

The Muckleshoot Hope: A Casino and Its Footprint  
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Abstract: The Muckleshoot Tribe, although having a history of financial and sovereignty issues, has utilized the Casino as a source of economic subsistence. The Casino is utilized as an avenue for cultural expression, while allowing for entry into unique ventures such as the White River Amphitheatre. Their unique relationship with the State of Washington has fostered economic prosperity not only for the tribe, but the state as a whole

## **I. Background**

As the name implies, the Casino is both managed and operated by the Muckleshoot tribe. The tribe is based south of Seattle, Washington, 30 minutes north in Auburn. Although the Muckleshoot Tribe implies a sense of singularity, the tribe itself is actually a combination of multiple tribes who were consolidated into one federal entity per the Medicine Creek Treaty of 1854. Isaac Stevens, the then Governor of Washington State, led the efforts to relocate the river tribes onto the newly created Muckleshoot Reservation. This is interesting in that rather than be acknowledged as a federally recognized tribe in order to occupy a given reservation, the Muckleshoot were essentially federally created and thus given a national tribal identity. Given this unique history, the tribe uses the Casino as a place of both cultural expression while creating the income necessary to not only create unique asset diversification; in this case the Emerald Downs and the White River Amphitheatre, but economic sustainability. All this while maintaining their sovereign status. The compact with the State of Washington has ensured that the Casino remains a benefit to the interests to the tribe, while financially benefitting the surrounding Muckleshoot community. In order to understand the motivations of the Muckleshoot, one must individually dissect the cultural, political, and economic motivations that the Casino reflects. Understanding these concepts will give transparency to the Casino, and thus the tribe itself.

## **II. Findings-Culture**

In attempting to understand the cultural ideals and motivations of the tribe, a comparison between the online pages of the Tribe and Casino was developed. The Muckleshoot tribal webpage offers all that one would expect of a culture attempting to make a name for itself. The

only image is that of an ancestor among her items like baskets, etc. This gives readers a sense of deep history rooted within the tribe. By using this imagery paired with a subtle light-brown background, one sees the immediate connection to culture taking place. The page starts out with an immediate paragraph detailing the history of the tribe. This is the only general information available to online readers although, as the tribes only other use of social media is through Facebook. With only 130 observed Facebook fans for the tribe, it appears that the public's main online source of anything Muckleshoot comes through the Muckleshoot Casino. Given Ms. O'Carroll- Expert in the field of online continuity methods, her research into the success of her tribe's use of Facebook to maintain cultural continuity, it is surprising that the Muckleshoot do not utilize their Facebook page in the same way. The page does not appear to be utilized in order to create their own virtual marae, but rather is a method of linking themselves to the Casino. This is reinforced in how the tribe chooses to acknowledge the Casino online. There is no hyperlink to the Casino online, or even a description of the purpose of the Casino. There is only a small paragraph highlighting the Muckleshoot's commitment to fair gaming practices. Readers get a sense of an 'Us vs. Them' mentality from this, as the tribe is intentionally absent about linking themselves with the Casino. The Muckleshoot Logo itself contains a dream catcher, which in itself is problematic to the how the tribe is perceived. The dream catcher itself is originally of Lakota origin. Using the dream catcher within the Muckleshoot tribal logo not only inaccurately displays Muckleshoot history, but reinforces the common Native American stereotypes that have created such tribal mysticism in the first place.

The Casino appears to be the most popular piece of Muckleshoot culture with cues taken from these stereotypes, yet does not depict anything 'Muckleshoot' on its website. The main page uses colorful imagery of non-tribal members and links to specific entertainment with an

emphasis on multiple social media platforms. Over 45,000 people are fans of the Muckleshoot Casino Facebook page, which is in severe contrast to the 130 for the tribe. Facebook appears to be the main attractor for non-tribal members interested in anything 'Muckleshoot'. Due to this, it is surprising that the only propaganda on that page is of opportunities to win within the Casino, such as "Win 50,000 points instantly!" The Muckleshoot Casino does not reflect Muckleshoot tribal customs online, but surprisingly does contain subtle information about the tribe. The information is copied directly from the Tribal webpage, but offers a link to the page in less than obvious view. The 'About Us' page, merely plays on the common stereotype of the salmon in Pacific Northwest Native American culture, as well as the idea of 'natural resources'. The information is merely a summary of what is contained in the tribal webpage. More effort seems to be put into the presentation of events rather than the role the Casino plays in influencing Muckleshoot culture.

With an ever-increasing world of technology and entertainment, tribes must utilize social media as well as gaming ventures, to ensure cultural continuity. The Muckleshoot Tribe has intentionally marketed the Casino not as a symbol of their cultural identity, in order to generate as much profit as possible. Visitors to the Casino are concerned with the entertainment that is received solely from gaming, and thus do not visit with the intent of boning up on Muckleshoot culture. All marketing concerns of the Casino must conform to this fact in order to generate maximum revenue. This is problematic in that through doing this; common Native American stereotypes (such as the dream catcher in the logo) are reinforced, thereby taking the tribe in reverse. These stereotypes are also played out within the Casino, as the ideas of money and prizes are epitomized over Muckleshoot cultural elements in key social media areas such as Facebook. This has formed a disconnection between the tribe and Casino that is seen by the lack

of information concerning the Casino on the tribal webpage, and the generic portrayal of the tribe on the Casino page. These ideas of identity and representation are vital to the discourse between the Tribes of North America, and the United States government. This centers around the idea of sovereignty, and the constant fight that tribes must wage to maintain. As with any other tribe within the United States, the Muckleshoot have had to prove their Sovereign title to their traditional lands. Through a difficult process of dwindling reservation land due to off-reservation interests as well as state intervention, the tribe paired with the Puyallup and Nisqually Tribes to file suit against the state in order to federally recognize their sovereignty. Through this federal process, the tribe has sought to utilize the Casino as another economic venture, and has had prominent success. This comes at a price although, as the Indian Gaming Regulatory act of 1988 has ensured that the State of Washington enter into an agreement with the tribe in order to effectively regulate gaming. This agreement is highly technical as well as detailed, which highlights the red tape that tribes must negotiate in order to sustain themselves economically. This reflects a fight for sovereignty through constant intervention at the state and federal level.

## **II. Findings- Legal**

### **State/Federal Intervention and Sovereignty/Tribes' Rights**

As Jonathan Taylor- a Cambridge scholar who once spoke of tribal sovereignty said: Because tribal governments are long-standing and permanent fixture in the state's political geography, the economic presence of Indian gaming is assured for much longer than even the presence of a mainstay corporation like Boeing" (Taylor, 2005) Here is a reference to the inherent sovereignty of the Muckleshoot tribe due to the establishment of the reservation by Governor Stevens. As such, the state of Washington has sought consistent intervention into Muckleshoot gaming per

the IGRA policy. This has allowed the Muckleshoot to open up their own Casino in 1983 per an individual compact with the state. What is interesting is that the state of Washington has chosen to hold back in terms of state intervention, in favor of upholding federal standards to bargain in ‘good faith’ with the tribes (Kamper and Mullis). The state’s reasoning can be traced back to their intervention in the Muckleshoot’s access to their traditional fishing rights. The tribe’s sovereign right to fish on ‘usual and accustomed grounds’ (Silvern) and their ultimate victory in federal court has been used as a reminder of the state’s limits on intervention in tribal sovereignty.

### **Revenue Guidelines and Mandates**

As with any tribe benefiting financially from their Casino, IGRA has created a strict set of revenue guidelines for the Muckleshoot. Through federal guidelines, the tribes are not required to disclose their revenue guidelines regarding their Casino. Attempting to look for any evidence of the Casino’s required revenue spending has yielded no results. The tribe itself has intentionally chosen to disclose specific information about its spending that appeals to the public, mainly ‘donations’ The tribal webpage offers the only hint at the state-tribal agreement on a portion of gaming revenue going towards community improvement. The page describes the process of applying for ‘Casino Grants’. The Auburn Newspaper provides the only solid number, noting that “the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe provided more than \$4.1 million to Washington nonprofits and other governments serving communities throughout the state last year. (Auburnreporter, 2010). this furthers the idea that the tribe intentionally remains silent about its spending in an effort to retain a sense of financial sovereignty. The Muckleshoot are keen on the idea of promoting charitable donation both within the tribe as well as through the casino. State mandates concerning the tribe follow a similar trend. Given the size of the casino, as well as

other local casinos in the area, state mandates on Muckleshoot gambling are few and far between. The only prominent evidence of a tribal-state agreement comes in the form of the Muckleshoot compact.

## **Licensing**

With the Muckleshoot Casino presently a fully functioning economic venture for the tribe, a distinct set of requirements must be followed through the Washington State compact. What is surprising is the initial 6 months of operation, in which there are limits set on not only the number of gaming stations, but the hours of operation as well (goia.wa.gov, 1995) within the initial six months, the tribe may operate a maximum of 112 hours per week, only moving into ‘Phase 2’ of 140 hours after the initial six months. This has echoes of the perceptions of the Marshall Trilogy, which defined the status of Native Americans and thus sovereignty. Just as Justice John Marshall defined the tribes as ‘domestic, dependent nations’ (Kamper and Mullis), the state of Washington has done the same, in taking a parental role in monitoring the first ‘phases’ of the casino before giving more leniency. The same can be said for the required licenses. The licensing standards are a blatant attempt to allocate funds from not only the tribe, but employees. The current compact requires a \$200 fee for in-state gaming employees. The fees are both established as well as collected by the Indian gaming agency. Sovereignty is threatened through the agencies ultimate decision as to even whether or not tribal members can be licensed. “For enrolled members of the Tribe who are applicants for Class III gaming certification and licensing, the State Gaming Agency will consult with the Tribal Gaming Agency prior to denying certification to such an applicant who does not meet the criteria for certification” (goia.wa.gov, 1995). As the Casino licensing standards follow strict requirements through the

compact, not even members of the Muckleshoot themselves are free to operate their casino without expressed state intervention.

The Muckleshoot Tribe has had a long history of fighting for their sovereign right to their traditional lands. These fights have resulted in economic subsistence through a federally recognized right to specific fishing territory. This fight has formed the basis for the formation of the casino, and just as the state sought political intervention during the battles for the river, the same is being done for a share of the fiscal pie in Muckleshoot gaming. The tribes are recognized for their status as a sovereign entity, yet denied complete control through their federally mandated compact with the State of Washington. The compact should not be seen as a complete negative although, as it ensures a source of income. The tribe has used the economic freedom from Casino funds to create sophisticated economic methods of sustainability. These revenues enable the Muckleshoot to influence not only the prosperity of the tribe, but the economic atmosphere of the state as a whole. As the investment of these funds is specifically mandated by the state compact, understanding where the revenues go will further ones understanding of the impact upon everyone's interests.

## **II. Findings- Economic**

### **Tribal Revenues: To improve life of members**

The revenues generated from these multiple ventures have allowed the tribe to imbed itself within the community as well as reaffirm specific Muckleshoot cultural values. The newly built Elders Center is a direct result of these attempts. The Muckleshoot Monthly Newspaper emphasizes their renewed “”commitment to their elders” (Muckleshoot) often when one considers the health of the tribe, the well-being of the elders is often overlooked. Emphasizing

the health of the elders is a huge indication of the positive allocation of these revenues towards addressing specific needs. Elders Program Manager Wendy Burdette summarizes it perfectly by affirming that "The cultural component was a big topic, and now the elders can weave cedar, do beadwork, and make quilts and much more. All with a glorious view of the mountain they all love so much." (Muckleshoot). Aside from the allocation of revenue towards elder care, the tribe has used revenues to create programs designed for job training as well as education. More specifically, the 'Adult Work Training Program' uses generated revenue to "provide continuing educational opportunities and on the job experience" to members of the tribe.

### **Diversifying Assets**

The tribe has taken a more original approach to asset diversification, in that they have invested in both the White River Amphitheater as well as the Emerald Downs racing track. White River is owned by the tribe, while managed by Live Nation. This is interesting in that the tribe itself does not directly recommend the entertainment, but essentially charges 'Rent' for using the facility. This enables the tribe to take in a portion of the profits without having to attach the Muckleshoot name to something that could attract negative publicity. The Amphitheater consistently hosts world-class entertainment with world-class profit as a result. The Emerald Downs racetrack functions in the same way, but was acquired through a different method. The tribe acquired the track in 2002 (Bloodhorse, 2002) and has since then been referred to as 'landlords' rather than owners. Here we see a historical reversal of fortune, in that the tribes, who are still considered 'wards' are now considered lords in their own right. The \$70 Million purchase has essentially wiped out any nearby competition to the casino.

### **Sustainable Communities**

One of the key missions of the Muckleshoot tribe is to provide sustainability through construction. This is affirmed on the Muckleshoot tribal webpage, which asserts that “The Muckleshoot Construction Program's mission is to provide quality programming, design, and construction in a collaborated effort to provide sustainability for tribal buildings and infrastructure with the future in mind” (Muckleshoot, 2013). The tribe has put an emphasis on not only internal infrastructure, but appropriate geographical management through sophisticated programs such as the Geographic Information System (GIS) (Leach, 2010). The tribe essentially has taken a dual approach to sustainability in that traditional methods of sustainability are being reaffirmed through cultural education and practice, as well as through non-tribal systems that employ the western method of information systems. A combination of traditional methods with sophisticated information systems greatly assists in continued Muckleshoot sustainability.

### **Non-Tribal: Influence on Players and Disposable Income**

Disposable Income can be used in an infinite number of ways, so the Muckleshoot seek to provide as many of those ways as possible within the casino. The Muckleshoot have utilized unique methods of entertainment to influence people looking to use their income. One of the most popular yet underestimated is the Banquet service that the Muckleshoot Casino provides. The Casino webpage boasts that “Muckleshoot Casino offers first-class event space accommodating groups up to 300. We offer a 5,000 square foot ballroom, divisible into two rooms and 3,000 square feet of meeting space, also divisible into two rooms” (Muckleshoot Casino, 2013) with so much attention to the fine details in the customer experience, it is easy to see how players are compelled to dispose of their income into entertainment that they would not traditionally find in other places.

## **Community Contributions**

The Muckleshoot tribe has made it a primary goal to establish consistent charitable donations per the compact with Washington State. The tribe has diversified these contributions however, and has extended them towards areas such as “Non-profit organizations, Public School Proposals, Churches, Government Agencies, and Native American Programs” (Muckleshoot, 2013). The ‘Muckleshoot Charity Fund’ contains a strict set of guidelines that one must follow in order to receive financial contribution from the tribe. The application process is clearly outlined online which allows for anyone to get an idea of how vested the tribe is with the local community. This helps to fight the common stereotype of the casino only benefiting the tribes with community exclusion.

## **III. Conclusion**

The Muckleshoot have seen immense success with the implementation of the Casino. This success is not strictly limited to the financially, but must be acknowledged wholistically. The need to economically diversify has led the tribe to invest in unique ventures. This has generated the income necessary to ensure tribal sustainability through investing in infrastructure as well as programs with the intent of securing financial futures of tribal members, as well as creating environmental sustainability within the tribe. The Casino has allowed an outlet for the Muckleshoot to culturally express themselves while influencing the lives of the surrounding community. The Muckleshoot Casino has left a lasting impression on the lives of those who live within Washington’s boundaries. This impression is one that cannot be accurately reflected in the numbers, but in the experience. The Muckleshoot Casino, although complex in its own right, has become a crucial pillar for success not only for Washington State, but as a beacon for the Tribes

of North America. As long as this pillar remains erect, entire nations are given a foundation to build upon. The very future of not only the Muckleshoot, but all Indian Nations depends on the ability to build upon those very foundations.

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