

CHAPTER 12

The Politics of Honorific Naming: Alan Webster Neill and Anti-Asian Racism in Port Alberni, British Columbia, Canada

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Introduction

On 23 January 2017 the city council of Port Alberni (on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada) convened a formal meeting. Early on, knowing that the proposal of whether or not to change the name of Neill Street was on the agenda (raised by city councillor Chris Alemany), a member of the Tseshaht First Nation, Hi?hunkennis (Robert Watts), spoke. He noted that Alan Webster (A.W.) Neill spent much of his life opposing people like him “as well as other races” (apparently referring to Asian Canadians). He supported the idea to change the name of Neill Street, which had been named in honour of Neill more than sixty years earlier.¹ Then Rosemarie Buchanan, a school board trustee for School District 70 Alberni, summarized many of Neill’s racist views, backing up her findings with Neill quotes taken directly from Hansard, the official record of the Canadian House of Commons. She too suggested that it was time to change the name of Neill Street. However, Cameron Stefiuk responded by providing information about the positive contributions of A.W. Neill. He opposed the idea to change the name of the street and was also opposed to moving toward reconciliation in relation to the past.² As far as he was concerned, no recognition or reconciliation was necessary.³ Instead, he advocated for the following: “We should not forget the past but learn from it and not repeat the same mistakes going forward.”⁴ Nevertheless, before long the following proposal was moved and seconded: “That Council for the City of Port Alberni, in the spirit of Reconciliation, work with the Hupacasath and Tseshaht First Nation Councils, the Community and any affected property owners to potentially rename Neill Street.”⁵ However, the council voted down the motion, five to two, thus retaining the name of the street.⁶

There was still the matter of the school. A.W. Neill was said to have been particularly proud that the first junior secondary school (later an elementary school) in Port Alberni – which opened in September 1957 – had been named after him. The *Alberni Valley Times* reported that “Among the honors he [Neill] cherished in the later years of his life were the fact that the district’s first junior high school was named for him.”⁷ Tonkin wrote in a newspaper article thirteen years after Neill had passed away, “the A.W. Neill School in Alberni perpetuates a name which surely should be remembered



Figure 12.1 Photo of the sign for Neill Street

best as belonging to one who never as indicated above, some have argued (whites), while working actively against First Nations). Thus, on 24 January had been defeated by city Council Board to rename A.W. Neill Elementary board did not initially agree to change strong opposition to the proposal, the school and thus to the name as

Questions related to honorific naming In this case, how should A.W. Neill be to change the names of places that of how we should understand the producing particular places and land Neill and the controversy that has with him. In particular, it documents Canadians. This chapter contributes ternment era by drawing inspiration politics of honorific naming. In Bri



Figure 12.1 Photo of the sign for Neill Street in Port Alberni, August 2018.

best as belonging to one who never forgot he was a servant of the people.”⁸ However, as indicated above, some have argued that he was only the servant of some people (whites), while working actively against others (Asians, people of Asian descent, and First Nations). Thus, on 24 January— the day after the motion to rename Neill Street had been defeated by city Council – Chris Alemany petitioned the Alberni 70 School Board to rename A.W. Neill Elementary during the 2017–18 school year.⁹ The school board did not initially agree to change the school’s name, with some trustees voicing strong opposition to the proposal, maintaining that local memories are attached to the school and thus to the name as well.¹⁰

Questions related to honorific naming and renaming can clearly be controversial. In this case, how should A.W. Neill be viewed? What are the implications of the effort to change the names of places that honour him? More broadly, it raises the question of how we should understand the role of honorific naming in constituting and co-producing particular places and landscapes. This chapter reviews the history of A.W. Neill and the controversy that has emerged regarding honorific naming associated with him. In particular, it documents Neill’s longstanding views regarding Japanese Canadians. This chapter contributes to our consideration of the legacies of the internment era by drawing inspiration from a wider scholarship on the contentious politics of honorific naming. In British Columbia, as elsewhere, the names given to

public spaces and facilities convey important societal values, linking people and spaces and constituting inclusion and exclusion through imbuing landscapes with the names of people who symbolize particular values.¹¹ Indeed, naming constitutes an important part of how spaces are produced.

My research regarding Japanese Canadians

In the summer of 2016, I started conducting focused research regarding white racism against Asians on Vancouver Island during the twentieth century, initially concentrating on my own family's involvement in racist organizations in Nanaimo, British Columbia, particularly the Native Sons and Daughters of British Columbia. I endeavoured to develop an anti-racist methodology that involves investigating and interrogating one's family's own past links to racism.¹² However, in the summer of 2017, when I returned to Vancouver Island to conduct more research, I learned that some of my relatives – who had been small-scale fishermen in the Nanaimo area – had developed close relationships with some Japanese Canadian fishermen who also fished out of Nanaimo, both before and after World War II. This inspired me to theorize that an important part of my antiracist methodology should be to not only expose and challenge family racism from the past but also to investigate how and under what circumstances good cross-cultural interactions occur.¹³

In the summer of 2018, I continued my research regarding Japanese Canadians on Vancouver Island. Work done at the Nanaimo City Community Archives in 2016 and 2017 had been rewarding, not just with regard to gaining access to important documentation but also for what I learned from people whom I met at the archives. These people helped direct me in my research, put my research in historical context, and recommended and helped find people for me to interview. This being the case, I was interested in learning what was available at the community archives in Port Alberni. In preparation, I emailed with one of the volunteer archivists at the Port Alberni Historical Society, which manages the archives. Then in early August 2018 I visited the archives, even though I had been informed by an archivist that, "We do have a clipping file of newspaper articles relating to the Japanese 'problem' ... internment, and redress, but nothing of a more personal nature." Still, it seemed worth visiting the archives.

When I arrived at the archives, a volunteer archivist helped me access the files I was looking for. We talked and I provided some background information about my research regarding the history of Japanese Canadians on Vancouver Island. I also mentioned my interest in learning more about the racism directed towards Asian Canadians in the past. She asked me if I had heard about the controversy associated with proposals to rename Neill Street and A.W. Neill Elementary. Up to that point, I knew nothing about either, so she explained the controversial proposals, particularly that Neill had been accused of being strongly racist against people of Japanese descent

(both Canadians and non-Canadian) for proposing the name changes seemed to be suddenly converging. I decided to shift my immediate focus to Japanese Canadians in the area to investigate Japanese Canadians and how his renaming controversies. I found A.W. Neill at the Port Alberni Archives of the key anti-Asian Canadian political group, the Anti-Asiatic League. I also sought out Buchanan, and others with an interest who were either living then in Port

My research

In 2017, I first became aware of this research seemed relevant to my own Asian descent on Vancouver Island and maintained dialogue with its history occurred outside the scope of the project emerging from, the activity of the project grapples with the enduring legacies of present-day landscapes of the province. History remains unfinished. I now study history, in order to provide the appropriate naming controversy.¹⁴

Who was

Alan Webster Neill was born in Melbourne was a Scot and his mother was English. He emigrated to New Zealand where he farmed a large farm.¹⁷ Neill immigrated to Canada and set up acquiring a quarter section (160 acres) in the restless and soon joined the military. He returned to Scotland to assist his ailing father. He moved to the Alberni Valley in 1897.¹⁸

Neill unexpectedly became nominated as a member of the Legislative Assembly in a position for which he was twice reelected.

(both Canadians and non-Canadians) and that his racist views were the main reason for proposing the name changes. I was surprised that my historical investigations seemed to be suddenly converging with present-day controversy in Port Alberni. I decided to shift my immediate focus from generally looking at the history of Japanese Canadians in the area to investigating how A.W. Neill was linked to racism against Japanese Canadians and how his legacy is associated with present-day naming and renaming controversies. I found a considerable amount of documentation about A.W. Neill at the Port Alberni Archives, and before long I realized that Neill was one of the key anti-Asian Canadian politicians of the twentieth century, a member of the Anti-Asiatic League. I also sought out and interviewed Chris Alemany, Rosemarie Buchanan, and others with an interest in the issue, as well as some Japanese Canadians who were either living then in Port Alberni and Ucluelet or had been previously.

My research and Landscapes of Injustice

In 2017, I first became aware of the Landscapes of Injustice project. The project's research seemed relevant to my own investigations regarding racism against people of Asian descent on Vancouver Island. Soon I was officially affiliated with the project and maintained dialogue with its director, Jordan Stanger-Ross. My research has occurred outside the scope of the project itself, complementing, rather than directly emerging from, the activity of the research collective. As Landscapes of Injustice grapples with the enduring legacies of the dispossession, controversies over the present-day landscapes of the province help to illuminate one of the ways in which this history remains unfinished. I now turn to recounting relevant parts of A.W. Neill's history, in order to provide the appropriate context for thinking about the honorific naming controversy.¹⁴

Who was Alan Webster Neill?

Alan Webster Neill was born in Montrose, Scotland, on 6 October 1868.¹⁵ His father was a Scot and his mother was English.¹⁶ In 1885, when Neill was just sixteen, he traveled to New Zealand where he farmed, logged, and worked as a sheep shearer on a large farm.¹⁷ Neill immigrated to Canada in 1891 at the age of twenty-three. He ended up acquiring a quarter section (160 acres) of land in the Alberni Valley, but he was restless and soon joined the military. After a few years, he left the service and returned to Scotland to assist his ailing father. However, Neill decided to return to Canada and the Alberni Valley in 1897.¹⁸

Neill unexpectedly became nominated to run for office, and in 1898 was elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, representing Alberni, a position for which he was twice reelected.¹⁹ From the beginning of his political career,

Neill lobbied to have all people of Asian ancestry expelled from Canada and, crucially, he did not distinguish between Canadian citizens (or British subjects of Japanese descent) and Japanese nationals. Neill was persistent, and by his own admission, during his time in the BC legislature he voted "for each and every anti-Chinese law."²⁰ Neill's scrapbook from the period includes many newspaper articles critical of Asian immigration, indicating his considerable interest in the topic.²¹ Neill decided not to run in the 1903 election, apparently due to the high cost of financing frequent election campaigns. Once he left politics, Neill was appointed stipendiary magistrate for Nanaimo and Victoria. From 1903 to 1913 he also served as federal Indian Agent in the Alberni area, and between 1911 and 1927 Neill operated the Pioneer Feed, Coal and Oil Store in Alberni.²² He was a school board trustee from 1912 to 1914 and an alderman on Alberni's first city council in 1913. Beginning in 1916, he served as mayor of Alberni for a year.²³

In 1921, Neill launched his first federal election campaign as a strong advocate for the "Absolute exclusion of Asiatics" from immigrating to Canada. He also argued that fishing licences should only be issued to "White British subjects."²⁴ In all, Neill appears to have been able to take advantage of post-World War I racial tensions to advance his political career.

Within a few weeks of being elected to federal Parliament for the first time as a member of the Progressive Party, Neill pledged his support for Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's Liberal Party. Later, Neill would become an Independent, apparently so that he could work with different parties depending on the issue. He was the only member of Parliament from Vancouver Island who supported the Liberal government at the time. He often supported policies that, in his view, advanced the interests of the working class.²⁵

In 1922, Neill took his concerns about Japanese domination of the fishing industry to the Fisheries Committee of the House of Commons, since Canada did not yet have a Ministry of Fisheries.²⁶ In his first speech in the House of Commons, delivered on 16 March, Neill demanded "Asian exclusion," and he also advocated for heightened restrictions on the issuance of fishing licences to people of Japanese descent. Neill stressed, "on these matters particularly I want action – not talk, and legislation – not lengthy debate."²⁷ Within just three months of becoming a member of Parliament (MP), Neill had contributed to a 33 per cent decrease in salmon trolling licences for Japanese fishermen, and he had gained the reputation for being the chief anti-Asian member of the House of Commons.²⁸

In 1922, the federal British Columbia Fisheries Commission (also known as the Duff Commission, chaired by William Duff) was established, of which Neill was one of the commissioners.²⁹ The Duff Commission – undoubtedly influenced by Neill's strong anti-Asian views, along with those of two other well-known racist members

of Parliament from British Columbia, licences allocated to nonwhites are 10 per cent, a decision that, Neill boasted, was made by the courts. Neill also argued for fishing.³⁰ In line with this, Fukawa argued for fishing licence reductions for Japanese fishermen. The courts prohibited such discrimination and upheld their fishing licences.³¹

Neill explained it in a letter, writing that a 40% reduction was only for this year and that a further 20% was made in 1923, for a total of 25% reduction this year. Neill also argued for making a total cut of 58%." Neill also argued for the exclusion of people of Japanese descent by 10 per cent. Neill would have got nothing."³³ Then, Neill also wrote that he planned to ask for a 25% reduction to Japanese, the same reduction as for Chinese and Japanese. Neill wrote, "Cod hand licence should be kept to licence them so we would not be cut out of the fishery heavily after being cut out of the salmon fishery."

For the gillnet fishery, Japanese fishermen were excluded in 1922, and there was a further 15 per cent reduction in the pilchard fishery, everyone involved in the fishery. Neill claimed that he would not accept a 15 per cent reduction there was agreement regarding this.

In 1924, the so-called "Neill's Law" was passed, reducing the number of Japanese who could hold licences for fishing plants, reserving those positions for British subjects. The idea was to reduce Japanese Canadian involvement. No Japanese Canadians were employed in the fishery. "This law is now working out to reduce Japanese Canadian involvement on this Coast ... It will add greatly to the building up of little communities and reduce Japanese Canadian involvement. However, the courts determined that the provincial government, not the federal government, had the right to reduce Neill to fear that this might lead to a reduction in fishing plants on the coast.⁴²

Neill's committee created political pressure on behalf of the fishermen and the representative of the fishermen.

of Parliament from British Columbia – recommended that the number of fishing licences allocated to nonwhites and non-Indigenous peoples be reduced by 40 per cent, a decision that, Neill boasted, caused 800 Japanese Canadians to be barred from fishing.³⁰ In line with this, Fukawa and Fukawa reported that throughout the years of fishing licence reductions for Japanese Canadians, between 1922 and 1927, when the courts prohibited such discriminatory behaviour, 1,253 people of Japanese descent lost their fishing licences.³¹

Neill explained it in a letter, writing, “The recommendation of the Commission of 40% was only for this year and did not extend beyond this year. On the trolling it was made 25% reduction this year because there had been a 33% cut the year before making a total cut of 58%.” Neill also claimed success for reducing trolling licences to people of Japanese descent by 10 per cent more.³² Neill recounted, “If I asked 40% I would have got nothing.”³³ Then, in 1925, there was another 15 per cent cut.³⁴ Neill also wrote that he planned to ask for a 40 per cent reduction of handline cod licences to Japanese, the same reduction as there had been on salmon trolling licences for Japanese. Neill wrote, “Cod hand line fishing was not licensed until this year, I got the dept to licence them so we would know how many Japs fished as they went into it heavily after being cut out of the salmon licences.”³⁵

For the gillnet fishery, Japanese fishermen were allocated 40 per cent fewer licences in 1922, and there was a further 15 per cent reduction in 1925. For the newly proposed pilchard fishery, everyone involved had to be white, since Neill insisted on it.³⁶ In fact, Neill claimed that he would not allow the industry to commence operations until there was agreement regarding this matter.³⁷

In 1924, the so-called “Neill’s Law” was introduced. It mandated a reduction in the number of Japanese who could work in sawmills, canneries, and dry salt herring plants, reserving those positions for either white people or “Indians” (First Nations). The idea was to reduce Japanese Canadian employment by 25 per cent per year until no Japanese Canadians were employed after the fourth year, 1927.³⁸ As Neill put it, “This law is now working out to restore to the white race an important industry on this Coast ... It will add greatly to the population of our Coast and result in the building up of little communities of hardy, white fisherfolk.”³⁹ Neill’s efforts to reduce Japanese Canadian involvement in fisheries were quite successful.⁴⁰ In 1929, however, the courts determined that fish plants were under the jurisdiction of the provincial government, not the federal government.⁴¹ This caused people such as Neill to fear that this might lead to the rehiring of Asian Canadians to work in fish plants on the coast.⁴²

Neill’s committee created political campaigning materials that stated, “Mr Neill’s efforts on behalf of the fishermen have caused him to be recognized as the friend and the representative of the fishermen from the whole of British Columbia.”⁴³ In line

with this, on 14 October 1925 the *Port Alberni News* published an article titled, "Made White Man's Chances Better is What Fishermen Say about Neill."⁴⁴ The reporting was mainly devoted to describing the content of a letter sent by the West Coast Fishermen's Association to L.A. Hanna, Neill's campaign manager for the western part of the Comox-Alberni electoral district. The article reported that the association had praised Neill for reducing the duty on gas engines that the fishermen needed to operate their boats and compete with the Americans.⁴⁵ More importantly, however, the association praised Neill as follows:

Before the last Dominion election it was felt that it was only a matter of a few years and there would be no white fishermen on the coast of British Columbia, especially considering the rate at which the Japanese were increasing and the white fishermen decreasing. Mr Neill has been instrumental in changing these conditions, with the result that more and more white fishermen are being employed in the fishing business from year to year.⁴⁶

Neill clearly put a lot of effort into reducing the involvement of Japanese Canadians in various fisheries along the coast of BC. Indeed, the number of Japanese Canadians working in fisheries declined significantly during the 1920s.

Although Neill put a lot of his energy into undermining Japanese Canadian fishermen and fish workers, he also supported various other important initiatives, albeit ones specifically designed to benefit white Canadian fishermen. For example, Neill assisted white Port Alberni fishermen in changing the gillnetting boundary to enable netting for salmon going up the Somass River, and worked to prevent discrimination against small seines in relation to larger ones.⁴⁷ He also advocated for reducing the licence fees for white fishermen. Seine licences went down from \$500 to \$20 each, and gillnet licences declined from \$5 to \$1.⁴⁸ Neill also became well known and popular in the Alberni Valley, and more generally in British Columbia, for advocating the adoption of the Canada Pension Act in 1927. He also promoted legislation in support of what eventually became known as Remembrance Day.⁴⁹

Despite these other areas of activity, the politics of race never receded from Neill's view or his interventions in public discussion. In 1928, Neill wrote a letter to the *Port Alberni News* in which he bemoaned a 1927 Supreme Court decision regarding the Fisheries Act of Canada, which stated that, "the Minister has no power to discriminate between British subjects, whatever their origin." In other words, "a naturalized Oriental could not be refused one [a fishing licence]." In Neill's view, "The result would threaten to be very serious for the white fisherman of British Columbia." However, the court did not state that the Fisheries Act could not be amended to grant powers to the minister to discriminate, and not surprisingly, Neill advocated "to get the government to amend the law at this session" (a proposal that did not succeed).⁵⁰

In the same letter, Neill explained immigration. He praised the government's "Agreement with Japan," which "discovered and stipulated that in order to hold those passports," the government would issue a limited number of passports to Japanese, to about 500 a year, but "under the agreement Japanese authorities would abrogate their immigration laws as they saw fit and issue visas." Abrogation of the agreement would "enable the authorities to handle the immigration of Japanese."

Neill's anti-Asian views dominated his public life. In an advertisement paid for by Neill's newspaper, he wrote, "Enough to tackle the Oriental question? A.W. Neill." "Four years ago the constant and increasing encroachment of Japanese as one of the greatest problems in British Columbia too often be emphasized." "In 1925 the problem became more and more difficult for Japanese."

Neill's ongoing work

Not surprisingly, Neill was a strong advocate for all Japanese nationals and Japanese Canadians on the coast and intern them far into the interior. In early February Neill wrote to Neill on external affairs, arguing against a proposal to naturalize Japanese Canadian citizens and Japanese naturalized Japanese [i.e. the British subjects] without providing any evidence in support of Japanese descent be subjected to the same radio sets as Japanese nationals. He also advocated for confiscating Japanese Canadian fishing licences and driving Japanese Canadians away from the coast of those of Japanese descent.⁵⁵

Just over two weeks later, on 19 February 1928, Neill spoke in the House of Commons on "The Japanese Situation in British Columbia." He advocated for stricter restrictions on all people of Japanese descent, British or not. He praised the government for its "policy of driving the boats of Japanese Canadians in British Columbia away from the coast."

In the same letter, Neill explained his views on immigration, particularly Japanese immigration. He praised the government decision to abrogate the 1908 "Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan," which emerged following the 1907 anti-Asian riots in Vancouver and stipulated that in order to reduce anti-Asian tensions in Canada, Japan would issue a limited number of passports, and Canada would only accept immigrants holding those passports.⁵¹ The agreement significantly reduced immigration of Japanese, to about 500 a year, but that was not sufficient for Neill, who claimed that under the agreement Japanese authorities had been allowed to interpret Canadian immigration laws as they saw fit and that "we were bound to accept their recommendations." Abrogation of the agreement, Neill believed, would allow Canadian authorities to handle the immigration of Japanese as a matter of domestic priorities.⁵²

Neill's anti-Asian views dominated his political campaigns. In 1930, a newspaper advertisement paid for by Neill's reelection campaign stated, "Who has been big enough to tackle the Oriental question and worked hard to improve the lot of the fishermen? A.W. Neill."⁵³ Four years later, Neill's committee asserted that Neill "regards the constant and increasing encroachment of Orientals in many fields of endeavour as one of the greatest problems in BC and a peril to the coming generation that cannot too often be emphasized."⁵⁴ In 1938, Neill continued to try to find ways to make it more and more difficult for Japanese to immigrate to Canada.

Neill's ongoing vocal racist position in the 1940s

Not surprisingly, Neill was a strong supporter of the early March 1942 order to relocate all Japanese nationals and Japanese Canadians living within one hundred miles of the coast and intern them far into the interior of British Columbia. Prior to that decision, in early February Neill wrote to Norman Robertson, the powerful deputy minister of external affairs, arguing against a policy that would differentiate between naturalized Japanese Canadian citizens and Japanese nationals. He wrote, "I maintain the naturalized Japanese [i.e. the British subject of Canada] is very often more dangerous," without providing any evidence in support of this view. He suggested that all people of Japanese descent be subjected to the same restrictions on the use of cameras and radio sets as Japanese nationals. He asked what the government had done since confiscating Japanese Canadian fishing boats and strongly argued for relocating all Japanese Canadians away from the coast, suggesting that this would ensure the safety of those of Japanese descent.⁵⁵

Just over two weeks later, on 19 February 1942, Neill delivered a speech in the House of Commons on "The Japanese Situation in British Columbia" in which he called for stricter restrictions on all people of Japanese descent, whether they were British subjects of Canada or not. He praised the government for quickly confiscating the fishing boats of Japanese Canadians in British Columbia but criticized it for not moving more

quickly to restrict their freedom of movement, places of residence, and their possession of cameras and radios. He also recommended that the government deport all people of Japanese descent from Canada once the war was over:

I do suggest – perhaps it is too early to talk about it now, but it is well to get it started – that we should make an arrangement that when peace time comes, we expatriate all the Japanese; do it on fair terms, buy them out, pay them liberally ... Let us settle once and for all this canker in the life of Canada which prevents us from being a united white Canada. And that is what British Columbia wants.⁵⁷

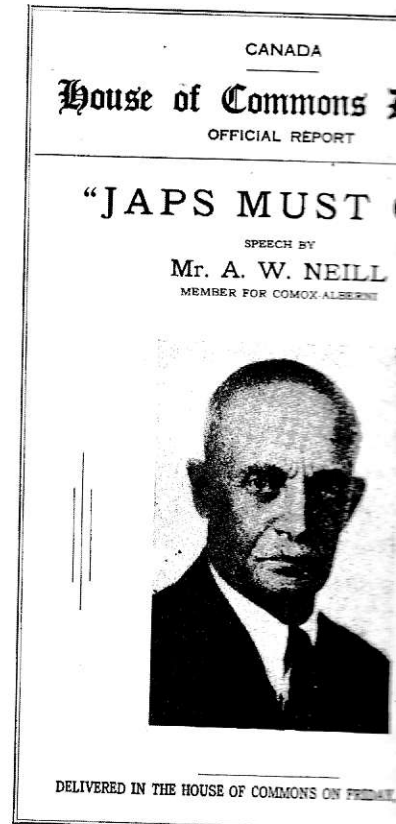
It was a view that Neill would repeat as the war continued. He also appealed to Christianity when arguing against Japanese Canadians even though many were Christian. He even wrote to the United Church's general secretary in order to protest their resolutions supporting Japanese Canadians. He also claimed that Japanese Canadians bred three to one compared to whites, so as to justify his proposal to exile Japanese Canadians from Canada as part of a peace agreement with Japan once World War II ended.⁵⁷

As World War II progressed, Neill continued to insist that advance arrangements were needed to deport all people of Japanese descent immediately after the war ended. Indicative of Neill's view, he said the following in the House of Commons in 1944:

I have not said anything about race or creed. I have not attempted to raise the issue at all. But we say, as the hon. member of New Westminster said, that these people will not assimilate and cannot assimilate. They do not want to assimilate. The real test of assimilation is marriage. You cannot get anything else without that. They simply do not want to do that. They approach you and say that it made their heart bleed on Election Day when they see white men going to vote and they cannot. That is all poppycock. When the war broke out we had to close sixty-nine Jap schools, entirely Jap staffed, where they taught the Japanese language, Japanese culture and Japanese doctrines. We got some of their stuff. It was written in Japanese, of course. We got some of their textbooks translated. It was anti-white man stuff. They used to leave the white schools where they got all their stuff, and go across the road to their own schools.⁵⁸

The above quote clearly indicates that Neill was indeed strongly racist, even if he did not want to think of himself in such a way, instead imagining himself as a protector of the vulnerable white people, a position that many white supremacists endorsed.

In 1945, at the age of seventy-seven, A.W. Neill resigned from Parliament due to age and failing health. At the time, he was the only MP in British Columbia to have held his seat continuously from as far back as 1921.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, at the end of



World War II, Neill once again proposed to deport all Japanese from Canada," and almost 4,000, indeed deported in 1946.⁶⁰

In 1945, Neill returned to Alberni for a number of years. He was nine years old when the *Western Advocate* reported that Neill was respected and admired by all who knew him. Neill was not intended to include Asian Canada.

A.W. Neill he

The two local politicians who initiated the street in Port Alberni were Chris Alemany and Buchanan, a school board trustee. He was a member of the council of Port Alberni, who inspired them to name the street. In 2002, Stevenson wrote

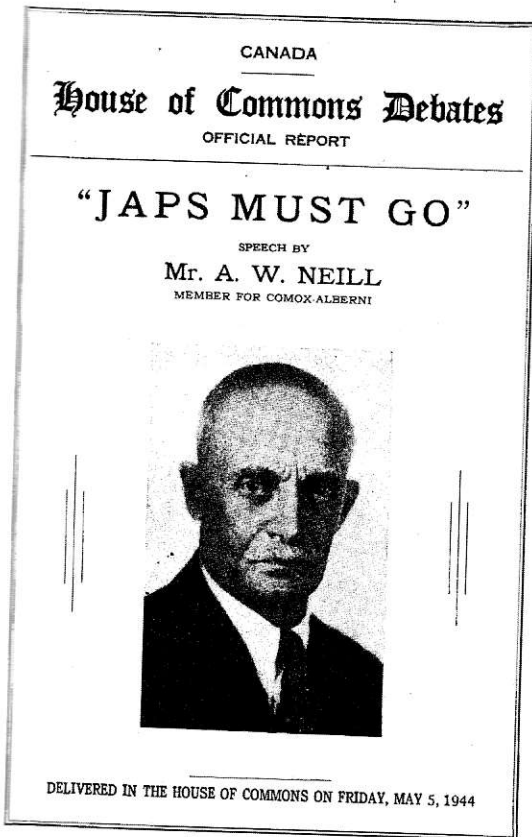


Figure 12.2 Front page of the "Japs Must Go" speech in the House of Commons by A.W. Neill, 5 May 1944.

World War II, Neill once again proposed that "everyone of Japanese origin be deported from Canada," and almost 4,000, including many who were Canadian citizens, were indeed deported in 1946.⁶⁰

In 1945, Neill returned to Alberni to set up a notary public business, which he ran for a number of years. He was ninety-one years old when he died on 7 July 1960. *The Western Advocate* reported that Neill had been "one of Alberni's greatest men, respected and admired by all who knew him," but "all who knew him" was undoubtedly not intended to include Asian Canadians.⁶¹

A.W. Neill honorifics in Port Alberni

The two local politicians who initiated name-changing efforts related to A.W. Neill in Port Alberni were Chris Alemany, city councillor of Port Alberni, and Rosemarie Buchanan, a school board trustee. However, it was Chris Stevenson, a former resident of Port Alberni, who inspired them to push for changing the names of the school and the street. In 2002, Stevenson wrote a university paper about World War II injustices

associated with the internment of Japanese Canadians. At that time Stevenson identified Neill as a key white racist from Alberni, and Alemany and Buchanan learned about this through a social media post.⁶² On 11 May 2016, Stevenson wrote the following on Facebook:

Speaking of possible renaming of things ... how many people are aware that one of the schools in the [Alberni Valley] district and a street are named for one of the most vocal political aggressors against the Asian-Canadian community in the late 1930s and 1940s – the MP for this area, who was one of the most vicious and ardent proponents for Japanese internment, who had the power, authority and voice, and made it his mission to make internment happen? You know, where all people of Japanese descent (some third generation) were forced to leave their homes, businesses and property (property that was subsequently stolen from them)? Talking about AW Neill of course. If we're looking to rename things, let's start with these things. I'm surprised that his name still smears a SCHOOL, and a street ... How about renaming the school with a First Nations name, in the spirit of reconciliation?⁶³

This post sparked discussion about changing the names. However, the idea did not gain traction until December 2016, six months later, when more focused discussions started to occur and Alemany and Buchanan began to seriously consider the possibility of name changing. Some First Nations people got involved, writing letters in support of name changing, but, despite some effort, Alemany and Buchanan were unable to find any Japanese Canadian families in town who would speak to the negative impacts of Neill's racism.⁶⁴ However, Lorene Oikawa, vice president of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, sent a letter to Port Alberni Council to support the idea to change the name of A.W. Neill Elementary School and the street named for Neill. She pointed out that, "tributes to A.W. Neill are tacit support for his racist actions" and that changing the names would constitute "the first step towards reconciliation."⁶⁵

While Alemany and Buchanan were receptive and willing to act once they learned about Neill's racist history, many others in Port Alberni strongly objected to their efforts. When Alemany's plan to change the street name was leaked to a local radio station, *the Peak*, many in Port Alberni strongly criticized him on social media. The controversy particularly erupted on a Facebook page devoted to Port Alberni politics called AV (Alberni Valley) Chatter Box. Brian Calm, an administrator for the site, criticized the idea heavily. Critics made comments including, "These people need to get a life, and talk about real issues."⁶⁶ One commenter wrote, "waste of time [and] taxpayers money! Move on to something more constructive!" Others, however, such as Shelley Shenton supported Alemany, writing in response to Cameron Stefiuk, "We

can work harder on lessening it [r] inter-cultural work." The controversial candidate for Member of the Legislature was particularly critical of removing names. "I remained critical of these name changes that took place in BC, he criticized, via the names of our national leaders, people, than learning from them."⁶⁹ His criticism of Cameron Stefiuk made at the Port Alberni

More than fifty letters were submitted on this changing issue, indicating the interest of many who took the time to write well beyond the symbolic value of doing so, and in favour of reconciliation. Others, however, wrote in opposition to moving ahead with such changes well up old wounds." Still others argued that the cost of changing the name of Neill School was a waste of taxpayer's money to

Although initial efforts to remove the name were not successful, the proposal to change the street, was not actually defeated. There was no policy in place to deal with the school board announced that it would consider potential school name changes.⁷¹ The street could be changed in the future, once a policy had been established.⁷² Indeed, Rosemary Cameron, in 2018, that if she was reelected in 2022, she would be changing the name of A.W. Neill Elementary School. A new policy for school naming stated that it would be after individual people and that it would not be for or landscape features, such as streets. "I would like the students who attend A.W. Neill Elementary School in the future the school could be given a new name. That would be symbolically important." Cameron, a Japanese Canadian in town, Marlene Cameron, who was interned during World War II and who had petitioned when the time comes to again petition for the School changed.⁷⁴ More recently, the school board is changing the name of A.W. Neill Elementary School. This proposal, including possible ne

can work harder on lessening it [racism]. That is the whole point of cross-cultural, inter-cultural work.” The controversy polarized Port Alberni.⁶⁷ A former Liberal Party candidate for Member of the Legislative Assembly in Port Alberni, Darren DeLuca, was particularly critical of removing Neill’s name as an honorific.⁶⁸ DeLuca has remained critical of these name changes, and on 26 October 2018, after local elections took place in BC, he criticized, via Facebook, politicians “who prefer to desecrate the names of our national leaders, people like John A. McDonald or A.W. Neill, rather than learning from them.”⁶⁹ His comment, in some ways, mirrors the comments that Cameron Stefiuk made at the Port Alberni City Council meeting on 23 January 2017.

More than fifty letters were submitted to city council with regard to the name changing issue, indicating the interest that the public had in the issue. Not surprisingly, many who took the time to write were strongly supportive of name changing, pointing to the symbolic value of doing so, and the need to do so in order to work toward reconciliation. Others, however, wrote forcefully against name changing, arguing that moving ahead with such changes would cause division in the community and “open up old wounds.” Still others argued that there would be considerable costs associated with changing the name of Neill Street, such as changing letterheads, etc. Some felt it was a waste of taxpayer’s money to even consider name changing.⁷⁰

Although initial efforts to remove Neill’s name from honorifics in Port Alberni were not successful, the proposal to change the school’s name, unlike that with respect to the street, was not actually defeated in a vote. Instead, a decision was postponed, as there was no policy in place to deal with proposed name changes. In the fall of 2017 the school board announced that it had decided to develop a policy for addressing potential school name changes.⁷¹ This set up the possibility that the name of the school could be changed in the future, once procedures for dealing with such questions have been established.⁷² Indeed, Rosemarie Buchanan told me, when we met in August 2018, that if she was reelected in October 2018 (and she was), she would push for changing the name of A.W. Neill Elementary School in 2019. She explained that the new policy for school naming states that it is generally better to not name schools after individual people and that it is preferable to name schools after particular areas or landscape features, such as streams, hills, etc. Since approximately 50 per cent of the students who attend A.W. Neill Elementary are First Nations, it is possible that in the future the school could be given a local First Nations name to replace A.W. Neill.⁷³ That would be symbolically important. Buchanan has also been in touch with a Japanese Canadian in town, Marlene Mortensen (née Madokoro), whose parents were interned during World War II and who is willing to speak in front of the school board when the time comes to again petition to have the name of A.W. Neill Elementary School changed.⁷⁴ More recently, the school board publicly indicated their interest in changing the name of A.W. Neill Elementary School, and called for public input into this proposal, including possible new names for the school.⁷⁵

While none of the Japanese Canadians from Port Alberni have any direct memories of A.W. Neill – as is apparently the case with First Nations as well – their families were all affected by Neill's racism. One elderly Japanese woman, Terry Hamagishi, who lives in Port Alberni and was uprooted from Port Alberni during World War II, told me that her late husband Eugene, who was also interned, also did not know anything specifically about Neill, but like other Japanese Canadians of their era, he did know about Neill's part-time ally, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. Eugene remained angry with King for his whole life for ordering the internment of Japanese Canadians in 1942. Therefore, he always refused to cash a Canadian \$50 bill, since the bill honours King by having him on it.⁷⁶ I doubt that many white Canadians look at the \$50 bill in this way.

Conclusions

This chapter began with a discussion of the ongoing controversy surrounding efforts to rename Neill Street and A.W. Neill Elementary in Port Alberni. Some people feel that it is unproductive, divisive, and a waste of time to try to remove honorific names associated with blatant racists such as A.W. Neill. Others, however, clearly believe that removing problematic honorific names from the landscape is an important step towards reconciliation with those victimized by such racists in the past, whether they be Japanese Canadians or Indigenous peoples. Moreover, removing such honorifics clearly indicates that real change is desired. In this sense, such efforts can be very important for the present. Indeed, Keiko Mary Kitagawa – the leader of a related and successful campaign to convince the Canadian government in 2007 to name a federal building in Vancouver after Douglas Jung, the first Canadian MP of Asian descent, rather than Howard Charles Green, a prominent Canadian anti-Japanese politician – has recently been awarded the Order of British Columbia for her contributions to public life in the province.⁷⁷

Those involved in the controversy associated with A.W. Neill honorifics in Port Alberni, including Chris Alemany and Rosemarie Buchanan, were not aware of the Landscapes of Injustice project when I first met them in August 2018. However, their efforts demonstrate the types of struggles that are occurring to try to transform landscapes of injustice, places named in honour of blatant racists such as A.W. Neill, into places that symbolize reconciliation and justice. One of the first steps in that direction should be to remove A.W. Neill's name from the street and the school, so as to make it materially and symbolically clear that real efforts at reconciliation are underway, whether it be with Japanese Canadians or First Nations.

Indeed, projects like Landscapes of Injustice – and other research efforts – can help contribute to understanding more about how injustices have emerged and who was responsible for them. This work is crucial, as honorific naming has important space-

making value for people and tends to be a good indicator of the types of things they do not. No wonder that honorific naming is so controversial wherever such name-changing is far from trivial; honorific naming

In the particular case of A.W. Neill Street in Port Alberni, it is clear that he was a strong racist against Asian Canadians and that over many decades he contributed to the racism against Japanese Canadians. It would be appropriate to include Neill in the list of names to be removed, good, the bad, and the ugly can all be removed. It is not enough to not forget Neill and what he stood for, but to remember someone, elevating that person because they were an example to others, even as a role model, is not even close. Name changing is not about societal values, something that periodicals are not good at. That is why it seems to me that it is

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making value for people and tends to demonstrate societal values. It is also an important indicator of the types of things that people support and the types of things that they do not. No wonder that honorific naming and renaming is often highly controversial wherever such name-changing efforts occur. But make no mistake, this issue is far from trivial; honorific naming is important for representing societal values.

In the particular case of A.W. Neill, there is more than sufficient evidence to suggest that he was a strong racist against Asian Canadians, particularly Japanese Canadians, and that over many decades he consistently looked for ways to undermine Asian Canadians. It would be appropriate to include exhibits about Neill in museums, where the good, the bad, and the ugly can all be assessed and scrutinized. We certainly should not forget Neill and what he stood for. However, honorific naming is about honouring someone, elevating that person because he or she is seen as being worthy to stand as an example to others, even as a role model. I do not think that Neill reaches that bar; not even close. Name changing is nothing new. Rather, it represents a reevaluation of societal values, something that periodically occurs, and should not come as a surprise. That is why it seems to me that it is now time to stop honouring A.W. Neill.

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The Road to Redress: of Injustice

Art Miki

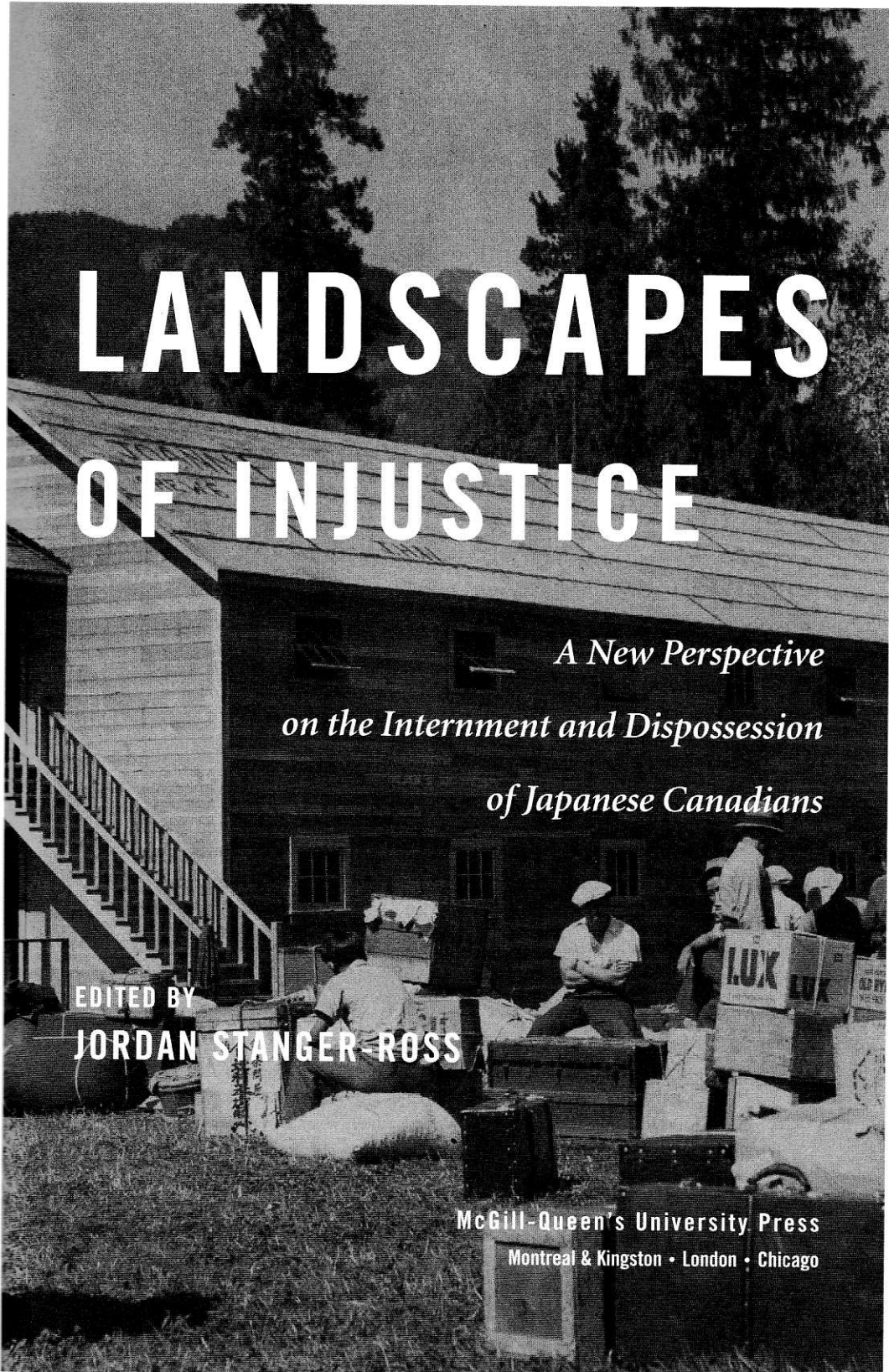
Early in the morning of Sunday, 27 August 2018, I attended a gathering of the federal government's acknowledgment of the Japanese Canadian community) of the National Association of Japanese Canadians at a gathering of the Landscapes of Injustice.

AUDREY

Good morning everyone. I am here for a conversation with Art Miki. You can just see how he reminisce. [crowd laughs] So if we go back to the gathering of the Landscapes of Injustice. Earlier, we saw a photograph of Gordon Kadota in the early 1970s. I'm not sure how that was going on, but it really was a turning point for Japanese Canadians as an organized community. Everyone knew, of course, about the hardships people had experienced the 1940s, but Japanese Canadians as a community were not aware of the history of this country.

I want to start with that turning point. The arrival of Manzo Nagano, believe it or not, was coming up and it was a tremendous moment together in planning that centennial in 1988 and I remember I wasn't very excited about it. I was a radical at UBC (to the extent that UBC was a radical). And there were a bunch of us who were interested in restaurants, and we were really determined to make the Canadian government accountable.

I remember Gordon Kadota standing in Oppenheimer Park or Powell Street.



LANDSCAPES OF INJUSTICE

*A New Perspective
on the Internment and Dispossession
of Japanese Canadians*

EDITED BY
JORDAN STANGER-ROSS

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