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Anthro Student Fund Final Report

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Using the money that I was rewarded from the Anthropology Student Fund, I was able to conduct research and fieldwork for my senior thesis. My thesis investigates indigenous fishing rights along the Nch’i Wana or Columbia River. I came into my thesis thinking it was going to focus on the legal history of fishing, however, after my interviews, I realized the stakes were much higher. Because of the opportunity to conduct interviews, I turned to writing a thesis that focuses on the relations between salmon, Wykanushpum (meaning the Salmon People, the Ichishkíin name for the indigenous peoples from the Columbia River Basin) and the Nch’i Wana as it persists and shifts with ongoing projects of development. Using the idea of “indigenous modernity,” I tease out the tensions between tradition and modernity, suggesting that “traditional” fishing is an adaptive and resilient process that has changed in response to the violent transformations of the Nch’i Wana, relocations of the Wykanushpum, and domestication of the salmon. The stories shared with me during my interviews are what helped me hone into these important topics.

Using my funding, I was able to generously compensate and gift the indigenous Elders that I interviewed. I felt very fortunate to have received enough funding to compensate my interviewees in culturally respectful and responsible ways, especially because they were Elders. Over shared meals, whether it was breakfast at Shari’s or salmon dip at the kitchen table, my interviews were more like casual conversations. I asked questions about fishing rights, the cultural importance of salmon, and fights for sovereignty. I heard many stories, harsh histories, and lots of quick-witted humor that will augment my other thesis research. Additionally, I used my funding to attend a virtual seminar with a tribal law lawyer and a Yakama scholar of the history of fishing rights. I was also able to attend an event celebrating the dam removal on the White Salmon River hosted by Yakama Nations Fisheries that helped me make connections with potential interviewees. My funding helped cover travel expenses and copy expenses for historical documents that I wanted to read for my thesis.

The chance to conduct fieldwork provided me with an invaluable experience. I learned how to interview people and get their perspectives on the topics that I was reading about. I experienced firsthand how ethnographic work can transform what you initially brought to the table to something different. I also was able to see a general appreciation for the project that I am doing. I like that I am not producing this academic work in a vacuum but am instead documenting and sharing stories and histories that these fishermen want told and shared with the broader world. I am honored to be able to ground the theory I am using in the words of actual traditional indigenous fishermen and am thankful for the Anthropology Student Fund for making that possible.