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Issaquah: The Silence Speaks Your Name

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ISSAQUAH: THE SILENCE SPEAKS YOUR NAME

Origins:

History allows us to understand the truth, and behind every name, there is a story. For most of my life, I lived in my hometown, Issaquah, Washington. Although the Issaquah I am familiar with consists of pleasant restaurants, stores, and nature in a suburban area, the history behind the city is quite interesting and different. From Native American roots to coal miners, Issaquah's origins are traced back to the foundation of "Squak Valley." However, Issaquah's history is complicated and consists of highs and lows. As a city with constant innovation, there were numerous events of racism and discrimination that are traced back to its early history of colonization. To this day, racism is still prevalent, and the effects of Issaquah's history continue to influence its development. Minorities, especially Asian Americans, are subjected to these acts of racism, and learning about the history of a city allows people to comprehend the meaning behind them.

Since its origins, Issaquah has had a history of minorities that contributed to its evolution. Squak Valley preceded the birth of Issaquah, and until the 1860s, it was inhabited by Native Americans (City of Issaquah, 2022). For centuries, the Native Americans lived throughout Squak Valley, hunting animals while developing civilization on the land. When the non-Indian settlers first arrived in the 1860s, relations were mainly peaceful. One notable figure, Mary Louie, an elderly Native American woman, was a friend to many early pioneers and taught their children the valuable customs of her people (Stein, 2003).

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Mary Louie, Medicine Woman of The Snoqualmie Tribe, ca. 1900

(Stein, 2003)

Behind every city's name, there is a reason for it that is explained by history. The settlers named the valley Squak due to the pronunciation of the local Native American name Is-qu-ah, meaning snake, "little stream," and the sound northern cranes produce, a bird common to the valley (Stein, 2003). Since Squak Valley was next to a lake called Lake Sammamish, the land was fertile and perfect for cultivating crops. While settling in, local Native Americans were hired to assist with many farms, but during one instance the differences of cultures created problems. In 1864, during Native American unrest in the Puget Sound area of Washington, two settlers, William Casto and Abigail Casto, were killed by two Native Americans in their employ. In addition, their housemate, John Halstead, and other assailants were killed as well. As a result of this catastrophe, many Native Americans living in this valley fled to the civilization of Seattle.

The Mining Era (1880s – 1920s)

For a city to grow, it must constantly innovate by utilizing environmental resources and technological advancements. Besides the rich farmland produced in the valley, the mountains

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surrounding Squak contained abundant deposits of coal that were discovered in 1862. However, it was not until the arrival of the Seattle, Lake Shore, and Eastern Railroad in 1887 that made coal mining profitable. Until this time, hop farming was the main industry in Squak Valley, and by the 1880s, unrest between the Native Americans dwindled, resulting in the remaining Native Americans working next to whites out in the fields. With the rise in popularity, the Wold brothers imported 37 Chinese men to pick hops at a cheaper price. Consequently, the whites did not approve of this, and they demanded the Chinese workers to leave, even though the Chinese workers wanted to stay. Unfortunately, in September 1885, the “then-unincorporated area was the scene of an attack on Chinese laborers who had come to pick hops from local fields” (“Issaquah, Washington,” 2022). As a result, three laborers died from gunshot wounds, the remaining Chinese workers quickly left, and none of the attackers were convicted for their actions (“Issaquah, Washington,” 2022). This event of racism is common among numerous cities in America at the time since people discriminated against minorities based on “the color of their skin or the sound of their accent” (Mohai et al., 2009, p. 406).

Despite these acts of racism, Issaquah ignored its dark history and continued to evolve by prioritizing its technological developments. When the railroad arrived in 1887, coal mining exploded in popularity, and Squak Valley experienced rapid growth. Areas of the settlement were transformed into small mining towns, and the settlement changed in both appearance and economic focus. Hundreds of men, consisting of many immigrants, moved to the Squak Valley for mining jobs. With more people moving into the area, businesses were established, and George Tibbetts was the town’s first entrepreneur, opening a hotel, store, and stage line (Stein, 2003).

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Seattle, Lake Shore, and Eastern Railway Depot at Gilman (Now Issaquah), ca. 1890

(Stein, 2003)

As cities evolve, their names can continue to change due to important historical events and connections. Initially, Squak Valley was officially incorporated as Gilman on April 29, 1892, but it was later legally changed to Issaquah in 1899. In context, the name Issaquah is “an anglicized word for a local Native American name, meaning ‘the sound of birds’” (Downtown Issaquah, 2021). The settlers named the settlement Issaquah because the Natives told them the name of their land “is Squak,” which sounds like the noises birds produce (Downtown Issaquah, 2021).

Although Issaquah adopted new technology that contributed to its development, there were some moments of adversity that produced new changes. Throughout the 1890s, hop aphids destroyed numerous crops throughout Washington, but Issaquah relied on other agricultural industries, including sawmill and lumber companies. Furthermore, The Northwest Milk Condensing Co. (eventually known as Darigold) opened in 1909, and Issaquah was one of the largest suppliers of milk to Seattle. Meanwhile, coal mining continued to succeed, and throughout the 1910s, newer and larger mines were developed. One of them, The Issaquah and Superior Coal Mine, was funded by German investors, but it eventually experienced financial

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problems when support declined at the beginning of World War I. Nevertheless, the other mines continued to prosper during this decade.



Coal Miners' Houses, Issaquah, 1913

(Stein, 2003)

With the rise of new industries, new advancements were quickly adopted that propelled its development. While the coal industry remained successful, the logging industry continued to grow as well alongside the city. From hotels to saloons, liquor stores, and tobacco shops, Issaquah transformed into a boomtown. However, as the town started to modernize, outdated parts were destroyed, and by the 1920s, citizens were living new lives with telephones, indoor plumbing, schools, and banks. As a result of these new changes, Issaquah was on the road to the future, and the city was transformed forever.

Road to the Future (1920s - Present)

Technology continues to evolve in Issaquah, but this leads to some technologies becoming obsolete. By the 1920s, the coal industry started to die out as fuel oil was a more popular resource for heating homes. When the Great Depression began in 1929, the logging industry struggled, and the boomtown days ended. For the next forty years, Issaquah experienced

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little change in its population of approximately 900 people. Although the town was isolated during this moment, long-time residents enjoyed the new lifestyle in the slow community. Social organizations flourished, and many of Issaquah's citizens were involved in civic groups and community boosterism. In the context of urban planning, this was a terrific choice made by the community because successful urban planning has "a wide range of organizations representing the mainstream of American urban reform" (Peterson, 2009, p. 128). Community engagement events were created to promote activity and involvement in the city. For instance, Memorial Field was developed in 1918 by the volunteer fire department and transitioned into the home for the Issaquah Round-Up, the annual rodeo (Stein, 2003). Throughout the rest of the year, townsfolk would gather here to watch high school football and baseball games. Issaquah High School, which was founded in 1901, would participate in these games. This was the high school I would eventually graduate from in 2019.



Issaquah High School Girls, Class of 1947

(Newman, 2011)

As less opportunities presented themselves, occupations grew more valuable over time. During the Great Depression, the people of Issaquah would work wherever they could. In 1936, the federal Works Progress Administration provided jobs through the replacement of the town's sewage system, and the construction of buildings, including the Sportsmen's Club and the

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Issaquah Salmon Hatchery (Stein, 2003). With the addition of the Sunset Highway built through Issaquah in the 1920s, the small town entered the Auto Age. More people could travel to Issaquah, and when World War II started, more people migrated to Issaquah to work at the sawmills needed for the war effort. After World War II, many Seattle residents began migrating to the Eastside suburbs, choosing communities closest to Lake Sammamish, including Bellevue, Kirkland, and Renton.

To expand its influence, Issaquah continued to branch out into other local areas that contributed to its growth. In 1958, Issaquah's train depot closed, but more work was completed on Interstate-90. This connected Seattle to Issaquah and began Issaquah's second boom. By 1970, Issaquah's population had more than quadrupled to 4,313 residents (Stein, 2003). Though the coal mining days were long over, the community of Issaquah saw an increase in gravel mining, which was needed for constructing homes and roads. Real estate, which was relatively stable for decades, also became a hot prospect. With increased accessibility to other companies in Seattle, operations were established in Issaquah. For example, "both Boeing and Microsoft have significantly affected Issaquah's history, cultural development, and diverse population through their active community participation and attraction of outside residents" made possible with the addition of headquarter buildings (Downtown Issaquah, 2021). As more companies started to develop in Issaquah, the popularity of the city progressively grew.

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Aerial View of Issaquah Facing South, 1970s

(Stein, 2003)

As Issaquah continues to evolve, the past starts to become more distant, alongside the stories behind its history. Despite the numerous changes being made in the city, there were efforts made by Issaquah to capture and preserve the history of its past. To maintain and share its historical roots, The Issaquah Historical Society was created in 1972, when many traditional loggers and miners were still alive. Since its formation, the organization has preserved thousands of photographs and stories, while restoring the old train depot and town halls into museums.

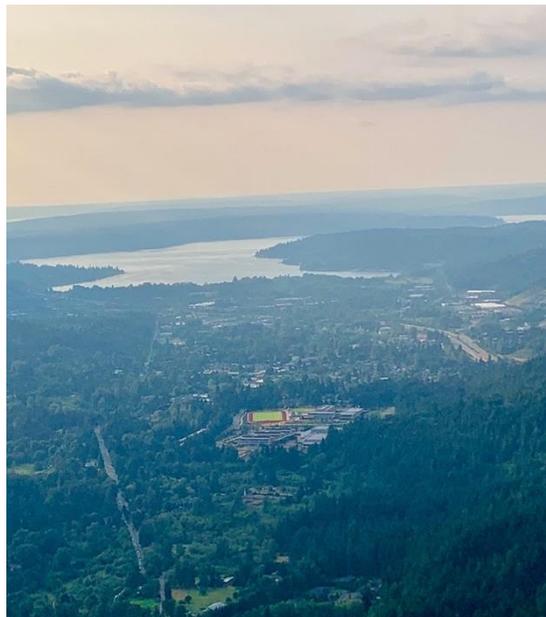


Historic Railroad Depot Museum, 50 Rainier Boulevard N, Issaquah, 1998

(Stein, 2003)

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Every decision has a consequence behind it, and as Issaquah made new changes, the landscape evolved. By the 1980s, much of Issaquah's farmland was sold to developers. Since then, Issaquah is filled with restaurants, shopping centers, tourist attractions, and other businesses. However, housing prices were influenced accordingly, with the median value of homes costing around \$250,000 by the end of the century (Stein, 2003). This has caused traffic problems along I-90 and other roads connected to Issaquah, necessitating new lanes and interchanges. Currently, Issaquah continues to combine its rich history with a modern atmosphere, providing music, art, and entertainment for residents and guests. For most of its history, the town of Issaquah revolved around its downtown, but as more people moved in, the city began annexing surrounding areas, such as Cougar Mountain, Squak Mountain, and the south end of the Sammamish Plateau. In 2003, census data revealed that Issaquah was Washington State's fastest growing city (Stein, 2003).



Issaquah Today

(Tang, 2022)

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Significance/Cultural Impact

By understanding the history behind Issaquah, urban planners and members of the community can incorporate positive changes to eliminate racism and discrimination. Income inequality, high housing prices, and environmental racism are key issues the city needs to resolve. According to the official Issaquah website, Issaquah's vision is to create "a sustainable legacy for future generations that honors its rich history and passion for the natural environment" (City of Issaquah, 2022). Ironically, even though Issaquah strives to establish a sustainable legacy for future generations, they have not acknowledged the flaws behind their history. To produce a sustainable legacy, the city needs to recognize the community's needs by focusing on locality development. By focusing on locality development, Issaquah can assist various subcommunities and provide new changes that respond to the people's needs. Based on successful locality development, Issaquah can encourage participatory action through "community-driven placemaking, grassroots action, novel forms of community engagement, and problematizing universal conceptions of the public" (Rios et al., 2021, p. 2). In essence, if Issaquah can improve on communicating with the public and provide more direct methods of engagement, issues can steadily be addressed. However, to gain a better understanding of these issues, people need to learn about the history of their community.

Since its roots, Issaquah's community is very culturally diverse, and there are various types of people in every part of Issaquah. Although Issaquah is culturally diverse, these differences have driven people apart. For example, on January 27, 2020, a Chinese American woman and her son approached a Costco sample table in Issaquah, but the worker there assumed they were from China. As a result, the worker refused to give them samples while forcefully demanding them to leave (Swaby, 2020). Although Costco uploaded a statement apologizing for

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this event shortly after it occurred, the woman's son continues to face trauma from this experience. Racism continues to thrive throughout Issaquah, and the community needs to resolve this. Similarly, I encountered a situation like this when I was attending Issaquah High School. Before I started school at Issaquah High School, I was enrolled in Newport High School. I transferred to Issaquah High School during the fall of 2017. During my first day of school at Issaquah High School, I was exploring the hallways since I was new to everything. While on my way to class, two Caucasian teenage males approached me and stated, "there are too many people from China at this school." I lived in Issaquah my entire life, and I am an Asian American. This experience transformed me because it drives my insecurity of being a minority in a nation dominated by privileged people. Although I did not report this incident, it signifies that change is necessary for Issaquah. Throughout the situation, I stayed calm because I cannot let the behavior of others destroy my inner peace. Peace brings people together, and it demonstrates the presence of justice.

As demonstrated by both incidents, racism is evident at all stages of life and all parts of the community at Issaquah. This needs to end since conflict breeds catastrophe, and communities need to stay connected. The people of Issaquah should learn that strength lies in differences, not in similarities. In other words, cultural differences should not separate people from each other, but rather they should establish a collective strength that benefits all of humanity. To accomplish this, people need to gain a greater understanding of each other by setting aside their differences and accepting change. By doing so, the city of Issaquah will grow in harmony, and people of all cultures will be respected.

Although some people may believe Issaquah is only the name of a city, its cultural impact transcends throughout time. From environmental racism to the advancements in technology, the

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ongoing struggle and success of Issaquah allowed it to become what it is today. With the widespread growth of Issaquah in Washington State, businesses started to originate in the area. For example, Costco's headquarters are in Issaquah, and many local people from Issaquah travel to Costco to purchase discounted groceries and necessities. Company brands such as Costco have established worldwide success, and their origins exist in the heart of Washington State. Despite Issaquah's overall growth, some consequences preceded its current-day success. For instance, Native Americans in Squak Valley gradually left the area due to increased racism and discrimination towards them. In addition, numerous minorities, including the Chinese and Native Americans, were killed in the early stages of the city. To this day, Issaquah remains a relatively safe suburban community, but there are still accounts of racism that occur. With the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans are targets for racism, and over the past couple of years, racism towards Asians has grown. Due to the history of Issaquah, racism towards minorities was relatively common, but the community of Issaquah needs to act upon this.

Conclusion

History allows people to not only understand the meaning behind certain places but also helps communities learn from past experiences to incorporate necessary, beneficial changes that can shape the future. From the highs and lows of community development, communities need to correct their past mistakes and provide new policies and changes that address people's needs. This can be done through locality development and educating people about the history of their cities. During one instance, both Native Americans and non-Native Americans bonded by accepting and admiring each other's cultural differences. Everyone in Issaquah should remember this moment of history and integrate it into their lives today. Respect drives people together, and as a connected community, people can accomplish much more. After all, a nation's culture

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resides in the hearts of its people, and transformational change begins in learning what is right. In conclusion, there is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.

Revisions

For my Connect and Reflect revisions, I made numerous changes based on the feedback I received. These changes allowed me to provide more clarity that made the essay easier to understand and follow. For instance, when I was revising this essay, I highlighted the first sentences of every paragraph and changed them accordingly to improve the overall flow of the essay. This allowed me to convey my main argument and buildup a call to action for the readers. In addition, I added a roadmap paragraph at the introduction that allows my readers to gain a better understanding of where my writing will take them on this journey. Specifically, I emphasized that racism is still prevalent in the City of Issaquah to highlight its importance throughout the rest of the essay. In essence, this would foreshadow some of the personal experiences that I would share later in the essay. Another revision I made was changing the order of paragraphs for the “Significance/Cultural Impact” section. Initially, the order of the paragraphs was not consistent with the theme of racism, so I adjusted them to make the section flow better. Furthermore, I condensed the sections for the first 3 paragraphs of “Road to the Future,” since some of the events were not necessary with the theme of the essay. Based on comments on my essay, I adjusted some words around to clarify sentences and overall meanings. For example, when I described the instance where Chinese workers were attacked, I did not initially specify who performed the attacks. To address this, I confirmed that the white settlers performed the attack, providing more understanding about what occurred during this instance.

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