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A Fishy Proposition: Regional Identity in the Pacific Northwest

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“The Pacific Northwest is simply this: wherever the salmon can get to.” So declares Timothy Egan, *New York Times* correspondent for the region. Many in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington have joined Egan in invoking the fish as *the* regional marker; indeed, their attachment only increases as runs of wild salmon diminish in size with each passing year. Will Stelle, head of the Northwest office of the National Marine Fisheries Service, elaborates on the sentiment when explaining why saving the species is so crucial: “Salmon are part of the heart and soul of the Pacific Northwest. They have defined its history, and its culture and hopefully its future.”¹

This identification between salmon and the Northwest is striking for bringing what may be an unprecedented sense of certainty and consensus to regional thinking. In the 1990s, people in Idaho, Oregon, and

Washington are convinced that there is a clearly and autonomously defined Pacific Northwest and that it is distinguished by its salmon. Moreover, like most peoples in most places and times, they tend to read their own convictions back into the past. Thus they claim that there has always been a distinct and self-defined Pacific Northwest and that salmon have always been "the heart and soul" of its identity. The equation depends on both essentialism, as though the region truly were "simply this," and timelessness, as though Northwest history and culture were always defined by "simply this."

As strongly as Northwesterners today identify the region with salmon, it has not always been so. At least until recently, the peoples who have lived in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington have generally neither defined themselves readily as belonging to the same region nor, naturally, agreed on the meaning of that region. Indeed, historical consideration of how Northwesterners managed to forge a common identity leads one to suspect that regional consciousness in the Pacific Northwest has been a fishy proposition. That is, regional identity over the years has tended to be somewhat dubious, artificial, and ever-shifting.²

The fishy aspects of regional consciousness, of course, contradict the essentialist and timeless formulations that Northwesterners have preferred. Wild salmon make an ideal symbol for the region because, being native and natural, they seemingly defy the contingent and constructed character of regional consciousness. Salmon are not the first instance of inhabitants of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho looking to nature as a source of regional identity. They have also seized on the Columbia River and rainy weather as ways of "naturalizing" a regional identity, of equating the Northwest with something truly homegrown and enduring, maybe even unique.³

The operative assumption seems to have been that something indigenous to or inherent in a place gives it some stable or fixed meaning. Historical perspective on the Pacific Northwest, however, suggests that its inhabitants have more frequently tended to import a series of meanings for the region—even "natural" ones—from outside its boundaries. Regional identity has in many respects been imposed on or adopted within Washington, Oregon, and Idaho because of these states' relationships to other places. To a significant degree, the idea of a Pacific Northwest has been the creation of outsiders to the region as well as the product of ideas about places outside the region. To understand the current regional sen-

timent that Salmon Are Us, we need to appreciate how regional identity came to be constructed from materials provided by terms and interests located beyond regional borders.⁴

"WHEREVER THE SALMON CAN GET TO" makes for a problematic definition of region, if taken literally. The species of Pacific salmon (genus *Oncorhynchus*) known as sockeye, pink, chum, chinook, and coho indeed begin their lives, spawn, and die in the rivers and lakes of Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. But they also spawn in North American watersheds ranging from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers in California to streams in British Columbia and Alaska, as well as in Asian watersheds ranging from the Russian far east to North Korea and Japan. More than one observer has thus called salmon "the totem of the North Pacific Rim." Yet the "Pacific" salmon also run in Canadian, American, and Russian rivers emptying into the Arctic Ocean. On top of that, they have been transplanted to the Great Lakes, New Zealand, Australia, and Chile.⁵ If we take at face value Egan's words "wherever the salmon can get to," the Pacific Northwest includes Coppermine in Canada's Northwest Territories and Vladivostok in Siberia; Chongjun, North Korea, and Hobart, Australia; Sacramento and Cleveland and Detroit.

At the same time, there are areas of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho where salmon cannot get to, unless they are trucked in. Parts of Oregon and Idaho drain into the Great Basin rather than the Pacific and cannot support anadromous fish. Some rivers within the Columbia River watershed, such as the Clark Fork, have proven out of the reach of spawning salmon; in one prehistoric era, even the main stem of the river was blocked. Other streams that at one time supported the fish no longer do. Dams on the Columbia and its tributaries have contributed most to the diminution of runs; those watersheds upstream from Grand Coulee, in a strict application of Egan's definition, were excommunicated from the Pacific Northwest when the dam was built during the 1930s. Additional salmon habitat has been destroyed by means other than dams.⁶

As a literal definition of the Pacific Northwest, "wherever the salmon can get to" takes us both too far and not far enough. Aiming to identify the core ingredient that all parts of the region have in common, it settles on a species of fish that is not found in every corner of the Northwest but is found in many places outside. The appropriate question appears not to

be whether salmon really are the essence of the Northwest. We need to ask rather, in the late twentieth century, why so many Northwesterners have chosen salmon as the regional symbol, and, more broadly, how it is that they have come in the first place to have a common identity that requires a regional symbol.

To appreciate why salmon loom so large today in Pacific Northwest identity, we should take them figuratively rather than literally. The fish, Richard White explains, need to be viewed not so much as biological organisms but as "repositories of meaning" or "tokens of a way of life."⁷ As icons, the fish convey a variety of messages. They stand, for instance, for the relative abundance of natural resources long associated with the Pacific Northwest, and they represent a concern about the environment that unites diverse peoples who have long fought over regional resources. As fish that migrate across the Cascade Range, which divides the Northwest in half, they are a symbol shared by eastern and western subregions—two parts of the Pacific Northwest that have often not agreed. Additionally, sanctification of salmon serves to mask old grievances between Indians and non-Indians, with the latter now posing as "Indian-like" in their newfound appreciation of "the land" and its resources. When Egan summarizes the disappearance of salmon as the "loss of a regional right," he is claiming for late-twentieth-century Northwesterners the same thing that Indians have claimed for decades—that salmon have been essential to their way of life and identity as members of a regional "tribe."⁸ (A key difference was that some Indians' right, unlike Egan's "regional right," was actually recognized in law.)

But meanings valid or widely held today had little resonance with earlier generations. The significance of salmon as cultural "repositories" has changed dramatically over the decades. Before the arrival of Europeans, many Indians in the area regarded salmon as integral to their cultures, but they did not associate them with anything like a region, of course, because there was no notion of a Pacific Northwest until non-Indians arrived and began to incorporate the territory into Euro-American geographies. The initial newcomers—explorers and fur traders—hardly regarded salmon as a distinguishing feature of the country. If anything, many of them disliked it and complained of Indians smelling like fish. Fur traders resisted making salmon a dietary staple. They preferred the pemmican (preserved meat, often bison) they had known east of the Rocky Mountains, and when that proved unavailable in the North-

west their next preference was horseflesh, another red meat. Some who came to depend on preserved portions of the fish regularly disdained the dish as "horrid dried Salmon." Disregard for salmon continued into the 1850s when U.S. officials signed treaties recognizing some Indians' right "to fish in common" with non-Indians at "all the usual and accustomed places."⁹ Surely if whites had valued salmon as a resource, they would not have allowed Indians such liberal access to it.

During the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, non-Indians changed their minds about salmon's value. They discovered its economic potential and began extracting it, processing it, and marketing it around the world, while increasingly denying Indians access to the fishery. Salmon became something of a symbol of the American Northwest not so much in its "natural" form, but as a canned good that permitted consumers across the globe to sample a taste of the region. Northwesterners' attachment to the fish was not strong enough, however, to afford protection to its wild runs. Partly by overfishing, partly through the exploitation of such other resources as timber, minerals, and farmland, and partly because of industrialization and urbanization, inhabitants of the region steadily diminished both the runs of salmon and their spawning habitat.¹⁰ Their embrace of dams on northwestern rivers, culminating in the decades between 1930 and 1970, exemplified a willingness to sacrifice wild salmon for what was regarded as a greater good. New technologies such as hatcheries and salmon-farming offered some hope that the region could have its fish and consume it, too. Only when those technologies did not live up to expectations did much concern about protecting the fishery emerge, and only then were salmon widely regarded as symbols of the entire region. The idea that salmon in their "natural" state were the essence of the Pacific Northwest is a recent invention.

If salmon have served as repositories of meaning, their contents have changed continually over time. Ideas about the fish's importance have been unstable and contested, different for each group and province of the region and each period in its history. By the same token, consciousness of a Pacific Northwest—in sharp contrast to the universalist language used to express it—has also been an ever-changing, contested, contingent mentality, different for each demographic, spatial, and temporal division of the region and its history. Northwesterners today claim that salmon have always been the essence of the region. But sixty years ago, the non-Indian population was more persuaded that a combination of

dams, irrigation canals, and hydroelectric power was the regional signature. These engineering projects suggested that the region deserved to be called Our Promised Land.¹¹ And a century before that, some non-Indian occupants focused especially on furs as the dominant feature of the region they called the Hudson's Bay Company's Columbia Department.¹² Clearly, those aiming to track regional consciousness in the Pacific Northwest must be prepared to chase a moving target through time, and to pay attention to its changing name.

They must also be prepared to follow that target from group to group and place to place. Regional consciousness has proved elusive in part because the social composition of the Pacific Northwest has been so varied and changing. Diverse groups of inhabitants have brought widely different perspectives to the idea of region, making it difficult to develop a shared sense of place. Consider the phrase "Pacific Northwest." Although reified over the years, those words began as a *relative* term. "Northwest" made sense only if understood in relation to the framework of American history, for it identified a region at the northern and western edge of today's forty-eight contiguous states. "Pacific" (or often "new") was used in large part to distinguish today's Northwest from the "old" Northwest of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—what we now might call the upper Midwest. In other words, "Pacific Northwest" has made sense only for those who imagined the territory within the context of U.S. continental expansion. The term had little meaning for, say, Indians, to Canadians and Russians eyeing the same territory for possible annexation, or to Asians migrating there in the later nineteenth century. That is, it made little sense unless and until the American context from which the phrase derived its meaning was accepted. Regional consciousness of a "Pacific Northwest" began with *American* colonization of the territory and depended primarily on the perspective of *American* citizens, most of whom regarded the eastern states as the core of their nation and the Pacific Northwest as part of the periphery.

After its incorporation into the imagined community of the United States in 1846, the Pacific Northwest seldom constituted its inhabitants' primary sense of identity.¹³ The term "Northwest" hinged on the region's relationship to nation, and region did not replace nation as people's primary attachment. Newcomers from the United States regarded themselves first as Americans, not Northwesterners. Soon many of them also emphasized local attachments, saying that they belonged to Portland or

the Walla Walla Valley. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, region has generally fallen behind (as well as in between) the more primary attachments of nation and locality. Regional consciousness has been not just an elusive, shifting identity, a social construction always under construction, but one—and not the strongest—of the ways that people in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington linked themselves to place.

Moreover, within the region there are many subregional divisions that, while contested and contingent and constructed, too, have over the years also generally staked strong claims on people's loyalty. Geographers identify two major physiographic provinces in the Northwest: a wetter, greener place to the west of the Cascade Range and a drier, browner place to the east. Anthropologists point out that these provinces coincide with two distinct "culture areas," the Northwest Coast and the Columbia Plateau, each of which accommodated a set of Indian peoples with certain characteristics not shared on the other side of the Cascades. From the mid-nineteenth century, non-Indians have perpetuated many east-west differences in their thinking and behavior. The more urbanized settlement, timber and fishing economies, and cultural amenities on the ocean side of the mountains, for example, have had no equivalent to the east. Economic development, furthermore, generated over time still another set of divisions between metropolis and hinterland. These differences also tend to set apart west from east, metropolis from hinterland, though lines of economic power run in other directions as well.¹⁴ Finally, a powerful latitudinal division runs perpendicular to the longitudinal Cascade Range—the border between Washington and Oregon.¹⁵ Interstate differences in the region have also been imagined, contingent, and contested, but over the decades the accumulating effects of law and politics have reified and strengthened the power of state boundaries in enduring ways. Between modern Oregon and Washington, differing political cultures, links to the United States government, and land-use-planning systems exemplify the Northwest's multiple personalities.

In the face of so many supraregional and subregional alternatives, regional consciousness in the Pacific Northwest—in the form of some kind of identification with the three-state area—may be said to have been generally rather weak and at times inconsequential. Inhabitants have found it difficult to agree on a single indigenous characteristic of the Pacific Northwest—apart from wild salmon in recent years—as a source of common identity, so regional consciousness has seldom papered over effec-

tively the many fissures dividing cultures and societies in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

What, then, has been the basis for the limited regional consciousness that did emerge? I contend that, rather than looking mainly within the Pacific Northwest to find some sort of indigenous roots of regional consciousness, we should look more outside the three states. The notion of a Pacific Northwest has been cultivated best by outsiders who have wanted to shape the idea of region for their own purposes, and by inhabitants whose sense of place has depended extensively on their ideas and feelings about locales elsewhere. Regional consciousness in the Northwest has been largely constructed by reference to terms, interests, and images located beyond the boundaries of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho—in particular, in the vaguely defined regions of the “East” and in California.¹⁶

This speculation diverges from conventional explanations of regional consciousness. A more accepted model suggests that as a region matures and settles down, it acquires more resources for and interest in “indigenous cultural development.” In particular, writers and artists emerge who, after interacting over time with the physical and cultural surroundings, create works that qualify as *prima facie* evidence of a regional mentality. Thus authors such as Ken Kesey, Ivan Doig, and William Kittredge and painters such as Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, and Guy Anderson are classified as exponents of a “Northwest” style or school.¹⁷

This conventional wisdom satisfyingly accounts for only some aspects of regional identity. For one thing, it holds out as exemplars of regional consciousness individuals whose work might better be associated with only part of the Northwest—for instance, the west side of the Cascades. For another, in this view regional consciousness is mediated largely through those mostly white, mostly male members of cultural elites who are supposedly best able to distill northwestern traits into some sort of creative essence. The suggestion is that less well known people and their more “mundane” lives have had little to do with shaping regional identity. Finally, the conventional wisdom assumes that regional consciousness comes only after long-term and thoughtful contact with the region, and it implies that newcomers and outsiders have not had equally significant attitudes toward the Northwest. This assumption in particular bears scrutiny. One could argue that many newcomers and outsiders have had a greater stake than “settled” residents in establishing regional identity. Because they have been less caught up in the various subregional divi-

sions afflicting the region, newcomers and outsiders may have been capable of identifying more with an entire three-state area than with one of its subsections.

The relationship between the Northwest and its inhabitants differs from that of other American regions. John Shelton Reed, for example, identifies the South as the place that has produced Southerners.¹⁸ And, indeed, most Americans recognize Southerners when they meet them, and know whence they came. By contrast, few Americans outside Oregon, Idaho, and Washington regard those who have left the region as Northwesterners. The Pacific Northwest has generally not been a place people come from; it has been neither a major source for internal migration within the United States nor a significant cultural hearth.¹⁹ Rather, it has been a destination to which other Americans have gone. This fact looms large for explaining regional identity.

Instead of highlighting those who have settled down and soaked up the Northwest, we need to pay more attention to the relative mobility and newness of the non-Indian population. Voluntary migrants to the Northwest have by definition been involved in a process of regional comparison and contrast. First, they have chosen to leave one place after measuring it against prospective destinations. Then, having decided to move, they have had to choose a new place to live from among the alternatives. Once transplanted, furthermore, they have continued to compare and contrast between regions and, if not satisfied with the initial decision, sometimes opted to relocate or return. Explicit in all such comparison and contrast has been the matter of which place is best suited for migrants, and vice versa.²⁰

The term “voluntary migrants” helps convey the idea that, to some extent, people *chose* the region and that their choices are important starting points for comprehending regional identity. However, I do not mean to suggest that decisions to move to and stay in the Northwest were fully democratic, always “voluntary,” or equally available to all prospective migrants. There is ample evidence, for instance, that among families on the overland trail, women’s and children’s ability to affect the decision to move across country was quite limited.²¹ Some people have always been freer to choose the Pacific Northwest than others. Moreover, even before the Euro-American population became the majority in the Pacific Northwest, it undertook concerted efforts both to marginalize people of color within its society and to inhibit or prevent people of color from migrating

to the Pacific Northwest. Over the years since 1840, whites in the Pacific Northwest have discouraged African-Americans from coming; coerced Indians onto reservations and away from economic opportunities; lobbied the federal government to restrict or halt Asian-American immigration; pressured Chinese immigrants to leave, sometimes violently; prevented Japanese immigrants from owning land; and supported both the internment of people of Japanese descent during World War II and their continued exile from the region after the war.²²

Since the Pacific Northwest became a holding of the United States, then, white Americans have dominated the region legally and, after a brief time, numerically. Their power to exclude nonwhites from outside the region and to marginalize them inside the region, combined with the area's remoteness from the sources of African-American and Hispanic migration within and to the United States, has made the regional population considerably less diversified racially than the nation's. In 1940, none of the three states had a population of less than 97.8 percent white, in a country of not quite 90 percent white. World War II began a period of substantial change in the composition of the region's population, yet in 1990 the number of white Northwesterners (especially in Oregon and Idaho, with 92.8 and 94.4 percent, respectively) once more far exceeded the national figure of 80.3 percent white. (It should come as no surprise, then, that American white supremacist groups in the late twentieth century have been attracted to the region as one place where their goal of an exclusively white population seems relatively attainable.²³) Euro-American meanings for the Northwest have thus been defined with regard to other peoples, especially nonwhites, as well as to other places. Both by circumstance and by design, the American Northwest has been heavily white, and the prevailing constructions of regional consciousness there—the primary focus of this chapter—have been the product of American whites and, for the most part, males.

White or nonwhite, more or less voluntary in their coming, most inhabitants of the region have been either transplants to the Northwest or the children of transplants, and the process of relocating has shaped their regional identity profoundly. Comparisons and contrasts have been intrinsic to the decision making necessary for so much northwestward migration. In the 1840s, overland emigrants to the Oregon Country, as they termed the region, generally compared and contrasted conditions in the favored destination, the Willamette Valley, with those left behind,

usually in the Midwest. Simultaneously, they compared and contrasted the Oregon Country with the other leading, far western destination—California. As a Mexican and therefore officially Catholic holding until 1846, and as an area with little well-watered farmland, California ranked behind the Oregon Country until the discovery of gold made it the more attractive destination by far. Prior to 1849, Oregon had attracted 11,512 overland migrants; California 2,735. Between 1849 and 1860, California attracted more than 200,000 migrants, while more than 50,000 avoided the Golden State's temptations and headed to Oregon.²⁴ And so began the longest running bit of humor in regional history, first reported in the 1850s: "At Pacific Springs, one of the crossroads of the western trail, a pile of gold-bearing quartz marked the road to California; the other road had a sign bearing the words 'to Oregon.' Those who could read took the trail to Oregon."²⁵

The joke, of course, glossed over certain facts. Once in Oregon, the virtuous did not always remain there. Gold lured so many Oregonians to California in 1849 and 1850 that observers guessed that two-thirds of the farms in the Willamette Valley had been abandoned.²⁶ By the same token, some who did not succeed in California moved northward to try their luck in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. The highly porous boundaries of virtually all American regions have made it tricky to generalize about the composition of their populations. Nonetheless, the joke about the Overland Trail contained a kernel of truth. Mid-nineteenth-century California and the Oregon Country possessed different resources and reputations; they attracted different kinds of emigrants (to summarize crudely, Oregon got more families and farmers; California, more males and miners); and the decisions made by the migrants—for many, before they ever saw the Far West—proved influential in establishing regional identity and perpetuating regional differences.²⁷

Oregonians and Washingtonians of the 1850s probably had little shared identity as Northwesterners. However, if they could not much agree on who they *were*, they could surely go on at length about who they were *not*: they were no longer part of the East or Midwest they had left behind, and they were not part of the Californian destination they had decided against.

The Golden State has figured prominently over the years in Northwestern ideas about region. It was often one of the few things about which white Northwesterners could agree, even as diverse groups of them

developed along distinctly different lines. Oregon gained statehood in 1859, for example, and Portland emerged as a significant metropolis; the two were integrated relatively quickly into national political and economic systems. Washington, by contrast, remained a territory and economic hinterland for thirty more years, and Seattle did not catch up to Portland until the early twentieth century. But although developing at different paces, the two shared a subservience to, and therefore a suspicion of, California.

As the center of capital, transport, and manufacturing, San Francisco dominated the Northwest economy for decades beginning in 1849. On Puget Sound, where California lumber barons prevailed until investors from Minneapolis–St. Paul arrived in 1900, the colonial nature of such outside control was well understood. “Are the people of the Territory, generally, advised as to the MANNER in which our lumbering interest is controlled?” asked the Olympia *Pioneer* in December 1853. “Are they aware that, to a very undue extent, it is controlled by irresponsible SHARPERS and SPECULATORS, resident in Sacramento, San Francisco, and elsewhere along the coast?” Portland newspapers railed similarly against the economic “tyranny” of California.²⁸

From the perspective of the metropolis, of course, things looked rosier. Writing on the eve of the arrival of the transcontinental railroad, Henry George scarcely exaggerated when he wrote, “Not a settler in all the Pacific States and Territories but must pay San Francisco tribute; not an ounce of gold is dug, a pound of ore smelted, a field gleaned, or a tree felled in all their thousands of square miles, but must, in a greater or less degree, add to her wealth.”²⁹ The advent of transcontinental lines only heightened San Francisco’s control. By 1880, the city, with 20 percent of the inhabitants of the Pacific coast, controlled 99 percent of its imports, 83 percent of its exports, and 60 percent of its manufacturing. It “had more factories, employees, capitalization, value of materials, and value of product than the other 24 western cities combined.”³⁰ When railroads arrived in the Northwest to stimulate growth there, San Franciscans, rather than worry about the competition, expected a new round of profits. “We need rich neighbor states,” wrote John S. Hittell in 1890:

The advance of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho . . . will be beneficial to California. . . . It will make a greater demand for those things we sell, and a greater supply of those we buy. It will multiply the number and the means of those people who will come to our State for pleasure and for

health. So long as men wish to escape from gloomy skies, dripping clouds, and dreary winters, and so long as they will seek a bright sunshine and a cheerful heaven . . . , so long the rich people of Oregon and Washington, Idaho and British Columbia, will enjoy much of their surplus wealth in the genial climate of the Golden State.³¹

No wonder Oregon and Washington chafed at California. Yet as much as Northwesterners resented their common economic domination from afar, they also recognized California’s success—at least tacitly—in their own boosterism. James Swan imagined in 1857 that only a lack of publicity prevented Washington from surpassing its competitor: “The Territory only needs men and capital to insure its being one of the most thrifty of our possessions, and when its value is more generally appreciated, we may expect to see as rapid an increase in the population as ever California had in its palmiest days.”³² Even today, a sign on the outskirts of Yakima forlornly bills the town as the “Palm Springs” of Washington.

In the first decades of American control over the Pacific Northwest, the inhabitants of Oregon, Idaho, and Washington did not have a strong, mutual, positive identity as a single region. But they were well along in fashioning a kind of “negative” identity based on the conviction that their adopted home was *not* like other places, particularly the Midwest and imperious California. In most instances, this negative identity served to make the Pacific Northwest stand above and apart from the alternatives. But in the minds of some, it took on less favorable connotations.

Northwestern urbanites cultivated their own peculiar version of regional consciousness in worrying that their cities were not similar enough to eastern counterparts. In a metropolitan context, success seemingly depended on demographic and economic growth, which in turn depended on towns becoming familiar, congenial, and refined places, similar enough to established cities that they could attract investors and immigrants from the East.³³

Northwestern cities tried several methods of imitating the Atlantic coast metropolis. One was in nomenclature. Before settlers on Elliott Bay accepted Seattle as their new city’s name, they proposed calling it New York Alki, *alki* being a Chinook jargon term meaning “eventually” or “by-and-by.” Towns in the lower Willamette Valley also went some distance to honor the East’s example. A coin flip in 1845 between a Maine and a Massachusetts native resulted in a city named Portland rather than Boston; Salem took its name from another New England town. Over time,

the residents of the Portland area cultivated—indeed, exaggerated—the similarities between themselves and New England urbanites because such imagery lent an economically and psychologically desirable sense of stability and refinement to urban life. A Portland that appeared as something other than a “frontier” community was a safer place for investors and immigrants because it seemed, in a word, more “eastern.” Portland confirmed its place in the pantheon of mature American cities by hosting a world’s fair in 1905. Not to be outdone, Seattle followed suit four years later.³⁴

Early ideas about the Pacific Northwest as a region depended on its white inhabitants’ perceptions of conditions in such other places as the Midwest, California, and the urban East, and these perceptions in turn emerged in large part when Americans moved to the region and attempted to develop it, all the while comparing and contrasting the Northwest with the other places. These beginnings of regional consciousness soon were supplemented by ideas that were largely imposed on the region by external powers, especially in the form of railroad companies. As before, new recipes for thinking about region would owe little to “indigenous” ingredients.

Transportation lines have loomed large in shaping notions of the Pacific Northwest because they have helped to knit together its different subregions. Commerce, cargo, and passengers moved up and down the Columbia River from a very early date, tying eastern Washington, eastern Oregon, and Idaho to the Willamette Valley and Pacific Ocean. Portland thus took its tribute before San Francisco grabbed the larger share. But the Columbia River system was never warmly or widely embraced as a source of regional mutuality. Monopoly control by Portland’s Oregon Steam Navigation Company alienated many, especially in Washington. Moreover, the Columbia River system touched few residents along Puget Sound or in communities on the ocean. Residents of Coos Bay on Oregon’s Pacific coast, for instance, went shopping in San Francisco, not Portland.³⁵

Virtually all inhabitants of the Northwest, however, needed railroads, or at least believed they did. And using bands of steel, the transcontinental lines that arrived during the 1880s and 1890s bound the region together in entirely new and more thorough ways. Railroad companies headquartered back east suddenly exerted an enormous and unprecedented influence on Northwestern affairs. Part of their influence came from linking the region more tightly to the global capitalist system; by itself, such integration likely served to diminish some regional differences.

But the railroad companies’ efforts to create a distinct regional identity may have counted for more. To be profitable in the Northwest, they needed to attract immigrants and investors who would buy their lands, ride their trains, and ship produce over their roads; they also wanted tourists to fill their passenger cars. To accomplish such goals, the companies launched continual publicity campaigns to sell Oregon, Idaho, and Washington as a single region called “the Great Northwest” or “the Great Pacific Northwest.”³⁶

A railroad agent once reportedly quipped, “The West is purely a railroad enterprise. We started it in our publicity department.”³⁷ The same could be said for the Northwest. Railroad companies often paid little attention to local- or state-oriented loyalties. Owning substantial holdings in all three states, it perhaps made sense for them to advertise regionally if it meant doing it once rather than three times. But their concern for the idea of region went beyond mere efficiency. Taking a proprietary interest in the notion of a Pacific Northwest, they sought to make it a household name. In 1923, publicists associated with James J. Hill’s railways criticized earlier promotions as too limited to single states, counties, or towns, and aimed now “to introduce the word ‘Pacific Northwest’ into the popular vocabulary—to make it convey a definite, clean-cut meaning. To make it stand for an idea.”³⁸

There is no precise way to gauge the power of railroads in strengthening a sense of place for the Pacific Northwest. But their influence appears to have been formidable. One measure was the frequency with which inhabitants of the region, apparently following the railroad companies’ example, began to use the term “Northwest” to refer to themselves. They had made limited use of the word before the railroads’ arrival. Suffragist Abigail Scott Duniway started a reformist newspaper in 1871 called the *New Northwest*,³⁹ for instance; Olympia’s *North-Western Farmer* was published briefly in 1875; and in the same year, Portland’s *West Shore*, “a family paper devoted to literature, science, art and the resources of the Pacific Northwest,” began a sixteen-year run. The frequency of use of the word “Northwest” increased substantially, however, after 1883 when the first transcontinental line arrived and the railroad companies began promoting the region in earnest. In 1883, there appeared a magazine successively called, until its 1903 demise, *Northwest*, *Northwest Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, *Illustrated Monthly Northwest Magazine*, and *Northwest Magazine*. Publicist Eugene V. Smalley published the

magazine in New York and St. Paul, and the Northern Pacific Railroad subsidized and distributed it around the world in order to advertise that region of the country made newly accessible by the completion of a rail line between Minnesota and Puget Sound. The magazine, along with a massive amount of other railroad publicity, appears to have increased the willingness of people in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon to view their three states as a single unit. In the 1880s and 1890s, the number of books and magazines using the term "Northwest" in their titles grew substantially. Many were produced in conjunction with the arrival of the transcontinental lines or in the course of promotions sponsored or encouraged by railroads.⁴⁰

It likely was not accidental that around the same time another kind of enterprise also began taking the idea of region more seriously. Edmond S. Meany at the University of Washington launched the first college course devoted to Pacific Northwest history in the late 1890s. He got his start as a historian by writing about "pioneers" in his days as journalist for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. He then became a state legislator and booster, helping to advertise Washington at the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893. Selling Washington led directly to teaching and writing about it; it is not clear that Meany saw much difference between the two activities. Thus he became one of the leading exponents of Seattle's 1909 world's fair and helped to ensure that the exposition took place on his campus. At the University of Oregon, Joseph Schafer started teaching regional history upon his arrival in 1900 and wrote the first scholarly text on Pacific Northwest history in 1905.⁴¹

As railroads helped to validate the idea of a Pacific Northwest inside the region, they promoted it as well among people outside the area. The Northwest's increase in population between 1880 and 1910—from 283,000 to 2,227,000—served as ample testimony to both the greater access that trains provided the region and the power of the companies' advertising in selling it. Many newcomers admitted that the railroads' promotional materials had turned their attention to the Northwest and thus given them a conception of the place even before they arrived. Because the publicity stressed an abundance of natural resources and a relatively good life in the region, many who accepted such images at face value were disappointed upon arrival.⁴² Yet regardless of the advertisements' accuracy, the terms in which the region was understood had been changed forever by railroad advertising.

Geographers have liked to discuss the Doctrine of First Effective Settlement, by which the dominant culture in an area is lastingly "imprinted" by the first colonizing "group able to effect a viable, self-perpetuating society" there.⁴³ But what if, because of advertising and other forms of publicity, the minds of large numbers of immigrants to an area have themselves been "imprinted" with (or colonized by) images and ideas concerning what that region is like? What if people have been conditioned to think a certain way about a place *before* they arrive? Maybe we need a Doctrine of First Effective Mass Advertising to account for the influence of modern public relations on ideas about region.⁴⁴

Such a doctrine could help explain lasting patterns of regional thought in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. If Northwesterners are upset about the loss of salmon as a "regional right" in the 1990s, it is due in part to earlier boosters forging links between the idea of a Northwest and its natural bounty. Railroads framed a "natural" Northwest, a place not only of resources to be extracted, but also of scenery to be appreciated and visited. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Great Northern and Northern Pacific lines, for example, commissioned Tacoma artist Abby Williams Hill to paint mountain scenes. They sent her to work in selected areas, incorporated the resulting paintings into their publicity materials, and displayed her artwork at world's fairs.⁴⁵ Such efforts increasingly equated the region with its scenery.

Even cities became part of nature's Northwest. Appreciating that paintings like Hill's made good advertising, urbanites were encouraged by such artwork to see their towns in a new light. Prior to the advent of the railroad, their main concern had been to demonstrate that their cities met eastern standards of stability and refinement. Nature in this context was to be conquered or ignored. Tacoma's founding fathers, after all, had instructed engineers "to lose all sight of the fact that [the town] was as yet a wilderness; to forget the forest that bearded the hillsides; to forget that they were on the frontier, and to anticipate the coming of a city of hundreds of thousands." If they donned blinders, Tacomans were convinced that newcomers would do the same: "Those who come here . . . expecting to encounter and suffer the crude associations of the wild frontier towns, will be very pleasantly disappointed."⁴⁶ After 1890 or so, however, as railroad ads helped condition Northwesterners to see their region anew, the beauty of a city's surroundings became more appealing and indeed was increasingly regarded as one of the features elevating it

above eastern counterparts. Abby Williams Hill herself summarized the emergent regional mentality while aboard a steamship leaving New York City for Europe in 1895: "Tacoma is more imposing from the water. The mountain [Mount Rainier] takes the place of the Statue of Liberty. We shall never need such a gift though our city become a metropolis."⁴⁷

So prominent had the natural become in regional thinking that it was casually blended with the urban into a mixture taken not just to rival but to surpass the eastern city. Once devoted to imitating eastern examples, northwestern urbanites now believed that their towns would attract migrants and capital because they differed from cities back east.⁴⁸ Identity still hinged on comparison and contrast with the eastern part of the United States, but northwestern urbanites were no longer such slavish imitators.

Of course, improving on the East was one thing, competing against California was quite another. Whatever Oregon, Idaho, and Washington could manage, California always seemed able to manage better. As much as Northwesterners worried about their standing in relation to the East, they were at least equally concerned about their standing compared with that of the Golden State, whose natural resources and scenery appeared to be more alluring than the Northwest's—or at least more successfully marketed.

Promoters went to extreme lengths to overcome California's edge. In 1924, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce published a racist booklet by Erwin L. Weber. *In the Zone of Filtered Sunshine: Why the Pacific Northwest Is Destined to Dominate the Commercial World*, that made explicit the pseudoscientific premises behind the idea of a region predominantly for whites. Weber explained that "intense and prolonged sunshine, as exists in the greater portion of the United States, is detrimental to the highest human progress. . . . The most energetic human types and the highest and most enduring civilizations have evolved in the cloudiest region of the world, Nordic Europe." He then asserted that the Pacific Northwest (by which he meant that area west of the Cascades), with its more modest sunshine, was one of earth's "few favored regions, which possess all the basic requirements necessary and desirable for the development of the most virile types of humanity, and the highest attainments of civilization." It should be home to superior Nordic peoples, Weber averred, while "the darker types" were better suited for such places as California, where the "Mediterranean races and their descendants will undoubtedly ultimately dominate." Weber predicted the "fall" and

"decay" of California civilization, comparing its fate with that of other "empires" built "under the temporary stimulus of intense sunshine." The Nordic Northwest, by contrast, could expect to thrive and endure, for its productive inhabitants would be so well adapted to its weather.⁴⁹

Selling the region required not only drawing attention to the relative homogeneity of the population, but also making virtues out of rain and overcast skies. And make no mistake: Northwesterners remained concerned above all with selling their region to immigrants and investors. Their growing interest in their physical environs did not yet make them into environmentalists. Rather, the main purpose for advertising nature remained to attract people who would help develop the country by exploiting its resources. Northwesterners continued to see their region as both underdeveloped compared with such places as California and the industrial Northeast, and in competition with those places for opportunities to grow. They lamented that the region, far from controlling its own economic destiny, was yet ruled by distant capital. Once more, they tended to define the region more by what it lacked than by what it contained.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Northwesterners planned to reduce the region's enduring subservience as some other place's hinterland. Proposals for the systematic damming of the Columbia River and its tributaries promised regionwide benefits ranging from increased inland navigation and irrigated agriculture to production of inexpensive hydroelectric power for electrifying rural households and attracting factories. Dams would move the entire region forward and ensure attainment of the "good life"—defined in terms remarkably similar to what railroad ads had pictured.⁵⁰ They would also require Oregon, Idaho, and Washington to cooperate extensively, to plan and build together as a region. The key to the success of this improbable crusade was that so much of the vision and so many of the resources required for the enormous effort and the new level of regional consciousness came once again from beyond the Northwest's borders.

The demand for dams and their attendant improvements—like that for railroads—had begun locally. But once again, the Pacific Northwest itself lacked the resources to acquire the transforming technology. Moreover, subregions and competing economic interests within the Northwest failed to agree on any one proposal because each insisted on maximizing its own advantages at the expense of the others.⁵¹ Dams became another source of regional commonality primarily because they were somewhat

imposed on the Northwest in the 1930s by the federal government, which not only possessed the resources for and interest in building them, but also provided a level of commitment to regional planning and development that Oregon, Washington, and Idaho by themselves could not attain. Like the railroad companies, the federal government had less intrinsic attachment to specific states and subregions of the Northwest; it saw the region instead as a single system to be managed. And in creating and operating that system—building the dams and power lines that further integrated the disparate fragments of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho—the federal government heightened regional consciousness. “In a sense,” writes Richard White, “the Columbia River dams made the Pacific Northwest a region.”⁵²

Planning, building, and managing the dams required thinking on a regional scale, which came more readily to the federal government as “outsider” than to local inhabitants. Such thinking came especially readily to those federal and regional planners of the 1930s who regarded regions as more logical frameworks than states or nations for the reengineering of communities, culture, and nature.⁵³ And it became enshrined thereafter in the federal bureaucracy. The government has had several agencies—such as the National Park Service, National Forest Service, and National Archives and Records Administration—that, over the course of the twentieth century, have regarded the Pacific Northwest as a single administrative unit. To operate the Columbia River dams, it created in 1937 another bureaucracy tailored specifically to the region. The Bonneville Power Administration is the little-understood agency responsible for collecting hydroelectric power from federal dams on the Columbia River system and distributing it throughout the region. Its operations offered another definition of the Northwest—wherever the kilowatts can get to. “The lines of the BPA marked the region’s boundaries,” explains White. “Where interties with other transmission systems occurred, there the Pacific Northwest encountered other regions.” Over time, the BPA’s ability to shape the region expanded. Law committed it “to supplying power at the lowest possible cost, planning its distribution, and stimulating the market. Above all, the agency worked to secure its own growth,” primarily by planning for and promoting regional growth.⁵⁴ Like the railroads, the BPA had its own proprietary stake in encouraging the idea of region.

The BPA promotions succeeded, in large part because the dams and their kilowatts were harnessed to national mobilization during World War

II and the Cold War. The resulting boom did not spread evenly across the region, but its inhabitants no longer regarded the Northwest as so underdeveloped.⁵⁵ They beheld themselves as more on a par with eastern centers of population, commerce, and industry, and less dominated by California. Some west coast rivalry remained, of course. Northwesters have not minded sending kilowatts to California in the summer because they have received kilowatts back during the winter. They have resented, however, regular appeals to divert Columbia River water southward to the various California canals and pipelines, helping to integrate and create a “Pacific Southwest.” At first, the issue remained one of continuing to compete with the Golden State for immigrants and investments. Thus in the later 1940s, during one of California’s periodic dry spells, Portland and Seattle newspapers responded to one proposal to divert Columbia waters southward by inviting Californians northward: “Why should not the people come to the water, instead of the water being transported . . . to the people? There are no barriers of which we are aware to the migration of drouth refugees to the irrigable lands of Oregon and Washington, which are within easy reach of the great Columbia.”⁵⁶

Twenty-five years later, many Northwesters had begun to think that erecting barriers between themselves and California was a pretty good idea. Still viewing the Golden State as a rival, they took regional identity to new heights by emphasizing not just economic distinctions, but also differences in the quality of life. Both because of and in response to sustained regional growth since 1940, environmentalism took serious hold of the Pacific Northwest during the 1960s. The region’s identification with its natural resources—nurtured for so long by railroad companies and other boosters—came to have new implications; calls for preservation rather than exploitation of those resources became stronger. Continued growth—especially “unmanaged” growth—came into question; overcrowding and pollution threatened the good life that the Northwest had advertised for so long as its trademark.

In this context, overgrown and overdeveloped California became the leading negative example; Oregon and Washington vowed not to repeat its mistakes.⁵⁷ Indeed, citizens in each state, especially west of the Cascades, increasingly focused on Californians migrating northward to live in the Northwest as the single greatest threat to their environment and way of life. Northwesters still seldom agreed on who they were or what their region signified, but they reached near consensus on what they were

not. They were *not* Californians, and they were not shy about saying so. Oregonians made the most of this antipathy during the 1970s when they tried to make newcomers, especially Californians, unwelcome. Much of the hostility came wrapped in humor, such as Governor Tom McCall's proposal to build a "Plywood Curtain" between the two states or another wag's plan to eliminate all Oregon off-ramps from Interstate 5, which runs from California to the Canadian border. But such bumper-sticker messages as "Don't Californicate Oregon" also expressed (and continue to express) deeply felt antagonism.⁵⁸

Washington was slower to rise to the bait, in large part because—with more people, more cities, more factories, more money, more nuclear reactors, and more of a stake in the American military-industrial complex—it resembled California too much. (Indeed, when Oregonians jokingly proposed rerouting Interstate 5 so that it went around rather than through their state, or closing down all its off-ramps, they were clearly hinting that Washingtonians were not all that welcome, either.⁵⁹) But by the late 1980s, many in Washington, especially around Puget Sound, considered recent growth as too rapid and uncontrolled, and felt overwhelmed by such problems as urban congestion, crime, and a lack of affordable housing. They might have blamed themselves (and booming companies like Boeing and Microsoft) for these problems—after all, most of the recent population increase was "natural," and many newcomers were friends and relatives of existing residents. But Washingtonians preferred to single out migrants from California as the major source of their problem. Once again, newcomers from the Golden State were made to feel unwelcome, as one transplant noted hyperbolically: "The hostility toward Californians is worse than race relations in the South. It's just open season for contempt of Californians."⁶⁰

By this point, California—much like the wild salmon today—clearly had to be taken figuratively rather than literally. It was hardly the main source of Washington's recent growth; in fact, between 1980 and 1987 Oregon accounted for more than one-fifth of net migration into Washington, while California accounted for less than one-eighth. Yet few were interested in blaming Oregon for the problems of growth in Washington (and nobody thought to ask whether Oregon's anti-California sentiments were infecting Washington). Instead, while Washingtonians and Oregonians preserved a sense of difference between them, they had also grown quite accustomed to deriving a Northwestern identity through compari-

son and contrast with the Golden State. They were not yet sure about what the Northwest *meant*—Salmon Are Us was still as spawning. But they were dead certain that the Northwest did *not* mean anything resembling California, whatever that was.

At the height of Oregon's anxiety about Californians, a Portland journalist, David Sarasohn, cast a wary eye on developments. Regionalism, he warned, was being replaced by sectionalism, and to explain the shift he referred to the American South: "regionalism is Robert Penn Warren; sectionalism is John C. Calhoun."⁶¹ Invoking Calhoun, architect of the theory of nullification and extreme advocate of states' rights, may not have been an altogether untoward forecast of the direction in which one variant of regional consciousness was headed. Some in the Pacific Northwest found inspiration in the novel *Ecotopia* by Ernest Callenbach (a Californian, of course). In this story, set in 1999, Washington, Oregon, and northern California had actually seceded from the United States in 1980 after threatening to blow up eastern cities with nuclear weapons. With that act of environmental terrorism as its founding moment, the new nation of Ecotopia—significantly led more by women than men—proceeded to mold its society and economy into an ecological utopia. It outlawed the internal-combustion engine, reduced the work week to twenty hours, and required those who wanted lumber for building a house to work for several months in the forests.⁶²

Ecotopia's literary qualities were debatable; twenty-five publishers rejected it before a Berkeley collective brought it out. But the novel sold surprisingly well and was bought by a paperback publisher. In 1979, it was still selling at a rate of 1,000 copies a month; Callenbach estimated that at least half of those copies were purchased in Washington and Oregon. Some Northwesterners seemed to feel that *Ecotopia* captured the essence of their region. So did reporter Joel Garreau, whose popular *Nine Nations of North America* not only dubbed the coastal strip from Monterey to Alaska "Ecotopia," but also, by calling it a "nation," weighed in on the side of sectionalism as opposed to regionalism.⁶³

The idea of Ecotopia emerged from a counterculture that has perhaps passed. The concept, though, lives on today in the more mainstream garb of "Cascadia," a term used to describe the urbanized coast stretching from Vancouver, British Columbia, through the Puget Sound area to Portland and Eugene, Oregon. Cascadia means different things to different people: some see an economic unit; others, a "bioregion." But to many, it implies

a relatively well-preserved and well-appreciated natural setting inhabited by people "with a love of the outdoors and reverence for the environment passed to us from the native people." Explicitly and implicitly, Cascadia suggests a population more disposed than those elsewhere to protect nature through such efforts as developing "sustainable cities."⁶⁴ With Ecotopia and Cascadia, regionalism had moved beyond sectionalism toward exceptionalism.

There could be something to the Northwest's confidence that it can avoid the mistakes made in other places and do things differently, perhaps even better. Maybe because American settlement there has been relatively recent and because it remains somewhat remote, its cities will prove more manageable, its problems more tractable, its social divisions more amenable.⁶⁵ But regional exceptionalism can certainly appear to be little more than an ill-founded conceit. If Northwesterners fancy themselves Ecotopians, how do they explain the fact that their wild salmon and spotted owls are disappearing, that their Cascade and Olympic and Blue Mountains contain enormous clear-cuts, that their highways are overburdened, or that their sprawling cities consume so much land? Inhabitants of the region have liked to point to California as the antithesis of the Pacific Northwest, but they have never had to look so far afield to see genuine environmental crises. They have also often regarded Californians as scapegoats, but the truth is that Northwesterners must bear primary responsibility for their own crises.

The region's recent fixation on salmon as markers of regional identity summarizes nicely the paradox of extinction in Ecotopia. In the same way that spotted owls serve as an indicator species for old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest, wild salmon have evolved as a kind of indicator species for northwestern exceptionalism.⁶⁶ Decades of regional consciousness, based on the idea of an abundance of natural resources and given shape by such outsiders as railroad companies, have helped elevate salmon to their current symbolic importance. They represent the Pacific Northwest as a place of plenty where the people feel at one with their natural environs. At the same time, the wild salmon's threatened status, which in itself belies the premise of Ecotopia, has only strengthened regional attachment to the fish. As species of salmon become endangered, it seems that the region to which Northwesterners have become attached—or rather that region's chance to remain exceptional—also becomes endangered.

The salmon scenario parallels one that unfolded a century ago, albeit at the national rather than the regional level. In the 1890s, the United States faced new challenges in the form of industrialization, immigration, labor radicalism, and urbanization, to name only some. Seeing uncomfortable and often unwanted changes on the horizon, some Americans worried about losing the distinguishing traits that had supposedly made the nation special. Whereas Northwesterners in the 1990s have made salmon the measure of regional exceptionalism, in the 1890s anxieties about the nation's future came to revolve around the West. Frederick Jackson Turner, among others, declared that the frontier was what had made the country unique and good. Warning that the extinction of the frontier around 1890 or so had brought to a close "the first period of American history," Turner implied that the United States needed to reestablish its identity by pioneering new challenges.⁶⁷

While Turner's formulation was powerful, influential, and not altogether wrong, today it seems more persuasive as evidence of national consciousness during the 1890s than as an explanation and periodization of American history.⁶⁸ One might speculate that Salmon Are Us will have the same significance for the Pacific Northwest. The region's survival as a distinct entity may seem to hinge on the fish, but in fact it does not. Even if the wild salmon themselves survive, they will likely lose their status as the premier regional talisman sooner or later. Historical perspective suggests that the Northwest has been characterized not by any one single meaning, but by a series of meanings or identities emerging over the years—each one suited to the cultures and concerns of its time; each one paradoxically expressed in essentialist language; each one contested by a variety of other ideas and a host of subregional divisions; each one also capable of building in part on, or even absorbing, its predecessors. Regional identity is always being reinvented—not always out of whole cloth entirely, but sometimes out of well-worn pieces of fabric. And, truth be told, a great deal of that reinventing has taken place outside the region.

Regional consciousness in the Pacific Northwest may seem fishy because it has been somewhat artificial and imposed, not altogether home-grown and natural. Even if it has been an ever-shifting, contested, and contingent social construction, however, regional identity has been forceful. It may seem inauthentic because it does not meet certain standards of indigenouness or durability, but the effects of regional identity on people are authentic enough, as many recently arrived Californians can

attest. Just as, at the national level, there is nothing dubious about the pervasive influence of the frontier on American identity, so in the Pacific Northwest there is nothing fishy about the power of icons such as salmon.⁶⁹

NOTES

1. Timothy Egan, *The Good Rain: Across Time and Terrain in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 22; Will Stelle, quoted in Scott Sonner, "U.S. Role Pondered on Rescue of Salmon," *Seattle Times*, 5 February 1995, B3. Egan's book surveys its topic by following "the historical fish arteries from the continental crest to the ocean"; one use of "wherever the salmon can get to" is establishing regional boundaries based on watersheds.
2. In taking up regional consciousness as a state of mind and sense of identity, my Pacific Northwest is subjective. Other studies have relied on more "objective" criteria, such as levels of education and kinds of religious affiliation, to define the Northwest as a "cultural region." See Raymond D. Gastil, "The Pacific Northwest as a Cultural Region," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 64 (1973): 147-56.
3. I am indebted to Richard White for the idea of a naturalized regional identity, and for many other helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.
4. Let me concede at the start that defining the Pacific Northwest as the three states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho represents an arbitrary, if commonplace, reliance on political boundaries. One could argue that British Columbia, western Montana, far northern California, and Alaska, or parts thereof, deserve to be considered part of the same region. One could also argue that much of Oregon and Idaho should be considered parts of the Great Basin and the Mountain West, respectively, and not the Pacific Northwest. I have decided not to engage those arguments here; my concern is more about the "unnatural" nature of regional identity than it is about determining any essential Pacific Northwest. Indeed, I doubt there is any such thing as an essential Pacific Northwest. Were there such a thing, however, the weight of the evidence in this chapter would suggest that it consisted of Oregon and Washington but not Idaho, whose deep cultural and physiographic divisions illustrate the dangers of relying on political boundaries for a definition of region. On Idaho's problematic nature, see Gastil, "Pacific Northwest as a Cultural Region"; and Carlos A. Schwantes, *In Mountain Shadows: A History of Idaho* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 1-4.
5. Robert L. Burgner, "Life History of Sockeye Salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*)," in *Pacific Salmon Life Histories*, ed. C. Groot and L. Margolis (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), 4, 9; William R. Heard, "Life History of Pink Salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*)," in *ibid.*, 122, 127; E. O. Salo, "Life History of Chum Salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*)," in

ibid., 233; M. C. Healy, "Life History of Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*)," in *ibid.*, 315-16, 317; F. K. Sandercock, "Life History of Coho Salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*)," in *ibid.*, 398, 401; Tom Jay, "Initiation," in Natalie Fobes, *Reaching Home: Pacific Salmon, Pacific People* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Books, 1994), 17.

6. In *Good Rain*, Egan considers "dams a false boundary marker" (22), meaning that his Northwest extends along some of the rivers where salmon no longer swim. However, there are additional, undammed river systems where the fish have disappeared for reasons other than dams. The fate of the Columbia River salmon has been told succinctly in Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); and Charles F. Wilkinson, *Crossing the Next Meridian: Land, Water, and the Future of the West* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1992), chap. 5.

7. White, *Organic Machine*, 90, 91.

8. Egan, *Good Rain*, 22.

9. Donald W. Meinig, *The Great Columbia Plain: A Historical Geography, 1805-1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 59-60; Frederick Merk, *Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal . . . 1824-1825* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931), 40, 47-48. Quotations about the miseries of a dried-salmon diet can be found in James R. Gibson, *Farming the Frontier: The Agricultural Opening of the Oregon Country, 1786-1846* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 24, 25. An introduction to treaty fishing rights is Fay G. Cohen, *Treaties on Trial: The Continuing Controversy over Northwest Indian Fishing Rights* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 35-51.

10. Jay Taylor has taught me most of what I know about salmon. The destruction of salmon habitat is discussed in Joseph E. Taylor, III, "Making Salmon: Economy, Culture, and Science in the Oregon Fisheries, Precontact to 1960" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1996), chap. 2.

Quoting the annual report of the Portland Board of Trade, the *Morning Oregonian* exemplifies the emergent notion of salmon as a defining commodity: "What renders this valuable export of more importance to Oregon than anything else which she produces is the fact that while all other countries compete with us raising wheat, wool and other products no other state or country in the world has competed or can possibly compete with us in producing canned salmon in large quantities, so that practically, with careful protection and development of our salmon interests, we can as a state have a monopoly over the world in controlling the prices of an article of diet which is everywhere in daily consumption and which ought and can yield to Oregon ten or twenty years hence an immense revenue, enriching our citizens and increasing the state's wealth and prosperity" ("Board of Trade," *Morning Oregonian*, 16 August 1877, 3). Similarly, Howard H. Martin called salmon "one of the symbols of the Pacific Northwest," just as "codfish is associated

with New England" ("Fisheries of the North Pacific," in *The Pacific Northwest: An Overall Appreciation*, ed. Otis W. Freeman and Howard H. Martin [New York: Wiley, 1954], 179). This recognition of salmon as symbol comes within the context of a discussion of fisheries as part of the regional extractive economy.

11. The term comes from Richard L. Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* (New York: Macmillan, 1938). The optimistic 1930s thinking about the region is summarized in Wesley Arden Dick, "When Dams Weren't Damned: The Public Power Crusade and Visions of the Good Life in the Pacific Northwest in the 1930s," *Environmental Review* 13 (1989): 113-53.

12. The Hudson's Bay Company's Columbia Department is treated in Meinig, *Great Columbia Plain*; and Gibson, *Farming the Frontier*. Both the Hudson's Bay Company and the Roman Catholic Church can be described as global entities that often paid little heed to national borders. The church in 1846 established the Archdiocese of Oregon City, which included parts of Canada as well as the United States and was roughly coterminous with the Columbia Department. But Catholic conceptions of the region did not have a lasting impact on the largely non-Catholic American arrivals. Colonization by the Roman Catholic Church is covered in Wilfred P. Schoenberg, S.J., *A History of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest 1743-1983* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1987), chap. 4.

13. Here and throughout the chapter, I am indebted (often indirectly) to Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

14. Richard E. Ross and David Brauner, "The Northwest as a Prehistoric Region," in *Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest*, ed. William G. Robbins, Robert J. Frank, and Richard E. Ross (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1983), 99-108; Judith Austin, "Desert, Sagebrush, and the Pacific Northwest," in *Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Robbins, Frank, and Ross, 129-47. Richard Maxwell Brown skillfully portrays the coastal Northwest in "The Great Raincoast of North America: Toward a Regional History of the Pacific Northwest," in *The Changing Pacific Northwest: Interpreting Its Past*, ed. David H. Stratton and George A. Frykman (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1988), 39-53.

15. The importance of the Oregon-Washington border, which is the same as the Columbia River for many miles, is well expressed in Richard L. Neuberger, "The Columbia," in *They Never Go Back to Pocatello: The Selected Essays of Richard Neuberger*, ed. Steve Neal (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1988), 33-34. Idaho's border with Washington and Oregon, too, has distinguished political and legal subregions.

16. David M. Emmons, "Constructed Province: History and the Making of the Last American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (1994): 437-59, argues that the entire trans-Mississippi West was a "construction" of northeastern economic, political, and ideological forces beginning in the

1840s. In his reading, the construction of region proceeded more or less according to a blueprint fashioned by ascendant external elites. I appreciate his attention to defining (or limiting) factors based outside the West. My own focus, though, is on the regional consciousness or identity of those *inside* the region, which Emmons does not really explore.

17. This model is summarized in William G. Robbins, "Introduction," in *Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Robbins, Frank, and Ross, 6-7; and Edwin R. Bingham, "Pacific Northwest Writing: Reaching for Regional Identity," in *Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Robbins, Frank, and Ross, 151-74, and it is utilized in part by Brown, "Great Raincoast of North America," 46; and Austin, "Desert, Sagebrush, and the Pacific Northwest," 136.

18. John Shelton Reed, *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 6, 39.

19. Some would contend that in the past decade or two Seattle has become a center for exporting clothes, coffee, and certain kinds of music and high-technology products to other parts of North America, but it is unclear whether these exports add up to a Pacific Northwest cultural hearth.

20. Students of the Pacific Northwest are fortunate that one of the most thoughtful considerations of decisions made by the westerling migrant concerned the region: Dorothy O. Johansen, "A Working Hypothesis for the Study of Migrations," *Pacific Historical Review* 36 (1967): 1-12. Also of value is George W. Pierson, *The Moving American* (New York: Knopf, 1973). The idea of "voluntary regions" is explained in Wilbur Zelinsky, *The Cultural Geography of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 134-39. Zelinsky emphasizes that this type of region emerged most fully in the twentieth century.

21. Men's dominance in making the decision to migrate overland, and women's frequent opposition to moving, are treated in John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979); Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982); and Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path-Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in Pacific Coast States* (Portland, Ore.: Binford and Mort, 1914), 8.

22. Although this is not the place for it, a companion essay about how the Pacific Northwest has been defined (against the Other) as a place for whites needs to be written. Starting points for such an essay might include the following. On exclusion and discouragement of African-Americans, see Thomas C. McClintock, "James Saules, Peter Burnett, and the Oregon Black Exclusion Law of June 1844," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 86 (1995): 121-30; and "The Negro Exodus," *Seattle Daily Intelligencer*, 28 May 1879, 2. On the attempted marginalization of Indians, turn to, among many other works, Alexandra Harmon, "A Different Kind of Indians: Negotiating the Meanings of 'Indian' and 'Tribe' in the Puget Sound Region, 1820s-1970s"

(Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1995). Regarding efforts to exclude or expel Asian-Americans, consult Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Roger Daniels, "The Exile and Return of Seattle's Japanese" (Paper presented at the symposium "World War II: What It Took to End the War," Museum of Flight, Seattle, 25 August 1995); Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885," *Pacific Historical Review* 23 (1954): 271-83, and Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle, 1885-1886," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 39 (1948): 103-30.

23. Kenneth S. Stern, *A Force upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 19-20.

24. John D. Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 84-85. The reasoning of overland migrants to Oregon during the 1840s, which contrasted Oregon as destination to prospects in the Midwest, is examined in William A. Bowen, *The Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978).

25. Quoted in Johansen, "Working Hypothesis," 8.

26. Hudson's Bay Company chief factor James Douglas, cited in James R. Gibson, "Furs and Food: Russian America and the Hudson's Bay Company," in *Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier*, ed. Barbara Sweetland Smith and Redmond J. Barnett (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1990), 48-49.

27. Johansen develops the ideas further in "Working Hypothesis."

28. Quoted in Robert E. Ficken, *The Forested Land: A History of Lumbering in Western Washington* (Durham, N.C.: Forest History Society, and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 33. "Tyranny" is borrowed from Rodman Paul, *The Far West and the Great Plains in Transition, 1859-1900* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 117. For more on the power of San Francisco, see Ficken, *Forested Land*, 26, 102-3; Paul, *Far West and Great Plains in Transition*, 115-18; E. Kimbark MacColl, *Merchants, Money, and Power: The Portland Establishment, 1843-1913* (Portland, Ore.: Georgian Press, 1988), 5; and William G. Robbins, *Hard Times in Paradise: Coos Bay, Oregon, 1850-1986* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 12, 13, 22.

29. Henry George, "What the Railroad Will Bring Us," *Overland Monthly*, October 1868, 300.

30. William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 22.

31. John S. Hittell, "The Boom in Western Washington," *Overland Monthly*, 2nd ser., September 1890, 231.

32. James G. Swan, *The Northwest Coast; or, Three Years' Residence in Washington Territory* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857), 407.

33. These ideas about western cities are broached in John M. Findlay, "Far Western Cityscapes and American Culture Since 1940," *Western Historical Quarterly* 22 (1991): 41-43; and Findlay, "Place as a State of Mind: The Case of the Western American Cities" (Paper presented at the symposium "American Urbanism," Oregon Historical Society, Portland, November 11, 1995).

34. On "New York Alki," see Murray Morgan, *Skid Road: An Informal Portrait of Seattle*, rev. ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 19, 24. On Portland's name and its New England heritage, see Carl Abbott, *Portland: Gateway to the Northwest* (Northridge, Calif.: Windsor, 1985), 19, 28, 31; and MacColl, *Merchants, Money, and Power*, 108. On worlds' fairs, see Carl Abbott, *The Great Extravaganza: Portland and the Lewis and Clark Exposition* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1981); and John M. Findlay, "Urban Contexts for American International Expositions: World's Fairs in Washington State, 1909-1974" (Paper presented at the meeting of the Organization of American Historians, Chicago, April 1992).

35. Robbins, *Hard Times in Paradise*, 39.

36. This and the following paragraphs draw heavily on Carlos A. Schwantes, *Railroad Signatures Across the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993).

37. Quoted in *ibid.*, 323.

38. Cited in *ibid.*, 188.

39. Duniway no doubt used the broader term "Northwest" instead of "Oregon" because she hoped to spread the influence of her good works beyond the boundaries of one state. By referring to a *new* Northwest, she, like a host of contemporary reformers, radicals, and utopians, imagined the region as more receptive to social and political change, perhaps because it was less settled than the East and therefore less set in the "old" ways.

40. On the magazine subsidized by the Northern Pacific, see Schwantes, *Railroad Signatures*, 86-87. For the information about the dramatic increase of books and magazines using "Northwest" in their titles, I have relied on the computerized database of the University of Washington Libraries. Their holdings do not include all materials using the term "Northwest" in the title (and with some titles "Northwest" refers to Canada's Northwest Territories or America's "old" Northwest), but the library catalogue provides a reliable and convenient index of the changing frequency with which the term was used in the titles of books, journals, and magazines to refer to the three-state area. In computerized searches, I checked database for titles issued between 1870 and 1899, and found most published after 1883; then I checked the period 1900 to 1929 and found still more publications using the word. The late nineteenth century—after the arrival of railroads in 1883—appears to be when the terms "Northwest" and "Pacific Northwest" became used quite widely in print.

41. John M. Findlay, "Closing the Frontier in Washington: Edmond S. Meany and Frederick Jackson Turner." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 82 (1991): 59-69. Joseph Schafer, *A History of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Macmillan, 1905). A phone conversation with the ever-helpful Richard Maxwell Brown, 13 March 1996, provided details about Schafer.
42. Schwantes, *Railroad Signatures*, 91-92; Carlos A. Schwantes, "The Concept of the Wagerworkers' Frontier: A Framework for Future Research," *Western Historical Quarterly* 18 (1987): 51-53.
43. Zelinsky, *Cultural Geography of the United States*, 13-14. This doctrine offers the basis for the continued currency of the punchline "Those who could read went to Oregon." Northwesterners assume that they continue to differ from Californians because of the decisions and character of the earliest American settlers.
44. Migrants to Sun City, Arizona, for example, admitted to having their views of the retirement town shaped firmly through advertising and other means before arrival. See John M. Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture Since 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), chap. 4.
45. Ronald Fields, *Abby Williams Hill and the Lure of the West* (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1989), chaps. 2-5.
46. Quoted in David Hamer, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 89.
47. Quoted in Fields, *Abby Williams Hill*, 20.
48. Findlay, "Far Western Cityscapes and American Culture," 41-43; Findlay, "Place as a State of Mind."
49. Erwin L. Weber, *In the Zone of Filtered Sunshine: Why the Pacific Northwest Is Destined to Dominate the Commercial World* (Seattle: Seattle Chamber of Commerce, 1924).
50. Dick, "When Dams Weren't Damned."
51. Richard Lowitt surveys how federal planning shaped regional projects in *The New Deal and the West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), esp. chaps. 9-10. Robert E. Ficken, *Rufus Woods, the Columbia River, and the Building of Modern Washington* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1995), and Paul C. Pitzer, *Grand Coulee: Harnessing a Dream* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1994), illuminate disagreements within the region over the dams and explain why the federal government's intervention and supervision was so influential.
52. White, *Organic Machine*, 64.
53. White develops this point with regard to the regionalist influence of Lewis Mumford in *ibid.*, 64-65.
54. *Ibid.*, 64, 71, 75.
55. Carlos A. Schwantes, "The Pacific Northwest in World War II," in *The Pacific Northwest in World War II*, ed. Carlos A. Schwantes (Manhattan, Kans: Sunflower University Press, 1986), 4-19; Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
56. Portland *Oregonian*, quoted in Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (New York: Wyn, 1949), 348; "If They Want Our Water, We Have Room for Them," *Seattle Times*, 3 October 1948, 6. Among other helpful remarks on an earlier draft of this essay, William L. Lang has pointed out to me that by sending kilowatts to California, people in the Northwest *have been* sharing their water with the Golden State, in one sense.
57. The irony, of course, was that for all its environmental problems California had also pioneered many of the nation's planning and environmental initiatives designed to protect quality of life. See Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 44.
58. A California sociologist reports that anti-California attitudes continue to prevail in Oregon. Glenn T. Tsunokai took surveys commonly used to detect prejudice toward African-Americans, gays, and other "vulnerable groups": substituted "Californians" for "blacks" and "homosexuals" on the forms; and sent them out to a sample of Oregonians. The respondents demonstrated fairly significant prejudice against their neighbors to the south. See Foster Church, "Oregonians Just Say No to California," *Portland Oregonian*, 12 November 1996, A1, A6.
59. On this suspicion of Washington, see David Sarasohn, "Regionalism, Tending toward Sectionalism," in *Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Robbins, Frank, and Ross, 224.
60. Glenn Pascall's remark on Seattle bigotry toward Californians is quoted in Mary Bruno, "Seattle Under Siege," *Lear's*, July 1991, 53. (Of course, in making this quite exaggerated comment, Pascall was also "constructing" or reinforcing certain regional stereotypes of the South—but that is the subject of another essay.) The data on the sources of Washington's growth in the early and mid-1980s, in this paragraph and the next, come from Richard Morrill and David C. Hodge, "Myths and Facts About Growth Management" (Report, 1991, in author's possession), 8-11. Jonathan Raban, *Hunting Mister Heartbreak: A Discovery of America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 299-303, found in the late 1980s that Seattle was relatively welcoming to virtually all immigrants except those from California. Eloquent testimony to the survival of "California-bashing" comes from a sixteen-year-old Idaho woman who describes the hostility directed at her and other transplants from the Golden State. She regarded the "unfair treatment and blatant prejudice" against Californians as one reason that California youths had dropped out of her high school. See "Even Teachers Show Dislike for Cal Teens," *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, 25 September 1996, G1.
61. Sarasohn, "Regionalism, Tending Toward Sectionalism," 223.

62. Ernest Callenbach. *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (Berkeley: Banyan Tree Books, 1975).

63. Joel Garreau. *The Nine Nations of North America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 251-52.

64. The literature on Cascadia is large and diverse. I have relied in part on Alan Artibise, Anne Vernez Moudon, and Ethan Seltzer, "Cascadia: A Case Study Prepared for the Conference on Cities in North America" (1995); Alan Artibise, "Cascadian Adventures: Shared Visions, Strategic Alliances, and Institutional Barriers in a Transborder Region" (Paper delivered at the symposium "'On Brotherly Terms': Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies," Seattle, 13 September 1996); and Gary Pivo, *Toward Sustainable Urbanization on Mainstreet Cascadia* (Vancouver: International Centre for Sustainable Cities, 1995). The quotation comes from Paul Schell, "Cascadia: The North Pacific West" (Paper presented at the meeting of the North American Institute, Seattle, October 1992), 4. Like Ecotopia, Cascadia is mainly an artifact of west of the Cascade Mountains.

65. This sentiment, which runs through the Cascadia literature, has also been expressed by people ranging from Oregon's environmentalist governor Tom McCall (as cited in "The People's Choice," *Pasco Tri-City Herald*, 3 July 1969, 4) to a host of business publications ranking Northwestern cities as among America's "most liveable." Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 177-78, holds out hope for Portland and Seattle as two of the relatively few manageable American cities where the future of urban life need not seem such a bleak prospect. After scouting other parts of the United States, the British writer Jonathan Raban relocated to the Northwest: "if I were seeking a fresh start in America," he wrote before moving, "I'd go to Seattle" (*Hunting Mister Heartbreak*, 255). And so he did.

66. A fine primer on the old-growth-forest and spotted-owl issues and on the idea of an indicator species is William Dietrich, *The Final Forest: The Battle for the Last Great Trees of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

67. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1894), 227; Findlay, "Closing the Frontier in Washington," 59-61.

68. David M. Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

69. One of the many works assessing the impact of ideas about the frontier on national identity is *The Frontier in American Culture: Essays by Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick*, ed. James R. Grossman (Chicago: Newberry Library, and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

3

When the Desert Won't Bloom: Environmental Limitation and the Great Basin

Elizabeth Raymond

James Cowden spoke for many Americans in 1853 when he so casually dismissed vast acres of the interior West as good for nothing except connecting more significant parts of the country.

From Fort Larramie [sic] to the Nevada Mountains, a distance of twelve or fourteen hundred miles, wild sage constitutes three fourths of the vegetation to be seen. I would give more for one county in Iowa than for all of it, except perhaps the Salt Lake Valley. Can't see any use for so much desert country, for certainly it is good for nothing only to hold the rest of Creation together.¹