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Claiming Idaho: Detangling the Narratives of Home

By

Catherine G. Carignan

Thesis Advisor: Robert Ward

Second Reader: Elizabeth Rush

Thesis

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Introduction

The memories of home I continually circle back to are the tactile— sagebrush between fingers, dirt under feet, sand spotted and gritty in eyes. I return to the physical reminders that differentiate the place I'm from and the place I am in, in order to organize my sense of self over time, my distance from those objects signifying a maturity otherwise lost amongst routine. I grew up in a high-plains desert, one that boasts mountains, trees, rivers, and sand dunes alike, jigsawed into a state constantly clinging to its rural and unapproachable identity. When I moved to Rhode Island, I began to understand that the place I came from— Boise, Idaho— possessed a novel quality, one that resulted in “from Idaho” being a core tenant of my identity. This, combined with my deep and unexpected longing for the familiar landscapes of home, resulted in a copious amount of reflection.

My family is not from Idaho. I'm now in Providence, my parents have since moved to Colorado, and my brother is in Brooklyn. My brother and I were both born in Chicago, my mom too, my father in Woonsocket. Rootlessness runs deep in my immediate family, parallel with a sense of pride in being brave enough to move to unfamiliar places and learn to love them deeply. We carry forth a generational oscillation of east to west motion across this country. Like so many before them, my parents moved West searching for that *something*, to raise my brother and I in open space, to have a grand adventure.

This story, one as old as the United States we know, rings throughout the literary canon, through the ideological frameworks of our government, into the perceived righteousness of our collective American culture. My sense of the west grew in tandem with my sense of adventure and free-spirit, grounded in the literature I poured over as a kid and young adult. I read the *Little*

House on the Prairie collection in its entirety, several times. Me and my best friend would reenact our favorite scenes, like the discovery of Soda Springs or the flattening of cow dung into flat, burnable pies, our hands deep in mud and little brains in the 1870s. My imagination fed off of historical fiction like *The Captain's Dog* and *Thunder Rolling in the Mountains*, the cowboy classics like *True Grit*, each story of seemed to be alive and possible in the Boise foothills.

As I got older, my curiosity crossed genres, going beyond fiction into poetry, memoir, more non-fiction. Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* spiraled me into a world of environmentalism and pristine wilderness, Robert Frost pulled me out of my west-centered literatures into the greater world of nature writing, and Thoreau quotes were written on little scraps of paper and taped to my walls in the angst of early high school. The stories grounding my sense of place were those of a travelled, claimed, and conquered west, and those grounding my sense of self eloquently equated the wildness I loved in nature to the core of what we are as humans. The poetic nature of belonging outside, romanticized and spun beautifully by these white writers, resonated profoundly in my growing-up self. To Thoreau, "The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild," and "life consists with Wildness. The most alive is the wildest." Moving west, moving towards a setting sun, moving into the unknown— all serve as metaphors for the colonial empires and transcendentalists alike.

In her work *The Transit of Empire*, Jodi Byrd frames colonial empires in terms of the cacophony created by their movement. She puts the weight of settlement onto transit and illustrates how the success of a colonial settlement depends on its ability to falsify its indigeneity. When the transit *to* becomes the way a place is defined, when an empire iterates and grows and complicates, a historical traffic jam occurs. Like the horns of angry Rhode Islanders on a bumper-to-bumper I-95, a cacophony— a harsh, layered, discordant mix of noises— rises from the

discourses of a land's history. Cacophonous discourse starts history with transit, not in a place. In Byrd's framework, colonizers dawn a perceived transferrable "Indianness" once they settle, assuming the role of indigenous to the place they conquer.

The west of my mind, Thoreau's West, a place to be moved towards and into, was the metaphoric West of an expanding America— it is the Turner Thesis, Manifest Destiny, and the root of a Carignan family moving to Boise in an RV. Perhaps the latter is a bit different, but the basis of the move was not new— Homer the Class C Winnebago was no covered wagon, but our move followed a script written long before 2003. Journeys from empire to the west become the starting point of the American west's history, and the voices of place-based stories get lost in the cacophony.

Thoreau's West, the new Wild after the colonization of New England, is also the west of pristine, uninhabited wilderness. It is not the west of the Shoshone-Bannock, Nimiipuu, Eastern Shoshone, Niitsitapi, and Lemhi land on which I grew up. These tribes, each alive and still living in Idaho, struggle to pierce through the cacophony, the absent presence, of indigenous groups in the historical narrative. The nomadic movement shared by these tribes was swallowed by the transit of empire. I learned an indexed version of the tragedies, the relocations and terminations, but nothing about the persistence of the Indigenous communities in my state today. I experienced local wilderness largely through recreation, by choice, and recognize fully the privilege by which I was able to do so. More so than explore my personal connection to the beauty of this place, to assert an ownership over wildland with my whiteness and joy in being outside, I want to reckon with the procurement of it. I want to put transits in conversation with places, spanning time and space. I want to reckon with this: how do I untangle my relationship with a place so

complicated?, or better yet, how do I begin to understand the complications of a place tangled up in me?

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In my short visit home to see high school friends over New Years, I spent a day visiting the Idaho State Historical Society Archives. Situated next to the Idaho Botanical Gardens, the archival office is a twenty-minute walk on a trail through the Table Rock foothills. I grew up just on the other side of those hills, less than a 30-minute hike away. Even still, this visit was my first time actually going inside, and I had to take an Uber from my friend's house to get there, not a trail over some picturesque hills. My parents' move to Denver had shaken a lot of things up, and I could no longer move around my hometown with ease. Nevertheless, I arrived at the archives with the nebulous mission to find "stories", ones left out of the transit and distant from my conception of home, but I didn't quite know where to start. The research librarian was polite but given that it was the morning of New Years Eve, she distantly pointed me towards shelves that "might have some journals", proceeding to tap-tap-tap with manicured nails on her phone.

I gravitated towards the "Indian Affairs" section and began pulling records from heavy manila folders, leafing through yellowed paper. Bolded report titles shouted at me, and phrases like "CESSNUM 444 FOR SHOSHONI AND BANNOCK LAND" and "STATE OF COMMERCE ON THE FORT HALL INDIAN RESERVATION" dampened my naive spirit. These were not the stories, these were the consequences, the administrative mandates of shattering policies, and I put the folders away. I felt too directionless to justify asking for help from the librarian, I couldn't even specify a region or time period of desired research, I just wanted to read about *people*.

I felt somewhat stupid for a few minutes, wandering around the warm, sun-lit research area, looking to 1800s maps attempting to articulate the vast landscape of this beautiful state to help me articulate what it was I wanted from this visit. There was a special exhibit about “Lincoln in Idaho” open to the public, which confused me, though I never got so far as to enter the dark Lincoln room because I came across a small row of hip-height shelves, loaded with blue, open-mouthed file organizers. Inside each sat dozens of folder-bound booklets, and the sign affixed to the top of the shelves read, “Oral History Collection.” I inquired about the kind of oral histories these contained, and the librarian laughed, telling me to take a look. I pulled out file after file, opening to skim an index of terms used during the interview. From scattered words, my imagination began putting together narratives for these isolated pieces of information.

I pulled dozens of these interviews from the shelf. They were products of a multi-agency effort to preserve the scattered narratives of our state history by interviewing older members of communities. The interviews were recorded, two thirds of them had been transcribed, and all were delivered to the Archives for safe keeping. Some “interviews” were just quick synopses of community members and some focused only on one or two pointed questions before concluding with, “the subject requests the interview to be complete.” But many were extensive, self-told histories of the subject’s entire life. There were over 3100 stories in the oral histories collection, and I read madly, searching for *someone* to include in this still-nebulous project of mine. I wanted words that made me see a new side to a familiar place, a story to shake-up my perspective or pull some other vague reaction from my brain and make it feel like the right fit. But who was I to discriminate between all of these lives? Each person “made a go of it”, a phrase I read over and over again, in Idaho to varying degrees of success, telling their story with candor and reflection I felt misguided for judging.

I became invested in the stories of first-generation Idahoans and their general stores, in the farming escapades of the children of miners, in the intricate retellings of weddings that required two day horse rides to the nearest church to consecrate. I was overwhelmed and running out of time, wishing that I'd configured my break better to spend more time in this special place with all of these lives spread out in front of me. I knew the dozens of lifetimes couldn't come with me back to Providence, perhaps I could call after leaving and get a few copies mailed, but I needed to find the ones that felt *right*. In the final hour of Archive time, I settled on three women whose stories struck chords in my chest.

Emaline George was interviewed in 1980. A Shoshone-Bannock woman born on the Fort Hall Reservation to two Lemhi-Shoshone parents, Emaline spoke extensively about her undeniable connection to both the reservation and the land from which her parents were removed. She grew up and left Fort Hall to pursue an education, eventually leaving Idaho, but returned without a degree to be with her family and the land she missed deeply.

Florence M. Pearson came to Idaho in 1889 as her father pursued employment in several southern Idaho mines, and she recounted stories from her childhood with such remarkable clarity that I could identify the places she was talking about with ease, despite countless name changes. She moved every winter, and covered a huge swath of Idaho in a few short pages. Anna Hayes' father came to Idaho in 1876 to work on a ranch, and the marriage of her parents in 1877 was the first pioneer wedding in the region. Hayes' stories contain characters like Indian Nellie and analysis of Frank Riblett's proposition to irrigate the desert of Southern Idaho, details that made me reread pages of her dense sentences three or four times before understanding the complexity of the scene she remembered.

Ten minutes after closing, to the annoyance of the librarian, I gathered my things and left the archives. A scramble of emotions built up in my chest as I ordered an Uber to twenty my percolating New Year's Eve plans twenty minutes away. I was incredibly happy to have met this pile of paper people and leave with transcriptions of three women I yearned to thank and hug, to make tea for and chat with. But I was also annoyed. I was annoyed at the reality of my dwindling roots in Boise, annoyed that I was getting into the back of a stranger's car to drive up a road I'd driven every day as a kid. I felt unmoored, wondering what my story would read like if I were interviewed at 80. Inevitably, it'd be a conglomeration of places and homes, different steps in life marked by uprooting instead of deepening roots. I wanted more time with these paper people, I wanted to learn how to stay put.

I find myself often in the tension between transit and roots, not quite moving and taking but not staying and claiming. I grew into myself by cutting my hands open on rocks, climbing up peaks, traveling across landscapes and rolling around in the dirt, thriving from a competitive need to *earn it* through exertion and exploration. When I did this and came home tired but full of new places, I felt I belonged. My Dad called me fearless once, it was the kindest thing he ever said to me. His validation is why I am doing this. "This", in the moment I am writing, means deeply detangling what home means to me, and trying to put the claims and stories that shaped Idaho into conversation with the ones that shaped the Idaho in me.

Upon reflection, it's perhaps ironic that I was drawn to three women whose stories are marked with transit over and around Idaho, who were in near constant motion until choosing to settle later in life. Each woman has a strong sense of belonging and identity, despite moving and drastic intergenerational change. In attempting to collect place-based narratives from specific areas in Idaho, I gravitated to the stories that transcended that very idea, but somehow

maintained a persistent sense of belonging in a place. If I decenter myself from the bones of my home— for I was not there in its infancy thousands of years ago, its containment 200 years ago, or its reorganization 70 years ago— and give other voices space to testify (or complicate or persist), I can perhaps make sense of my place-confused identity.

Foothills and Sage Brush

So, you see, the Indians and the government is always fighting. And see who owns certain lands and it's valuable, there always somebody that's going to promote the Indians to try to get it, control over it, you see.

Florence M. Pearson

There seemed to be no place for the Chinese in this section of Southern Idaho. The Danish, the Germans, and the Swedish were highly respected and most of them prospered genuinely, and most of them became permanent citizens of this area. In fact, their children and their grandchildren had become citizens of the present settlement. We were carefully taught always not to discriminate between nationalities because as my father said, 'we are all Americans. And so, they are all our people.'

Anna Hansen Hayes

I asked my best friend Sarah what she remembered most from growing up in Boise, and while painting a romantic scene of the Sawtooth mountains and endless days spent hiking she stopped herself, laughed a little, and said, “actually, I want to change that: what I remember most is my backyard.” The instinct to conflate my growing up with the wildness of central Idaho is instinctive, though that wasn’t where I or most of my friends spent the majority of time as kids. The amount of time I did spend in the deep wild impacted me significantly, instrumentally, but most nights were spent looking at scruffy foothills, not granite peaks. Most mornings were spent driving in the truck to school, not down dirt roads into National Forests. The sublime of Idaho’s inner wilds, the central mountains and forests, stick in my ribs differently, they shaped a piece of me I hold onto in times of flux and uncertainty. But my time in the areas within in an hour of my house, those made me hungry for exploration, the places where Florence and Anna carved out lives for themselves.

Florence Pearson's family came to Idaho in 1889, because her father was ostracized in the small community of her birth, Minersville, Utah. Interviewed in 1970, Florence characterized Minersville as "a little Mormon town," and her father wasn't a believer. There were mining employment opportunities in Idaho, and her father moved the family north in 1889 and to settle about 60 miles east of Boise. Anna Hansen Hayes was born in Idaho, her father moved to Cottonwood, 200 miles north of Boise, in 1876 after reading in a newspaper about a "land of eternal sunshine" and stayed in Idaho thereafter. Each discusses how tough the days of early-settlement were, but both had access to one or two-teacher schools and were able to learn to read and write. The progress they saw in the course of a lifetime astounded both women, who tell stories of an Idaho on the cusp of its statehood. Anna Hayes recalls early barriers to formal statehood discussed in 1880,

In Washington, the Congressmen were debating the fact that Idaho could not be justified as a separated state. Its resources were all gone when the gold mining panned out. So Governor Niel felt perhaps the counties would be able to supply some definite resource that would justify holding the state as an identity. Mr. Riblett went to work at once and his idea was that all of this waste land on both sides of the Snake River could be irrigated from that great river and he set about to lay out a plan through by which the water could be diverted from the river and spread over the wasted, dry land.

Mr. Riblett, a character that "few people know, he was a very modest and a very small man," pushed for irrigating the dry lands to achieve justifiable statehood. The state was ratified before these projects went into motion, but Anna Hayes says the critical part was Mr. Riblett articulating a grand, modern vision.

The development of productivity paralleled the development of relationships between these settlers and the construction of social stratification. This extends beyond descriptions of Native/ settler conflicts, they both talk about the amalgamation of identities among the settlers. Anna Hayes notes particularly the presence and marginalization of Chinese miners,

For several years, there were many Chinese in Snake River Canyon mining for gold. Few of them stayed, however, because they were not really very welcome and they were not much respected. It was occasionally someone had a Chinese cook. Other than that, there seemed to be no place for the Chinese in this section of Southern Idaho.

Florence also alludes to the segregation of miner camps though, saying there were “lots of Chinese. And they were always very nice to people who was nice to them, there was no resentment at all. But there were lots of Chinese the early miners...there was a lot of them that were in all those little camps.” However, in Anna’s story, white settlers were grouped into her father’s description of Americans in a way the Chinese were excluded from,

The Danish, the Germans, and the Swedish were highly respected and most of them prospered genuinely, and most of them became permanent citizens of the area.... We were carefully taught always not to discriminate between nationalities because as my father said, ‘we are all Americans. And so, they are all our people.’ It was not a mysterious lesson to me at that time because it was the casual way that the early citizens treated almost all foreign people.

A block of “Chinatown” storefronts are reconstructed in the Idaho History Museum, I remember looking at their elaborate green and red trims in confusion as a kid. Why weren’t these still downtown, where the sign said they were taken from? Twenty eight percent of Idaho’s population was Chinese in the 1870 census, and over half of miners were Chinese laborers. After the mines ran dry, much of the Chinese population, enduring racist hostility and segregated towns, moved further west.

Though Anna and Florence were young as forced removal and relocation of tribes increased significantly in the late 19th century, both depict Natives interacting with their families in a multitude of dynamic ways. Anna says when she lived in Rockcreek at her uncle’s farm in the summer,

Indians were my friends there; I had not seen Indians in Albion; but my friends were constantly about the ranch. Indian Nellie lived in her wigwam not more than, oh, three or four hundred feet from the Hansen home. The wigwam was a lovely place – it always smelled of buckskin and smoke and I watched Nellie make fine gloves to sell, she made once, a tiny pair for me when I was five years old and this gloves could keep me warm no matter how cold the weather was.

These fond memories, though somewhat trivial given the massive removal happening in the state, are woven into Anna's stories organically, tinted with a sweet fondness of childhood and a sense of white settler ignorance. These characters come up frequently,

When I was about six or six and a half, my only playmate was Indian Tom – a little boy a couple of years older who had been picked up in the forest by two cowboys at that time... but it was a happy, most enlightening summer because he seemed to know a great many things that I'd never heard of, and I learned.

Anna, though identifying these characters primarily as Indian and secondarily as figures in her life, was able to interact with Natives in

Florence's experience is less detailed, but she asserts that, "Indians, of course, there were always friendly Indians around... Never unfriendly and everybody was just nice to everybody." Both women acknowledge violence, but only as it relates to the safety of their families. During the Bannock War of 1878, Bannock and Paiute warriors, who had been removed from their ancestral western Idaho and eastern Oregon land. Organized by Chief Buffalo Horn, a group of warriors left the Fort Hall reservation and moved north, fighting General Howard as they moved through southern Idaho. Anna Hayes says her family was minimally affected, and that this movement wasn't spread among the Natives she interacted with,

At the time of the 'uprising' as they called it, that was 1878, the first year that my father and mother had gone to make their own home at Cottonwood. They were forced to flee to Ten Mile, Utah, for the protection of the soldiers. And the Rockcreek people, however, were not harmed and they were not frightened. The Indians living in that section did not join what was called the 'uprising' and the daily stage continued to run daily and operate in a regular manner even throughout that time of the Indian excitement.

Florence makes light of smaller-scale violence, "Of course there was lots of murders and disturbing things, but we were at the age it really didn't mean anything to us... that's just the history of any mining town." The conflation of violence and the development of frontier towns is entrenched in the stories of both women, but the violence had little impact on their day-to-day

experiences of settlement life. Pull that narrative to today, and it still rings true. Fundamental, systemic violence rarely ruptures the sage brush dirt in a way that prompts the settled, me, to question how such bloodshed and theft goes unrectified. It's buried in the common narratives of place I grew up, in the Anna Hayes-like stories of perseverance and tenacity that are inherently tinged with racism and violence but still tell the story of triumph over odds.

These stories, though remarkable in human accomplishment, empowered more white, western families to make a go of it. They build the foundations of the erasure narrative used to claim land. When does possession turn into calling a place home? How long before an erasure narrative, writing out the indigenous stewards of this land, becomes the origin story of new inhabitants? How do I reckon with this, continuously *and* productively? Do I have any way in which to claim a piece of home as formative in the story of my growing up without possessing it?

My point of entry into the established culture of settlement entangling the foothills and sage brush wasn't by way of reading, rather, through traveling in pursuit of a sweet music. Rebecca walked into my life in fifth grade. A slightly pudgy girl, red-faced in a Tom Brady jersey and wool hat in late August, nervously opened the door to Mr. Baxter's fifth grade classroom (at that point, still taught in a trailer), visibly resisting the temptation to apologize for the intrusion. She was born in Texas, raised until 5th grade in Singapore, and arrived in Boise a little geographically and socially turned around. Rebecca insisted on being called Rebecca, and self-righteous as ever in my basketball shorts and a polo shirt, I immediately decided she was much more of a Becca, called her such, and somehow, we've been friends ever since.

We played in Middle School Modern Ensemble together, a formative experience to both our patience and our shared musical inclinations. The group met in Mr. Brown's classroom (also taught in a trailer, though he made an attempt to improve the acoustics by layering carpet samples beneath the instruments and stapling cork boards to the walls) before class on Mondays and Wednesdays. All were welcome, and this strictly enforced inclusion policy resulted in arrangements of Mr. Brown's favorite songs that seemed to break all theoretical rules of balance and timbre. Our talent show performance of Guster's "Satellite" included two separate banjo solos and five vocalists; the Spring Festival rendition of the Fleet Foxes "White Winter Hymnal" had not three but four pianos playing the rhythmic lines in lieu of a drummer and a mandolin line piping out the high harmony. All to say, Becca and I played a lot of music together, and as we grew up, we recognized this make-it-work style of arrangement to be a fundamental component of folk and bluegrass.

Idaho has a pipeline of old-time musicians coming down from the mountains and into Boise, Weiser, and other foothill towns. Farm towns hosted festivals each summer, and Becca and I became infatuated with the fiddle festivals, the harmonica hoop-la's, the mandolin mountain get-downs. We gathered a band that somewhat mimicked a passable old-time group and started busking at the local outdoor market. Happy organic crop-purchasing moms and grandfolk would pause or sing along, and we became connected to a community that represented a tradition far greater than our little school and city, crossing our state to listen to more of this "old time," this "tradition."

When Becca and I were 17, we went to the Weiser Fiddle Contest 3 nights early with Sam Larsen and his father. Weiser is about 75 miles northwest of Boise, along the Snake River and surrounded by light brown foothills and sage. Sam was a guitarist in our band, though he

also dabbled on harmonica, kickdrum, background vocals, and the band favorite, the foot tambourine. Sam's dad had told us that he'd caught word at his guitar group (Jim was also a very talented musician, and also childishly curious about the depth of the Idaho bluegrass and old time scene) that all the 'real' musicians who attended the festival arrived in Weiser a few nights early. They'd camp out and play music all night, walking from tent to tent to jam with each other and share beers and grills and all the good, old time stuff.

We were definitely not good enough to be there in terms of musical talent, but curiosity got the best of us. We set up camp, made dinner in the trailer, then slowly started to walk around, guitars and fiddles and mandolins in hand. It was nerve wracking, peaking our head into tents with withered old musicians shooting whiskey and haphazardly picking out riffs I'd be lucky to learn in a year of sober attempting. Some tents had a carpet rolled out, some people had clicked together those plastic tiles so as to create a hard floor for stomping. As it got darker and darker the tents grew louder and louder, and like a of village possessed by the spirit of stomping boots and haw-yees the parties raged. We tumbled from tent to tent, eventually giving up on playing along and just listening, dancing if there was enough room under the little white roof, moving to the side when an upright bass got wheeled in on a dolly by a hearty woman who heard her favorite song.

Mountain Dew, Shady Grove, and a hundred songs I couldn't name bumped late into the dry June night, crickets sang along, and we finally stumbled back to our trailer at 1 am. Sam, Becca and I crashed on the ground by the fire outside its steps, soaking up all the sweet wafts of a sound we'd chased an hour out of town. We woke up to a silent camp, a couple jack ripper snores tearing through tent walls but no life visible from our piece of ground. The bluegrass

Bacchanal felt like a fever dream, an explosion of the thick dirt and sagebrush and fading green to brown foothills of Weiser that let loose an Idaho I was infatuated with.

I felt at once connected to and distant from my home, my perceived difference between my connection to this history and the ratty old musicians' seemed monumental. It felt as though they were children or grandchildren of Anna and Florence, with direct ties to families who wanted to be in this place before it was made into a true state. Playing simple, good music that had been played for a hundred years in these small towns, it felt rich in tradition and I wanted so badly to be a part of it, in a more honest, gritty way than my outsider-ness allowed. My family didn't make a wagon journey or a train voyage. Does my family get a journey, an origin story of claiming land? In a two-minute phone conversation with my mother while I was mhm-ing to her updates about book club and walking club in her new Denver neighborhood, I was deep in the contemplation of those questions. I spit out,

"Wait, mom, why did you guys move to Boise in the first place?"

And the immediate response,

Freedom, wide open spaces, to get you guys closer to the natural world. Where I'm from, the western suburbs are west of the city. I wanted to get you guys to the real west. It's why we bought the RV.

We thought, oh my god, without room they're going to be neurotic nervous city kids, and all of our friends were moving to western suburbs, and I guess we just took that and rolled. Literally, rolled in the RV to the west... It also dropped our cost of living.

I guess in hindsight that's kind of a fucking nuts answer (laughs). Love you guys.

There, the origin story of my growing up in the scrubby foothills of Boise. The westward impulse took root in my parents, the physical experiences offered in a wilderness were left unmatched in a city. Different from those who persevered and endured, but predicated on the

violence that enabled us all to move West. Perhaps Thoreau's thought, "Every tree sends its fibres forth in search of the Wild. The cities import it at any price. Men plow and sail for it. From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind", is a fundamental calling that white, Western America now feels its presence continues to answer.

I. Moving Away

I left for the East and realized all of my sweet and whole memories of people, the ones I reach for in the depths of Providence Februaries, were ingrained in place, knit into home alongside strings of juniper trees and pine pollen and alpen blue. The way woods are tangled up in me, my friends and loves and family are tangled up in them. Objects and permanence, I give the objects I hold close permanence in these places, associating a very particular wilderness with the people I love.

A place I hold dearly: Ponderosa Pine Scenic Byway, Highway 21 to most Idahoans, connects a stretch of wilderness in a roller-coaster, not-sustainable-but-has-last-ed-100-years kind of way. In the winter, avalanches crash from high peaks on either side, burying the road for weeks at a time while men in orange jackets and six layers of thermals attempt to get a snowplow through. In the summertime, it's inevitably closed at some point in August due to wildfires, with massive crews using it as an access point to get into the abyss that is the Idaho wilderness.

It's a drive I grew up hating, the elevation gain and loss coupled with hairpin turns inevitably making my brother throw up in the back seat of the car. There are old signs posted every 20 or so miles, trying to explain the road's history at each important point, recounting stories of French fur traders crashing their boats in the April rivers, establishing towns from wreckage, or Oregon trail explorers getting turned around on their way to free land and a better coast, or miners chasing false leads to find gold. The founders of the pass somehow made it through several rugged mountain ranges between Boise and the Montana border, with no pavement or guard rails to give them a sense of assurance that they were indeed going to make it.

I'm not sure if those stories are real or not, the legitimacy seems to live in the delivery via permanent road sign and not in citing sources. But regardless, so much time I spent on those drives was contemplating the anecdotes from those signs. Grand explorers charging out of the 19th century and into the unknown, the vastness that I was cutting through so easily on a paved road they hiked and rode horses and pulled wagons up, tackling impossible peaks out of necessity.

Last summer, I drove east out of Boise on 21 with a car full of boxes en route to Colorado, helping my parents out with their move to Denver. With much quiet, contemplative time on my hands driving up 21, for the first time I thought of this outlandish possibility: *The road signs aren't real*. These stories all read as impossible to my now-adult mind. Me and my little car full of packed things, whipping around these mountains on a road that demands attention, and my mind was 200 years away in those stories. For the first time, I debated the probability of French men actually paddling rafts down this river and stumbling up these mountains to try and cut a path home. The road signs could be hear-say, they could be folklore! Who knows, perhaps they were real, but they weren't infallible in my head anymore, and that was strange.

Since the days of road sign infallibility, I'd gotten older, I'd grown out of this place, but the roads stuck in my ribs, every sharp breath inhaled in real life reminiscent of the ones taken while whipping around turns in central Idaho as a kid. Things like that are woefully tangled up in this grown/growing version of myself. And while moving boxes with no concrete plan of returning soon, I felt older than I had when I'd left Boise 100 miles earlier.

The Salmon River Wilderness

*We have a treaty, an 1867 executive order and a 1868 treaty and its specific wording in there that the government agreed that if we gave up this land— see **we gave up**, they didn't take it, **we gave** all this land to them— make assurances that we have an education, that we shall have our lands that will be appropriated by however, when the time came that we chose to have a government, or however it was going to be, that we would have all these things.*

When the time came, when the agreement with the government was not as such as they promised, then when they were forced to move, there was bitterness; they moved here with bitterness.

The Indian people, they're political outlook is making assurances that what we have is kind of a uniqueness, a right. It's something that we possess. Our land is ours; our water is ours, everything that was agreed to in the treaties is ours. And even though maybe at one time we had vast acreage, millions of acres, in comparison today, this reservation has about 544,000 acres. But with those lands that were deeded back to the government, we still have rights, off reservation grazing, hunting, fishing, wood gathering and those other rights we still retained. But even to enjoy those rights, we still have problems.

Emaline George, 1989

Emaline George was born on the Fort Hall reservation in Southern Idaho, 228 miles south of the Salmon, Idaho. Her grandmother was from the northern area of Idaho, and her parents were among the generation of Lemhi Valley Shoshones moved onto Fort Hall. Interviewed for the local PBS station's History of Idaho project in 1989, Emaline said of her mother's forced relocation, "Their trek, when they were moved here... it was a pain, a pain that you don't— it's a pain that when they talk about, in their voice, you can tell they were hurt." The geographic differences between Fort Hall and the Salmon River area are vast. The former lies in a dry and flat area south of the mountains, and the latter boasts the highest peaks, deepest valleys, and most profound whitewater in the state.

The Salmon River is a main artery of the Idaho watershed. It pumps whitewater through canyons across the state, delivering runoff from the major mountain ranges in the east to the Snake River on the Idaho/Oregon border in the west. It's the largest undammed river in the lower 48 and its banks and surrounding forest are protected in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. The Wilderness' namesake, Senator Frank Church, was the senate-floor sponsor for the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the creator of the 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which prevented the construction of dams on protected rivers, the protection of the Salmon River his top priority. In 1980, he pieced together several designated "primitive areas" and the Magruder Corridor to construct the 2.4 million-acre River of No Return Wilderness. After being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, his name was added to the title of the Wilderness.

The Lemhi Valley is one of several along the Salmon River, and its stewards, the Lemhi Shoshone, were relocated to Fort Hall between 1907 and 1909. The Lemhi valley, town, and mountain pass located to the east were named by Mormon missionaries who settled in the Salmon River valley on the western side of the Divide. They misspelled Limhi, the third king in the Book of Mormon. The Limhi Mormon mission arrived in 1855 and stayed in the valley until 1858, when President Buchanan caught word of this northward settlement and mobilized 2,500 troops to fight the expansion of the Mormon church. The interviewer asked Emaline if she had any stories from her grandmother's first interaction with non-Indians to which she responded, "yes, when she first encountered non-Indians, that was in the Lemhi Valley and she said, 'it was the Mormons'. The soldiers were there and then there is Mormons that were there... and at the time they were under the leadership of Chief Tendoy." Her grandmother called them "the people

who wear dark clothes of one color,” and said the question “Why did they want our lands and what were they going to do with us?” rang throughout the community.

Members of the Shoshone, Bannock, and Salmon river tribes caught word of potential conflict, and a white mountaineer named John Powell, also trying to conspire against Mormon expansion, worked with a Bannock Chief known as Le Grand Coquin to attack the Limhi settlement. Thus, the Limhi missionaries were some of Idaho’s first white residents, and returned to Utah a short three years later after nearly inciting a war with the federal army on Lemhi land. Such is the history of the Salmon River area.

Growing up in Boise, the Salmon and its forks were mythical places to me, and I knew them best through fabled stories of recreation. Each September, the cohort of exceptionally outdoors-y teachers would come back to school with stories of self-guided trips down the south fork or trout fishing on the middle fork. Running a raft trip down any fork of the Salmon takes an immense amount of resources, planning, and technical competence.

Most summer river tourists embark on expensive, commercially guided trips, and the rafting industry is a huge source of local income. The permitting process for non-guided trips involves in-person visits to the Forest Service station in the city of Salmon, a packing list of leave-no-trace gear, and much persistence. A combination of the logistical hassle, high price tag of guided trips, and a deep fear of whitewater in my transplant parents meant that my family never ran the river. Had they been passionate about rafting, we may have made it work, but they much preferred their feet to be on sturdy ground.

Thus, I got to enjoy the Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness area on foot a few times, but never saw it from the water.

Working for a guiding company that ran trips on the Salmon was a goal for many I grew up with, and they worked to attain the skill level necessary for such technical work. For me, it was a pipe dream, as my parents kept me as far from whitewater as possible, but I fantasized about it often while kayaking on the tamer rivers around Boise. The Salmon’s remote lure pulled me and my friends’ thoughts often away from Boise and into daydreams full of deep wilderness and free-spirited river-guide fun. The energy of seasonally employed “river rats” is a contagious and consistent part of summers in Idaho. They fill small-town bars when they’re not running trips, live in tents along two-lane highways, and make up a romanticized vision of short-term employment I find myself envying any time I’m home in July. I took my Rhode Island-raised boyfriend to a bar called The Dirty Shame in Crouch, Idaho to see a cover-band made up of river guides called “Bootjuice” last summer, and after an evening of swing dancing, all he could ask was “Why did you leave?”

When I was home for the holidays in 2019, my good friend Karoline was applying to several companies that run trips on rivers across the state for her fifth season of guiding. Karoline wasn’t raised in a very outdoor-oriented family, her grandparents moved west from Connecticut and she grew up in suburban Boise. And yet, Karoline has spent most summers since she was 12 in the backcountry, learning how to kayak and eventually guide through just being on the river for three months a year. Her stories are like that of my teachers growing up, they make me feel connected to the greater Idaho I know that I’m from, but didn’t always get to know as I should have. She’s guided exclusively on the Salmon for two years, and she insists that “it’s just unlike anywhere else in the world.”

Karoline lived in Stanley when she worked on the Salmon. The recreation industry makes up most of the Salmon River traffic, though it's highly regulated by the Forest Service, BLM and Fish and Wildlife Service. Only seven permits per day are issued during the season, and there's a 30-person limit per permit. The permitting system is largely a stewardship effort taken to maintain the pristine nature of this wilderness, but it also bars access to many. But, "once the season ends, it gets too cold, the water level goes down, and the area kind of has a chance to regrow and heal from three months of nonstop visitors." After rowing over 400 miles in a 28-day trip last summer, Karoline talked about the geography of the area with ease, but continually gravitated to describing the river's past.

In getting off the water and exploring the banks, Karoline says that you see "all of the history of the pioneers who settled along the river, their old cabins are still around", she tells the story of Lewis and Clark turning back when they reached the river's Impassable Canyon, but she also has seen the remnants of cultures predating any white settlement.

You pull off to the side of the river and you see these pictographs by Native Americans that lived there however many thousands of years ago, there's pit-houses along the river too. We don't have any history about them... there's no historical record of this tribe that very obviously lived out here. They're called the Sheepeaters, but there's just so much we don't know because they're either wiped out or maybe, you know, they merged with a different tribe, but there's a lot of unknown history.

I pushed her on this subject, as I've been digging into the complicated reality of tribes being left out of federal recognition, and thus, out of the historic archives. I asked if her company or others she's worked for practiced some kind of land acknowledgement or had built a relationship with groups that claimed Salmon River land before settlement.

When she worked on the Middle Fork of the Salmon, she says that a woman whose family had been living in the area for generations tried to educate the visitors. Though unsure of her tribal affiliation, Karoline said she encouraged guiding companies on the Middle Fork to pull over at the first Forest Service station to meet with her, and she told them legends and stories

about the land they were about to travel through. Karoline didn't know the specifics, she was typically outside the station roping rafts or preparing meals, but says that "right off the bat, the visitors learned about what this place meant to other people, even if it's just the limited knowledge we do have." She says that even though information is limited, the vast history "is just inherent in the place."

I understood the concept Karoline was trying to talk about, and it's one that still sits strangely in my sense of home. There is undeniable history, abundant narratives run the banks of the Salmon alongside the trout and the rafters, but it is scattered. Layers of erasure, claim, reclaim, and more erasure spiral through this land, inherent yes but easy to understand, no. It's the folklore, the creation stories, the countless journeys through and over and into each place. The history of the Salmon River area defines the state of Idaho, its land witnessed the arrival of Lewis and Clark, the removal of Emaline George's parents to Fort Hall, the Sheepeater people, those groups whose names were lost. The complex narratives inherent in this place are distilled into passing statements, small stories retold to countless kids learning about state history, uncomplicated in their husked form.

In state-mandated fourth grade history class, the story of Idaho begins with Lewis and Clark and their Corp of Discovery. Though French fur trappers, and long before them indigenous tribes, were already present at the time of the journey, the Corps of Discovery was the first I knew of Idaho becoming part of America. At the center of the Corps' success was its guide and indigenous heroine, Sacagawea, who has a statue down at the state capitol. Her role was both romanticized and challenged, but I was always enamored with the idea of a fourteen-year-old girl possessing the capacity to guide those men into a new world.

President Jefferson commissioned his secretary, Captain Meriwether Lewis, to assemble an expeditionary team tasked with finding a water-route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. The first Americans to undertake this journey, Lewis and Clark bore the heavy significance of federal expansion at its precipice. No longer would beyond the Mississippi be an uncertain, foreign land. With every mile, Lewis and Clark carefully recorded, mapped, and documented a future Western United States.

In 1805, the land making up the state of Idaho began its journey to becoming American, and that's where Mrs. Kasserman transported a classroom full of mesmerized 4th-graders to. I absorbed these stories hungrily, never pausing to question validity or asking questions. This is where my history of America began, and its importance in grounding my worldview was undeniable. Idaho's land became relevant to the expedition a year before Lewis and Clark made it to the Continental Divide on Idaho's now-eastern border. Preparing to spend the winter near a Hidatsa-Mandan settlement on present-day South Dakota land in November of 1805, the Corps met French fur trapper Toussaint Charbonneau. Charbonneau lived full-time near the settlement and spoke French and Hidatsa, presumably a child of a French father and Hidatsa mother. He had "won" Sacagawea from the Hidatsa tribe in a gambling game of unknown detail and promptly married and impregnated her, the state in which Lewis and Clark met her. Sacagawea was not Hidatsa, but a prisoner kidnapped from a small Shoshone-speaking band living between present-day Idaho and Montana around 1900. Thus, she spoke both Hidatsa and Shoshone, two unrelated languages whose dialects were spoken across a huge swath of the west.

Lewis and Clark knew from conversing with various traders on their journey that Shoshone-speaking tribes lived on a long stretch of land beyond the Hidatsa territory, and recognized Sacagawea's language skills as a potential investment in their future crossing this

land. Charbonneau spoke Hidatsa and French, and a member of the corps spoke French, thus there was a complete line of translation from Shoshone to English through Sacagawea. Three months after she gave birth to her son Baptiste, Charbonneau and Sacagawea went west with the Corps.

Shoshone is a Numic language, with variations spoken by tribes from Nevada to eastern Wyoming. At one time a skill of critical value, surviving Shoshone dialects are spoken by less than 1000 people today. Emaline George's children did not speak her native tongue,

My husband went to boarding school and I guess they were disciplined, very severely, for speaking their language.... And he says, 'In the future,' he says, 'Emaline, they're going to only speak English.' He says, 'they're not going to speak Indian', and again, by the conditioning that we have been conditioned with, I guess, with public school standards, it was difficult for me to say otherwise so I did not teach my children Indian language.

In their journals, meticulously kept as the bedrock of the west in a language then foreign to its landscape, Lewis and Clark wrote very highly of Sacagawea's skills and presence. With her child, Lewis wrote that she softened the appearance of the Corps and her language skills and general knowledge of the terrain proved to be essential to the mission of the Corps. When the Corps reached the continental divide, Lewis knew they'd need to purchase horses from a band of Shoshones and had planned on using Sacagawea's words, her language of the place, to enable the transaction.

Lewis and a small group of men went on a scouting mission to try and find Shoshone from which they could purchase these horses. After finding a small band, Lewis convinced the band's leadership to return to the Corps' main camp, where Clark and Sacagawea awaited their return. Mrs. Kasserman's eyes twinkled as we read aloud Lewis' account of this, as it's a story engrained in the identity of the state of Idaho.

As the expeditionary group returned with Chief Cameahwait and some of his men, Sacagawea recognized them to be from her tribe of birth, and Chief Cameahwait as her long-

estranged brother. The two had an “emotional reunion” recounted in the journals of both Lewis and Clark, and the expedition named the camp on the eastern side of now-Lemhi Pass ‘Camp Fortunate’. Chief Cameahwait’s band gave the Corps of Discovery a guide named Old Toby for a few months, to lead the Corps over the Bitterroot pass to the north of the Salmon River. They gave the Corps horses, at a steep price, but nonetheless a critical component to move the heavy canoes and equipment over Lolo trail and into the Salmon River valley.

They gave the Corps time by offering to fend off Blackfoot raids while Clark went on a reconnaissance trip with Old Toby. They gave them salmon, when Lewis left rations at the camp with the bulk of the manpower on the other side of the Beaverhead Range. With this aid and resourcing, the Corps was able to clear the range and continue towards the ocean. Sacagawea remained with the expedition and with Charbonneau, travelling all the way to the ocean and back to the Hidatsa settlement. This profound moment in the Corp of Discovery’s expedition is continually retold as an integral part of Idaho state history, despite its centering, even if just for a moment, of Sacagawea and Chief Cameahwait in the Corp of Discovery narrative.

After the missionaries left, white settlement continued rapidly in this area, and the band now known as the Lemhi-Shoshone, Sacagawea’s people, were contained in a quickly decreasing area. This part we do not learn about as wide-eyed 10-year-olds. There are only four federally recognized tribes in the state of Idaho: The Coeur D’Alene and Kootenai tribes of the far north, the Nez Perce Tribe of central and eastern Idaho, and the Shoshone-Bannock in the south. Idaho is the traditional land of upwards of nine distinct tribes, but during settlement, due to the Indian Removal Act and the introduction of private property, treaties and cessations were made quickly, efficiently, and with lots of oversight in terms of differentiating groups. In the 1860s, forced

relocation further complicated tribal distinctiveness, as tribes were grouped and moved together despite previously living as related but separate entities. Not only are tribes without federal recognition not entitled to any land claims, trusts, or reservations, but they are denied distinctiveness from their neighboring tribal counterparts.

An Executive Order on June 14, 1867 established the Fort Hall Reservation designated for the “Indians of southern Idaho” without any tribal specificity. A mix of Shoshone and Bannock bands facing a direct threat from settlers moved onto the reservation, but its designation wasn’t formal until an Executive Order in 1869 intended to clarify the Cession 524 clause regarding Bannocks. In the “Historical data and remarks” of the Fort Hall designation, the records state that “Subsequently, by treaty of July 1868, with the Shoshoni and Bannock, the President was authorized to set apart a reserve for the Bannock whenever they desired. It was therefore decided to accept the Fort Hall reserve as the one contemplated by the treaty, and it was so done by Executive order of July 30, 1869.”

The Shoshone and Bannock were forced onto the Fort Hall reservation in the coming years, but the Lemhi Shoshone persisted in the Salmon River Valley.

In 1868, Lemhi Chief Tendoy and ten representatives from the Lemhi-Shoshone band signed the Virginia City treaty, allotting two townships on the banks of the Salmon River to the tribe. But in 1871, Congress ended treaty-making, and the agreement was nullified without the fruition of these reservations. In 1873, government officials tried to persuade Tendoy to move the band down to the Fort Hall reservation, but they were met with resistance and insistence that the Lemhi people deserved an allotment on the Salmon River. After a white Idaho congressional

delegate named John Hailey lobbied the territory representatives to give the Lemhi Shoshone land, they were finally allotted, by executive order of Ulysses S. Grant, 100 square-miles along the Lemhi River.

The Nez Perce War of 1877 brought Chief Joseph's tribe through the Lemhi valley with General Howard in hot pursuit. Salmon City locals armed themselves and prepared to fight against the encroaching Nez Perce, Chief Tendoy was forced to remain neutral to keep peace between the settlers and his tribe. Throughout 1878, various conflicts between settlers and Bannocks, Shoshones, and Sheepeaters set the whole Salmon and Lemhi valleys on edge with the presence of Tendoy's tribe and the reservation. Pressure ceaselessly mounted for the Lemhi Shoshones to move to Fort Hall, but they continued to refuse. In May of 1880, the Indian Commissioner brought Tendoy and several delegates to Washington D.C. in order to persuade the men to give up the reservation land. After two weeks, they finally agreed to receive \$4,000 annually for 20 years and move to Fort Hall, ceding their rights to the Lemhi River reservation. Shoshone-Bannock representatives also agreed to cede a portion of the Fort Hall reservation for \$6,000 annual payments. It read, "This agreement provided for the cession of the Lemhi reservation to the U.S., and the removal of the Indians to the Fort Hall reservation. It also provided for the cessions of a portion of the Fort Hall reservation to the U.S."

After returning to the reservation, the Lemhi Shoshone still refused to leave, despite Today's agreement. The Indians on Lemhi reservation refused to remove to Fort Hall reservation, and the agreement was never ratified by Congress. It wasn't until 1908 that 474 Lemhi Shoshones were formally removed to Fort Hall,

They never left willingly... They packed their meager belongings on horses, strapped the ends of their wick-i-up poles to the sides of the horses and they dragged them along. They were very sad and passed thru the valley, crying. The ranchers along the way could hear their crying for some distance before they passed

their homes. The ranchers were near tears and some did cry. They were so sorry for them, having to go against their will. I'm still sorry for we had great respect for Chief Tendoy and his tribe.

Nora Yearian Whitwell, Lemhi Valley Resident

Emaline's father went to school in a town named now Tendoy in honor of the chief, and when they moved the Lehmis here (Fort Hall) between the years 1907 to 1909, he was one of the ones that they sent directly to Chemawa and from Chemawa, he returned to this reservation because by then everybody was forced to move to Fort Hall.

Some Lemhi Shoshone families stayed in the valley, but they had no rights to land or subsistence. Several persisted and became the 1.3% of Lemhi County's population that identifies as of indigenous descent. The rest moved onto Fort Hall, where they intermingled with the Shoshone and Bannocks but remained a somewhat autonomous group of "others." It wasn't until Emaline's generation that a recognition of cross-cultural collaboration was necessary if any of their cultures were to survive, "now that we're a tribe here as a Shoshone Bannock people... The important thing is for our people... to know that we should have respect for one another... we're not a distinction, we're not Shoshone and we're not the Bannock people... We were placed here... we have mixed bloods here now and it's important for us just to survive."

This tribal integration happened in conjunction with the wider assimilation of Emaline's generation into the public-school system, and as a young woman, she studied in Boise while living with a foster family. The rural reservation stood far from the bustling capital city, and she was terrified. A bright student, Emaline's white foster parents wanted to keep her in Boise. She never talked much about this time in Boise, because she had a sense of shame in leaving her

family for a white town, “all of a sudden here you are calling a non-Indian, you know, Anglo people, parents. And they wanted to adopt me and I think that’s when I felt the fear.”

She transferred to an all-Indian boarding school in Chilocco, Oklahoma, but only stayed for a year, because she was not easily accepted. She returned to the reservation, and “never did really complete my high school education. What I did though was the next best thing. I started taking care of my elders and I took advantage of the GED programs.” Emaline’s clarity in this decision struck me, “due to the fact that I made a choice not to stay with my non-Indian family who had planned and set goals for me for an education that included college, I gave up those plans to return to the reservation. And I’ve always felt a sense of guilt that I owed myself something better, and it was very difficult here because I didn’t have those advantages here on the reservation like I would have off the reservation.”

In order to be a place where she felt she belonged, to be with her family and history, she gave up opportunity. In the context of this educational sacrifice for cultural preservation, Emaline identifies what she sees as a fundamental difference between “Anglo” and natives.

Even today, I am trying to compare or try to understand the non-Indians. Because we were taught their education. They educated us with their English. They educated us in teaching us the importance of vocational trades and having higher education. It’s always been, when I can recall back to the older leaders of this tribe, they’ve always encouraged us to go to school, to go to college. So that one day we could maintain those positions that were needed, like in the tribal government or in the bureaucracy that we have, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and maybe some professional fields... That’s the difference that I can find in the Anglo system and their standards of education, their living standards, is that they don’t understand the Indian people. We have a culture that is very, very different from the Anglo people. And even today, the Anglo people, they don’t have a culture, and this is why I always stress culture today now. And it’s really unfortunate because I have a family and my children don’t understand their language and it’s because of boarding school concept, and Anglo concept.

And she blames this Anglo system for the downfall of the culture of her tribe, “Unfortunately, our culture is almost dying... people have been talking and we’re discussing the sun dance. And we don’t have any leaders here anymore for our sun dance.”

Emaline George, a woman who saw much of the west and had the desire to pursue an education beyond her reservation, returned to Fort Hall for her culture. Though her culture did not develop in the place she grew up, the traditions and familial ties pulled her back. This culture should be alive in the Salmon River Valley, but it's been erased from the mountains it once roamed, penned in and contained in the acres of Fort Hall.

II. Moving

I drove to the end of Highway 21, where it dead ends into the Sawtooth Scenic Byway, Highway 75, right outside an old trading fort town called Stanley. Stanley's namesake is Captain John Stanley, a civil war veteran and prospector in the early days of Idaho's creation, and it has a year-round population of 68. Stanley lies in the heart of a rolling camas valley that functions as the starting point for any adventure into the Sawtooths or up to the Salmon river, and I remember many stopovers here before backpacking trips in the surrounding wilderness areas.

Highway 75 runs north/south, and I knew I had to take a right to go south to Colorado. Unlike the movement in Emaline's story, this was voluntary, this came from a restlessness of my parents and means to get out. I could have taken the interstate and zipped out of Boise on a clear, flat path into Wyoming, but I was feeling too nostalgic, so instead I twisted in and out of the forests and relived the drives I daydreamed about when far from home. I sought out easily land longed for by Emaline's parents, I spoke freely of a movement whose pain was unspeakable for a generation. My movement is easy, and that is to reason to pause.

As I approached the T intersection, I hesitated momentarily with my turn signal. If I flicked it left and swung onto the north-going road, I'd wind into a wilderness I rarely visited but often read and heard about. Maybe one more drive through would satisfy the insistent feeling that I should have spent more time up in the Salmon area. The distance was always a little too long for my family to make the trip up there, and the wilderness just a little too vast to be able to navigate with a non-generational understanding of maps. Thus, my hesitation was only that, a brief moment to think of the places I probably should have gotten to know better while I had the

chance. I turned right on 75 and started to make my way south, eventually reaching the Wood River valley, home of Sun Valley and other access points to ranges further east.

The Wood River Valley and Access Points

He loved the warm sun of summer and the high mountain meadows, the trails through the timber and the sudden clear blue of the lakes. He loved the hills in the winter when the snow comes. Best of all he loved the fall ... the fall with the tawny and grey, the leaves yellow on the cottonwoods, leaves floating on the trout streams and above the hills the high blue windless skies. He loved to shoot, he loved to ride and he loved to fish.

Now those are all finished. But the hills remain. Now Gene has gotten through with that thing we all have to do. His dying in his youth was a great injustice. There are not words to describe how unjust is the death of a young man. But he has finished something that we all must do.

And now he has come home to the hills. He has come back now to rest well in the country that he loved through all the seasons. He will be here in the winter and in the spring and in the summer, and in the fall. In all the seasons there will ever be.

Ernest Hemingway, Eulogy for Gene Van Guilder and Inscription on Hemingway Memorial in Ketchum, ID

Ernest Hemingway died in Ketchum, Idaho in 1961. I learned that story about fifty years later while my father was teaching my seventh-grade English class, in which we were reading “The Big Two-Hearted River.” Despite taking place many states away, it was hard to not envision the Ketchum wilderness as home to Nick Adams’ wandering. Ketchum is home to the Sun Valley resort, Idaho’s first ski mountain and the most widely known tourist destination in the state. The resort and surrounding homes look like a refined, put-together for the B-list rich and famous seeking an “escape” from the busy. Though located in the Wood River Valley, Sun Valley has become the blanket term to refer to the expanse of land and the three towns lining the Wood river along Highway 75. The valley’s dedicated community of locals and multitude of access points into deeper wilderness shouldn’t be discounted, though both tend to identify as part of the Wood River Valley and not the dressed up “Sun” Valley.

Admittedly, I only made it through Part I of “Two-Hearted River”—I was growing out of young adult books and into more complicated literary worlds, but they were difficult, and I

possessed much more curiosity than follow through at that point in my life. But Hemingway's interest in Idaho stuck, it made sense that a man defined by the performative masculinity of his leading characters and enamored with the grit of wilderness gravitated to a valley dotted with rustic-themed cabins and purchased taxidermized moose heads to hunt in unrivalled wilderness.

Gene Van Guilder invited Ernest Hemingway to spend a few weeks in autumn at the then 3-year-old Sun Valley lodge in 1939. Owned originally by Union Pacific, Sun Valley resort was built at the end of a new rail extension. Gene was the publicist for the resort, and he invited several famous guests in hopes of sparking interest in the remote resort town. It worked, and it also hooked Hemingway on the Idaho wilderness. He called it "A helluva lot of state, this Idaho, that I didn't know about," and returned most autumns after that for hunting season, eventually purchasing a home and ultimately taking his own life in Ketchum. His eulogy for Gene, who died a hunting accident, is inscribed on his grave as well. Hemingway found a place with boundless wilderness for hunting but access to modern comforts, a civilized yet wild place fit for the man who helped create the archetype of masculine Americanness.

Though I wish Hemingway hadn't been my start to the American canon, he was, and I was captivated. It was easy for my imagination to situate the wilderness and wandering narratives prevalent in the American classics in woods and on roads I could picture clearly. I spent years tediously attempting to construct an America capable of creating the multitude of characters I read in the canon. The breadth of work created from, by, and with the history of this country made my somewhat isolated growing-up into a time of imagining how deep the sedimentary layers of stories beneath our feet must run, in every place on which we stand on the land of this country.

In the smattering of American classics, I gravitated towards the white, the gritty, and the rootless. Perhaps projecting a romanticized version of my family's lineage onto Sal Paradise, I poured over Dean Moriarty's ramblings that put the layered America of my brain into technicolor, projecting dynamic scenes of interactions between all these superhuman characters onto the back of my eyelids as I dosed to sleep. I imagined that life, cars and busses zig-zagging a continent constantly. Going West did not satisfy the hunger of these characters, and their insatiable and reckless transit rang more American to me than other white narratives of moving west. There seemed to be an infinite search for Americanism at the center of American journeys, at once exposing the underbelly and the beautiful, a liminal space in which I felt a resonance of home.

The construction of the West is dependent on these stories for its continuation, and the stories are built on the tenuous construction of the west. In an investigation of home, the literary knots tying these concepts together must also be examined. Historian Anders Stephenson calls the idea of America "a unique mission, and project in time and space, a continuous process." It wasn't until college that I began to read stories that pulled at this construction, confronted this process by questioning the threads of its origins, its results. Some books did this by underscoring contradictions between identity, land, and societal standing, like Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. Others showed the instability of my "America" just by presenting narratives drowned by the voices I grew up listening to, like Simon Ortiz's *From Sand Creek*.

I had read post-colonial literature in high school, but very little about the post-settler colonial America I grew in. "America" became more than the land holding stories, "America" became process, a directed performance forcing a constant struggle for representation beneath its

confused and shifting weight. Fascination turns quickly into generational claim— Hemingway’s eldest son raised his family there and was the Idaho Fish and Game commissioner from 1970-76, his grandchildren still living in the Wood River Valley, all because of a visit to a resort and a system that enabled the process to continue constantly.

“Manifest Destiny” is a term often encapsulating the *process* of building “America.” Coined in the 1840s, when a heightened sense of “apocalyptic Protestantism and utopian mobilization” was rampant in young America. The legitimizing force behind this concept was the missionary nature inherent in the founding of this country, the Pilgrim’s intention to both civilize and prosper with benevolence the empty lands. endowing a divine right unto every action taken in the name of progress.

D.H. Lawrence was particularly fascinated with the developing American identity and consciousness during and after the Frontier days. Looking on from Britain, Lawrence asserted the American consciousness was unfinished and incomplete, in his pro-homeland, pro-Europe *Studies of Classic American Literature*. In *Studies*, Lawrence responds to literary figures emerging out of the great American project. Of particular interest was James Fenimore Cooper, author of *The Last of the Mohicans*, cited as a primary example of the absence of cultural identity clearly manifesting in the hyperbolic Frontier.

Fenimore Cooper constructed a text revolving around stories of war and the frontier predicated on violent conflict, aiding in the construction of an emerging archetype for a white, male, “American” character. These protagonists worked the land as lumberjacks or leather-men

and lived risky and exciting lives full of Indian conflict and exploration. These stories spread across the world, becoming the outward expression of the frontier era in America's development. In discussing Fenimore Cooper's 'White Novels', Lawrence takes particular interest in the relationship between the American and the continent, and the space Indians occupy in this bond. Lawrence asserts that, "No place exerts its full influence upon a newcomer until the old inhabitant is dead or absorbed", therefore in order to finalize the "unexpressed spirit of America... Americans needed either to destroy Indians or to assimilate them in a white American world."

Emaline George's experience is the rupture created when assimilation is incomplete, a resistance to the violent erasure Lawrence insists is required for an American culture to be established. Her stories of forced movement and restricted return run counter to the movement-centered America shown in the stories of its canon, in Manifest Destiny itself.

Wrapped up in a scathing review of literature and the American soul is an observation critical to the construction of the American west. The connection between settler American and land, "continent" in Lawrence's phrasing, must be intimate. The white American desires to identify and possess the "spirit of the continent", but that spirit exists solely within the indigenous communities of North America. Indians spoke for the spirit of the continent, and settlers desired the spirit, yet we failed to become aboriginal and thus, Lawrence asserts, we have souls wrought with incompleteness. Seventy years later, Emaline George said "even today, the Anglo people, they don't have a culture."

A claim to physical space, in the colonial and bureaucratic sense as well as the emotional and narrative sense, must be laid for that space to become American. This claim requires a sense of "from-ness." Anna Hayes' story of Idaho needing to be more productive in order to become a

state shows capital gain as integral to spaces becoming American, but “from-ness” requires a whole-hearted belief in ownership extending beyond resource extraction and productivity. Jodi Byrd calls this a “transferable ‘Indianness,’” a construction that allowed and continues to allow the expansion of the U.S. empire. I struggle to face the notion of “transferable ‘Indianness,’” because I see so clearly how it works today.

Every September, the calendar designates a day for Public Lands appreciation– the National Park Service opens the gates of national parks for free, REI campaigns to Get People Outside, and Instagram pops off with scenic mountain photos captioned “Save our Public Lands!” and “Keep Public Lands in Public Hands!” (I admit, I have a mug with the latter saying written across it bought in the 2017 Bears Ears liquidation to ‘support on-the-ground activists’ from my distant and cold Providence dorm room). A day intended to remind people of the benefit of having access to so much wild, protected land, and I’d argue it also attempts to imbue a sense of ownership, if only through stewardship, over these wilderness areas, national parks and forests, and other swaths of federally protected acres.

That sense of collective ownership, though not actively possessive, is what I think some conservationists hope will result in more collective action to fight the liquidation and sale of these places. But it also dredges up complications, as the erasure involved in harvesting the “spirit of the continent” in order to protect land becomes evident in campaigns surrounding Public Lands awareness. During the Trump presidency, an unprecedented number of articles and bills have directly attacked “public land”, including reducing the size of Bears Ears National Monument and threatening to sell the Arctic Refuge, but whose land is being seized?

The outdoor gear company Patagonia lead a massive campaign in the wake of Bears Ears, changing their website home page to an all-black screen, with “The President Just Stole Our

Land” written in bold, unavoidable white lettering in an attempt to funnel crowd-sourced fundraising to activists on the ground at Bears Ears. The pushback to this campaign came largely from conservatives, in another complication, but more relevant here, indigenous coalitions and allies. The appropriation of the term “stolen land”, the lack of acknowledgment of Bears Ears as a cultural heritage site for several tribes, and the collective possessions of “our land” were just a few of the issues, in 1987 Emaline George could have

But with those lands that were deeded back to the government, we still have rights, off reservation grazing, hunting, fishing, wood gathering and those other rights we still retained. But even to enjoy those rights, we still have problems.

Indigenous communities still cannot call this land theirs, and the Shoshone-Bannock still fight to protect “our” land from us, the outsiders. Transferrable Indianness has allowed settlers to claim land beyond the assertion of ownership over its fruits. Efforts like Patagonia’s illustrate clearly the power of claim in narrative, in emotional possession.

III. Moving

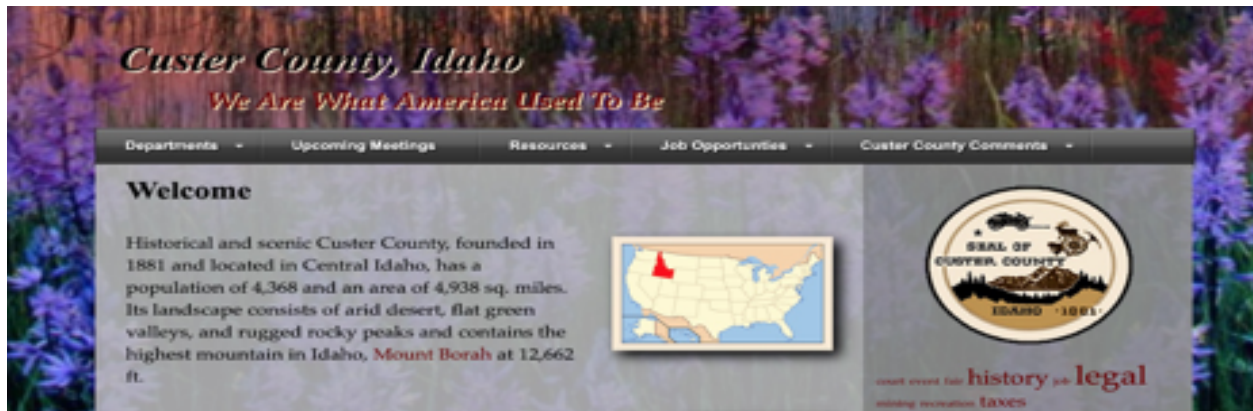
Highway 75 swoops east-wards right, becoming a near-vertical ascent versus a lateral movement. The road arches as if the car's being yanked on tracks, lurching and stuttering all the way to the highest point of the road, Galena Summit. I thought this would become less dramatic as I grew older; it truly has not.

Galena is the site of a thousand photo-ops, various stages of childhood and adolescence and early adulthood marked in photographs, taken in front of "Learn the History of Galena" signs nailed to posts. A small shoulder is built out with a bench, just to overlook the vast valley surrounding Stanley and the looming peaks of the Sawtooths. I pulled me and my boxes over, stopped, took the obligatory photo. Yearned and longed in that childish way to run up into those hills and squirm around in the dirt for a few weeks, got back in the car. And as I drove through and away, there was a slow separation, a feeling of distance in more than my mind, in my lungs and heart. Those mammoths were to my back as I exited the valley on that vertical road, and every now and then I glimpsed in the rearview mirror, exhaling into this distance I created with my four wheels full of boxed things. The stress of taking turns at a reasonable speed without stalling the car demanded a focus only penetrated by quick peeks at the looming jagged edges of the range in the mirror.

The next twenty miles require only a brake pedal as the road crashes down into another valley, this one far more rugged and less farmable, and a left turn off the highway at this point kicks you into an entirely different wilderness system, the Salmon-Challis National forest, home of the Pioneer Mountains. I hurdled past the turnoff, smiled at fragmented memories of the early

morning hikes and clean autumn air synonymous with the Pioneers in their short climbing season, kept coasting.

Custer County and the Sawtooth, Pioneer, and Lost River Ranges



Many things have happened within the bounds of this county, of which no history has ever been written.

Dr. Jesse Black, "History of Custer County"

Custer County, Idaho, where “We Are What America Used To Be” attaches itself to even the most trivial matters. Ancestrally stewarded by the Eastern Shoshone, Lemhi-Shoshone, and Nimiipu, the Custer County lines were founded by white pioneers in 1880 and “named in honor of General Custer, famous because of his part in the Indian fight known as ‘Custer’s Last Stand.’” This quotation is from the “History of Custer County”, penned by Dr. Jesse Black when he was a young man in 1900.

On a map, Custer contains mostly deep green land, codified as National Forest and BLM trust. The Salmon-Challis Wilderness and the Sawtooth National Forest historically take the cake on Custer’s beauty scale – holding some of the most iconic peaks and alpine lakes in the state and boasting an extensive network of well-maintained trails. A mining hub in the late 1800s, tourism and ranching now make up most of Custer County’s income. It’s a key access point into

two National Forests that lay west of Highway 93 and contains swaths of the Pioneers and Sawtooths.

The forward to Black's Library of Congress dedication reads, "The state of Idaho conducted a contest for all high school seniors to write a history of their own county, Dr. Black won the \$5 first prize money with this history while he was a senior at the Challis High School, Challis, Custer County, Idaho." The contest judges authenticated the publication, "Material for this treatise has been secured from the Challis Messenger and verified by Thomas Jose of Challis. Many other pioneers have contributed and verified dates and occurrences."

Thus, the most thorough historical documentation of pre-statehood Custer County lay in Dr. Black's account. This history is referenced in most synopses of the county and occupies the primary search result in the Library of Congress, its publication predating geological surveys of the region and established road networks through the rugged hills. Dr. Black interviews an array of 'old-timers', original pioneers who came to the county and surrounding area prior to its formal creation. These old-timers are clearly infallible in the young man's eyes, recollecting journeys through the Sawtooths and altercations with small groups of Natives as Dr. Black sits between them around a campfire. In the first few lines of this story, with wisdom beyond his years, Dr. Black writes a truth that still holds today, "many things have happened within the bounds of this county, of which no history has ever been written."

Custer's Last Stand occurred nearly 500 miles east of Challis on Lakota/Northern Cheyenne/ Arapaho land, currently the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana. But Black begins the history of Custer County in a similar vein, "Probably the earliest events recorded deal with Indian troubles, a condition which is typical of all early history." According to Black in 1900,

Up to within a few years ago, it was a very common thing for prospectors and immigrants to be swept away by the red savages that then infested the whole Salmon river country. The trail builders had both red men and road agents to contend with; sometimes these went hand in hand when the occasion required a union of the two forces of land pirates.

Custer County's history, as told by Black, is entirely framed by interactions and conflicts with the local Shoshone and Bannock bands. America as it "used to be" details old pioneers and prospectors navigating a dynamic relationship with the Lemhi-Shoshone community, "It was in the summer of 1878. The Lemhi Indians were peaceful under the leadership of Chief Tendoy, which fact was a great aid to the settlers" is followed swiftly by "They had no guard up, as they believed no Indians were near." Even in the context of peace, settlers armed themselves in constant preparation of conflict, in fear of the unknown.

In his 1994 work *Playing Indian*, Phillip J. Deloria places the figure of the American Indian at the root of American 'incompleteness' in its own origin story. Deloria retells an American event canonized in collective memory, the Boston Tea Party, and emphasizes that the rebels were dressed as appropriated Indians. Whooping and creating a spectacle of rebellion, the colonists invaded the harbor wearing feathers and blankets, speaking a fake Indian language, and thus establishing "an Indian hero virtually indistinguishable from the average patriot." Long before the frontier days, the paradigm of spirit was established, forming the backbone of American contradiction. Deloria plainly states, "As England became a them for colonists, Indians became an us." Indianness became a tool to differentiate American identity from its Colonial counterpart, it was an ideal to aspire to, an image that expressed both the desire to conquer and possess land and live harmoniously amongst it.

In the era of the Western Frontier, Indianness, the desire "to savor both civilized order and savage freedom at the same time," pervades Dr. Black's history. He details the heroism of the early pioneers fighting combative tribes while depicting the systems early settlers put in place

to modernize the Custer area. Mountains and towns in the area are named after these men, “Mt. McCaleb stands near Mackay and was named in honor of Jesse McCaleb, whose courage and manliness were as lofty as the peak itself. The grave as located marks the spot where the faithful followers of McCaleb laid him at rest, after the fatal shot.” Killed in a confrontation with a band of Shoshones while defending a coach line, McCaleb become a martyr of the county and a figure embodying this contradictory enforcement of modernization and complete, unrestrained freedom.

A second iteration of exploration that proceeds Dr. Black’s historical account of Custer county is the geological surveys that took place throughout the 1930s, after remaining Lemhi and Shoshone were removed to Fort Hall. Like the naming of Mt. McCaleb, these surveys razed remaining Indigenous claim, as peaks and rivers were renamed after white men taking measurements and documenting the deep wilderness of Custer County. The Shoshoni-named Pahsimeroi Range (settler name Lost River Range) contains Idaho’s largest peak, Mount Borah, and a string of other 12,000 ft + mountains. Black refers to the Sawtooths as the “loftiest peaks in the land,” showing how unexplored the Pahsimeroi range, on the eastern side of Custer County, was to many living there. The range juts out a near vertical mile from the plains that encompass it, and from every distance it’s hidden by surrounding ranges. The peaks are only visible when confronted directly, and mountains to the left and right of Borah are shrouded in weather almost constantly.

In 1934, [“Chief” Lee Morrison](#) holds his hat low at his side, suit jacket whipping in the wind. His 1929 calculations asserted Hyndman Peak, a craggy old face visible from the central

Idaho plains, must not be the highest point in the relatively new state of Idaho. It didn't make sense given the configuration of plates—there has to be another basin, and a higher mountain, and 1934 was a year in which he could survey it. The 15 minute Mount Borah quadrangle survey encompassed a 900 mile radius and took a full year to complete. Photographer and journalist [Lyman Marden](#) documented the U.S.G.S. mission, and Chief lead a team through the rugged Lemhi-Shoshone land, sketching and documenting the peak from every angle the surrounding area offered. He named it Borah in honor of the longtime Idaho congressman William Borah, leader of the Irreconcilables (those who refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles), but most still call the peak Beauty Peak.

Chief moved through the Thousand Springs Valley, Plane Table instrument neatly assembled and telescope extended. Lyman photographed, [Chief sketched](#). A familiar routine for two men who dedicated 1934 to surveying the untouchable, staring at the feet of the most dramatic mountains in the area, clicking shutters and sketching planes. Moving west, [Chief sketched](#) northward from the backside of the giants, deep into the 1934 [snow and ice](#).

These two men danced around Borah, a mighty and ugly granite slab of a peak, and even after conquering its peak they dug into the geological history of its formation in order to construct a scientific understanding of the brutal Pahsimeroi Range.

This survey lives in the state archives, and Lyman's photographs and newspaper articles constructed a self-understanding of that era. Idaho was undoubtedly rugged, and the surveys built a scientific understanding of this dramatic landscape. A new epistemology emerged from this white exploration, knowledge invoking claim.

When I attempted to climb the mountain Chief had named “Borah,” I was 16 and bribed by my brother— and I was a mess. My brother still makes fun of me for the morning, the summer before my sophomore year of high school, when we got up at 3:30 am to summit Borah. I cried after an hour because the whole-wheat bagel and organic peanut butter I was trying to eat while gaining 1000 vertical feet per mile was the one thing I did not foresee being incredibly unpleasant, and its mouth drying reality hit my morale harder than any blister ever could. But that aside, we made it to the summit of Idaho’s tallest point and back down in one piece, celebrated heartily with pickles and milkshakes at Arco, Idaho’s only diner, The Atomic Pickle, and drove back to Boise zonked and grinning.

We made it a tradition to go up into the mountains anytime Jackson came home from college, whether that be on skis or feet or ropes, to be with each other, sure, but also to just be in this place. Our relationship functioned differently when we were outside, especially after I became the high school athlete and he grew into the college stoner. We levelled out in our abilities, and we levelled out in our mutual enjoyment of a challenge. It had been a perhaps absurd decision to attempt Borah as my first real peak, but we made it, and now we habitually returned to the central Idaho ranges that boasted the crags we loved to climb.

It was a year after Borah, and I woke up with my eyes swollen half shut from the wildfire smoke at 3:45 am, nervous that the alpine start and first few miles of this endeavor would be like the previous year’s. I was confident Hyndman and Old Hyndman (thought to be the highest points of my state until some guys did some math in 1934) would conclude with the same feelings of pride and tired, accomplished legs, though we had the luxury of driving through Ketchum on the way home, which meant celebratory burritos instead of pickles. I’d grown some lungs and thighs since Borah and was excited to see if I could handle two peaks in one day and

keep up with my brother, the challenge of my childhood. I was careful to not pack whole-wheat bagels this time, rather we had cereal bars while stumbling up the side of the hill to the trailhead, both of us nervously excited for the sunrise to unveil our lofty goal.

We hiked under a moon and then under a teal sky, the stars slowly giving way to cotton candy clouds tinged red from the always-suffocating smoke synonymous with late August. Finally, the sun framed its forehead between the two peaks we had our eyes on, illuminating the granite giants. I dropped my cereal bar, and Jackson stopped dead in his tracks. The orange and pink peaks stood shoulder to shoulder, for a moment even the sun stopped in its tracks to behold their gentle grace. My brother said he wished to grow old with grace like those peaks, and I agreed, and we continued on to scale the feet of the giant, all the while daydreaming origin stories of such gentle and monstrous creatures.

V. Leaving

Once Highway 75 descended into the valley, I continued past Ernest Hemingway's cabin, his grave, further into the Wood River Valley, past Sun Valley, then into rolling farmland and towards the state line.

VI. Returning



Alice Lake, Sawtooth Range, July 2019

Returning last summer was something I debated. I was with a new person, a New England boy who I wanted desperately to show the rugged center of my state. He had taken me to a lot of seaside places important to his fashioning as a person, and it felt fair to share the mountains that captivated me. Alice Lake, specifically, was a place I felt I had to go, as I had neglected most wilderness in my rushed holiday visits to Boise since my parents moved. Driving to Colorado, I had a knee-jerk reaction to never touch Highway 75 again, to make leaving final, to not return. Perhaps dramatic and definitely swaddled in privilege, I felt resolved to leave this

goodbye in its place and attach myself to different land, grow in new places. Partially for fear that it would change, and partially for fear that it wouldn't, and I would return to a place that showed me unabashedly how far from home I'd grown.

I'm at an age where the people who left Boise don't return home anymore, at least not with frequency, and the people who stayed assume the roles and tropes of adults we made fun of growing up. Driving back to Idaho with Cole was the first time I had made the trip in reverse, taking all of the opposite directional turns and ending up in the same wild from a far different 12-hours-away city.

I noticed the Fort Hall Ahead signs for the first time. I made mental notes of the boundaries in Southern Idaho erected by Mormon Churches around groupings of houses, I paid attention to the mile markers skipped and their colors as we moved from private land to state trust to national forest. I was hungry to see things that changed, but I just saw more things I'd never noticed.

After a night in a motel along the highway and a stop at the Winco Foods bulk grocery store, we drive up 93 over Galena Summit and into the heart of the Salmon River valley. With a sense of pride, I watched the face of this boy change into confusion and then awe as the car lurched down the steep summit and into an open, green basin surrounded by jagged Sawtooths and the back of the White Clouds. We were heading to the Tin Cup trail, a classic trip that connects several alpine lakes in the Sawtooths, including Alice Lake. I almost remembered where the turnoff for the trailhead was, consulting a guidebook only once before taking a left onto a dirt road and driving for a dozen miles.

I asked Sarah, who was infatuated with her backyard, that Sarah, if she thought she had grown out of Idaho.

“Sarah, would you move back? Or have you grown out of it?”

“I don’t think we ever grow out of a place... in deep time they’re going to deeply outgrow and outlive us. I think being outside makes me feel a lot younger than I am. I don’t have moments that make me feel old, it all makes me feel young. I think about my parents, and my stories aren’t very much different than theirs, these places will outlast us every time.”

And Idaho and the mountains and land have held so many people, so many claims, over the deep time, it’s held this history in its fields and ranges. Like the rock itself, sediment layering constantly, the history of this place holds intricacies and complications only comparable to the infinite possibility of the landscape.

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The origin story of Idaho's etymology is still deeply unknown— "Idaho" is neither Shoshone nor Bannock, Nez Perce nor Lemhi, a "complete mystery" as publicly recognized by the state itself. Allegedly, there was a pioneer and eccentric lobbyist named George M. Willing who put forth the name "Idaho" in 1861 during the division of the Oregon territory, claiming that it was "derived from a Shoshoni Language term meaning 'the sun comes from the mountains' or 'gem of the mountains.'" Well into the 1950s, stories or ones like it were published in state history textbooks,

Idaho" is a Shoshoni Indian exclamation. The word consists of three parts. The first is "Ee", which in English conveys the idea of "coming down". The second is "dah" which is the Shoshoni stem or root for both "sun" and "mountain". The third syllable, "how", denotes the exclamation and stands for the same thing in Shoshoni that the exclamation mark (!) does in the English language. The Shoshoni word is "Ee-dah-how", and the Indian thought thus conveyed when translated into English means, "Behold! the sun coming down the mountain.

Martine Barber, Idaho in the Pacific Northwest

And this point of claiming is just not true. The early Idahoans craved a connection between language and land that justified their claim to space. And Indigenous connection to land, as Lawrence stated, is only possible when the Indigenous occupants are wiped out, a transferable Indian name fitting the new settled territory can only exist if the previous names are eliminated. Like Anna and Florence carved out a home from mining money and resourcefulness predicated on conflict and the introduction of violent structural change.

Karoline talked about the pictographs and remnants of tribes now unknown along the banks of the Salmon River standing as a reminder that there was deeper history than we know. Dr. Black details stagecoaches left to rot after a railroad was built in Custer county, "These relics, nevertheless, force us to remember the hardships our fathers and grandfathers suffered in order to make for us Custer county, as it is today." The physical reminders of human presence

testify to the iterations of claim weaving in and out of history but leave even more unrepresented. It's stories that carry claims, that build the cacophony I try to discern, pick apart, examine.

An argument could be made against putting theories in conversation with fictional stories, oral histories, and constructed origin stories, because they should be rooted firmly in the real. But in my understanding of the west, stories are as critical to its development as the *real*. So much of what makes it special to us settlers is the product of a collective imagining and romanticizing, of inserting origin stories in places where there were robust epistemologies, of families migrating west in hopes of finding good fortune, within a structural state that told them their movement was benevolent. The west is mountains of fictional claims and real violence, validated claims and fictional names, and at the root of the cacophony lay the stories and experiences of all the people, most of which were just trying to make a go of it. The injustice is glaring, the west is a complicated and living process. I don't feel detangled yet, and I think if I keep doing this work, I never will. That is my reckoning, accepting fully a role of perpetual learning.

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