

Authenticating Chief Seattle's Speech

F. E. Osterhaus

In late December of 1854, an Indian chief by the name of Noah Seattle delivered an important speech to the assembled members of his tribe as well as members of other tribes in the Puget Sound region of the Pacific Northwest. Also in attendance were a number of Euro-American settlers and a delegation of U.S. government representatives led by the new territorial governor Isaac Stevens. This last group provided the primary reason for the speech in that Stevens and his group had just arrived in order to negotiate a treaty with the local Indians to facilitate the expansion of territory available for settlement and development by Euro-American colonists. The negotiations were interspersed over a few-week time frame that also included several major feasts and traditional celebrations on the part of the Native tribes. The official report of this watershed event—the speech, the negotiations, and signing—is relatively one-sided with the U.S. delegation providing most of the archived official written record.

Unfortunately, within that record there are few references to Chief Seattle and the speech itself. This has caused some to doubt whether it took place at all and claim that Chief Seattle's famous speech is simply an invention to meet the needs of a later moral or political agenda. Therefore, before taking up the question of the aesthetic or rhetorical value of the speech, we must consider its fundamental legitimacy. Did it happen? Are these famous words myth or reality? The question is important not only for properly evaluating its intrinsic aesthetic worth but also because the

speech still has a strong influence today and is often quoted by environmentalists¹ due to its basic premise that mankind is part of the cyclical life of the natural world and cannot be separated from it.

One of the great Indian leaders of the 19th century, Noah Seattle, served as chief of the Duwamish and Suquamish Indian Nations as well as other, less powerful, neighboring tribes from roughly 1808² to his death on June 7, 1866. Though he cut an imposing figure in the region and many stories have grown up around and about him, much of the factual evidence is left in obscurity. His precise birth date is uncertain (though a relatively close estimate of 1786 can be given)³ and his parentage, especially concerning his mother's position is a bit problematic⁴. Perhaps most telling of all is the uncertainty even about Chief Seattle's name. His birth name was not recorded and is lost even to conjecture. The name Seattle, itself, used because it was more pronounceable for the settlers, is a variant rendition of the name he assumed at a naming ceremony on his accession to a leadership position in his tribe. It is variously spelled Sealth, Sealt, Siattle, *si'áb* Si'ahi, See-at-la, and See-a'ilth⁵.

He was not only a physically imposing figure, but he also had a strategic sense and political acumen that were of the highest level. In terms of moral authority, his reputation for courage and honesty was unquestioned. However, far beyond those passing individual qualities, he was a gifted orator⁶ and his speeches had an impact that shaped the course of history for his people as well as the white settlers of that area. Moreover, the images and themes he allegedly described continue to be reflected in current public discourse and take on more value and meaning as time passes.

In taking up the question of the legitimacy of this particular speech and whether it has any historical merit or value—let alone rhetorical and literary value, it is important to understand the socio-historical context

that led up to and informed its delivery, as well as understand the nature of the man who delivered it.

Even though very few of the coastal Indian tribes saw any of the early European explorers who skirted the Northwest coast in the mid 18th Century, all of the Indians felt a powerfully inimical presence in the form of a spate of sweeping epidemics of terrifying and previously unknown diseases that horribly disfigured and mercilessly killed large numbers of the defenseless Indians⁷. The population level, once stable, took an alarming turn downwards. The Indians' relatively benign world seemed fraught with some new, inexplicable danger.

When the *H.M.S. Discovery* sailed into the Puget Sound in 1792 and anchored off Bainbridge Island where the Suquamish had their central lodge house, it must have marked a revelation of the forces that were enveloping them. The ship was more than three times the size of their largest war canoe that was capable of ocean-going transportation. The huge sails and sheer bulk were far more than the Stone-Age Indians could possibly comprehend. Fitted with iron and armed with canon, the *Discovery* projected a power certainly beyond anything the Indians were capable of either producing or opposing. To a sensitive and highly intelligent 7-year-old boy like Seattle was at the time, the ship and its crew must have fired up his imagination about a new order in life that had to be learned about and adapted to. The *Discovery* was a window into a much more expansive world with an entirely different nature and culture. It stimulated his sense of adventure and offered access to new dangers as well as new opportunities.

It also seemed to have impressed him with a deep sense of humility about personal and tribal limitations in knowledge and in capacity to project power – the world was fundamentally different, changed forever. Moreover, it provided a possible solution to the inimical forces that had so

drastically altered Native life. The 7-year-old boy apprehended both the overwhelming force of arms as well as the more efficacious application of Western remedies. And these early lessons seemed to guide his future decisions.

However, actual contact between the different cultures was rare, though the sporadic epidemics continued. The primary source of contact in the early part of the 19th Century came from explorers, missionaries striving to convert the Natives to a Christian way of life, and trappers who gathered furs both on their own and also by trading with the Indians to feed a burgeoning market on the east coast of America and in Europe. Since the missionary message was one of accommodation, and trappers by nature tend to be solitary and non-aggressive – both success and survival stem from these characteristics – the contact remained relatively limited and benign for a long time.

A radical shift in the relationship occurred due to a combination of circumstances. First, the rivalry between the fledgling United States and Great Britain for dominance in the western hemisphere began to cause friction in the Northwest as the boundary between the two was as yet unsettled⁸ in that area. Whoever controlled the territory could control the profits from the fur trade, so the U.S. government started to promote exploration and settlement of the area in order to take de facto control on the ground though Great Britain had initially "discovered" it by ship.

Lewis and Clark were the earliest official explorers (1804-06) for the American government, but they stayed farther south and never made it up anywhere near the Puget Sound. Nevertheless, they were able to open a way for settlement of the general area of the Pacific Northwest. Settlements began sprouting up throughout the region after their expedition, starting from the vicinity of the Columbia River basin, especially near the mouth but a little inland away from the open Pacific Ocean. The settlement

growth intensified with the General Preemption Act of 1841⁹, spreading both north and south, establishing a base in the lower Puget Sound region around what is now known as Olympia.

Whereas fur trappers and traders were fundamentally nomadic and didn't claim any particular piece of property as their own and thus caused little friction with the indigenous Indian tribes, farmers, shop owners, and industrialists were an entirely different matter. Their lives and economies were based on private ownership and exclusive development of particular properties. With success came expansion and the need for more space and resources. The powerful dynamism of economic development had started to feed, thrive and grow... And the indigenous peoples could offer little resistance with whatever rifles they were able to trade for, supplemented with their traditional weaponry of clubs, spears, roughly fashioned knives, and arrows—basically sticks and stones. With the border dispute settled at the 49th parallel in 1846, the U.S. achieved control of the entire Puget Sound region and made plans for its economic exploitation.

Probably the most significant event that promoted the rapid expansion of Euro-American settlement up and down the west coast was the discovery of gold in California in 1848. Reports of extensive timber stands in the Puget Sound region (the tall, straight Douglas Fir tree provided perfect material for shipbuilding as well as for housing), in combination with the area's reputation for having an unlimited and easily obtainable supply of salmon, made the area exceedingly attractive to people who wanted to take advantage of the tremendous demand for food and building resources that the huge influx of people to the gold fields was causing. Apart from the immediate benefits from timber and salmon resources, people looking for a more stable life than the gold fields had to offer noticed that the Northwest region was blessed with a temperate climate, fertile soil, and plenty of rain and water.

In order to increase the pace of stable settlement on the west coast, and offer a viable alternative to the many who came west but did not "strike it rich," Congress passed the Federal Donation Land Claim Act of 1850¹⁰, which granted 320 acres per man (and another 320 if he had a wife) at absolutely no cost except personal labor. This law had a few provisions: First, similar to the earlier law, the man had to actively cultivate the property and live on it for an extended period of time (several years) to promote stability. Second, and significantly, it had a time element: If the person arrived on the property and claimed it within a few months (the deadline was December 1, 1850—the same year as the law passed, then he could have the whole 320 acres (and if his wife accompanied him, 640 acres). If he arrived between December 1, 1850, and December 1, 1853, then he could only lay claim to 160 without wife or 320 acres with—the same as in the General Preemption Act. This last date was later extended to 1855, but the acreage remained at the lower level of 160/320. It remained different from the GPA in that the land was still a "gift" from the government. The Donation Act of 1850 had the direct result of affording the first boatload of settlers a chance to select the first choice sites for building homes on the area around Elliott Bay. They made the deadline with almost no time to spare, spent a hard winter in temporary shelters, but began to put in strong roots.

Thus, in the early 1850's settlers began to build a small community in the Puget Sound on Elliott Bay. They developed a cooperative relationship with the Indians there and were able to thrive. The timber and fishing industries grew rapidly with the tremendous demand from California, with Chief Seattle involved as a partner in the enterprise.

The U.S. government then took steps to include the territory and its various settlements into its social system and make it safe for further and more intensive Euro-American development. This meant that a series of

treaties had to be established with the indigenous peoples who lived in the region in order to increase the amount of territory as well as to forestall problems and assuage fears by placating any hostile elements. This set the stage for the Point Elliott Treaty conference where Chief Seattle is reported to have delivered his famous speech.

That this speech was delivered by Chief Seattle on that occasion was commonly accepted as fact by the local Euro-American community at its publication in the *Seattle Sunday Star* on October 29, 1887; however, in an article published by the U.S. Archives & Records Administration in 1985, Jerry Clark suggests that the speech might not have in fact even taken place, and that the copy attributed to him is a complete fabrication built from "sentiments... consonant with those held by persons disturbed by the destruction of the Indian world by the development of the American frontier. ...Despite its popularity, this affirmation of Indian eloquence may not be founded in historical reality."¹¹ Clark rests his claim primarily on the lack of written notes of the speech found within government records. There was also no "Duwamish-language text of the speech, ...silence on the part of persons known to have been present during meetings between Stevens and Seattle, and...failure of the speech to appear in the official treaty proceedings."¹² He sums up his argument by saying that "it is impossible to either confirm or deny the validity of this powerful and persuasive message *placed in the mouth of* an Indian sachem."¹³ (Italics mine). Obviously, Clark believes the speech to be someone else's fabrication and thus apocryphal and without historical validity.

The arguments listed here appear difficult to refute because written evidence supporting the speech is slim, and these arguments arise from a different cultural perspective: There was no "Duwamish-language text" (Lushootseed would be the proper term) because it was primarily an oral culture and speeches were not delivered from notes, nor were they written

down. Instead, they were committed to the tribal memory. The "silence" could stem from a variety of factors, including the fact that the western note-takers were not conversant in Lushootseed and were dependent on summaries provided by an interpreter, B.F. Shaw¹⁴ who spoke the Chinook language, but who was not fluent in Lushootseed, the language spoken by Chief Seattle, who refused to speak Chinook either out of a lack of command of the language, respect for his own "Spirit-voice," or simply because he refused to use the language of a long-time rival tribe.

However, there are several reasons why the speech should be accepted at face value. The most compelling argument in favor of supporting the traditional view that the speech represents a reasonably close transliteration of Chief Seattle's words is the fact that the English translation by Smith is universally accepted by the Suquamish Indians as the definitive version¹⁵. Smith claimed to have been present and taking notes at the speech¹⁶, though not at the actual negotiations. They were handled by the official government translator/interpreter, B.F. Shaw. Smith also spent several years meeting regularly with Chief Seattle going over the content of the speech in order to make as accurate a translation as possible and to "convey the chief's true meaning."¹⁷ He also reportedly met with other tribal members who had been present to clear up meaning and details.

Moreover, all of the Indian tribes in the Northwest region were oral cultures that depended on memory rather than written material for passing on information and learning. Story telling was highly developed, and the people naturally were very sensitive to and retentive of the spoken word. All ceremonies contained much speechifying, and historical events were catalogued, honors and promotions granted, and changes assimilated within the lore of the tribe through formal speeches and stories that were instantly recorded in the living, collective memories of the tribe. Stories were told and retold from different perspectives allowing richer under-

standing of events and developments. This is one reason why honesty was a highly valued character trait in an oral culture, and divergence from oral agreements was something the entire tribe would be aware of and antagonistic to. This would underscore the scope and value of the effort Smith put into translating the speech. Such collaborative efforts would not make sense if the speech were merely Smith's fabrication.

Concerning the official interpreter, B.F. Shaw's recollection of his first meeting with Chief Seattle in 1850¹⁸ can be viewed as a reflection of the strong speechifying impulse that Chief Seattle represented. Surely if Seattle would undertake a solemn exchange of formal speeches when greeting strangers beaching a canoe near the village, then certainly at the opening ceremony for an important negotiation, Chief Seattle would make considerable efforts to impress his guests as well as his people with his understanding.

Furthermore, using a negative approach, the Western negotiating strategy of promising one thing orally, or simply ignoring opening statements, and then offering something else to fundamentally non-literate (in terms of writing and Western language skills) people for signature was a common strategy and had proved quite successful in the Western legal system where the written word supercedes the spoken. However, taking advantage of cultural difference is not necessarily fair and equitable. There is also reason to believe that the Native position was often suppressed¹⁹, and this would explain why an important speech by Seattle was not included in the official public record. A ceremonial speech in Western culture carries little force of law, while in an American Indian culture, it is exactly the way to negotiate and establish "law." Western tradition is guided by written contract, Indian by oral. To discount the oral is to discount that culture. It is reasonable to assume that this occurred because supplanting the Native culture was the purpose of the negotiations from the Western vantage

point. Therefore, Clark's contention that 1) "there were no written notes" has no meaning for an oral culture—the tribe carried the speech in their hearts, and 2) "there was no comment on Seattle's strong position in the official government record" also carries little weight because for the government the speech would have meant nothing since it was only a ceremonial greeting and recording it would only disrupt the government's recorded narrative of the negotiation. For the U.S. government, the agreement was what was written down in English and signed to.

Be that as it may, there are several other ways to gauge the authenticity and validity of the speech. One is to judge whether it occurred by assessing possible ripple effects. These effects could be classified in at least two ways. First would be the effects the speech might have had on its possible target audience. This would mainly include Seattle's own people, but it would also involve the Euro-American settlers, and the visiting delegation of government representatives. Related to this is the second way, which would be the effect the speech might have had on the final version of the treaty, itself. In essence, does the treaty reflect the concerns of Chief Seattle?

Since the Native tribes of that region within Chief Seattle's sphere of influence did not, for the most part, resist the treaty and removed themselves to the assigned reservations, it is reasonable to assume that Chief Seattle was able to persuade his people to abandon the path of resistance and revenge. According to tribal custom, the method of persuasion would be through a major address that dealt with the problem in an honest and forthright manner, or else it would be quickly debunked as empty and of little value.

Compare this to the plan of action that Seattle proposed about 40 years previous when he first spoke up in a council of war. At that time his new and audacious plan was recognized as superior to the various plans of the

erstwhile military leaders²⁰. Regardless of his relative youth, Seattle was able at that time to step directly into a leadership position due to his pragmatic and insightful approach. His plan had been judged on its merits and accepted over the ideas of those in positions of tribal superiority.

Therefore, during this speech in support of the treaty, Seattle had to find a way to convince everyone, including the younger forces with ideas that favored an aggressive defense of traditional hunting grounds. Seattle must have found a way to move the entire tribe to his way of thinking because his position of leadership was always contingent upon general agreement²¹. At that time, the Euro-Americans did not have the immediate forces on hand to quell a full Indian uprising, so the treaty necessitated cooperation between both cultures. It is much more improbable to believe that such a drastic change in tribal custom and life-style would occur so peacefully without a major address that re-set tribal priorities and inter-cultural relationships, orally.

In terms of the effect that the chief seemed to have had on the treaty, itself, several elements appear to be evident. Chief Seattle had three main concerns that stemmed from his early childhood experiences and were at the heart of many of his decisions vis-à-vis the Euro-American settlers throughout his life. The first concern was the problem of health. The Indians had suffered grievous losses from the devastating Western diseases, as their Native medicine had proved completely ineffectual in dealing with them. Seattle had from the outset welcomed the settlers and made a special effort to befriend Dr. David Maynard. The chief urged them to settle in the area, and he actively provided the settlers with assistance. In this way, Chief Seattle was able to secure the services of a Western medical doctor to deal with emergencies that Native medicine had no remedy for. With the treaty, too, Chief Seattle demanded that continued access for his people to Western medicine be included in the conditions. This is important

because without it written down, it would be easy for the Indians to be ignored once the Indians removed themselves to the reservations established by the treaty. This fear of Western disease and an attendant respect for medical expertise was deeply rooted in the chief, and it bore fruit in a treaty promise of medical access.

So too was his respect for Western power. Chief Seattle had a dual purpose in befriending the settlers: In so doing he also succeeded in allying himself with Western technological expertise and force of arms. He was extremely active in talking with and learning from the settlers. He studied Western economic business practices by going into business with the settlers, thereby building a stronger community and at the same time increasing his own wealth and position within his tribe. He was able to obtain Western accoutrements, weapons and clothing, and was able to enfold the settlers within his own growing sphere of influence. He warned them of impending Indian raids²² from tribes outside of his control and protected them, as they also aided and protected him. Certainly, Chief Seattle's alliance with the Western community greatly enhanced his resources and standing relative to the other tribes in the general area, and he grew to a position of pre-eminence if not outright dominance. In this way, Chief Seattle sought to use the treaty to make the alliance part of the official record and put his tribe under the protective umbrella of the U.S. government.

Third, Chief Seattle sought to provide long-term material support and stability for his people to balance the loss that would come from diminished resources from the much smaller territory. There were two elements to this: First, he asked for a significant amount of money to compensate for the move and the loss of territory. This was in direct conflict with the listed aims²³ (to only pay with some manufactured goods) of the Stevens party; however, the chief prevailed, though the process of actually forcing the

government to follow through with the promises proved difficult and time-consuming. Second, in line with U.S. government desires, the chief requested that a school and teachers be provide so that his people could learn how to function within the new culture and how to make and utilize the new technology. In this way he wanted to ensure that his people had a chance to adapt to and survive in the new world. All of these things were included in the treaty and offer proof that Chief Seattle's vision was forcefully put forward in the treaty discussions and so implemented.

In terms of tribal symbolism and position, it should also be pointed out that this period of the year in December and January is/was the most significant time for the spirit powers to manifest themselves²⁴. Chief Seattle would certainly be sensitive to the responsibility he carried with his own spirit gift. There are many major rituals that take place during this time, including spirit quests and potlatches²⁵, that bring the community together to celebrate tradition, acknowledge changes in position and determine future policies. Since Chief Seattle's primary spiritual power was Thunderbird – manifested through oratory – it is simply inconceivable that he wouldn't be the primary tribal spokesman to greet and guide the treaty council with the main focus of his words being on integrating the developments into tribal lore and history rather than on the more mercenary and mundane aspects.

Why would a speech in support of the treaty by the most important chief in the region be suppressed? First of all, it was reportedly delivered in December of 1854 as the treaty council was about to get underway, so it might be ignored by the U.S. government representatives as a mere formality, as mentioned previously. Also, since Chief Seattle was speaking in figurative language derived from Indian legend and lore, it might not have been considered germane. Further, it was more about creating an atmosphere that would be conducive to achieving the aims that Chief

Seattle saw were of paramount importance: namely, getting as much federal support as possible in the transition and acquiring a safe haven with a protective umbrella for his people by placing responsibility for the future welfare of the Indians squarely on the shoulders of the U.S. government, as well as convincing his people that it was in their best interest to find a way to accommodate the rising Western power. This would not reflect a position that the government would be willing accept as a basic contract premise, and thus best left as a quaint ornament not really worthy of official record. Besides, the U.S. government agenda was more concerned with acquisition and development by and for incoming Euro-American settlers that would advance U.S. hegemony²⁶.

As we look more closely at the artful construction of the speech, it will become manifest that this particular speech, though one of acquiescence, points out, with intelligence, the patent unfairness of the situation and the attendant responsibilities. If these were made part of the public record, they might also become open to adjudication and governmental liability – even if it is only in the court of public opinion. The eradication of a race of people who have acted only with generosity and are only attempting to live in peaceful co-existence is an act of unprovoked genocide best kept unmentioned and unnamed. It's also just more expedient to avoid possible problems arising from un-kept promises that were written down.

One example of this oral versus written discrepancy can be found in the treaty negotiation method of Governor Stevens. He organized four treaty councils (the one in this particular case was called the Treaty of Point Elliott²⁷), each lasting about four days²⁸. For his own intents and purposes, he "distributed some manufactured goods, read out the treaty terms in the Chinook Jargon, allowed some comment, then invited the tribal representatives to step forward and affix their marks to the treaties."²⁹

Stevens was an ambitious young man in a hurry to further his own

political interests by expeditiously promoting and facilitating the western expansion. He had the focused purpose of organizing the territory under his jurisdiction so that it could be settled and economically developed. His mission was to gather signatures on a treaty written in English that would secure vast tracts of land for Euro-American settlement. The job of the people who traveled with him was to make it happen as quickly as possible. To his credit, Stevens allowed the Indians to continue to live according to traditional hunting and fishing customs on their newly created reservations, though he did also intend for them to slowly become civilized to a degree and settle on individual farms. Seattle understood the reduced territorial circumstances, but it was presented as a partitioning in which the Indians would be left to their own devices, albeit in a greatly reduced territory from which they would have to make their living.

There was also the matter of the concessions made in the treaty that were not part of the written outline given to Stevens that was supposed to limit payment to blankets and other manufactured goods. Seattle was a very pragmatic man who was concerned about the practical welfare of his tribe. He wanted to make sure his people had access to Western medical care to treat the devastating Western diseases that were disfiguring and destroying his people³⁰, and he was concerned that his people receive enough money to survive in the burgeoning new economic system that was being introduced to the area³¹. These were concerns that were easy to promise but turned out to be difficult to deliver because once the Indians signed and moved from sight, they were no longer a government priority. These were issues that Seattle continued to clamor for on behalf of his people until his death. They were commitments that the federal government failed to live up to and might have been loath to see publicly addressed since they might be construed as a political embarrassment and slow the pace of western development.

Though the Indians accepted the prospect of diminishment and probable disappearance as a part of the natural process, Chief Seattle also expected the promise of payment of money and support to be part of the contract³². The Native American culture of that area was not literate in the sense of being able to read and write, especially in English. By necessity they would be utterly dependent on the spoken terms and on the capability and veracity of the official translator who happened to be in the employ of Stevens and the U.S. government³³. The official historical record would also be written from the same perspective. Stevens needed the signatures; he got them and then moved on to the next treaty council. Fulfillment of oral and written agreements was another thing entirely.

The next step of gauging authenticity of the speech would consist of examining factors concerning the person of Chief Seattle as well as the reconstruction process of his speech. Thus, it behooves us to consider a few questions. First, if this were a reconstruction of the actual speech, what would be the most effective way to go about it? Second, what were the circumstances for the speech, and related to that, what were the circumstances for the reconstruction?

Unfortunately, the speech we have today is essentially a collaboration based on the memory of a white man, Dr. Henry Smith, who had arrived in the area about two years before and had learned the language well enough to be able to follow the speech. Smith, though, was fortunate for three reasons: First, Lushootseed was a language used by a relatively simple culture without a need for a large vocabulary or a complex syntax and so not too difficult to learn. Second, the speech was delivered to inform Seattle's people of the treaty to be negotiated, as well as to set some parameters for the Euro-American settlers and representatives of the Territorial government in attendance. This necessitated a simple and clear approach because ultimate success depended upon cooperation and trust.

Everybody needed to fully understand what was at stake. Seattle did not want to obfuscate matters nor did he want to mislead anyone. For this he used images drawn from their own natural world and used simple, clear language. Third, Dr. Smith had access to Chief Seattle. Seattle was a sociable and generous man who worked closely with Dr. Smith on the translation of the speech. Seattle would not have understood the value of the somewhat flowery Victorian English³⁴ that Smith used, but the chief would have understood the images and ideas expressed. It is these very images and ideas that give the speech a kind of literary life that extends beyond the particular situation he was addressing in 1854 and reaches to fundamental human concerns that the entire world is facing in the 21st Century. Of course, Smith had his own perspective, with his own agenda and motives; however, to his credit, he did take extensive notes during the speech and worked on the translation in collaboration with Chief Seattle until his death and also interviewed tribal elders who had been in attendance.

It was published almost thirty-three years later (and more than twenty years after the death of Chief Seattle on June 7, 1866) on October 29, 1887, in the *Seattle Sunday Star*. There are other versions of the speech, notably one by Ted Perry for the movie *Home* (1972), but the Suquamish Indian tribal elders consider the original version by Dr. Henry Smith to be the most accurate.

Considering all these factors—Chief Seattle's position within the tribe as well as his Thunderbird gift; the oral tradition of the Native tribes as well as their tradition of noting change of position or status through ceremonial speeches; the record of such speeches at less significant events; the way the treaty reflected the spoken aims of Chief Seattle (sometimes in direct conflict with the official aims of the U.S. government negotiating team); the way in which Chief Seattle continued to fight for full implemen-

tation of the treaty terms until his death; the claims of Dr. Smith who worked in collaboration with both Seattle and the tribal elders to produce a version of the speech that reflected the tribal memory of the event; the fact that the government relied on their own written accounts that reflected their own concerns and perspective—it seems absolutely inconceivable that Chief Seattle did not deliver a very powerful and effective speech on that day (best translated by Dr. Henry Smith), that caused Seattle's people to acquiesce to the terms that he envisioned for the forthcoming Point Elliott Treaty.

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¹ For the environmentalist purposes, the Ted Perry version is usually cited (see Jefferson, pp 93-99). This version is not accepted as authentic at all by either the Northwest tribes or even by Perry, himself. However, the Smith version is considered the definitive one.

² Jefferson, p. 75.

³ Jefferson, along with other scholars, places his birth in 1786. This is partly based on Chief Seattle, himself, who claimed that as a young boy, he witnessed the arrival of George Vancouver in the *H.M.S. Discovery* when it anchored off Bainbridge in late Spring of 1792.

⁴ Some scholars describe her as a slave (see Buerge), others (like Jefferson) as the daughter of a chief. Evidence suggests that both could be correct in that she might have been first taken as a slave when his father Schweabe led a successful expedition against the Duwamish tribe, and then married her as a way to solidify his position as a chief and enable his son to be of royal lineage of both tribes (thus allowing for the possibility of a blood-related noble (i.e., Seattle) to be chief of both tribes). Taking slaves was a common part of inter-tribal warfare, and the position of a slave could be a fluid one.

⁵ When Chief Seattle's Euro-American settler friends approached him with the idea of honoring his help and friendship by naming the new city after him, Seattle tried to talk them out of it because according to his tribal belief, every time your name is uttered after death it disturbs your rest. Thus, Seattle was highly resistant, but reluctantly gave way when a financial stipend was attached to the honor.

⁶ In David Buerge's essay "Chief Seattle and Chief Joseph: From Indians to Icons" Buerge states that "Seattle's noble status was affirmed by his reception of Thunderbird power from an important supernatural wealth-giver during a vision quest held sometime during his youth." The Thunderbird power manifested itself in oratorical skill—a necessary skill for someone to assume and maintain a position of overall leadership. See also the Coll-Peter Thrush article "The Lushootseed Peoples of Puget Sound Country."

⁷ See Robert Boyd's definitive study, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline among Northwest Coast Indians 1774-1874*. Vancouver and Toronto: University of Washington Press, 1999. It is estimated that the Native American population in the Northwest plummeted by about seventy percent. The first epidemic of smallpox in the 1770s "eradicated at least 30 percent of the native population on the Northwest coast..." (Lange) This devastation along with the complete failure of the Indian "Medicine Man" to deal

with it made a huge impact on the boy who would become Chief Seattle. Throughout his life he continually depended on Western medicine for any health concerns and made sure to incorporate it into the Point Elliott Treaty.

⁸ The border dispute between the United States and Great Britain became quite contentious at times and even almost came to war, especially when it became part of the 1844 political campaign. However, it was finally settled peacefully by compromise with the Oregon Treaty of 1846, setting the boundary at the 49th parallel.

⁹ See government archives above. In order to promote settlement of the western territories, in 1841 the U.S. government passed the General Preemption Act as an incentive to prospective settlers: Each could claim up to 160 acres to keep and develop at a relatively low cost. If the man was married, he could claim another 160 acres.

¹⁰ See <http://www.nps.gov/archive/ebla/adhi/adhi3d.htm>

¹¹ Clark, Jerry L. "Thus Spoke Chief Seattle: The Story of An Undocumented Speech."

¹²: *ibid*

¹³: *ibid*

¹⁴ Shaw provides a first-hand account of his initial meeting with Chief Seattle in 1850, at which time the two each gave speeches. Seattle spoke in his native Lushootseed because he could not speak Chinook and had another Indian translate his speech into Chinook for Shaw who did not understand Lushootseed. Shaw was a junior officer in the party, but he was forced to do all the speaking, including a formal speech of greeting because he was the only one who spoke an Indian language—Chinook. See: "My First Reception in Seattle."

http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/my_first_reception_speech.html

¹⁵ The two main versions are the one by Smith and the one by Perry. There are other variations on the Smith version that add a few lines, but these are not considered legitimate. The version used by Clark is one of the variant Smith versions.

¹⁶ See Smith, Henry. "Chief Seattle's 1854 Oration." Clark both discounts and disputes the possible presence of Smith because his name was not part of the official written record. Clark is being a little misleading here because he is apparently equating presence at the speech with presence and participation in the negotiations. These are two different matters; and, though connected in process, do not logically necessitate attendance at both—even for an interested observer.

¹⁷ Jefferson. P. 82.

¹⁸ See Shaw. "My First Reception in Seattle."

¹⁹ In Clark's article arguing against the authenticity of the Seattle speech, he

mentions that one of the local settlers, Ezra Meeker, accused Stevens of suppressing speeches in opposition to the treaty by one of the leading Indian figures (Chief Leschi in this case). Though Meeker did not mention Seattle's speech, the practice of editing to control public perception is commonly done to further a political agenda. Besides, Seattle's speech was not in opposition to the treaty, but it did carefully delineate parameters that would be best left forgotten since they reflected oral agreements not necessarily included in the final version written in English.

²⁰There are several accounts of this pivotal incident in Seattle's life. Jefferson's version found on p.73-74 of his book is indicative:

"It became known that a group of over one hundred warriors from inland tribes...were assembling to stage raids on the Suquamish... This was unwelcome news because they had raided the region before and many people were killed or captured as slaves. So tribal leaders came together to plan a defense. Various ideas were discussed but none seemed like the right one. Chief Seattle spoke up. He was a young man [about 21] and untested as a leader but he proposed a plan so brilliant that it was immediately accepted by the leaders.

The raiding tribes were known to be coming down the Green River. At a certain point in the river there was a section of rapids just downstream from a sharp bend. Here Seattle had his men fell a large tree. It was trimmed and put into position just below the surface of the river so as not to be visible from a canoe. Seattle and his men then hid in the forest to await the arrival of the raiding party.

Soon the raiders came streaming down the river. When their canoes hit the tree, they capsized and the men were swept into the rapids. Many were dashed on the rocks and were drowned. Those who made it to shore were dispatched with spear and arrow...The raiding party was completely routed. The people rejoiced and Seattle was honored in a great celebration that lasted many days."

²¹Various contemporaries of Seattle, as well as historians familiar with tribal decision mechanics, have noted his method of using sound argument rather than force of will to achieve fully supported decisions. One example can be found in the reminiscence of the speech, itself, by Henry Smith.

<http://www.ilhawaii.net/~stony/seattle.html>

²²Coll Thrush recounts how the Duwamish Indians around the settlement named after Seattle warned the settlers about an impending Indian attack thereby saving the new community. Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place*, University of Washington Press, 2007. p52.

²³In *Life of Isaac Ingalls Stevens*, Volume 1, written by his son, Hazard Stevens: "The salient features of the policy outlined [to the advisers] were as follows:

1. To concentrate the Indians upon a few reservations, and encourage them to cultivate the soil and adopt settled and civilized habits.
2. To pay for their lands not in money, but in annuities of blankets, clothing, and useful articles during a long term of years.
3. To furnish them with schools, teachers, farmers and farming implements, blacksmiths, and carpenter, with shops of those trades.
4. To prohibit wars and disputes among them.
5. To abolish slavery.
6. To stop as far as possible the use of liquor.
7. As the change from savage to civilized habits must necessarily be gradual, they were to retain the right of fishing at their accustomed fishing-places, and of hunting, gathering berries and roots, and pasturing stock on unoccupied land as long as it remained vacant.
8. At some future time, when they should have become fitted for it, the lands of the reservations were to be allotted to them in severalty."

This is also quoted in a fine Wikipedia article on the Duwamish tribe. "Duwamish (tribe)." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 17 Mar 2008, 01:38 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 25 Mar 2008

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Duwamish_%28tribe%29&oldid=198763424.

²⁴See Coll Thrush. "The Lushootseed Peoples of Puget Sound Country."

²⁵Christopher Bracken notes how the winter was the time for the spirits to dwell with the Indians (p. 173 of *The Potlatch Papers*). This was also the season when they had less food to gather and thus more time to spend on socio-cultural activities.

²⁶This has been the primary American agenda from the time of the colonial period and throughout various presidencies that promoted western expansionist policies.

²⁷http://washingtonhistoryonline.org/treatytrail/treaties/timeline/treaty_2.htm

²⁸Buerge, David M. The Port Elliott Treaty negotiations were spread out over a longer period of time, from the end of December 1854 to January 22, 1855, due to winter conditions, difficulties in transportation and other logistical considerations, and various community activities and ceremonies. The actual negotiations were also on a larger scale than the other meeting places because more tribes were involved.

²⁹http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=5314

This link also contains a link to a PDF file of the treaty itself.

³⁰See Boyd and Lange.

³¹See Articles 6, 13, and 14 of the Point Elliott Treaty.

³²Jefferson sums up the terms of the treaty as including \$150,000 for nearly 90,000

acres of Suquamish land (they retained only about 7,500 acres) with \$15,000 for moving expenses (Articles 6 and 13 of the treaty). Also, "the United States was, under treaty, to maintain for twenty years a carpenter, blacksmith and the necessary shops, a farmer, a physician with necessary medicines, and to support an agricultural and industrial school with proper instructors." (Eells, 1985, p. 28) p. 79 of Jefferson and Article 14 of the treaty. See also a file of the complete treaty itself at:

http://washingtonhistoryonline.org/treatytrail/treaties/timeline/treaty_2.htm

The U.S. took four years to ratify the treaty and Chief Seattle lodged many complaints about non-compliance. More of the small allotment of land they had left was lost to encroaching settlers, monies weren't paid and the other support did not materialize. Seattle wrote: "I fear that we are forgotten or that we're to be cheated out of our land...I have been very poor and hungry all winter and am very sick now. In a little while I will die. I should like to be paid for my lands before I die."

³³That is, B.F. Shaw, who traveled with the government representatives as the official interpreter on the government payroll – not Dr. Henry Smith who had taken up residence in the area a year or two previous and was busily studying the culture and language (Lushootseed) for his own personal interest.

³⁴A term used to describe Smith's translation – see Clark.