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“I Want My Agency Moved Back . . . , My Dear White Sisters”

Discourses on Yakama Reservation Reform, 1920s-1930s

TALEA ANDERSON

In April 1922, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) announced its decision to relocate the Yakima Indian Agency from Fort Simcoe to Toppenish, Washington.¹ As reason for the move, the BIA pointed to the poor road conditions around Fort Simcoe, which hampered travel by businessmen and employees. The Yakama received their federal payments and health and educational services at the agency, but whites visited as well to negotiate property transfers and payments for reservation resources. Located well inside the reservation, rural Fort Simcoe readily accommodated local Yakama, but the Toppenish location on the eastern edge of the reservation provided easier access to white residents and businessmen. Officials from the BIA argued that Toppenish simply represented a more logical choice for the agency, with its superior roads and closer proximity to the white population in the area. They therefore slated relocation for July 1, 1922.²

The announcement triggered a variety of reactions from diverse groups in central Washington State. Business leaders in Toppenish, who had courted the agency since 1919, celebrated the news, but others were less enthusiastic. Yakama Indians convened in council to draw up an official protest against the BIA's decision, which had been made without tribal consent. The Toppenish location would inconvenience Yakama Indians, who would be forced to travel farther to access federal services, and

its selection was emblematic of the BIA's disregard for tribal preferences and desires. In addition to protesting officially, the Yakama also sought support from the white community on and off the reservation—most notably, local clubwomen, who soon submitted their own objections to the relocation, noting in particular that the alcohol trafficking in Toppenish would have an adverse effect on the hapless Yakama Indians.

Accusations flew. Businessmen accused clubwomen of being overly sentimental toward Native Americans, while clubwomen accused businessmen and BIA officials of being morally unfit to care for their indigenous charges. On the surface, Yakama Indians may appear as mere objects in this paternalistic squabble—the means by which groups demonstrated their status in the region. However, even when shunted aside, the Yakama managed to pursue their own interests by manipulating the players in these discussions. Specifically, they won attention for their cause by appropriating the clubwomen's discourse about morality and, in some cases, the businessmen's discourse about economic growth. In this way—by framing their arguments to win over particular white audiences—the Yakama secured concessions from local and national authorities. The case of the relocated Yakima Indian Agency thus illustrates how Native Americans exercised agency in the early 20th-century West. It affirms the

findings of scholars such as Peggy Pascoe, Philip Deloria, Daniel Herman, Laura Jane Moore, and Margaret Jacobs, who have all noted ways in which Native Americans secured social, political, or economic advantages by operating effectively within paternalistic contexts.³ To tell the story of the agency relocation, this article tracks the multiple, competing, and sometimes parallel discourses of women's clubs, the BIA, businessmen, and the Yakama themselves. As an entry point to these discourses, this article examines the work of a particular woman, Margaret Splawn, who stood at the nexus between business, women's club, and indigenous interests in the West.

Margaret Cecilian Larsen Splawn (1873-1954) distinguished herself as a historian of the Far West, a successful businesswoman, and an advocate for Native American rights. In 1897, she married A. J. Splawn—a prominent rancher and community leader in the Yakima area—and soon began to manage her husband's three ranches, comprising 600 acres.⁴ After her husband passed away in 1917, Margaret Splawn edited and published his book, *Ka-mi-akin*, a history of the Yakama Indian War (1855-58) that presented the Yakama perspective in the conflict.⁵ As her husband had done in the past, she began to speak publicly about Native American history and culture, noting her nostalgia for the old, undeveloped West and the “primitive” people who once occupied it.⁶ She

channeled her interest in Native American cultures into two organizations—the Yakima Valley Historical Society, which was committed to commemorating the history of the West, and the Washington State Federation of Women's Clubs (WSFWC), which aimed to heal, educate, and domesticate Native Americans. These goals often coexisted comfortably enough, but during the relocation debates, promoters of the West came into conflict with the clubwomen and their maternalist agendas.⁷ As a member of the two groups, Splawn took part in both discourses, giving each voice in her activities during the 1920s and 1930s.

Splawn served variously as member, historian, and president of the Yakima Valley Historical Society from its founding in 1917 until her death in 1954. The Yakima Valley Historical Society was one of many societies that appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as settlers sought to record and commemorate their experiences in the West.⁸ Society members crafted hegemonic narratives about pioneers in central Washington, focusing in particular on their role in bringing irrigation to the region. For instance, at a pageant performed in 1917 to celebrate the society's inauguration, prominent white residents played pioneers who ousted the “superstitious Redman” and ushered in the burgeoning reclamation era.⁹ Society members used these narratives to foster a sense of common identity, sometimes at the expense of outsider groups like Native Americans.

During the early decades of the century, Splawn played an active role in the historical society's commemorative activities, assisting in the creation of those hegemonic narratives about Native Americans. However, it should be noted here that Splawn's work with the historical society ultimately made her more vulnerable to Native American appeals for support and assistance. Her interest in Yakama culture and his-

tory led her to involve herself in indigenous affairs, giving Yakama Indians the opportunity to turn her assistance to their own purposes. Although Splawn sometimes displayed ambivalence toward Native American culture in her work with the historical society, this same work also opened her up to greater activism in the relocation debates of the 1920s and 1930s.



Because Margaret Splawn, shown here circa 1888, took a great interest in Native Americans' culture and living conditions, members of the Yakama hoped to gain support from her and other white clubwomen in their battle over the location of the Indian agency. (Homer B. Splawn Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Brooks Library, Central Washington University)

As a member of the historical society, Splawn participated in efforts to preserve and mark sites of importance to local pioneers. These included sites with complicated histories—for instance, spots where settlers had defeated Indians in the Yakama Indian War, or where white pioneers had first settled. Although they acknowledged the role of Native Americans in the

West when they marked these sites, society members also chose to commemorate the history of white conquest and indigenous subjugation in the region. As an Indian rights advocate who ranched on contested land, Splawn also displayed these contradictions.¹⁰

Splawn revealed her ambivalence toward Native Americans in 1918, when she spoke at the commemoration of Kamiakin's Garden—the purported site of the first irrigation canal in the Pacific Northwest.¹¹ Splawn praised Kamiakin, one of the leaders of the Indian wars of the 1850s, and called the garden a “sacred spot” in the Pacific Northwest, constituting the “birth place of irrigation and stock raising in the Yakima Valley.”¹² Though generous in her praise of Kamiakin, Splawn appropriated the story about Yakama irrigation and used it to honor white achievements in the valley. The settlers' present-day irrigation projects appeared all the more noble for having romantic indigenous roots. Indeed, Splawn—and more so her colleagues—effectively mythologized the origins of irrigation in the West, depicting white settlers as saviors who perfected the primitive Indians' crude agricultural efforts. In the process, the newcomers often downplayed the role of Native Americans as serious irrigators and agriculturalists, even as they acknowledged the Indians' part in the origins narrative.¹³

Splawn and the historical society again demonstrated their ambivalent relationship with Native Americans in their efforts to preserve indigenous languages. Splawn actively collected Yakama words in notebooks, listing plants, remedies, and place names.¹⁴ She likely gathered this information from contacts her husband had made while driving cattle. For instance, the “Saluskin families,” who had long known the Splawns, regularly visited their ranches while on their journey to root-digging territory.¹⁵ In the evenings, the Saluskin women sat in the

not only as a warrior / June 30, 1918 5cc
 is he known

We admire the man whose garden spot
 we mark to-day. In the story of this
 community he has played an important
 part in both the agricultural and
 religious history. To do him justice
 "Every inch a King" is the way Theodore
 Winthrop characterized the chief, whom
 he met at the Ahlamma mission in
 1853 on the horseback trip thro' this country,
 of which he wrote in "The Canoe & the
 Raddle". He was a tall, large man,
 very dark. writes Winthrop, with a
 massive square face and grave re-
 flective look. His manner was
 strikingly distinguished quiet and
 dignified. He greeted the priest as
 a Kaiser might a papal delegate.
 To me, as their friend he gave his hand
 with a gentlemanly word of welcome
 Kamiakin's costume was novel. He
 must be every inch a King who can
 appear in an absurd garb and yet
 look full royal. Kamiakin stood the
 test. He had the advantage of an imposing
 presence and bearing, and above all

At the commemoration of Kamiakin's Garden, believed to be the site of the first irrigation canal in the area, Margaret Splawn spoke highly of the chief, even as she appropriated his story to celebrate white settlers' achievements. (Page from Margaret Splawn, "Kamiakin's Garden," Splawn Papers)

"spirit of the region."¹⁸ Splawn brought her concern over place names to the Yakima Valley Historical Society. For instance, in 1932, she asked society members to join her in campaigning to have the name of Mount Rainier National Park changed to "Yakima Nation[al] Park," to better reflect the original Yakama presence in the region.¹⁹ In Splawn's view, this kind of name change would preserve Native American culture while enriching white settler history and promoting the region's uniqueness to tourists and visitors.

As a member of the Yakima Valley Historical Society, Splawn played her part in utilizing indigenous culture to promote her region's uniqueness. At the same time, she became involved in another organization with its own discourse about Native Americans: the Washington State Federation of Women's Clubs. Acting as the local arm of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), the WSFWC allowed women from clubs across the state to work collaboratively in addressing social issues such as poverty, sickness, alcoholism, and illiteracy. Clubwomen justified their involvement in these social issues by invoking the old idea of female moral authority. As women, they argued, they were ideally suited to identifying and resolving society's moral problems—including perceived problems in Native American communities.²⁰

In the 1920s and 1930s, a number of clubwomen—Margaret Splawn included—became concerned about Indian policy as they observed the results of the Dawes Act of 1887. The Dawes

living room, "combing their hair, and convers[ing] with Mrs. Splawn for hours in Chinook jargon."¹⁶ Splawn acquired facility in the Yakama language—or some hybrid of English and Yakama—at least in part to collect information about indigenous cultures. Believing that Native Americans represented the best of a lost era in the West, Splawn took it upon herself to preserve indigenous history. She was not alone; many scholars have shown that other women were involved in collecting Indian artifacts, promoting tourism, and endeavoring to preserve indigenous history at this time. Historians have of-

ten taken these women to task for treating Native Americans as objects to be manipulated and consumed.¹⁷

Like others of her time who expressed an interest in Native American culture, Splawn also had ulterior motives. For instance, by incorporating indigenous place names into the West, she hoped to add depth—a kind of romantic glow—to the region. She believed that the West should differentiate itself from the rest of the country by leaving aside "threadbare" European place names and reinstating Indian names that retained the "beauty" and the

Act had attempted to assimilate Native Americans into white society by enforcing individual land ownership and sending children to boarding schools. The act discouraged Native Americans from pursuing their own cultural traditions, and it also tended to exacerbate white-Indian inequities by transferring reservation land deemed excess to white ownership. Some clubwomen felt that the Bureau of Indian Affairs had shirked its duty to Native Americans by shutting down their artistic traditions—avenues by which tribal members might turn a profit. Others felt that, by transferring resources to white ownership, the Dawes Act diverted finances and materials needed to improve reservations. Clubwomen therefore claimed Native Americans as their own wards, whom they would tend through a variety of programs.²¹

To organize its work with Native American communities, the GFWC established an Indian Welfare Committee in 1922.²² From the start, the welfare committee agitated against the BIA and its policies. At its 1924 biennial convention, the GFWC drafted a resolution stating that “after three years of intensive study,” it was “aroused to the need of re-organization of the Indian Bureau.”²³ Members, therefore, called on the president of the United States to appoint a new commission of “outstanding, impartial and expert citizens to make a survey of conditions and return recommendations which should insure justice to the Indian.”²⁴

Writing in 1930, the second chair of the GFWC Indian Welfare Committee stated her belief that this 1924 resolution had produced results: it led a private organization, the Institute for Government Research, to investigate conditions on reservations and produce the Meriam Report in 1928.²⁵ The Meriam Report condemned the Dawes Act and called instead for limited Indian self-government, expanded health and education programs, and in-

creased use of day schools for Indian education.

Although the Indian Welfare Committee celebrated the publication of the Meriam Report, it continued to criticize the ethics of the BIA throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Committee members suggested that, though Indians had been cruelly neglected by the government, under new policies they could become more industrious and attain a better standard of living. To realize these goals, GFWC women encouraged the BIA to foster domesticity on reservations, likely believing that changes in the home would have a far-reaching social and economic impact on the community at large. They argued that Indian women should be instructed in homemaking and taught to abandon their “Nomad existence” in favor of the “planting of gardens, canning[,] . . . poultry raising, keeping a milch cow, garment making[,] . . . and sanitation.”²⁶

In Yakima, Splawn and other local clubwomen made similar efforts to improve health, education, and financial security on reservations. They offered baby clinics and tuberculosis examinations, and organized surveys of health, education, and employment. To foster domesticity and a strong work ethic, they offered Indian girls classes in “sewing, balanced meal planning, canning, [and] first aid.”²⁷

Additionally, throughout the 1920s, Splawn called on officials at the Yakima Indian Agency to curtail policies that transferred land and resources from Indian to white ownership. In 1928, she joined other women of the Indian Welfare Committee in advocating the King resolution—a proposal brought by Senator William King of Utah to investigate the BIA in the wake of the Meriam Report. As a supporter of the resolution, Splawn wrote letters to S. M. Brosius of the Indian Rights Association as well as the Washington senators W. L. Jones and Clarence Dill,

requesting their support for BIA policy changes.²⁸ On the basis of these and other recommendations, the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs did in fact undertake its own investigation of reservation conditions in Washington, Oregon, California, New Mexico, Montana, and Utah. Like the authors of the Meriam Report, the committee discovered corruption in Indian agencies, as well as poverty, unemployment, and sickness on reservations. Based on these investigations, the government ultimately passed the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which substantially increased Native American tribal sovereignty. By insisting on the importance of reservation reform, clubwomen like Splawn thus helped to instigate national policy change.²⁹

Splawn played a part in the Senate’s investigations, making a statement on reservation conditions at the hearings in Washington State. In her testimony, Splawn identified herself as a Yakima clubwoman and accused the Yakima Indian Agency of favoring particular white business interests over the local Native American community and, further, of failing to provide adequate health services and financial assistance to reservation Indians.³⁰ Topping her list of grievances was the relocation of the Yakima Indian Agency from Fort Simcoe to Toppenish. Splawn cited the move as a prime example of the ways in which the BIA neglected its duty by exposing Indians to unsanitary and immoral conditions such as poor health care and increased alcohol trafficking. Splawn argued that these problems were more prevalent in Toppenish, where the federal government had fewer controls in place. Her remarks were only the latest in a debate that had been raging for years over the location of the agency.

Business leaders in the Yakima Valley had begun agitating for the BIA to move the Yakima Indian Agency as early as 1919. Specifically, they complained about Fort Simcoe’s poor

roads and rural location, which forced them to undertake onerous journeys when transacting business. In July 1919, the Wapato Commercial Club addressed these concerns to the BIA commissioner, Cato Sells, noting that roads around Fort Simcoe were “never good[,] and for practically two-thirds of the year” they were “almost impassable.”³¹ In April 1922, the Toppenish Commercial Club similarly bemoaned the transportation difficulties surrounding Fort Simcoe and, as a solution to the problem, offered to furnish the agency with quarters in Toppenish “at a nominal rental.”³² BIA officials found these arguments compelling and chose to accept the Toppenish Commercial Club’s offer effective July 1, 1922. To cover the costs of moving the agency to a new location, Congress appropriated \$50,000 of Yakama tribal funds.³³

The town of Toppenish celebrated news of the agency move as a boon to the local economy. The *Toppenish Review* noted that the agency would bring a “large volume of business” to town, because it disbursed \$400,000 every year to Native Americans.³⁴ Local boosters and businessmen were overjoyed at this further proof of Toppenish’s superiority over other nearby communities such as Wapato, which had also hoped to secure the agency. Toppenish boosters had for some time been touting the town’s successes in farming, irrigation, and transportation. For instance, the local newspaper ran headlines such as “Reservation Rancher Sees Big Future through Use of Scientific Methods” and hometown booster stories—articles that celebrated ingenuity and modernization in the local community.³⁵ On the whole, the news about the relocated agency fit neatly into the booster narrative about growth in the town’s economy.

In contrast to the boosters, the Yakama Indians were incensed to learn of the agency removal. The tribe had a long history in the Simcoe area, having used

it historically as a camping site and gathering spot while en route to and from the Columbia River. The Yakama were intimately familiar with the local geography, as suggested in their names for the place—Mool-Mool (bubbling water) and Sim-ku-ee (saddle in the hill). In proposing to move the agency, the BIA essentially disregarded the tribe’s spiritual and historical connection to Simcoe. Furthermore, the BIA failed to invite Yakama input when it began considering new locations. Ultimately, it made its decision without Yakama approval or support.³⁶

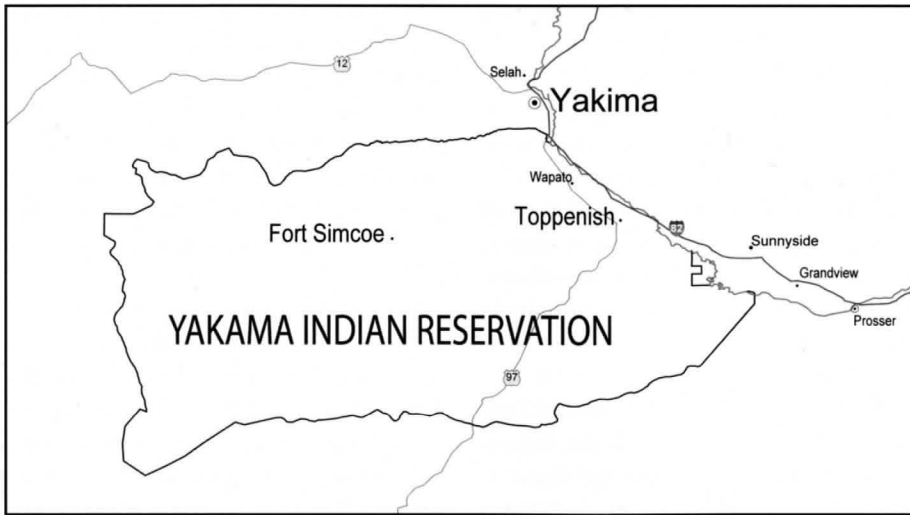
With relocation pending, Yakama Indians registered protests with congressional representatives and BIA officials, noting that the BIA had completely disregarded tribal sovereignty when it opted to move the agency. In 1921, the general council of the Yakama Confederated Tribes prepared a resolution in which it noted that tribal funds should not be expended on “white man business” without tribal consent.³⁷ Fourteen chiefs signed the resolution, arguing that the Yakama Confederated Tribes should be permitted to make its own decisions for the benefit of its own people. “Let no blind business be carried hereafter in our behalf,” the resolution concluded.

Although Native Americans seemed concerned primarily with the loss of tribal sovereignty inherent in the removal of the agency, they reframed their concerns to garner the support of particular white audiences. Leaders in the tribe sought out clubwomen as allies in the struggle with the BIA. They adopted the moralizing discourse of the clubwomen and identified their opponents as business leaders—including the BIA—who cared more about profits than the welfare of Yakama Indians. To begin, they accused businessmen in Toppenish of scheming to profit from the relocation by selling bootlegged liquor to hapless Yakama. They argued that Fort Simcoe provided a safer environment for Na-

tive Americans because it was federally owned property, where the sale of alcohol was strictly forbidden. With this argument, the Yakama capitalized on Prohibition-era concerns over alcoholism—many of which had been raised by women—and further suggested that unscrupulous businessmen would do anything, ethical or not, to turn a profit. Louis Mann, a tribal leader, argued that Toppenish businessmen desired nothing more than to waylay Yakama after they had received payments at the agency and “have Indian fill up on moonshine and get in skookum house and pay money to town and treasurer.”³⁸

Accusations like Mann’s played to clubwomen by summarizing their worst fears about alcohol—not only that it negatively influenced impressionable community members (that is, Indians), resulting in indolence and violence, but also that it robbed families of financial security. The women and children waiting at home would receive no benefit from the agency’s payments, and white businessmen would be entirely to blame for this state of affairs. Yakama Indians thus framed their argument against Toppenish to appeal to clubwomen and their concerns about society’s moral condition.

Along with concerns about alcohol, Native Americans also noted that the Toppenish location would present a barrier to impoverished Indians, who would have to travel farther to collect federal payments. Like the tempting alcohol, the journey to Toppenish would deplete family resources, further weakening the indigenous community. On this point, the Yakama reiterated their attack on unscrupulous businessmen. As Louis Mann argued, white businessmen were far better equipped financially to handle the commute to Fort Simcoe than Yakama were to travel to Toppenish. Mann sarcastically noted that, to reach Fort Simcoe, wealthy businessmen had merely to



White businessmen argued that the Indian agency would be better placed near other towns. A modern map illustrates how far Fort Simcoe was from the towns growing along the eastern edge of the Yakama reservation in the early 20th century.

“buy airplane and go like angel as he is through the air.”³⁹ The Yakama argued that business leaders privileged their already substantial financial security over the moral and economic well-being of Native Americans. This argument, too, was calculated to garner the support of clubwomen.

Despite Yakama protests, the BIA proceeded with the relocation of the Indian agency to Toppenish in July 1922. Nonetheless, Indians continued protesting, now calling on the government to return the agency to Simcoe. Local clubwomen increasingly expressed interest in their cause, thus opening new forums for Native Americans to register their opposition. For instance, with Splawn’s support, Yakama leaders appeared at a local clubwomen’s meeting to make their case for Fort Simcoe. They appealed to the women’s maternalist concern for the economic and moral welfare of minority groups. Nealy Olney, a tribal member and prominent reservation landowner, indicated that the cost of relocating was sapping the reservation of the resources it needed for more important projects—schools, hospitals, and health clinics.⁴⁰ Chief Eagle Seelatsee called on the women to intervene, and he accused the federal government

of shirking its duty to educate and advance Native Americans. “I am ignored,” he said.

I have no education. I am like blind man myself. . . . Our reservation is without light. The lights have been taken away and we are without it. Now my dear white sisters, you help me and my people out, to take that light back there and put it where it was formerly established by the United States Government.⁴¹

Seelatsee used metaphors that translated easily for clubwomen, who often situated their work around churches and Christian theology. Coming from this context, the women would understand “light” to mean the truth, education, and healing denied to Native Americans by the BIA—which embodied light’s moral antithesis. Seelatsee thus heightened his complaint by using the language of good and evil, light and dark. He also portrayed himself as a helpless individual, playing on the women’s desire to claim their own space as community leaders. By encouraging clubwomen to act on his behalf, Seelatsee engineered a challenge to the BIA. In this way, making use of the women’s concern, he and the Yakama delegation could secure their ultimate goal of curtailing the BIA’s disadvantageous policies and reasserting their tribal sovereignty.⁴²

In their statement to clubwomen, the members of the Yakama delegation also accused white businessmen of manipulating Indians into supporting the move to Toppenish. They claimed that Toppenish businessmen bribed tribal members with blankets and clothing in exchange for their support on the relocation issue. The delegates presented evidence of these bribes, with Chief Ow-hi (Jimmie) Saluskin explaining that businessmen offered tribal members “boots, hats, and everything good” in exchange for their signatures on the pro-Toppenish petition.⁴³ By presenting this evidence, the delegation suggested that, rather than sharing their resources, wealthy businessmen were using the Yakama’s poverty against them—an unconscionable act by any good Christian. Finally, the delegation urged the women to break out of the club setting, to do more than listen and collect examples of indigenous history and culture. They called on the clubwomen to respond not as curious bystanders but as active participants in the relocation conflict. As Saluskin said, “I am not talking for curiosity talk. . . . I want my agency moved back. . . . Then, my dear white sisters, you help me out in this proposition. That is all.”⁴⁴ Saluskin challenged the notion that Native Americans were mere makers of quaint curios. Rather he depicted them as people with agency—initiators of the protest who merely sought additional assistance from women’s clubs.

The Yakama urged clubwomen to act on their behalf, and the women responded. Margaret Splawn went to the press, presenting an article in which she summarized the problems resulting from the relocation and noted that “women’s clubs had come to the assistance of the Indians.”⁴⁵ A newspaper reporter observed that “a number of white women’s organizations” had joined “most of the Indians” in protesting the agency’s move to Toppenish in 1922.⁴⁶ Clubwomen addressed letters of protest to government officials.

For instance, Eva Sundwant Troy, chair of the wsfwc Indian Welfare Committee, and Mrs. C. E. Reinig and Miss Lee of the White Swan Women's Club wrote to the commissioner of Indian affairs and the superintendent of the Indian agency, registering their opposition to the Toppenish location.⁴⁷ As noted previously, Splawn also brought her concerns to a congressional hearing. She presented transcriptions of the Yakama Indians' statement to clubwomen, noting that she had also attended a tribal council to collect signatures opposing the move. In testimony, she added her own complaint about Toppenish—that the new hospital was located “near a drainage ditch,” obviously an unsuitable location for a sanitarium.⁴⁸ This concern about the health of Yakama Indians fit in with others expressed by clubwomen about the ethical costs of relocating the Indian agency. Clubwomen argued that the new Toppenish location was inimical to Indians' financial, physical, and moral welfare, and they insisted that officials respond to their concerns.

Finding itself barraged with complaints, the BIA was repeatedly forced to defend its decision to move the agency to Toppenish—and, in doing so, the bureau took the businessmen's side in the relocation conflict.⁴⁹ Identifying their opponents as women and Indians, officials framed the relocation argument as a battle between efficiency and sentimentality. They had long suggested that the agency move made good economic sense, while the Yakama clung to Fort Simcoe “as a matter of sentiment.”⁵⁰ After the move, the new commissioner of the BIA, Charles Burke, reiterated in a letter to a congressman that the move was undertaken on rational grounds—to improve the “efficiency of the Service”—and that the change in location only upset those “older Indians” who relied on old traditions for comfort.⁵¹ Bureau officials characterized Indian protesters as superstitious and overly emotional, implying that clubwomen had

“stimulated” the protest by inciting anger in the Yakama community.⁵² In these statements, the BIA made veiled references to gender stereotypes, characterizing Simcoe supporters as effeminate and irrational compared to the rational, male-dominated BIA. The bureau used this dichotomy to diminish its opponents and insist to onlookers that the agency should remain in Toppenish.

The boosters and businessmen in Toppenish likewise criticized the opponents of relocation, labeling them as backward, uncivilized, and sentimental. The *Toppenish Review*, like the BIA, noted that the Indians opposed the move, for “sentimental reasons.”⁵³ Specifically, the newspaper suggested that the traditionalists had an emotional attachment to the old days, when the white buildings at Fort Simcoe had been built as an “outward and visible manifestation of the power and generosity of the Great White Father at Washington, D.C.” The *Review* implied that the childish Yakama, longing for guidance in the wake of the Indian war, felt safest in these government buildings. The newspaper further insisted that progressive Indians—those Yakama who had more fully assimilated into white society—recognized the wisdom of relocating the agency. As evidence, the news writer proffered Thomas K. Yallup, who had attended Chemawa Indian School, one of the boarding schools charged with integrating Indian children into white society.

The *Review* described Yallup as a person living “half way between primitive Indian life and civilization” and claimed that he had progressed enough to recognize that BIA officials and business leaders could more adequately care for Indians in Toppenish.⁵⁴ According to the *Review*, Yallup had acknowledged that the Yakama were better off conducting business in a developed city like Toppenish, which was “as modern, up-to-date, advanced

a little city as can be found in the Pacific northwest.” Toppenish boosters argued that the more integrated members of society, like Yallup, would naturally embrace relocation because Toppenish offered all the advantages of a cultured city while the rural Fort Simcoe belonged to the antiquated past.

As the Thomas Yallup example suggests, the relocation controversy sometimes produced divisions in the prevalent discourses of the period. Although most Native Americans and local clubwomen opposed the move, some sided with business leaders. For instance, many clubwomen in Toppenish took the objections to the relocation as an affront to their city, and so joined the boosters in defending the town.⁵⁵ In this case, their local interests—and perhaps even their relationships with men at home—outweighed their interests as clubwomen. Similarly, although the newspaper may have exaggerated Yallup's position for rhetorical purposes, the Yakama community probably experienced some degree of division between traditionalists and progressives. The younger generation, who, like Yallup, had attended boarding school and settled closer to the white population off reservation, may have sided with the boosters. It is worth noting, however, that those like Yallup probably supported business interests for their own reasons—financial gain, improved social standing, or otherwise. With their words and actions, Yallup and the Toppenish clubwomen hint at the complexities in the relocation conflict, and the diverse ways that women and Native Americans pursued their interests, even when they diverged from the majority.

Over time, as agitation against the Toppenish location continued, protesters slowly shifted the prevailing discourse away from efficiency and economy, forcing businessmen and BIA officials to address the morality of relocation. The *Toppenish Review* began to publish defenses of the reloca-

tion, noting how Toppenish fostered upstanding behavior on the part of local residents by constructing a new high school, a new church, and a public library. Not only that, but the \$200,000 high school would admit Indian boys and girls, and the town would host an annual Chautauqua—"an additional moral and educational influence." Finally, the newspaper hastened to add, the Toppenish community had voted for prohibition by a "large majority," and strove to suppress all drinking and prostitution.⁵⁶ A town as moral as this could easily host the Yakima Indian Agency, the paper argued.

Members of the Saluskin Grange—supporters of relocation who lived near Toppenish in Harrah, Washington—also argued that Toppenish was eliminating alcohol and prostitution on town premises, thus making the town suitable for Native Americans. Grange members further insisted that conditions were worse at rural Fort Simcoe, where bootleggers could easily engage in the "illicit manufacture of liquor."⁵⁷ Finally, the grange posited that the white community could best assist Native Americans when it was prospering, that is, when the agency was located in Toppenish. The grange concluded, "Anything . . . that operates to the convenience of the whites operates also to the best interests of those Indians whose welfare is most worthy of first consideration." While still citing self-interested economic reasons for the agency's removal, Toppenish boosters were forced by the shift in dialogue to account for the Native Americans who would be entering their community. Perhaps they were only paying lip service to the concerns raised by protesters, but boosters indicated that Toppenish would improve over time to better accommodate the agency, in particular by creating a more virtuous environment for impressionable Indians. These concessions suggest the extent to which members of the Yakama tribe—using clubwomen as allies—in-

fluenced the relocation debate.

Toppenish may have attempted reforms to appease protesters, but the BIA also began to reconsider its decision to relocate. Perhaps swayed by the moral arguments made against Toppenish, or concerned about the negative publicity generated by the agency relocation, in 1925—three years after relocation—the commissioner of Indian affairs and the superintendent for the Yakima Indian Agency began to discuss moving the agency back to Fort Simcoe. Superintendent Evan Estep investigated the feasibility of reestablishing the agency in Simcoe, concluding that the cost of construction, water systems, lighting, and repairs would be approximately \$14,720—a sum that the agency could afford.⁵⁸ Estep assured the commissioner that the return could be accomplished in an "economical and satisfactory manner," and Estep chose December 28, 1925, as the date for removal back to Simcoe.⁵⁹

Despite the announcement in December, the BIA did not take action; rather, the bureau continued with its investigations well into 1926. In April, the commissioner finally reversed his recommendation to return to Simcoe, indicating that the government would instead purchase the agency's headquarters in Toppenish and remain there permanently.⁶⁰ By taking control of the property, the BIA made a concession to protesters who had expressed concerns about the cost of renting facilities in Toppenish. The government—not the Yakama—would pay to purchase the property, and it would also take responsibility for keeping the premises alcohol-free.

Further conceding to protesters, the BIA increased efforts to end prostitution and alcohol consumption in Toppenish. Superintendent Estep approached the Toppenish Commercial Club to request assistance in cleaning up the town. He framed his request as a gender issue, noting the particular

need of "carefully guarding the young girls among the Indians" from prostitution and alcohol trafficking.⁶¹ He added that "White and Indian men alike" were "responsible for the immoral conditions on the reservation," and he asked the businessmen to show white women and their "Indian sisters" the same respect. This speech suggests the effectiveness of the clubwomen's discourse, because it echoes the women's concern for community morality—and especially their desire to protect all women at home. Estep used this argument well, playing to the businessmen's patriarchal concern for abused women. As a result, in that same year, the Commercial Club and the city commission of Toppenish initiated a search for a detective to investigate liquor trafficking in the city.⁶² Reflecting on the disagreements of the past several years, the *Toppenish Review* concluded that Toppenish's "material interests [were] bound up in maintaining decent conditions in town."⁶³

Although the Yakama did not secure the agency's return to Fort Simcoe, they still influenced the debate by manipulating the complex gender and racial discourses of the time. Toppenish leaders and BIA officials made concessions as a result of the protests, which Native Americans engineered by appealing to clubwomen's perceived moral authority. Of course, manipulation happened on all sides. Women and businessmen constantly buttressed their positions by invoking stereotypes about Native Americans. Whenever possible, they appropriated indigenous voices to make their arguments for economic growth or moral cleanliness, as the case may be. However, by using each other, white people and Native Americans each secured benefits. Most notably, clubwomen such as Splawn earned respect from their local communities by positioning themselves as Indian experts and guardians of morality, while at the same time, Native Americans gained allies who could apply additional pressure for reservation

reform. For these women reformers and Native Americans of the early 20th century, cooperative protest proved mutually beneficial.

Returning to the story of Margaret Splawn, we can see that Native American efforts proved effective in part because of the contradictions built into the American West at the beginning of the 20th century. As an Indian rights advocate who had also settled on Indian lands, Splawn found herself in a conflicted position. Like the boosters, she celebrated the West, despite its fraught history. She sought to distinguish the region by promoting its indigenous culture and language. This goal led her to study Native language and history, causing her to sympathize with Native Americans even as she appropriated their culture for her own use. As a westerner, Splawn gained advantages from Native Americans by taking their lands and assuming their linguistic and cultural identity. At the same time, Native Americans could gain something from her by playing on her desire to understand indigenous culture and her sense of guilt about white intrusions on Indian lands. For

instance, during the relocation debate, the Yakama gained an invitation to a session of the Yakima women's clubs in part by appealing to Splawn's sense of culpability in reservation conditions. In the grand scheme of things, Splawn may have garnered greater economic rewards than Yakama Indians, but the two sides did use each other to some advantage—increased sovereignty, community authority, or otherwise.

As suggested above, Native Americans also took advantage of gender conflicts in the West. Yakama Indians played on clubwomen's desire for authority, calling on their help in the relocation debate. True, in their work, clubwomen often treated Native Americans in a maternalist manner, assuming control over their communities and sometimes perpetuating stereotypes about dirty, savage Indians. However, Native Americans turned this sometimes condescending, matriarchal concern in their favor, using it to combat influences in the West that sought to further divest them of sovereignty and resources.

As the agency relocation debate re-

veals, Yakama Indians played on the prevailing discourses of the 1920s and 1930s—conversations about gender, authority, and community identity—using latent conflicts to assist them in pursuing their own goals. In the case of the agency relocation, they may not have achieved a resounding victory, but they did force authority figures to hear their arguments and adjust accordingly. Thus, the story about Margaret Splawn and the agency relocation illustrates how Native Americans continued to find opportunities that they could manipulate to their own advantage. In this way, they came a little closer to their ultimate goal of tribal sovereignty.

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1. This article will employ the spelling "Yakama" when referring to the people and "Yakima" when referring to the geographic location, acknowledging the 1993 decision by the Yakama Tribal Council to revert to the earlier spelling, which better approximates the pronunciation of the name. "Yakama" was also the spelling used in the 1855 treaty in which 14 bands and tribes ceded territory to the United States and took up residence on reservations. See "The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation," Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, <http://www.critfc.org> (accessed April 20, 2013).
2. "Indian Agency to Move to Toppenish," [*Tacoma?*] *News-Herald*, July 9, 1922, clipping, box 318, decimal 134, Decimal Subject File, 1906-1967, YK19, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (RG 75), National Archives at Seattle (hereafter cited as Records of the BIA).
3. Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The*

- Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York, 1990); Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, Conn., 1998); Daniel J. Herman, *Rim Country Exodus: A Story of Conquest, Renewal, and Race in the Making* (Tucson, Ariz., 2012); Laura Jane Moore, "Elle Meets the President: Weaving Navajo Culture and Commerce in the Southwestern Tourist Industry," in *Women and Gender in the American West*, ed. Mary Ann Irwin and James F. Brooks (Albuquerque, N.M., 2004); Margaret Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879-1934* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1999).
4. Homer Splawn and Lallooh Carpenter, *Story of Margaret Larsen Splawn* (Yakima, Wash., 1989), 45.
5. A. J. Splawn, *Ka-mi-akin, the Last Hero of the Yakimas* (Portland, Oreg., 1917).
6. Margaret Splawn, "Ne Sitka Klat-a Wa Nan-lah Til-li-cums (We Go to See Our

- Friends)," typescript, n.d., folder 9, box 3, Homer B. Splawn Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Brooks Library, Central Washington University, Ellensburg (hereafter cited as Splawn Papers).
7. In describing clubwomen as "maternalist," this article refers to maternalism as defined by Seth Koven and Sonya Michel—an ideology that sought to extend women's mothering traits from the home to society as a whole. See Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York, 1993).
8. For more on pioneer societies and their efforts to commemorate the history of white settlers in the West, see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991); and David M. Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence, Kans., 2002).

9. Sue M. Lombard and Alice M. Tenneson, "Visions Fulfilled: A Symbolical Pageant of the Valleys of the Yakima," quoted in William Lyman, *History of the Yakima Valley, Washington: Comprising Yakima, Kittitas, and Benton Counties*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1919), 1:377-82 (qtn., 378).
10. Yakima Valley Historical Society, minutes, Oct. 3, Nov. 7, 1917, Feb. 5, May 7, 1919, folder 16, box 11, Splawn Papers.
11. Margaret Splawn, "Kamiakin's Garden," manuscript, June 30, 1918, folder 5, box 3, Splawn Papers. For a description of the event, see "Historians of State Will Meet at Yakima," *Yakima Daily Republic*, June 20, 1918; "500 Attend Annual Pioneers' Picnic: Tribute Is Paid to Kamiakin, the Father of Irrigation in the Yakima Valley," *Yakima Herald-Republic*, July 1, 1918; Edmond S. Meany, "Historic Gardens of Chief Kamiakin," *Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 9 (1918), 240.
12. Splawn, "Kamiakin's Garden."
13. In particular, Chad Wriglesworth has accused Margaret Splawn of "complicit participation in the social and economic marginalization of the Yakama Nation" for failing to acknowledge the full story of irrigation in the West and the ways in which it privileged white people like her. See Chad Duane Wriglesworth, "Geographies of Reclamation: Writing and Water in the Columbia River Basin, 1855-2009," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Iowa, 2010), 65, available online at Iowa Research Online, <http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/761> (accessed June 11, 2013).
14. Margaret Splawn, "Native American Vocabulary and Culture," notebooks, c. 1877-1930, folders 5, 10, 11, box 4, Splawn Papers.
15. Splawn and Carpenter, 83.
16. *Ibid.*, 84.
17. For discussions of women like Margaret Splawn who collected indigenous stories, artwork, and cultural artifacts around the turn of the century, see Leah Dilworth, "Tourists and Indians in Fred Harvey's Southwest," in *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West*, ed. David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long (Lawrence, Kans., 2001). See also Jacobs; and Sherry L. Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880-1940* (New York, 2000).
18. Margaret Splawn, "An Indian Name I Planted There," manuscript, n.d., folder 2, box 3, Splawn Papers.
19. Yakima Valley Historical Society, minutes, Feb. 14, 1932, p. 107, vol. 1, Yakima Valley Historical Society Minutes and Historical Papers, Yakima Valley Museum, Yakima, Wash.
20. For more on how clubwomen used moral authority to secure position in American society, see Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York, 1980).
21. Jacobs.
22. John Collier, *From Every Zenith: A Memoir; and Some Essays on Life and Thought* (Denver, Colo., 1963); Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, "The Red Man's Burden," *New Republic*, Jan. 16, 1924, pp. 199-201.
23. General Federation of Women's Clubs, Department of Public Welfare, Division of Indian Welfare, *Report of Indian Welfare Division, 1928-1930, and Outline of Work, 1930-1932* ([New York?], 1930), 4.
24. *Ibid.*, 5.
25. *Ibid.*, 4-5. See also Lewis Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration* (Washington, D.C., 1928).
26. General Federation of Women's Clubs, Department of Public Welfare, Division of Indian Welfare, *Report of Indian Welfare Division for the Phoenix Biennial Council, April 27th-May 2nd, 1931* ([New York?], 1931), 13.
27. Serena Matthews, "History of the WSFWC," typescript, c. 1949, p. 74, box 1, Historical Features, acc. 3463-001, Washington State Federation of Women's Clubs Records, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle.
28. S. M. Brosius to Margaret Splawn, Jan. 28, 1928, folder 11; Splawn to W. L. Jones, Jan. 20, 1928, folder 12; Splawn to Clarence Dill, Jan. [n.d.], 1928, folder 12; Splawn to Mrs. Joseph Lindon Smith, Feb. 21, 1929, folder 14, all in box 2, Splawn Papers.
29. Jacobs, 19.
30. Testimony of Mrs. A. J. Splawn, in *Survey of Conditions of Indians in United States: Hearings before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs*, 70th Cong., 2d sess. (1929), 200-201 (hereafter cited as Splawn testimony).
31. Wapato Commercial Club to Cato Sells, July 24, 1919, Records of the BIA.
32. Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Protest of Yakima Indians to Transferring Yakima Sanatorium to Toppenish Community Hospital Association," typescript, c. 1922, Records of the BIA.
33. *Ibid.*
34. "Offer of Local Commercial Club to Construct Building for Accommodation of Agency Staff Has Been Formally Accepted by Commissioner Burke," *Toppenish Review*, April 21, 1922.
35. See, for example, "Fertilizing Success Key: Reservation Rancher Sees Big Future through Use of Scientific Methods," *Toppenish Review*, Aug. 4, 1922, and "Home Town Booster Stories, No. 7," *Toppenish Review*, Aug. 5, 1921.
36. Albert Culverwell, "Stronghold in the Yakima Country: Fort Simcoe and the Indian War, 1856-59," *PNQ*, Vol. 46 (1955), 46-51.
37. Yakima Indian Reservation Tribal Council, Resolution, July 18, 1921, Records of the BIA.
38. Mann quoted in "Indian Agency to Move to Toppenish."
39. *Ibid.*
40. Olney quoted in Exhibit 33, in *Survey of Conditions of Indians in United States*, 204-206.
41. Seelatsee quoted in *ibid.*, 203.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Saluskin quoted in Exhibit 33, in *Survey of Conditions of Indians in United States*, 203.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Splawn testimony, 204.
46. "Indian Agency to Move to Toppenish."
47. Superintendent to Eva Sundwant Troy, Oct. 11, 1922; Troy to Don M. Carr, Oct. 2, 1922; Mrs. C. E. Reinig to Evan Estep, March 12, 1924; Estep to Reinig, March 14, 1924; Miss Lee to commissioner of Indian affairs, n.d., all in Records of the BIA.
48. Splawn testimony, 201.
49. For examples of congressional complaints, see Charles H. Burke to W. Summers, Feb. 4, 1924, and Burke to C. Dill, Feb. 4, 1924, both in Records of the BIA.
50. Superintendent to commissioner of Indian Affairs, Aug. 18, 1921, Records of the BIA.
51. Charles H. Burke to John W. Summers, Feb. 4, 1924, *ibid.*
52. Superintendent to commissioner of Indian Affairs, Aug. 9, 1922, *ibid.*
53. "Offer of Local Commercial Club."
54. "Indian Speaks for Removal of Agency," *Toppenish Review*, Aug. 25, 1922.
55. "Women Join in Strong Protest: Object to Resolutions Passed by Yakima Club without Ascertaining Full Facts," *Toppenish Review*, Dec. 25, 1925.
56. "The Indian Protests," *Toppenish Review*, July 28, 1922.
57. "Saluskin Grange Protests Removal of Indian Agency," *Toppenish Review*, Jan. 22, 1926.
58. Estep to commissioner of Indian affairs, Dec. 21, 1925, Records of the BIA.
59. *Ibid.* (qtn.); "Citizens Pay for Road: White Swan Men Raise \$600 to Gravel Six Miles," Dec. 11, 1925, clipping, Records of the BIA.
60. "The Agency Decision," *Toppenish Review*, April 16, 1926.
61. "Asks Aid of Business Men: Superintendent Estep Speaks of Problem of Department in Dealing with Wards," *Toppenish Review*, May 14, 1926.
62. Superintendent to H. B. Miller, Jan. 30, 1926, Records of the BIA.
63. Editorial, *Toppenish Review*, April 16, 1926.