

Notes on Camp: A Decolonizing Strategy

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Strategic Framework for Long-Term Decolonizing Initiatives

As a former camp counselor I recall with affection the exhausting and exhilarating days of my most fulfilling summers. By working in an outdoor classroom environment, I was able to develop unique, alternative approaches to teaching, and more importantly, I was able to learn invaluable lessons from bright and curious young people. I owe my skills in public speaking and, more importantly, in listening, to the campers who commanded my attention and taught me the value of quiet.

I acknowledge my identity as a former camp staff member, an art history student, and a white Christian woman, and its impact on my research. As a settler Canadian woman I have participated in camp traditions which imitate, appropriate, and misrepresent Indigenous ceremonies, names, and cultural practices of dress and craft. I wish to acknowledge my experience as a camp educator as I sift through camp histories, acknowledging that I have been a beneficiary of and a participant in many such histories. I take ownership of my past participation in the colonial appropriation of Indigenous cultural practices, and I understand the privileged posture from which I stand as I pursue personal decolonization.

I confront my participation in problematic camp traditions in response to Paulette Regan's call to action for settler Canadians. Regan, in speaking directly to non-Indigenous students at IGOV Doctoral Student Symposium, articulated that "we have to be willing to be uncomfortable, to be disquieted at a deep and disturbing level" in order to welcome "transformative learning" and "the kind of experiential

learning that engages our whole being.”¹ I do not believe that I have the ability, right, privilege, or experience to attempt to reform problematic camp traditions. Rather, I commit to opening this issue as a conversation, in hopes of facilitating interactions between the texts and testimonies of camp directors, Indigenous scholars, psychologists, elders, historians, community members, and children so that change can be propelled collaboratively.

The written history of camp programming is monolithic, and contemporary Indian mimicry at camp is poorly documented and often protected knowledge.² A comprehensive record of the many iterations of Indian programming in North America would necessitate extensive field research. As a preliminary measure, this paper examines oral and textual camp histories alongside theories of decolonization in order to build the strategic framework needed for summer camps to institute change, and for governing bodies to develop new policies. Rather than focusing explicitly on historical instances of racial mimicry, this paper problematizes overarching core values across summer camps, illuminating how camps posture themselves in relation to land, tradition, spirituality, and Indianness. Presenting early camp texts alongside Indigenous scholarship is in itself a method of decolonization, ensuring that contemporary Indianness stands in conversation with imagined Indianness. I advocate for the presence of Indigenous educators in camp programming, and correspondingly, I ensure that Indigenous scholarship determines the direction of my argument. This approach is an act of humility that welcomes the

¹ Paulette Regan, “A Transformative Framework for Decolonizing Canada: A Non-Indigenous Approach,” IGOV Doctoral Student Symposium, University of Victoria, January 20, 2006, 7. On settler responsibility, see Leah Decter and Carla Taunton, “Addressing the Settler Problem: Strategies Of Settler Responsibility and Decolonization,” *FUSE Magazine* 36, no. 4 (2013): 32–39; Alex Forsythe, “Acknowledging Settler Responsibility,” *Undergraduate Transitional Justice Review* 1, iss. 3 (2010).

² Many publications describing Indian Council Ring ceremonies are safeguarded against prospective campers to maintain the element of surprise. See “Safeguarded Material,” *Our History: Order of the Arrow, Boy Scouts of America*. Accessed April 14, 2015, <http://www.oa-bsa.org/pages/content/safeguarded-material>.

unsettling of a long-standing white-settler authority over camp scholarship, encouraging settler discomfort and embarrassment as healthy strategies in the process of decolonization.

Mohawk scholar and activist Taiaiake Alfred explains that often decolonization is conceptualized in policy as “restitution” as opposed to “reconciliation” or “recovery.”³ Adrian Stimson, an interdisciplinary artist and member of the Siksika (Blackfoot) First Nation, addresses the problem of the “healing industry:” a colonial project that formalizes what ought to be a restorative process, ignoring a multiplicity of Indigenous methods of healing.⁴ Rather than implementing one-time bureaucratic projects, it is important for institutions to make long-term commitments when coming to terms with a long history of Indigenous erasure. Institutions built on foundations of primitivism and racial mimicry must commit to continually unsettling their systems of values and re-examining their programming. Federal and provincial camping governing bodies ought to ensure that the infrastructure and resources are available for affiliated summer camps, so that they may build individual, long-term plans for decolonizing their programming. Healing must not be considered an institutional project or a national project, it must be approached at a slow pace, with attention to histories of assimilation in North America.

A bureaucratic project of restitution or reconciliation can take up an “us and them” model, becoming a colonial project that legitimizes the colonizer for having “recognized” the trauma of the colonized. A short-term plan to quickly reconcile a long history of assimilation and trauma can do little more than ease the guilt of the

³ “Gerald Taiaiake Alfred: Resurgence of Traditional Ways of Being,” Vimeo video, 20:20, Posted by ASU Libraries, March 23, 2009, <https://vimeo.com/4650972>.

⁴ Adrian Stimson, “Suffer Little Children,” *West Coast Line: Reconcile This!* 74, vol. 64, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 70.

colonizer. This type of project is merely an “optimistic but vague aspiration” to improve relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.⁵ In *Red Skin White Masks*, Glen Coulthard works to reject the bureaucratic strategies of recognition, explaining that these are colonial projects that serve the privileged body. Recognition in this sense reinforces a Hegelian master/slave model (or a colonizer/colonized model), in which the master does little more than recognize the trauma of the slave, reinforcing and re-establishing the power structure in place. A scholar and member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Coulthard argues that this Hegelian model of recognition creates a social order in which “senses of self are ... dependent on and shaped through our complex relations with others,” rather than through self-determination and self-definition.⁶ Under this social order, self-imagining cannot be achieved by the slave alone; the slave’s identity exists only in relation to the master. Furthermore, by being subjugated under the master/slave model, the colonized does not get the privilege of recognizing the colonizer, and “mutual recognition” becomes a myth. The “difference-blind” neo-liberal agenda which advocates for multiculturalism—a system composed of “large-scale exchanges of recognition”—ignores the importance of human subjectivity and the individual psychological implications of colonialism, not to mention the importance of self-determination.⁷

When facing the long-term project of decolonization, it is crucial to put forward “actional” projects as opposed to “reactional” ones, promoting long-term

⁵ Ravi de Costa and Tom Clark, “Exploring non-Aboriginal Attitudes Towards Reconciliation in Canada: The Beginnings of Targeted Focus Group Research,” *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the lens of Cultural Diversity*, ed. Ashok Mathur et al., (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011), 329.

⁶ Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 28.

⁷ Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks*, 29, 33.

development as opposed to guttural decision making.⁸ Reactional “quick fixes” often tokenize marginalized groups and consider long histories of oppression to be resolved through mutual recognition. When a colonial institution considers an issue of oppression “resolved” without radically shifting its infrastructure, it remains a colonial institution. The quick elimination of Indian programming would constitute a “reactional” project, whereas the introduction of new programs that build alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples would be an actional development. If a single, short-term strategy for abruptly “rectifying” or eliminating all Indian programming were to be applied on a national scale, this would not only be a token gesture towards Indigenous peoples, it would ignore the degree to which a child’s world view is affected by a camp experience. In institutions with increasing numbers of returning campers, children have been performing and re-performing racial stereotypes for years, developing a national identity, a personal identity, a relationship to land, and a perspective on Indigeneity rooted in their respective camp experiences. The delicacy of a child’s long-term psycho-social development requires that change is instituted at a gradual pace in order to promote deep understanding and transformative learning.

Actional decolonization at summer camps will mean acknowledging territorial sovereignty over land, as well as cultural sovereignty over dress, ceremonies, names, and symbols. Actional decolonization at summer camps will mean dismantling a white settler authority over woodcraft and environmental programming in order to bring forward Indigenous educators. Actional decolonization at summer camps will mean comprehensive education for camp staff. Once productive programming is underway, actional decolonization at summer camps will mean instituting long-term

⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), 222 ; Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks*, 44. Fanon uses the language of “actional” to advocate for black activists being empowered rather than acting in a “reactional” way, one characterized by *ressentiment*.

“send kids to camp” programs for Indigenous youth. Actional decolonization will mean constantly unsettling, questioning, reformulating and rebuilding decolonizing initiatives, in order to ensure that they remain a permanent project.

Core Values of Early Camp Programming

While many camp traditions were set in motion by several influential camp founders at the turn of the twentieth-century, it would be inaccurate to trace the entire North American camping movement to a small number of camp educators. I avoid the assumption that there is a single camp “industry” in order to recognize that today there is a multiplicity of independent and interconnected camping institutions with differing programs, core values and guiding principles. This chapter focuses on the core values of several camping forerunners, emphasizing the impulses that motivated their Indian programming, and resisting the impulse to revisit many specific instances of racial pageantry. From an anthropological lens the details of camp traditions are important components of institutional histories, however at the risk of causing trauma to individuals who have experienced racial oppression, I avoid unnecessarily recounting details of problematic programming. In an attempt to unsettle institutionalized Indian mimicry and reform practices of cultural appropriation at camp, it is crucial to determine the underlying core values that originally motivated those practices.

The Woodcraft Indians (later known as Boy Scouts of America) and the Camp Fire Girls each resisted industrialization and promoting a “return to nature” at the turn of the twentieth-century, embodying the ideals of antimodernism.⁹ This movement occurred during what Alan Trachtenberg calls “the incorporation of America,” a time in which social and economic units were becoming linked under unified bodies.¹⁰ In the face of emerging technologies, psychologists and early camp founders feared that over-stimulation in urban settings would impact a child’s

⁹ On cottage country and antimodernism see Norman McIntyre et al., *Multiple Dwelling and Tourism: Negotiating Place, Home and Identity* (Cambridge: CAB International, 2006).

¹⁰ Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 99.

development, prompting a retreat to wilderness.¹¹ The camping movement which unfolded, according to Sharon Wall, had much to do with “seeking a balm for the non-Native experience of modernity.”¹² The branding of summer camp as a valuable “retreat” from technologies is still widely-practiced as a marketing strategy. Peg L. Smith, the CEO of the American Camp Association states in the 2013 Annual Report, titled *RE:Connect: What Today’s Kids Need*, that kids have a universal *need* to “reconnect” in the face of increasing communication systems.¹³ If the mission of summer camp in North America is to retreat from technology in order to emerge reconnected with a universal set of values, it is crucial to note that historically, these antimodernist motivations have led to the tokenization of a primitive way of life.

In his detailed memoir *Trail of an Artist-Naturalist*, camping forerunner Ernest Thompson Seton suggests that his turn toward wilderness was a reactionary attempt to develop a non-Christian sense of spirituality. Seton presents his achievements in his own memoir as a causal sequence of events, each intellectual awakening triggering a series of personal projects. While his sequential account suggests a causal relationship between his turn from Christian faith and his turn toward the glorification of nature, causality cannot be directly confirmed. That being said, Seton did seek a new set of universal moral values after his rejection of Christianity, and those values would become the core of his Indian programming. Seton’s need to “reconnect” in the face of what he considered a “failing civilization” led him to idolize a brand of primitive life that he would market through Woodcraft Indians, the movement which would become Boy Scouts of America.¹⁴

¹¹ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Co., 1931).

¹² Sharon Wall, “Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: ‘Playing Indian’ at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920 – 1955,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (2005): 514.

¹³ American Camp Association, *RE:Connect: What Today’s Kids Need*, 2013, 3.

¹⁴ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 99.

Seton describes feeling deeply disquieted after rejecting his mother's religious doctrines, stating, "It was long before I found a word of comfort."¹⁵ He finally felt relief seven years later, in 1900, when he purchased "a tract of tangled wildwood" outside New York City, which would become the site for his Indian Village.¹⁶ The property became a secular camp for the local boys grounded in Judeo-Christian values, which "made chivalry, kindness, courage and honour the cardinal virtues."¹⁷ Ceremonial welcomes and graces in his Boy Scout manuals encouraged praise of a universal Great Spirit, emulating Judeo-Christian norms of worship and thanksgiving.¹⁸ Seton made the Indian brave his role model, a composite mythic figure that embodied Christian virtues, who he considered brave, self-disciplined, and harmonious with the natural world. It is clear that Seton's programming—which constructed an entire ecosystem of value systems, laws, commandments and hierarchical roles—attempted to make material a new holistic worldview in the absence of Christian faith.

Seton found respite from spiritual disquiet in Emerson's words, "If ye be of good ancestry, cast aside your judgment, and trust yourself indomitably to your instincts, and you won't go far astray."¹⁹ Correspondingly, Seton took up a direct study of what he considered universal human instincts, namely "... love of glory, hunter instinct, cave-man instinct, [and] play..." among others.²⁰ What Seton determined to be common instincts correspond with the traits of Rousseau's natural man, who is "robust, agile, and courageous" in the state of nature.²¹ Seton developed his curriculum in outdoor life using the sixty human instincts he had developed in his

¹⁵ Ernest Thompson Seton, *Trail of an Artist-Naturalist*, (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 375.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 384.

¹⁸ Ernest Thompson Seton, *The woodcraft manual for boys the fifteenth birch bark roll* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1917), 117.

¹⁹ Seton, *Artist-Naturalist*, 375.

²⁰ Ibid., 376.

²¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992), 20.

studies, which he expanded into a code of physical, mental, and spiritual exploits.²² Concerned more with the education of his campers than the accurate representation of Indigenous peoples, Seton wrote, “Our motto, was ‘The best things of the best Indians’ Whatever is picturesque, good, and safe in Indian life, that we used.”²³ The concept of the “picturesque” is foundational to Seton’s imagined Indian figure, a romanticized symbol of the virtues he associated with life in the wilderness. Seton believed that Indian teachings “need no argument beyond presentation” arguing that “they speak for themselves. The Red Man is the apostle of outdoor life.”²⁴ By considering “Indian teachings” to be universal values, Seton failed to acknowledge the multiplicity of diverse Indigenous nations in North America with differing knowledges, stories, teachings, and cosmologies. Homogenizing Indigeneity—reducing many identities into a single set of visual and cultural tropes—was the essential component of his Indian program that has persisted throughout camp programming.

By inventing a series of laws, hierarchies and ceremonies that could be followed to achieve a “genuine” (singular) Indian experience, Seton made it possible for his brand of Indian mimicry to proliferate rapidly. Not only did he create a desirable worldview, he created a palatable and comprehensive guide to that worldview, making his version of the Other imitable. Philip J. Deloria explains in *Playing Indian* that Seton’s Indian Other is diametrically opposed to the Other that was idolized in the American Revolution. Rather than “appropriating an interior Indian Other, a figure situated *within* American societal boundaries . . . Seton placed exterior Indians outside the temporal (and societal) boundaries of modernity,” idolizing a figure that was other to the feared industrial reality.²⁵ In a time when urban dwellers

²² Seton, *Artist-Naturalist*, 376.

²³ *Ibid.*, 384.

²⁴ Ernest Thompson Seton, *The Gospel of the Red Man: An Indian Bible* (Garden City: Doubleday and Doran, 1936), 1-2.

²⁵ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 103.

were interested in “going native,” Seton’s brand of Indianness was particularly accessible and even marketable; his *Woodcraft Laws* taking up the structure of the Ten Commandments and his manuals meticulously categorized into accessible indexes.²⁶ By homogenizing and essentializing Indigenous identities, Seton made it possible for his version of Indianness to proliferate. It is crucial for camp directors to note the extent to which Seton’s core values were passed on to their predecessors, in order to maintain awareness toward Seton’s legacy in the “return to nature” movement today.

Seton’s texts, written throughout the first two decades of the twentieth-century, had a visible impact on camp founders in Ontario in the interwar years. Mary Hamilton, who founded Camp Tanamakoon in 1925, claims to have consulted “the library, Pauline Johnson’s family, Ernest Thompson Seton, Indian people and authorities on Indian lore” before selecting the name of her camp.²⁷ Hamilton’s list of resources confirms not only the texts that were in circulation at the time, but the people considered to be authorities on Indianness. The literary, theatrical and pop culture voices of this period that achieved the highest cultural currency—including Buffalo Bill shows and early Western films—promoted a fascination with Indian Country and the regulation Indian maiden. Glen Bernard’s founder, camping forerunner Mary S. Edgar, also drew inspiration for her programming from Mohawk-Canadian performer Pauline Johnson, with whom she was entranced at ten years old. Having seen her perform in Sundridge in 1899, Edgar recalled, “I was fascinated and wished I were related to her.”²⁸ Tekahionwake, also known as E. Pauline Johnson, achieved visibility as a poet and performer in a time of federally instituted erasure of Indigenous ceremonies. Under the Indian Act, performances and ceremonies were banned in Canada from 1884 to 1951, but Johnson continued to entrance English-

²⁶ Seton, *Woodcraft Manual for Boys*, 10.

²⁷ Wall, “Totem Poles,” 523.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 513.

speaking settler audiences in this time period.²⁹ Considering that early girls camps, particularly the Camp Fire Girls, both reinforced traditional Western gender roles and idolized the figure of the Indian maiden, it is fitting that Johnson was idolized for representing both a Victorian lady and a Mohawk princess.³⁰

Charlotte Gulick, co-founder of Camp Fire Girls and friend of the Seton family, was particularly opposed to women's engagement in machine-driven and assembly-line production, and she intended for the programming at Camp Wo-He-Lo to promote an alternative, craft-based model of labour.³¹ The purpose of the organization, founded in 1910, was "to perpetuate the spiritual ideals of the home under the new conditions of a social community," and to "devise ways of measuring and creating standards for woman's work."³² Gulick taught young girls the importance of finding joy in selfless labour, treating "service" as a core principle of her programming as a way of preparing girls for marriage and motherhood. She explicitly states, "the bearing and rearing of children has always been the first duty of most women, and that must always continue to be. This involves, service, constant service, self-forgetfulness, and always service."³³ Gulick's programming was highly coloured by her impression of traditional gender roles and her distaste for the drudgery of machine-based labour, and her programming is a signifier of this.³⁴ Cooking tasks were hardly emblematic of life in the wilderness, requiring that girls "help prepare and serve" meals, including "purchase of food, cooking, and serving the meal, and care of fire."³⁵ In contrast to the Camp Fire Girls, who were taught to manage finances and enact transactions which occur in urban environments, young

²⁹ E. Pauline Johnson, Carole Gerson, and Veronica Jane Strong-Boag, *E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake: Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), xiii.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, xvii.

³¹ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 111.

³² *The Book of the Camp Fire Girls*, 3rd ed. (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1913), 7.

³³ Helen Buckler, Mary F. Fiedler, and Martha F. Allen, *Wo-He-Lo: The Story of the Campfire Girls 1910-1960* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961), 22.

³⁴ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 113.

³⁵ *The Book of the Camp Fire Girls*, 23.

boys seeking to win the rank of Minisino as Woodcraft Indians were required to “sleep out three nights, also cook a meal, with no utensils but a hatchet and what one can make with it.”³⁶ While young boys were taught resourcefulness in the absence of industrial technologies—embodying the virtues of the fictive brave—Camp Fire Girls requirements assumed the presence of a grocery store, bank account, and kitchen table in each young girl’s future as the caretakers of urban households.

The paradox of antimodernism is that any antimodern retreat necessarily points back toward the modern city—the purpose of the withdrawal being to prepare the individual to return in health to urban life.³⁷ The programming of the Camp Fire Girls is direct training for motherhood, the main requirements for winning the rank of Fire Maker being cooking, mending stockings, keeping accounts of financial transactions, and reciting “the chief causes of infant mortality in summer.”³⁸ The skills taught at Camp Wo-He-Lo are reflective of concurrent developments in child psychology, which “preached the wonders of ‘habit-training,’” and encouraged “factory-like routine.”³⁹ While ideologically, Gulick resisted modern industrial production, the type of domestic service she promoted reflected a modern industrial work ethic, further demonstrating how the skills valued in antimodern circles are reflective of that which they oppose. Strikingly, residential schools were simultaneously attempting to assimilate Indigenous children into the settler economy by promoting intensive labour and “habits of industry.”⁴⁰ Indian Affairs believed that one of the main factors inhibiting assimilation was the Indian’s inherent aversion to work, and in reaction to this stereotype, curricula in residential schools promoted

³⁶ Seton, *Woodcraft Manual for Boys*, 19.

³⁷ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 102.

³⁸ *The Book of the Camp Fire Girls*, 24.

³⁹ Wall, “Totem Poles,” 518.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 56. On labour at residential schools, see Thomas J. Morgan, *Indian Education* (Washington, D.C.: Indian Rights Association, 1890).

manual wage labour.⁴¹ Duncan Campbell Scott amended the Indian Act in 1920 to make residential schools mandatory for Indigenous children aged seven to fifteen, an assimilative procedure to eliminate the “Indian problem.” This was the same year that brought significant development for camping institutions in Ontario. As white settler children were increasingly retreating to nature, Indigenous children of the same age were being dispossessed from communities and ancestral lands, to be subjected to colonial violence.⁴²

As existing material culture proves, the methods of production practiced by children in Indian residential schools in the 1920’s were diametrically opposed to the craft-based labour being promoted at summer camps. Due to the fact that material production was a key component of Camp Wo-He-Lo’s programming, the costumes, props and objects produced there act as relics of the period of antimodernism. Acting both as antique objects which bear complex institutional histories, and as problematic replicas of an imagined Indian identity, they are conflated objects of material culture. Campers with the status of Wood Gatherer at Camp Wo-He-Lo were required to craft ceremonial dresses and headbands, which were embroidered with “a symbolic or pictographic record of the attainments, relationships, ideals and hopes of the owner.”⁴³ Meant to selectively chronicle the honours won in her camping career, a camper was meant to pass her costume down “as a priceless inheritance to her children.”⁴⁴

When creating ceremonial dresses, campers participate in the manufacturing of a personal identity that is reflective of a mythologized Indian figure. In *The System*

⁴¹ Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze*, 56.

⁴² Eileen M. Antone, “Reconciling Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives in Aboriginal literary practice,” *Proceedings from the First Nations, First Nations Thoughts Conference*, 2005, 5; Mary Jane McCallum, “The Fundamental Things’: Camp Fire Girls and Authenticity, 1910-20,” *Canadian Journal of History* 40, iss. 1 (April 2005): 6 – 7.

⁴³ *The Book of the Camp Fire Girls*, 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

of *Objects*, Jean Baudrillard describes how “antiques refer to the past” as signifiers and as allegories.”⁴⁵ For Baudrillard, antiques have “an exclusively mythological character,” and this myth-building occurs as objects age and become antiques, acquiring a glaring “connotation of historicalness” which is always “eccentric.”⁴⁶ While the Camp Fire Girls dresses are artifacts today, they do not simply act as signifiers, pointing in a straight line to a mythologized 1910. Creating a replica of a mythic historical dress, campers created their own instant antiques, each inscribed with an imaginary identity. Each girl who crafted a dress participated in a complex re-imagining, in which she mythologized her own identity, creating an origin story for herself as she moved forward into womanhood. Baudrillard declares that “the demand to which antiques respond is the demand for definitive or fully realized being;” a demand for the identifiable origin of a being.⁴⁷ These conflated objects act as imitations of an ahistorical Indian, but they also hold a child’s own self-imagining. While they are highly problematic costumes, it is crucial to note the importance of myth-building and self-imagination as a part of childhood education; a topic which I will revisit in the next chapter.

There is immense value in camp programming that facilitates a child’s transformative self-imagining, however it is important to recognize the extent to which such activities reflect the values of Ernest Thompson Seton and Charlotte Gulick. By enforcing traditional gender roles through guided self-imagining, Gulick inhibited *actual* self-imagining and self-determination by campers. By idolizing a fictive Indian figure, Seton facilitated destructive acts of imagining at his Indian Village. By encouraging campers to “reconnect” with nature, camps today risk reflecting a set of antimodernist ideals that prompted racial mimicry. Branded as a

⁴⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 77.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

retreat from civilization, camp activities—which serve to increase physical activity, develop valued skills, and teach care toward others and the environment—are reflective of the skills valued at the time by the dominant voice, given the economic climate in urban centers. They participate in what Benedict Anderson calls “anti-modern modernism;” the retreat from modernity in order to return, afresh, to an urban center.⁴⁸ As Deloria articulates, “the two positions—modernism and antimodernism—were, in effect, two sides of the same coin.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Fred R. Myers, “Introduction to Part One: Around and About Modernity: Some Comments on Themes of Primitivism and Mondernism,” *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, edited by Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 13.

⁴⁹ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 102.

Propelling Change and Shifting a Collective Consciousness

Many of the core values, motivations and impulses that prompted primitivism in early camp programming are still considered universal pillars of childhood education—discipline, care of nature, and service to others. In the face of increasing globalization and cross-cultural exchange, it is crucial to critically examine *how* these values are being performed in order to resist cultural appropriation, and to create a safe environment for campers who have experienced colonial violence. Before discussing strategies for unsettling problematic camp traditions, it is important to first discuss why they persist at all. What, structurally, makes a camp such a fertile environment for traditions of role-playing to persist?

Tradition is considered one of the underlying characteristics of camp programming which ensures returning campers, and activates the thrill of nostalgia.⁵⁰ Annual re-performances of songs, events, and games encourage mentorship between older and younger campers, and assist in developing memory through experiential learning.⁵¹ In *Child's Play: Myth, Mimesis and Make Believe*, L.R. Goldman characterizes the social conditions necessary for imaginative traditions of role-playing to flourish, stating that there must be a “shared knowledge about make-believe routines, about role playing, and also about the kinds of social information these representations incorporate.”⁵² Goldman stresses the importance of make-believe in a child’s development, connecting “mimesis” to “mythos” to acknowledge that in make-believe children conjure up “an alternative, counterfactual state that is temporarily

⁵⁰ On camp traditions, see Dawn Swindle, “Camp Traditions: Memories in the Making,” *Camping Magazine* (May/June 2010), <http://www.acacamps.org/campmag/1005/camp-traditions>. ; “Notes on Camp,” *This American Life*, August 28, 1998, 28:09 – 29:25.

⁵¹ The American Camp Association considers experiential education to be critical to camp programming. American Camp Association, *RE:Connect*, 6.

⁵² L.R. Goldman, *Child's Play: Myth, Mimesis and Make Believe* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998), 1.

overlaid onto a conventionally understood ‘reality.’”⁵³ The word “pretend” implies the creation of a new “pretense,” a whole new social order, and through playing in that alternative reality children come to know their lived reality. Goldman insists that these shared experiences of role-playing and make-believe necessitate a social contract, one in which all participants are conscious that they are engaging in a game of “let’s pretend.”⁵⁴ The social contract that is developed through tradition, annual repetition and re-performance at camp allows for role-playing to persist. Camps with a large percentage of returning staff rely on institutional memory, encouraging experienced staff members to lead hands-on training sessions to disseminate knowledge.⁵⁵ Internal teaching and mentorship leads to increased agreements about how programs “ought to run” or how they are expected to run. Sam Cote (director of Camp Lincoln and Camp Lake Hubert) and Don Cheley (director of Cheley Colorado Camps), respectively, state that they allow traditions to persist because the campers “expect” them.⁵⁶ With the expectations of returning campers determining the social contract, tradition persists and transformative role-playing flourishes.

Correspondingly, the fundamental characteristic of a racial stereotype is its ability to be repeated. Homi K. Bhabha illuminates the role of the stereotype in colonial discourse, calling it a “major discursive strategy” and “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.”⁵⁷ What is “known” in the colonizer’s mind is not necessarily truth, but it is validated and re-validated every time it is re-performed. By virtue of having repetitive programming based on the idea of tradition, summer camps are fertile environments for stereotypes to be repeated. A

⁵³ Ibid., xvii, 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁵ On the value of returning staff, Chris Rollins, “Utilizing Returning Staff During Precamp: Ideas for Team Building,” *Camping Magazine* (May/June 2001).

⁵⁶ Dawn Swindle, “Camp Traditions.”

⁵⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, “The other question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism,” *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66.

break from Indian programming means the eradication of the mentality that “what happened last year is what will happen this year.” Decolonizing summer camps requires a departure from an institutional structure that trusts tradition without self-criticality and self-reflexivity. The American Camp Association makes explicit that they are committed to helping all camps achieve “continuous self-improvement,” and the Canadian Camping Association commits to “study all aspects of camping and to interpret and disseminate knowledge concerning pertinent developments and regulations.”⁵⁸ For these governing bodies to institute processes that re-evaluate and unsettle camp programming would be an important step in combatting ambivalence among camp educators.

Another crucial step in disrupting traditions of racial mimicry is dismantling a white-settler authority over all camp programming, and promoting alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. A number of cross-cultural exchanges that occurred in early camp histories show that collaborative programming strategies have persisted for almost a century in North America. Mary S. Edgar, who founded Glen Bernard Camp in 1922, expresses her indebtedness to her Mohawk friends who taught her the songs and names which formed the foundation of her programming.⁵⁹ Jocelyn Palm, the current director of Glen Bernard and recipient of the Order of Canada, recounts how Edgar’s friendships impacted the camp’s early programming. According to Palm, Edgar’s family moved north from Toronto in the 1890’s to rural Sundridge where her father opened a general store, which he maintained through trade with local farmers and Indigenous vendors on nearby reserves.⁶⁰ Through her father’s business pursuits, Edgar befriended the daughter of a Mohawk chief from a Six Nations reserve, Dawendine. After founding Glen Bernard, records show that

⁵⁸ “About ACA,” *American Camp Association*, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.acacamps.org/about/who-we-are>; “About,” *Canadian Camp Association*, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.ccamping.org/about>.

⁵⁹ Mary S. Edgar, *Our Indebtedness to Our Indian Friends* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

⁶⁰ Jocelyn Palm. Interview by author. April 5, 2014.

Edgar arranged for Indigenous collaborators to visit the camp three times during her time as director: Chief Mudjeekwis of the Rice Lake Ojibway; Nanaki (Norah Gladstone), a Blackfoot woman from the Western Plains; and Dawendine (Bernice Loft Winslow), who became a poet and performer.⁶¹ In 1934, when Dawendine visited the camp she brought hand-crafted gifts and taught Edgar a “deep reverence for all living creatures.”⁶² When Anishinaabe Chief Mudjeekwis visited the camp’s Council Ring he told stories to the campers and, standing before Edgar he said, “I honour now your chief, Her name in camp shall be Ogimagua, Children’s friend, in happy memory.”⁶³ Collaboration with these Indigenous leaders and artists informed the traditions of Indian mimicry at Glen Bernard, such as the Council Ring program. That being said, her successor Barbara Gilchrist recalls how many of Glen Bernard’s Indian legends were from Edgar’s “own fertile imagination, and how many she [had] read about was a little hard to say.”⁶⁴ Edgar crafted her own Indian legends and lived in a wig wam cabin, appropriating customs and inventing her own brand of Indianness.⁶⁵

While it is important not to overlook instances of problematic cultural appropriation at Glen Bernard, from a decolonizing perspective it is more productive to discuss Edgar’s unique cross-cultural friendships as an example for camp educators today. Making space for Indigenous educators in camp curricula dismantles white-settler power over education, and has been a productive model for Camp Tanamakoon in recent years. The camp’s director, Patti Thom, annually welcomes a First Nations speaker, singer and performer to visit and engage campers in song, teaching them the meaning of the name Tanamakoon and the practical uses of local

⁶¹ Jessica Dunkin, “Manufacturing Landscapes: Place and Community at Glen Bernard Camp, 1924 – 1933,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* (May 2012), 90.

⁶² Edgar, *Our Indebtedness*, 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁴ Barbara Gilchrist, interviewed by Jack Pearse, November 6, 1986, 83-002/5/8, Ontario Camping Association Sound/Tape Collection, Trent University Archives.; Wall, “Totem Poles,” 524.

⁶⁵ Wall, “Totem Poles,” 513.

plants.⁶⁶ Thom attested to how captivated campers have been by these events each summer, and how this experience has enhanced the camp's educational capacity.⁶⁷ While annual events alone cannot fully dismantle a white-settler authority over camp programming, increasing visibility of Indigenous peoples at camp is a productive step in a long-term plan for decolonization.

Jocelyn Palm attests to still wearing Mary S. Edgar's dress at the Glen Bernard Council Ring, as it was a gift from Dawendine and is a symbol of the camp's history of friendship.⁶⁸ As Dawendine's dress demonstrates, costumes and props used in camp programming are unique objects of material culture, and cannot be treated as unanimously destructive. However, an overwhelming number of objects exist at camps as material reminders of colonial stereotypes, and each summer that they continue to be used in programming, they perpetuate misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples. As Camp Ahmek discovered in 2011, these material representations of problematic traditions can be helpful teaching aids used to explain decolonization to campers. Jay Kennedy was the director at Camp Ahmek—a Taylor Statten Camp founded in 1922—when measures were taken to reform the Indian Council Ring program. He collaborated with Jim Adams, a First Nations educator from Toronto, to institute change to the theatrical ceremony and retire props, costumes and headdresses.⁶⁹ Adams, “after visiting the ring [...] reiterated the overwhelming positive energy he felt and support he heard from spirits excited about the changes being made.”⁷⁰ That summer, Adams led the ceremony himself, beginning in song and then proceeding to invite campers to help him pack the camp's

⁶⁶ Patti Thom, interview by author, December 10, 2013. For videos of Indigenous performers at Tanamakoon, see their Youtube page <http://www.youtube.com/user/TanamakoonCamp>.

⁶⁷ Thom, interview.

⁶⁸ Palm, interview.

⁶⁹ Taylor Wilkes, “Transitioning Traditions: Rectifying an Ontario Camp's Indian Council Ring,” *Pathways: The Ontario Journal of Outdoor Education* 23, no. 2 (2011): 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

headdresses in bundles of sacred herbs in order to retire them and cleanse the space.⁷¹ In my recent conversation with Jay Kennedy, he said that the process was initially met with opposition from alumni due to the importance of the costumes to the institution's history, but Kennedy expressed that he hopes to see decolonization continually pursued at Camp Ahmek. The headdresses acted as an important part of the decolonizing process, allowing campers to physically engage in the project by literally burying the tradition.

By initiating cross-cultural collaboration, these camp directors advocate for the visibility of Indigenous educators in spaces that have historically branded Indianness as a characteristic of a vanished race. Summer camps have historically “rendered contemporary Aboriginal peoples virtually invisible,” and as Sharon Wall states, this has allowed non-Indigenous campers to “step in to fill the void as their remaining heirs.”⁷² Wall makes it explicit that settler Canadian campers must resist the assumption that Indigenous practices are their “heritage,” despite the history of the Indian being likened to a child under the Indian Act, and the child being considered primitive in theories of recapitulation.⁷³ The Indian Act is not simply a set of policies, it establishes a discourse—in Foucault's sense of the word—which governs the idea of Indianness, “creating an entire conceptual territory on which knowledge is formed and produced.”⁷⁴ Other texts reinforce this connection between child and savage, such as “Ornament and Crime,” published by Adolf Loos in 1908, which likens children to Papuan peoples, considering them equally “amoral” and

⁷¹ Jay Kennedy. Interview by author. April 7, 2014.

⁷² Wall, “Totem Poles,” 531.

⁷³ On childhood in the antimodern period, see George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1900).; Amy Susan Green, “Savage Childhood: The Scientific Construction of Girlhood and Boyhood in the Progressive Era,” Yale University, May 1995.

⁷⁴ Bonita Lawrence, “From Sovereign Nations to ‘A Vanishing Race,’” *“Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 25.

primitive.⁷⁵ *Adolescence*, published in 1904 by camp forerunner and psychologist George Stanley Hall, takes up recapitulation theory to explain how children represent the “savage” stage in human development.⁷⁶ In Hall’s highly circulated text, he declared that during the psychic transformation of adolescence, youth experience an inherent need for nature, and deprivation from the outdoors combined with overstimulation from modern civilization can cause “neurasthenia.”⁷⁷ Hall believed that children had to experience each evolutionary stage before developing to the next, and playing Indian was considered a way of reconnecting with nature, dwelling in the child-like “savage” state, and withstanding symptoms of this condition.⁷⁸

These traditions of Indian pageantry assume the erasure of Indigenous peoples, perpetuating the logic of genocide which, as Andrea Smith states, rests on the belief that a marginalized race must disappear. “Through this logic of genocide, non-Native peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was indigenous—land resources, indigenous spirituality, or culture.”⁷⁹ The assumption that Canadians have the privilege of accessing an Indigenous cultural “inheritance” ignores the existence of hundreds of autonomous, self-governing Indigenous nations today. While cultural assemblage creates the semblance of a unified nation under a mythological national narrative, it has the potential to erase regional and racial specificities.⁸⁰ James Clifford addresses the impulse behind the Western concept of “possessive individualism,” which originated in the seventeenth-century with the rise

⁷⁵ Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime” (1908), 19.

⁷⁶ McCallum, “Camp Fire Girls,” 4.

⁷⁷ Hall, *Adolescence*, 144; McCallum, “Camp Fire Girls,” 4.

⁷⁸ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 107.

⁷⁹ Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing.” *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006. 68; Wall, “Totem Poles,” 530.

⁸⁰ Eva McKay, “Introduction: Unsettling Differences: Origins, Methods, Frameworks,” *House of Difference* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 1 – 19.

of the “self as owner.”⁸¹ Under this model the cultural self feels actualized through the accumulation of goods and the presence of culture, or *patrimoine*, which is dependent on “an authentic collective ‘property.’”⁸² It is important to recognize that “collective cultural property” cannot exist in a stratified society of Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and immigrant peoples. In the process of fragmenting an assembled collective cultural identity, campers may feel that they are losing camp “culture,” and educators must work to frame decolonization as a development. Reforming camp “culture” will first necessitate dispelling the myth that a collective “culture” exists, allowing for distinct camps to develop differing methods and strategies for decolonization.

Seton’s brand of Indianness proliferated throughout the twentieth-century in part due to the didactic nature his extensive instructional manuals, allowing for the easy dissemination of his imagined Indian. In order for his essentialist stereotype to be re-imagined in contemporary terms, it must be fragmented in order to acknowledge a multiplicity of Indigenous identities. This involves bringing specificity to a camper’s image of Indianness, by acknowledging the Indigenous nation on whose land the camp is hosted, and declaring their sovereignty over the land. In his keynote speech at Arizona State University in 2009, Taiaiake Alfred powerfully stated that the psychophysical effects of colonization are ultimately a product of “the dispossession and the disconnection from land.”⁸³ Within Indigenous cosmologies, land is intricately linked to human experience and cultural practice, and assimilative processes that institute disconnection from land have caused deep trauma. Acknowledging the identity of the land is a powerful way of reinforcing the contemporary presence of Indigenous peoples.

⁸¹ James Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 96.

⁸² Clifford, “On Collecting,” 96.

⁸³ “Gerald Taiaiake Alfred,” 21:20.

In outdoor education, woodcraft, and wilderness studies, respect for nature is considered an underlying value; “nature” itself being a vague term for untouched wilderness. Dissolving the anonymity of wilderness territories is a way of enriching outdoor education, bringing specificity to the blanket term “nature.” Leave No Trace is an organization which teaches best practices for minimizing intervention on wilderness landscapes, its purpose being to promote responsible outdoor recreation, and to build “respect for our wildlands.”⁸⁴ Responsible ecotourism is essential, but it should be rooted in an understanding of land, rather than an idealized image of wilderness. By making the shift in language from “our wildlands” to “Anishinaabe territory,” for example, a drastic conceptual departure occurs—a shift from inheritance to stewardship. While the strategies of “no trace” camping are integral to sustainable outdoor recreation, the language of the core values harken back to Seton’s glorification of his rural home, which he called “my wildwood.”⁸⁵ Seton’s language implies ownership, and he was motivated to be a defender of wildlife because of the honour and virtue that it implied, rather than out of humility and reverence for the land. The sixth Woodcraft Law in his *Woodcraft Manual for Boys* reads, “Be the friend of all harmless *wildlife*. Conserve the woods and flowers, and especially be ready to fight wild-fire in forest or in town.”⁸⁶ This early call to wilderness preservation—while it encourages friendship and conservation—implies that it is a camper’s responsibility to defend the land and protect it from aggressors. When land sovereignty becomes the backbone to outdoor ethics in North America, strategies of wilderness preservation will be activated out of humility and stewardship rather than out of ownership and responsibility.

⁸⁴ “Welcome to Leave No Trace,” *Leave No Trace*, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.leavenotrace.ca>.

⁸⁵ Seton, *Artist-Naturalist*, 377.

⁸⁶ Seton, *The Woodcraft Manual for Boys*, 10.

In order to promote wilderness preservation in a way that acknowledges land sovereignty, it is crucial to teach *stewardship* at camp in order to teach campers how to be good guests. What Métis scholar and artist Dylan Miner calls “the methodology of visiting” encapsulates the art of social relations and the art of kinship from a Métis world view; a kind of visiting that yields rich inter-generational and cross-cultural exchange.⁸⁷ If camps were to apply Miner’s theory to outdoor recreation, campers would be taught how to be good visitors and good guests, rather inheritors or new-age settlers. This shift in language and in mentality is an important step in the ongoing process of decolonization.

Silence is equally as problematic as racial mockery. Natalie Maxson discusses the extent to which neo-liberal multi-culturalism creates a conversation in which race and Indianness are treated as “unspeakable and non-existent.” While many camps have eliminated Indian programming, by considering problematic histories “resolved” they risk falling into a sort of amnesia “whereby white subjects are perceived as innocent in a colonial context.”⁸⁸ In order to institute long-term change, camp educators must shift the focus away from the problematic tradition itself, in order to examine the social environment which allows for it to proliferate unquestioned. Camps that encourage imagination and make-believe ought to be valued as fertile environments, and existing programming can be used to re-imagine and re-mythologize identities. Outdoor classrooms ought to continue to pursue transformative experiential learning, maintaining the social structure while slowly introducing *new* songs, dances, activities, and stories. Rather than silencing all conversations about Indianness out of shame and discomfort, camps ought to allow

⁸⁷ Dylan Miner, “Agaming, Awasaakwa: on the shore, on the other side of the forest,” (Public lecture, NSCAD University, March 28, 2015).

⁸⁸ Natalie Maxson, “Tee Peez, Totem Polz, and the Spectre of Indianness as Other,” Master’s thesis, University of Toronto, 2012, 25.

Indigeneity to be re-imagined through partnerships with Indigenous educators, and by declaring the cultural, spiritual and territorial sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.

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Decolonizing Nature explores the influence of the colonial legacy on contemporary conservation and on ideas about the relationships between people, politics and nature in countries and cultures that were once part of the British Empire. It locates the historical development of the theory and practice of conservation - at both the periphery and the centre - firmly within the context of this legacy, and considers its significance today. [with an essay entitled "Notes on "Camp,"](#) in which she discussed the attributes of taste within the gay community. She also wrote on such subjects as theatre and film and such figures as writer Nathalie Sarraute, director Robert Bresson, and painter Francis Bacon. In addition to criticism and [Read More. Load Next Article.](#) Inspire your inbox ["Sign up for daily fun facts about this day in history, updates, and special offers. By signing up for this email, you are agreeing to news, offers, and information from Encyclopaedia Britannica. Click here to view our Privacy Notice .](#)