk among you. We have learned your ways. We dance by the sacred grounds of the Spokane." As a people, the Spóqínš have always been here, and we are still here, despite historical attempts at Indigenous erasure.

American Indian history is rarely taught in American schools. We learn a great deal about Hitler and Nazi Germany, but very little is taught about American Genocide. At the rally, Spokane Tribal Elder Dave BrownEagle, a retired educator, shared that he had once been ashamed of his family stories and thought they were not important. He said,

Now I tell my children the stories and they look at me like, not that story again. I teach from the history book, and I am teaching the U.S. History. But the history book doesn't tell the Tribal history. So, I teach how the history relates to my people. There's a lot of non-Native people that came here to this rally for a reason, and I respect that. There are Elders here and children here. It is a time for change. [Horse whinnies.] You can hear the four legged. We call on our City Council and our Planning Commission to make that change. (August 23, 2020)

As a U.S. military veteran and former Tribal Councilman, BrownEagle understands the fight for Tribal sovereignty and self-determination. As an educator, he revealed that he has had his job threatened for teaching the Tribal perspective of history. Nevertheless, our Elders must share the traditional knowledge that has been passed down to them, as a political and personal imperative.

Tribal leaders and other U.S. military veterans from many of the local Tribes attended the rally in solidarity. Dr. Michael Marchand, former Chairman of the Colville Tribe, also spoke:

We are here to honor our ancestors. We are grateful for our young people. Our people are veterans and warriors. Native Americans have fought in every war this country has ever been in. American Indian soldiers acted honorably and not dishonorably like Colonel Wright. He should have been put in jail for war crimes. This road named in honor of him is atrocious. (August 23, 2020)

With this sentiment, Marchand not only recognized the service of American Indian veterans, but also the lack of accountability for Wright and the U.S. military's inhumane crimes against us.

As the former Spokane Tribal Attorney, I am well aware of the misdealings of the U.S. Government with respect to land, water, and Tribal sovereignty. At the end of the rally, I spoke once again:

Okay, our drummers and singers are gonna share the "Hangman Creek Song," the "Hangman Song." As they lined up our Indian men, and some of our men didn't wait...to be pushed off the balance of the.... The United States Cavalry, they were...marking and measuring our territories, and there was a marker that they used as a platform to hang our men.... Some of our leaders did not even wait for the suyapees to hang them. They stepped off and did it of their own will. But...one of our chiefs, sang this song. And so, our drummers, our sing[ers].... And we have sang this song since that time. We never forget the atrocities of Colonel Wright. But we also sing this song as a prayer song, and [as] a tribute to our strength and our resiliency. And we thank all of our brothers and sisters, all of our colors, that are here today to march with us. We are one people, and we thank you. So please, if you would stop your cameras and recording for this song, and then we will follow the horses and we're gonna begin our march. We're gonna take back our streets. So, we're gonna have the drum and the singers sing our song, and we remember, we remember the lives lost.... We remember Qualchan.... We remember our warriors, and as Jim said, we remember those Indian women [like Whis-talks] that went into battle, right alongside our men. Lem lemsh. (August 23, 2020)

I shared these final words to remind the participants why we were marching: in memory of the brutality committed so that the U.S. could lay illegal claim to our lands. The mounted horses led the procession, and the marchers, with their signs, proceeded down Ford George Wright Drive, now Whistalks Way.

Marchers came from all races and religions: Natives, Muslims, African Americans, Chinese Americans, and white allies. The horses led and the people chanted, "No honor in genocide!" The tail end was brought up by Harley Davidsons. The Spokane City police had blocked off all of the traffic. Whether they wanted to keep marchers safe, or simply out of view, remains

unclear. Participants marched the full length of Fort George Wright Drive, and at the bottom of the hill, some of them hoisted a banner that said “Genocide Ave.” and covered the sign for Fort George Wright Drive. There, participants gathered in a circle and sang. Spokane Tribal member Davey Madera sang songs from the American Indian Movement, including a song that was sung at the Wounded Knee Occupation in the 1970s. Taking a stand to fight oppression is not new to American Indians and has happened all across the United States. American Indians, like other marginalized groups, have historically been met by the government with brutal force.

Despite that fact, in the past five years, we have seen an unleashing of grassroots activism within Tribal communities with movements such as Idle No More, Standing Rock, and Missing Murdered Indigenous Women. Until recently, American Indians had not taken to the street to protest since the 1970s. Our style of protest harkens back to the 1969 Black Panther Party that marched as Chicago officials rejected the naming of the Monroe Street for Fred Hampton, a Black Panther leader who had been killed on the street by City police. In “On West Monroe, Hampton’s Name Still Resonates,” Ron Grossman and Oscar Avila tell the story of how the Black Panther Party posted homemade signs with Hampton’s name emblazoned on them (2006). The story of Hampton worked to reawaken memories around the City, but for many, they were never forgotten. The story of Wright and Whis-talks, while reawakening memories for some, had never been forgotten by Tribal Elders like Charlene BearCub and Jim Sijohn. This case study thereby highlights how marginalized groups can utilize both formal, political means as well as informal rallies and protests to garner the undivided attention of elected officials. People of color have been attempting to get their own leaders recognized, and not just the white males from the dominant society.

Grassroots Efforts

For this name-change effort, grassroots activism at the community level in the City of Spokane, Washington, akin to the collective action witnessed in the Black Panther Movement, was led by local organizer and environmental lawyer Rick Eichstaedt, along with Gonzaga University’s Director of Leadership, Rachele Strawther. These organizers worked with Tribal members and historians to draft a letter to City Council, which relied on Spokane historical and Tribal documents, to advocate for the name change. Again, the letter was signed by 42 organizations located in Spokane and submitted both to City Council and the Plan Commission. A selected portion of the letter reads:

Dear Spokane City Council Members,

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to ensure that the City of Spokane Plan Commission prioritizes the long-overdue renaming of Fort George Wright Drive. It is time for the City of Spokane to cease the commemoration of a man responsible for brutal and inhumane acts against Northwest [T]ribes.

[...]

While some might argue that Colonel Wright was operating as any military leader would in war, historical records clearly indicate that he flouted martial law to inflict pain and punishment upon local [T]ribes, creating a ripple effect that continues to haunt present-day descendants. Reflecting on George Wright, Spokane Tribe historian Warren Seyler writes, “Today, as history is being revisited and emerging, the treatment of Native Americans and in this case Spokan[e]’s conjures up historical trauma hidden far beneath the scars.”

Colonel George Wright should have been reprimanded and convicted of his actions; instead, he was commended for his tactics and promoted. In modern-day, he should be memorialized as a perpetrator of genocide; instead, he continues to be commemorated as if a local hero with a street named Fort George Wright Drive.

As other U.S. cities confront the sins of Confederate generals by toppling down statues erected in their memory, it is time for Spokane to also confront its past. The time for Fort George Wright Drive to be renamed is past due. As citizens of Spokane, we urge the City Council to ensure that the name change is prioritized on the Planning Commission agenda, and that it is passed successfully this fall. Lastly, the City must work with local [T]ribes and Tribal leaders to develop a new name for the road that recognizes the rich Tribal history in our region.

City of Spokane organizations, in addition to those mentioned, that signed the above included: YWCA Spokane; The Lands Council; Spokane Community College; Spokane County Human Rights Task Force; Muslims for Community, Action & Support; Salish School of Spokane; and Asian Pacific Islander Coalition. The overwhelming support of these 42 organizations proved a powerful testimony in favor of the change.

Application Process

Organizers filed an application for a formal name change with the Plan Commission that was accepted on September 29, 2020. On October 7, 2020, Chairwoman Evans, along with me and Ferguson, met with Council members Stratton, Wilkerson, and Beggs. The City Council members shared that they were in support of changing the name but were encountering some resistance about the process from Natives in the urban community. Urban Indians, especially those at The NATIVE Project

led by Toni Lodge, complained that, by allowing a single Tribe to make the decision, the renaming would be an exclusive, rather than inclusive, process and thus fail to recognize the trauma suffered by many in the community. The Spokane Tribe responded to Lodge directly, reminding her that the City of Spokane gets its name from the Spaqni, the Spokane people, as does the river and the county. Moreover, that these are the ancestral lands of the Spokane Tribe and it is the Spokane Tribe and the other local Tribes that had blood spilt on these sacred grounds in dispute. In a letter dated October 10, 2020, Evans wrote: “We feel we have all the necessary interests currently at the table and will certainly keep your considerations in mind should we need your expertise.” The Spokane Tribe remained respectful of the urban Indian opinion but proceeded with the selection process.

The Tribal Process—Selecting a Name

The Tribal decision-making process often includes discussions and consensus. Five potential street names were nominated by Tribal historian Warren Seyler, Tribal members, and Spokane City residents. They included three historical and two contemporary figures: Chiefs Skull-halt and Polatkin, Whis-talks, Sadie Boyd, and George Flett. Seyler, also a former Tribal Chairman, suggested the renaming process include the Tribal Culture Program and Tribal Language Department, while Spokane Tribal member Jamie Sijohn, Jim’s daughter, suggested consulting the Elders. On October 15, 2020, the renaming committee sent out an explanation with a short history on each individual to the Tribal Elders with their delivered senior lunches. Tribal Council members then received emails and phone calls from Tribal Elders sharing their thoughts. Tribal Council members created a forum for community discussion.

On October 21, 2020, yet another meeting at Tribal headquarters in Council chambers (with participants wearing masks) was held with the Tribal Council, Elders, and culture staff (some of whom called in instead due to the pandemic) to discuss the street-name suggestions. The committee recommended a female leader to acknowledge the contributions of Spokane women. Following Tribal protocol, Chairwoman Evans sent emails to the Yakama Nation, Colville Tribe, and Coeur d’Alene Tribe. The Tribal leaders also discussed the proposed names and had discussions with their Culture Committees.

The Spokane Tribe and sister Tribes came to an agreement to name the street Whis-talks, after a revered woman warrior who was part of the resistance against colonization. *The Spokesman-Review* ran a front-page article on October 30, 2020, by Ted McDermott, who wrote: “By renaming the road after a female warrior who stood up to [Wright], Hill said the Tribe is ‘recognizing the enduring spirit of warrior women.’” For generations, women have been the backbone of our families and our Tribes, and still continue to play powerfully important roles not only in our Tribal communities, but also in our urban community.

Whis-talks Name Proposal Submitted to the City of Spokane

The Spokane Tribe submitted the proposed name “Whis-talks” to honor the “Women Warriors—Then and Now.” The Spokane Tribe not only wanted to honor our Native women from the battlefields of the 1800s, but they also wanted to honor the Spokane Tribal women of their families today. With this new name, they honor the female warriors who fight daily to protect and preserve their culture, lifeways, families, lands, environment, and Tribe. The City of Spokane benefits from the Spokane Indian women and Indigenous leaders who serve as nurses, lawyers, professors, school board members, and directors of urban service centers. The Tribal Council and Tribal Elders wanted to recognize Indigenous women who support and inspire our families and communities. Whis-talks exemplifies the strength of our Indigenous women.

Documented and Oral History of Whis-talks

Not only did we desire to honor Whis-talks as a warrior woman, but also share her story. To that end, I compiled the documented history, along with oral history shared by Tribal Elders, and drafted the following historical account of Whis-talks (recently updated to include additional source attributions), which the Tribe then presented to the City:

Whis-talks was the daughter off Chief Polatkin and wife of Qualchan. This marriage union brought peace and stability to the region. Her family was known for their intelligence and good looks, and her beauty is famous to this day, as first told by Qualchan’s sister Mary to an early historian [William Compton Brown, as cited in Boyden, 1996, p. 296].

Whis-talks, whose name means “Walks in a Dress,” rode alongside her husband Qualchan. [Richard Scheuerman and Michael Finley (2008) wrote, “According to Kip: With the utmost boldness they rode directly up to Colonel Wright’s tent” (p. 87).] They wore their “finery of beaded buckskin” as they rode into Colonel Wright’s camp [Splawn, p. 118]. Whis-talks took up Qualchan’s beaded medicine staff with feathers. The [C]hiefs and headmen usually carry them in ceremonies. Mary [said that it was] “Qualchan’s custom to have Whis-talks ride with him and she carried his medicine staff” [Boyden, p. 325]. The Yakamas told the story of Whis-talks, who also served as warrior. “Looking up,” historian A. J. Splawn [1958] later wrote, a soldier “saw Qualchan’s [wife] cutting her way through the troops with a sword she had seized from one of them” [p. 119].

Author T.G. Boyden [1996] wrote that Whis-talks described how “two soldiers entered the tent and grasped her husband at the head and shoulders, threw him on his back and bound him with cords” [p. 329]. Whis-talks stated, “I tried to cut one soldier with my knife, but another one kicked the knife out of my hand and then a great number of soldiers crowded in, overpowered us” [p. 329]. Whis-talks said that when she saw the rope go over Qualchan’s head, she knew all was lost. Grabbing a sabre from a soldier, she prepared to leave the camp.

Tribal people later recounted the story of Whis-talks in the moments of her husband Qualchan’s death. Her horse became nervous under the stress and strain of disturbance, but she kept it well in control and proudly waited in the saddle for her fate to be disclosed. The soldier indicated she could move on. Whis-talks swung her horse around, to a position where she could face the officer in charge in front of Wright’s tent. Then, lifting the medicine staff, she struck the staff into the ground. She reined her horse about and rode in quiet dignity out of camp.

Whis-talks went into Flathead country, joining buffalo hunts east of the Rockies, where battles with the Blackfoot Tribe were common. Later, she returned and lived her final years at the mouth of the Spokane River.

Native Women and Issues of Gender

In the passage above, I took the liberty of changing the extremely offensive and derogatory word “squaw” to “woman” or “wife” in these historical accounts of Whis-talks. Overall, this word served as a common historical description of Native women by European-Anglo authors and soldiers in their journals as part of the settler-colonial mentality, a usage we now deem unacceptable. As rather recently noted by both me and Mary Ann Keogh-Hoss (2018), “The literature describes the role of Native American women as more powerful than European men would have understood” (p. 226). Moreover, American Indian women writers argue that the subordinate status of contemporary Tribal women is a result of the imposition of Spanish and Anglo colonists’ policies and programs (Hill & Keogh-Hoss, 2018, p. 227). Today, Indigenous women are reclaiming their roles as leaders and are regaining prominence. Many social roles are still defined by gender, but clearly, women have remained integral to the decision-making processes of Tribal communities. Even though opportunities for leadership were thwarted by Eurocentric attitudes and U.S. Federal Indian politics provided further barriers, Native Women continue to take on leadership roles. With this new street name, the Spokane Tribe specifically wanted to honor the contributions of women, which is not common practice.

Another rare example occurred in Arizona some years ago. In their article “Geographies of Toponymic Inscription,” Rose-Redwood et al. (2010) report that racial minorities are now utilizing place-naming as a political strategy to address their “exclusion and misrepresentation” within traditional place-naming practices (p. 464). They discuss the white-dominated constructions of heritage and highlight an example in Phoenix, Arizona, where officials worked to have the offensive name “Squaw Peak” renamed for Lori Ann Piestewa, who was the first Native American female soldier to be killed in combat in the Iraq War in 2003. Moreover, the National Congress of American Indians weighed in on the issue of identity politics stating that using the term “squaw” is racist and disrespectful toward Indigenous women, “who are often political and social leaders of our communities” (Kelleher, 2004, p. 121). Not only do Indigenous women rarely have buildings or streets named after them, but they also have to deal with outmoded derogatory terminology.

In general, society rarely names streets after women. In her article, “Mapping the Sexism of City Names,” Linda Poon (2015) notes that, problematically, few streets are named to memorialize women. She reports how researcher Arsunna Sankaranarayanan and colleagues developed a program called “Mapbox” that showed how scarce female street names are around the world. They found only 27.5% of streets with female names, and many of those names were those of the wives and daughters of famous men. Therefore, not only is there an uneven distribution of gendered street names for Indigenous females, but we also have to stop the use of derogatory names.

Overall, *who* is elected to City Council matters. Does the elected leadership espouse and support social equity? The City of Spokane, specifically Councilwomen Wilkerson and Stratton, sponsored the name-change proposal and put forward the official application. The City stated:

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Spokane City Council requests that the Plan Commission make a recommendation to the [C]ity [C]ouncil for a new name(s) for Fort George Wright Drive, to help us move forward into a shared hopeful, united, peaceful[,] and welcoming future. BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the City Council requests that the Plan[...] Commission also make [a] recommendation, in consultation with the Historic Landmarks Commission, as to how Spokane [will] memorialize this dark chapter in our region’s history while renaming the street to reflect our shared values. (2020)

This resolution reflects a new attitude at City Council. Today we have a City Council that cares about social equity and worked with the community colleges of Spokane and property owners along the roadway in support of the efforts to change the name.

The City of Spokane's Name-Change Process

On October 14, 2020, the Plan Commission held a virtual workshop to discuss the application to change the name of Fort George Wright Drive. City staff explained the name-change process. As mentioned, previous to the workshop, Councilwomen Wilkerson and Stratton had officially submitted the application. In preparation, the City then reviewed all the address points along the road and developed a contact list. The City created a list of property owners to notify everyone of the date of the workshop, as required by statute. The applicant (Stratton and Wilkerson, in this instance) typically proposes the actual name change, but in this specific case, they contacted the Spokane Tribe to recommend a name. The City staff also notified the postal and emergency dispatch services. At this workshop, Evans spoke and shared our history:

Aw xest xl xalt pecya. Good afternoon. I am the Chairwoman of the Spokane Tribal Council. I appreciate the previous comments. This is the adjudicated historical homeland of the Spokane Tribe of Indians. My ancestors lived on this land and other Tribes visited. Those other Tribes came in and we welcomed them. I always acknowledge the Native Americans that live in the City in the current day. It's an honor to have the eighth largest Native urban population in the nation and for them to live on the historical homelands of the Spokane people. Then I know that the care and the Indigenous beliefs of taking care of the environment, our land, air, and water is still there. So, I am honored that there are 325 Tribes represented in Spokane.

My ancestors were a river people, a salmon people. [...] my ancestors, the Salmon Chiefs, welcomed the other Tribes to the area to share in the bountiful salmon harvest. We always gave permission for that. In no way do we intend to offend the Native people in the Spokane region. We welcome input on the naming. Colonel George Wright came to this area not to make peace but to exterminate my ancestors and other Tribal people that lived in this area. We all know Polatkin and Qualchan were warriors that [Wright hanged]. Whis-talks, his wife a Spokane, was a tremendous warrior of that time. My people suffered. One of the stories that came from the Deep Creek People, the people of the village were leaving the area because of the war and were fleeing for their lives. One of the Spokane women ran all the way to the river with her baby on her back. And when she got to the other side her baby had drown[ed]. She took the board and hung it on a tree. This is located on the current day Spokane Indian Reservation. We call this the "Babyboard Tree." It is near the mouth of the Little Tshimakain Creek. The Spokane people have eighty-eight documented historical and cultural sites within the City of Spokane. So, we have a rich history. So, we do not want to offend other Tribal peoples but would like to work together and not work against each other. If I had Tribal members living in Yakama, I would ask them to be part of the process but don't take it over because it's the Yakama's ancestral homelands. I do agree with inclusivity. I do want you to know this is the adjudicated historical homelands of the Spokane people. It is important to us that we continue to have input on the area and that's why we continue to provide guidance when it is asked of us. Colonel George Wright said he came to exterminate us. We will not be exterminated. We are still here. The Spóqínš people are still here. We've been here since time immemorial. We will bring back the salmon some day and we will bring back the salmon so we can heal. No disrespect to any other Tribal people that live in the area. You can't come in and erase our identity or take our historical homeland or rename it. I would hope that isn't what the current-day residents of the City would want to do. Because that's what Colonel George Wright was trying to do. At least give us that honor of being able to acknowledge that we are the Indigenous people of this area. I would not go into Yakama or Coulee Dam and claim that as our land. We will reach out to the Colville Tribe, Yakama Tribe, and Coeur d'Alene Tribe and get their input. It's important that we be heard and so I appreciate you taking the time to listen to me. I was told by my grandmother to listen with your heart, and I try to do that at all times. And realize that I myself have a lot to learn. I was born and raised on the Spokane Indian Reservation and was fortunate to have my grandmothers, uncles, and all of the Elders that were willing to share so much. I know there are many Tribes in the City of Spokane, and we support them, and we are thankful that they share this homeland with us. Thank you for allowing me to speak. Shey oh hoy lem lemsh. That is all I have to say. (October 14, 2020)

The powerful historical account by the Tribal Chairwoman Evans further motivated the group to continue to pursue the name change.

The Plan Commission held a hearing October 28, 2020, to discuss the name change. Several Natives from the City of Spokane complained that the process was not inclusive. Chairwoman Evans was very gracious about the complaints and explained that the Spokane Tribe worked with other Tribes to get agreement on the proposed name. Evans explained that the Spokane Tribe is a sovereign nation and that the City of Spokane sits on the ancestral homelands of the Spokane Tribe. Also, that Tribal Council is very busy with pressing issues such as COVID-19 and that it is not the Tribe's responsibility to consult with Natives living in Spokane. Moreover, if the City wished to rewrite history and did not recognize the City of

Spokane as the ancestral homelands of the Spokane Tribe, then she wanted no part of the renaming. On occasion you will find conflict between Tribes, and they may even include urban Indian organizations. Although there was disagreement with the process, everyone liked the name of Whis-talks Way.

After thirty years of Indigenous people and other City leadership working to change the name of the street, the seemingly impossible finally happened. On October 28, 2020, the City of Spokane Plan Commission initially heard the matter, and on November 11, 2020, held a final hearing in which they voted unanimously to recommend to City Council to change the name. Although we received complaints about the process, the City followed the legal planning process by holding multiple hearings with opportunities to both be heard and provide written comments.

Salish Language Meets City Code Requirements

An issue arose as to how the name “Whis-talks” should be written. The Salish dialect has sounds and fonts that are not utilized in the English language. The Tribal language and culture offices were consulted. “To walk” is “x^wísts” and “ál'qs” is the suffix for clothing, shirt, or dress. If we were just going with the spelling, the Tribal Language Director suggested we remove the hyphen: Whistalks or Whistalqs. However, the Salish dialect has no regular “k” in our language except for the borrowed words like “kanti” or “kapi.” Indigenous people experience challenges with Anglicized spellings in order to get to the closest correct pronunciation, an issue duly noted by one City representative: “We should not ask [the Tribe] to compromise anymore,” stated Plan Commission member Greg Francis. We appreciated this show of support.

Many discussions ensued on the Salish name “Whis-talks” and the use of the Tribal language dialect. Our Salish language represents our worldview and has complex meanings that do not translate well into English. As maintained by Wilson and Yellow Bird (2005), by utilizing your Indigenous language you recover Indigenous knowledge that “is in jeopardy of being lost as a consequence of colonialism...” (p. 3). Furthermore, colonization works to “methodically eradicate our Indigenous languages, our efforts to recover the language are also a powerful form of resistance” (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005, p. 3). Today, many Tribes are fighting to save their languages from extinction.

Many of the Tribal participants at the rally included community members who are rooted in Tribal culture, language, and history. The Tribal leaders from the Colville Tribe agreed on a name after consultation with Elders and their Culture Committee. As stated, the Spokane Tribe consulted with their Tribal linguist to determine the correct spelling of “x^wístalqs.” The Tribe submitted the phonetic representation “Whis-talks” to the City. The City staff explained that the emergency response team had a problem with the hyphen. Although the Plan Commission wanted to find a way to be more sensitive to the proper spelling, the City staff clarified that the naming current guidelines do not allow for any special characters or symbols. City staff explained that, in 2016, the city went through a county-wide naming standardization process. All of Spokane County uses the same naming conventions. They required about a year and a half to go through the county-wide process.

This new information sparked discussions as to how the Tribe’s viewpoint of history would be shared. Commissioner Cook believed that the City should provide a “‘way making’ sign and interpretation to ‘help heal the land and the people’” (2020). The code requirements restrict the use of special characters, but efforts are underway to accurately represent the Tribal dialect and add interpretive signs that tell the history from a Tribal point of view. After discussions on historical representation, the Plan Commission voted unanimously to recommend to City Council to change the name to “Whistalks Way.” This recommendation moved the process forward to the virtual hearing with the full City Council.

On December 14, 2020, the Spokane City Council held their official hearing regarding the name change from Fort George Wright Drive to Whistalks Way. We had some public comment regarding the renaming process, but most everyone spoke in favor of the new name. The vote to approve the name change by the City Council was unanimously in favor. The name change represents an accomplishment that had been decades in the making, and one due to the hard work of many people.

Overall, much of the movement’s success could be attributed to perfect timing and collaboration. Similar protests across the nation contributed to a sense of urgency to see the road renamed. The Spokane Tribe took a stand in their traditional territories, and the City Council did not give into pressure but respected Tribal sovereignty and Tribal protocol. Given this example, when other BIPOC find specific monuments offensive, they should deeply consider collaborating with City leaders, allies, as well as educating key stakeholders and the public. This successful collaboration of Tribal leaders and City officials demonstrates a reawakening and new awareness of history and provides action steps that can begin to help a community heal from past atrocities.

Further Recommendations

Based on this case study, and as the literature suggests, the ultimate goal of decolonial place-naming and cartography is to develop a toponymy and cartographic culture among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cartographers that is based upon, and respects, Indigenous mapping protocols (Larsen, S.C., 2013, as cited in Rose-Redwood et al., 2020). Scholars like Kiowa geographer Mark Palmer and non-Indigenous political geographer Cadey Korson expand the conversation of Indigenous toponymies and put forth the idea that cities and World Heritage maps have the potential of incorporating Indigenous content (2020, p. 183). They suggest that Indigenous place-names be accompanied by interpretive panels that explain the

meaning of the history of those names. One specific solution, Palmer and Korson propose, is “Indigital story maps” that can incorporate multimedia sources (audio, video, and additional interpretive content) to share the deeper meaning of the Indigenous storytelling custom (p. 184). Language interpretation is also needed, as Tribes have lost many of their Tribal language speakers.

The organizers of this name-change campaign in Spokane, Washington, would also urge cities to support Tribal efforts that draw on archival sources and oral histories to preserve the knowledge of their place-names, as suggested by Rose-Redwood et al. (2020). Statutes and place-names “memorialize[...] the survivors of frontier violence and express[...] a decolonial perspective from those descendants who carry the memory of massacres not verified [or ignored] by colonial bureaucracy” (p. 158). Toward this end, I have already been contacted by other organizations such as the Pacific Islander Community in Spokane, and a Citizens’ Advisory Council has been formed to consider the removal and/or future of the John R. Monaghan statue in Downtown Spokane. Monaghan is memorialized as a leader during the period of brutal American colonialism in Samoa. In this manner, this case study will serve as a tool kit for other marginalized groups to take action on issues of social equity.

Furthermore, we as citizens should continue to ask the difficult questions about the role that dispossession played in the formation of modern settler-colonial states and recognize that settler-colonial violence forms the foundation of colonialism. In order to decolonize the map, a community must record and prioritize historical Indigenous experiences of place and allow space for current cultural practices and ceremonies. Community organizers wishing to make name changes and remove offensive place-names or monuments should engage in letter-writing campaigns, plan rallies, educate community members with teach-ins on the true history of the area, and build relationships across social groups. Finally, who actually sits in positions of political power matters a great deal. Agents of change will need to work with politicians who have a strong moral compass that will help guide these positive initiatives.

Conclusion

Across the nation, we are witnessing the removal of statues, monuments, and toponymies that honor genocide or other heinous inhuman acts. Attitudes are also changing for the better here in Spokane, Washington. Of the 45 school buildings in the district, all but five are named after white men. Recently the Spokane School Board moved forward with a racial equity resolution following the protests in Spokane. The Board also promised to visit the issue of not just naming new schools with diverse intent but also possibly renaming others. On June 4, 2021, Spokane Public School Board members, the Mayor, and Spokane City Council gathered with the Spokane Tribal Council and dedicated a middle school to the late Pauline Flett, a Spokane Tribal Elder who fought for more than 50 years to protect and preserve the Spokane Salish language for future generations. Barry Moses said, “She recorded thousands of hours of speaking by fluent Elders, and also transcribed those tapes by hand in both English and Salish. In her lifetime, she created a massive archive that has become a critical foundation for a new generation of language speakers.” The significance of a middle school being named after a female Spokane Tribal citizen cannot be overstated. In addition to Whis-talks, Pauline Flett will be one more *Spoqínš šinmsčín* who will be recognized and thus honored by her community for her contributions.

As this study illustrates, public debate continues at Plan Commission and City Council meetings held to change the settler-colonial names of roads and landforms. Today the citizenry and leadership of these cities must reconsider the settler-colonial history and the official names that memorialize individuals who committed such horrific acts as genocide. In this instance, the Spokane Plan Commission and City Council opted for a decolonized process of finding a new name for the roadway. However, as this report also illustrates, this process is not a simple one. These efforts involve the clarification of municipal codes, as well as concerted coordination between plan commissions, city councils, city staff, and citizens. Moreover, some members of the public have differing opinions on whether these established historic names should be changed at all.

However, once the historical context is understood, many citizens and decision makers will likely support the name change. This case study demonstrates that a grassroots effort to gain public support with educational efforts like teach-ins, coupled with a planned protest rally at the actual site, proved effective. The timing of national events, such as the murder of George Floyd and subsequent protests, also helped bring to light inequities that remain today. We must not only focus on the ethical de-naming of commemorated colonizers but also center the discussion on the Indigenous story from the Indigenous perspective. The Spokane Plan Commission and City Council worked with the Spokane Tribe, who in turn worked with other area Tribes to change the narrative and the name to one that recognizes the injustices against Indigenous people and honors the warrior women of both yesterday and today. As of this writing, the street signs have been replaced to “Whistalks Way,” and the City has requested that the Spokane Tribe assist in the development of interpretive content that explains the history of genocide and tells the story of the *šinmsčín*, the woman warrior named Whis-talks.

Today, though the *Spoqínš* may have lost some of their songs, they are still fighting to keep their language from extinction. The cultural connection to much of their traditional territories is also nearly lost. Taking the place of Tribal territories are City-planned roads, pipe, and pavement, all according to comprehensive plans, zoning, and urban sprawl. Yet the

S'póqínš still tell the true history, sing the song about Hangman Creek 163 years later, and they remember the strength and the medicine of their ancestors. These songs are medicine for the hard times Indigenous people have experienced. As with many Indigenous people, this journey was not just a story—it was many stories and many songs, relived and remembered, tracing the footsteps of their ancestors. Changing the street's name honors the history of the original inhabitants, the S'póqínš, and their relationship to their sacred place. With "Whistalks Way," we honor women warriors and tell their story; we sing the songs of our ancestors and work to empower the next generation of Indigenous people.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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