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Canoeing, Campfires, and Cultural Appropriation:
Racism Against Native Americans in American Summer Camps 1880-2018

By
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It is hard to imagine an American summer without summer camp. S'mores on a crackling fire, paddling in a rickety canoe on a calm lake, going on nature hikes, swapping ghost stories, and making closer friendships in just a few weeks than in an entire school year. The fun is twofold. One can experience a summer camp as a camper, and then rise through the hierarchical ranks of the camp to be a junior counselor, and one day a full blown counselor, in charge of their own cabin of happy campers for the entire summer away from home. Summer camp is idyllic, nostalgic, and quintessentially American. After all, the American summer camp is second to only the American public school system in terms of how many children it has reached, more than 14 million children and adults attend camp in the United States every year.¹² The American summer camp is not without its international influence, either. Being a counselor is considered such a valuable work experience that there are entire programs dedicated to bringing young adults from overseas just to work as counselors in summer camp programs. Companies such as Camp America and Americamp promise to “turn your American dream into an exciting reality,” by offering job placements in summer camps around the United States, and arranging work visas in order for them to be accessible.³

As hinted at by the existence of companies like Americamp, this ‘American Dream’ of summer camp is not without its profits. A 2015 American Camp Association Business Operations Report valued the American Summer Camp industry at no less than

¹ Abigail A. Van Slyck. *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth 1890-1960* 2006.

² "ACA Facts and Trends." American Camp Association. January 17, 2018. Accessed September 19, 2018. <https://www.acacamps.org/press-room/aca-facts-trends>.

³ “Summer Camp America 2019.” *AmeriCamp*, 2018, www.americamp.co.uk/.

18 billion dollars, with more than 8,400 resident camps registered with the ACA by 2017.⁴

But who has been served by this American dream? As with many societal institutions, the nostalgia and fond memories of summer camp exist in a Euro-American centered consciousness: a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant reality that establishes norms based on a dominant group in society. To say that the American summer camp is a fixture of American childhood is to ignore the many voices of minority groups who did not benefit from the social institution of summer camp. Additionally, like most idealized American institutions, the traditional American summer camp is fraught with racism and integrated biases against these minority groups.

As recently as June, 2018, the *Pasadena Star News* published an article under the title “Pasadena summer camp commits to complete makeover after complaints of racism and cultural appropriation,” describing the summer camp formerly known as Camp Shi’ini, that used Native Americans as a theme for their camp. A self-description on a Pasadena- area business rating site highlights the obtuse nature of this theme, as sacred totem poles are listed as a standard summer camp activity, much like crafts or tie dying would be: “We are a 5-week Native American themed day-camp in Pasadena's Arroyo Seco. Some of our activities include: horseback riding, canoeing, archery, swimming, hiking, totem poles, athletics, and an amazing month-long treasure hunt!”⁵ Camp Shi’ini’s website is full of white, Caucasian youth running around clad in Camp Shi’ini (a

⁴ "ACA Facts and Trends." American Camp Association. January 17, 2018. Accessed September 19, 2018. <https://www.acacamps.org/press-room/aca-facts-trends>.

⁵ P., Lupe, Jennifer D., Claire L., Manny S., Nina P., Lesley M., Julie M., Debby W., Lori M., Kris P., Linda R., Kathleen I., Julie R., Jane H., Alison C., LU E., and Tiffany R. "36 Complaints & Reviews: Camp Shi'ini." TrustLink. June 19, 2018. Accessed September 19, 2018. <https://www.trustlink.org/Reviews/Camp-Shiini-205981141>.

Navajo word) t-shirts with a cartoon Tee-pee on the front, driving in vans with the word “Chickasaw,” a south-eastern Native American tribe, stamped on the back of them. This conglomeration of Native American terms was problematic to Kimberly Robinson, herself a member of the Muscogee Creek Nation, who posted about the racism of Camp Shi’ini on social media, eventually leading to enough complaints that the camp leaders had to change the camp name and vow to re-evaluate some of the camp’s logos and activities, mainly in the interests of avoiding a lawsuit.⁶

But why, in 2018, are summer camps still spewing racism and perpetuating biases against Native Americans, and why have the practices of these summer camps remained unquestioned for so long? Like many staples of American culture that go unexamined and unchallenged, the traditional American summer camp is a seemingly-innocent staple with foundations in ideologies fraught with problematic ideals. Although many think fondly of the experiences they or their children have had at summer camps across America, few are aware of the blatant racism towards Native Americans that often accompany them, shown through their founding, common traditions and activities, and lasting legacy.

Mainstream historiography of American summer camps rarely delves beyond the scope of a history of their formation. Racism against Native Americans, if discussed, is often relegated to a single chapter hidden in the middle or towards the end of the existing literature. Current literature on summer camps in America serves more to honor and explain the place of summer camps in society, and only plays with the idea of

⁶ Munguia, Hayley. "Pasadena Summer Camp Commits to Complete Makeover after Complaints of Racism and Cultural Appropriation." Pasadena Star News. June 26, 2018. Accessed September 19, 2018. <https://www.pasadenastarnews.com/2018/06/25/pasadena-summer-camp-commits-to-complete-makeover-after-complaints-of-racism-and-cultural-appropriation/>.

problematizing much of the racism inherent in some of the very traditions the American public is so nostalgic about. Two secondary sources in particular warrant mention for their integration of problematizing camp traditions and racism while celebrating summer camp's place in the American psyche. Leslie Paris's book *Children's Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* and Abigail Van Slyck's *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960* are the two leading contemporary sources that do not hesitate to question and challenge the foundations of the very traditions they are chronicling.

A basic background is necessary in order to situate the story of the American summer camp into its historical context. Stemming from the self reflection prompted by the American Camp Association's centennial in 2010, a team of historians and company officials compiled an official timeline of the American summer camp, placing the opening of the first private summer camp in the year 1876.⁷ The camp was operated by Dr. Joseph Trimble Rothrock, and was dubbed the North Mountain School of Physical Culture. The ACA quotes Dr. Rothrock's camp as having a mission to promote manliness and vitality in the upper-class boys of Pennsylvania, for 200 dollars the North Mountain School of Physical culture would take "weakly boys out into camp life in the woods . . . so that the pursuit of health could be combined with practical knowledge outside usual academic lines."⁸ While 200 dollars sounds like a bargain price for camp today, when calculated against common economic inflation rates, the North Mountain School of Physical Culture would have cost the parents of 1876 just under 4,500 dollars. This was a

⁷ "Timeline - 100 Year Anniversary of the American Camp Association." Timeline - 100 Year Anniversary of the American Camp Association. 2010. Accessed September 19, 2018. <http://www.acacamp.org/anniversary/timeline/>.

⁸ Ibid.

steep sum to pay for an outdoor education experiment, as The North Mountain School of Physical Culture was the first of its kind. One begins to see, through these calculations, the demographic that the American summer camp was first designed to target: families with enough disposable income to send away their boys for four months of the summer in an effort to gain back the hardiness presumably lost from being raised in a comfortable urban setting.⁹

Other sources bestow the title of the first official summer camp in America on Camp Chocorua, founded in 1881 by Ernest Balch in Squam, New Hampshire.¹⁰ Balch was a graduate of Dartmouth College and his motivation for founding a summer camp is quoted by the ACA as rooted in a concern “about the life of wealthy adolescent boys in the summer.”¹¹¹² Similar to Dr. Rothrock, Balch worried about the hardiness and manliness that were lost in upper class boys during a school year spent pampered in urban comfort.

Balch was just twenty one years old when he founded Camp Chocorua, a feat he presumably achieved by utilizing the same family fortune that had allowed him to attend Phillips Exeter Academy and Dartmouth College, both elite academic institutions.¹³ Balch’s motivations for founding camp Chocorua seem to give off a young person’s eager idealism, but echo the imperialism and racism widespread in a 19th century America. This is seen in the brashness of some of Balch’s language surrounding his choice to found Camp Chocorua in a location as idyllic and peaceful as Squam Lake. He

⁹ "Inflation Rate between 1876-2016 | Inflation Calculator." \$2 in 1890 → 2018 | Inflation Calculator. Accessed September 19, 2018. <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1876-dollars-in-2016?amount=200>.

¹⁰ "Timeline - 100 Year Anniversary of the American Camp Association."

¹¹ Leslie Paris, *Children's Nature* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 20.

¹² "Timeline - 100 Year Anniversary of the American Camp Association."

¹³ Paris, *Children's Nature*, 20.

writes in 1881 that he founded his summer camp to mould boys “to hold this Republic safe against the forces of evil and keep the soft hearted and soft headed safe in their homes.”¹⁴

One would almost think Balch was founding a small militia, but Paris links this militaristic language to a idealistic need to return to the pioneer ideal of hardy frontiersmen, ‘taming’ the countryside and wiping out entire nations of Native American people. A romanticising of the pioneer ideal can be found in one academic document in particular: Frederick Jackson Turner’s ‘Frontier Thesis.’ Turner places the experience of being a pioneer, an experience inextricably linked to fighting Native American tribes for land that had been theirs for generations, as *the* fundamental force that led to the development of American democracy, and distinguished the United States from Europe. In his 1893 Thesis entitled *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, Turner wrote: “Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.”¹⁵

Paris writes that “camping beckoned as a means of recapturing, however briefly, the early pioneers’ bravery and independence.”¹⁶ Implicit in this bravery and independence is the violence and destruction pioneers wreaked on the rich and vibrant cultures of various Native American nations during their steady march west. After all, the

¹⁴ Paris, *Children’s Nature*, 21.

¹⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, 1861-1932. *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. Madison :State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1894, 2.

¹⁶ Paris, *Children’s Nature*, 18.

Trail of Tears had ended just thirty years prior to Balch's founding of Chocorua.¹⁷ Though this may seem a stark comparison: the hopeful if misguided idealism of a young Ivy League attendee in Balch and a genocide of around 4,000 members of the Cherokee Nation in the Trail of Tears, places imperialist military aspirations among the top goals of early summer camp development.¹⁸ Slyck writes: "many (upper class white professionals) worried that this erosion of manliness (through urban life) would undermine the military might required to pursue the all but imperial aspirations of the United States."¹⁹ Summer camps, it would seem, had a secondary goal of producing hardy American soldiers, soldiers who, in the nineteenth century, had spent a significant amount of time battling and killing members of Native American tribes, specifically in America's Great Plains region.

In the post-Industrial Revolution Victorian world of late 19th century America, life was profoundly different for members of the various social classes. One distinction afforded to the middle and upper classes of society was the luxury of an extended childhood. This was placed in stark contrast to the poor and working class children in the mid-nineteenth century, as children who had once done chores on a family farm now worked on the streets as bootblacks, newsboys, or manure collectors.²⁰ By 1900, one in five children worked.²¹ As Leslie Paris writes in her introduction to summer camp

¹⁷ "Trail of Tears." History.com. November 9, 2009. Accessed September 19, 2018.

<https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears>.

¹⁸ "Indian Removal 1814-1858." PBS. Accessed September 19, 2018.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2959.html>.

¹⁹ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 12.

²⁰ Sullivan, Gena. "'What Was Life Like for Children in the 19th Century (150 Years Ago) and How Was It Different From the Lives of Children Today?'" *America on the World Stage*. Accessed December 10, 2018.

²¹ "History of Child Labor in the United States-part 1: Little Children Working : Monthly Labor Review."

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. January 01, 2017. Accessed December 10, 2018.

<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2017/article/history-of-child-labor-in-the-united-states-part-1.html>

development in her book *Children's Nature*, “companionate parenting, characterized by extended financial support and a more effusively affectionate parenting style, first took hold among nineteenth-century middle-class parents, whose ability to provide advanced education and cultural opportunities to their children signalled their own class status as well as their parental affection.”²² Childhood was a developing concept at this time, and the idea that children needed unstructured and structured playtime and educational experiences to supplement what they received in the classroom was very new. However, it is endlessly important to stress that this white, upper-class, protestant reality did not mirror much of the rest of the American experience, as Paris writes “camp histories are disproportionately those of white, urban children,” whose experience was far from the 19th century urban norm of contributing to their family’s livelihood.²³ It serves as no surprise that the cultural and socioeconomic homogeneity of early summer camps allowed for racist ideals and camp traditions to become embedded in the summer camp experience in a way that was not questioned, as the euro-American reality was the only reality taken into consideration.

Another dimension of this reality was a societal trend equally privileged to white Anglo-Saxon protestant Americans: a gradual movement deemed ‘back-to-nature.’²⁴ Intellectuals like Henry David Thoreau were some of the early harbingers of the back-to-nature movement; its general sentiments were encapsulated in the musings of *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front

²² Paris, *Children's Nature*, 4.

²³ Paris, *Children's Nature*, 7.

²⁴ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 9.

only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”²⁵

The back-to-nature movement was a reaction to the “moral and physical degradations of urban life,” and began roughly thirty or so years before the development of the first summer camp.²⁶ Only members of the upper socioeconomic classes could afford to go back to nature, however, as they alone possessed the leisure time, transportation, and funds with which to do so. Van Slyck insists that the very nature that the upper classes were going back to was not actually a wild and untouched landscape. Instead, it was a “wholesale commodification of the countryside to meet the needs and desires of tourists who consumed the very idea of country life.”²⁷ National Parks, developing virtually in parallel with American summer camps, explicitly acknowledged this consumption in their founding, as Yellowstone National Park was described in 1872 as “a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”²⁸

Summer camps were no different, and like any business, moulded themselves to fit the expectations and desires of their customers. Van Slyck writes that these expectations were decidedly biased against Native Americans, as it was a standard by 1920 for summer camps to mimic the “material trappings” of Native American life.²⁹ These ‘material trappings’ were not legitimate aspects of Native American life, instead they were stereotypical white conceptions of Native American life accepted by mainstream white upper-class culture.

²⁵ Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden, Or, Life in the Woods / By Henry D. Thoreau*, Ticknor and Fields, 2018.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 10.

²⁸ "Quick History of the National Park Service (U.S. National Park Service)." National Parks Service. May 2018. Accessed December 10, 2018. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/quick-nps-history.htm>.

²⁹ Ibid.

Native American culture was adapted and commodified by the back-to-nature and antimodernist sentiments of the society of late nineteenth century America. In his article “Historians Approach Tourism in the American West: A Review Essay,” Mansel G. Blackford describes the influx of tourism to Great Plains and Southwest regions after 1900 and the increased implementation of railroads. He recounts the emerging tourism industry and mainstream culture’s idealization of the customs Hopi Native American tribe, and subsequent mistreatment of other tribes that did not conform to this ideal: “The Hopi came to be seen as the standard Indian tribe and culture for the region; the Havasupai were ignored and marginalized.”³⁰ This was the age of Wild West shows such as those put on by Buffalo Bill Cody that featured Native American actors, who “added an aura of authenticity and exoticism, whether they were performing traditional dances or re-enacting famous battles and attacks on stagecoaches.”³¹ The American public, largely urban, had gained mental and generational space from viewing Native Americans as enemies, and began to see them as relics of a simpler naturalistic age, untouched by the grime and moral corruption of city life.³² As Van Slyck writes in her chapter “Living Like Savages: Tipis, Council Rings, and Playing Indian,” “antimodernists like Hall and Seton considered savagery a useful antidote to effete modernity and an integral ingredient in the protection of ‘robust, manly, self-reliant boyhood’.”³³ The use of the term ‘savagery’ here is in reference to the way of life of Native Americans, which reflects the common late nineteenth century euro-centric ideal of superiority over a culture different

³⁰ Blackford, Mansel G. "Historians Approach Tourism in the American West: A Review Essay." *The Business History Review* 75, no. 3 (2001): 579-85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3116387>, 581.

³¹ Katrina Phillips. *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 128-30. doi:10.5749/natiindistudj.1.1.0128.

³² Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 172.

³³ Ibid.

than ones own. ‘Savagery’ was linked to un-refinement and was considered to be the paradox of living in a ‘civilized’ manner. This terminology was adapted to form pseudoscientific doctrines of human development, reflective of Social Darwinism and pseudo-scientifically based racism that falsely extolled the merits of one race of humanity over another.

Psychologists of the age used these beliefs to inform some of their theories. For example, G. Stanley Hall wrote that “each individual’s life course recapitulated humanity’s evolution from ‘savagery’ to ‘civilization.’”³⁴ Moreover Hall believed that “in ‘advanced’ societies, a prolonged adolescence allowed youth to carry forward strengths of the primitive past.”³⁵ The newfound institution of the American summer camp, where adolescents and children were encouraged to impersonate idealized forms of the ‘primitive’ culture of Native Americans, therefore served as a means for America to continue on its path towards becoming an ideal and advanced society.

Herein lies the direct connection to the commodification and widespread racism against Native Americans found in early summer camps. ‘Playing Indian’ was seen as the natural consequence of theories like Hall’s, as “according to Hall, white Children were not only closer to Indians than they were to white adults, but their development also could be derailed if they were forced to adopt too soon the trappings of white civilization.”³⁶ Through leading social theories such as Hall’s, parents of upper class boys were convinced of the necessity of sending their children to summer camps, while the activities done at those very summer camps perpetuated the infantilization of Native

³⁴ Romesburg, Don. "G. Stanley Hall." Oxford Bibliographies. May 28, 2013. Accessed December 10, 2018. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791231/obo-9780199791231-0089.xml>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 172.

American culture and reinforced its supposed inferiority as simplistic and anti-modern. Historian Philip Deloria writes in his 1998 book *Playing Indian* that “Indians represented instinct and freedom...wild Indianness proved equally attractive, setting up a “have-the-cake-and-eat-it-too dialectic of simultaneous desire and repulsion.”³⁷

The most obvious case study of ‘Playing Indian’ at early summer camps can be seen in the Woodcraft Indians, a group founded by Ernest Thompson Seton in 1902.³⁸ The very basis of all Woodcraft Indians activities was the lived re-enactment of flagrantly stereotypical conceptions of Native American people. Slyck writes: “Boys did not just use Indian names while camping at Wyndygoul; they also impersonated Indians, adopting generic modes of Indian dress (wearing feather headdresses, fringed tunics, and blankets) and assuming the stony expressions of the Indians- seemingly resigned to the inevitable disappearance of their race.”³⁹ The latter part of Van Slyck’s statement is particularly disturbing, as it evokes a numbness and normalization towards the genocide actively being done to the Native American populations before and during this period. It is important to note that the Woodcraft Indians later became known as the Order of the Arrow, and have been incorporated into the Boy Scouts of America, where they currently operate under president Anthony Peluso, who bears the title of ‘National Chief.’⁴⁰ It should be noted that Anthony Peluso is a white male with no Native American heritage.

Summer Camp Traditions

³⁷ Deloria, Philip Joseph. *Playing Indian*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2007, 3.

³⁸ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 170.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Peluso, Anthony. "Welcome from the National Chief | Our History." W. D. Boyce | Our History. 2018. Accessed September 19, 2018. <https://history.oa-bsa.org/>.

While the ideology and personal biases of summer camp founders provide insight into the roots of racism against Native Americans in American summer camps, camp traditions are what perpetuate this racism. The personal views of a camp founder are quickly forgotten, but the culture, activities, and goals of a summer camp make up camp traditions that continue far longer than the memories of the individuals they originated with. Examining common summer camp traditions gives valuable insights into racism against Native Americans, some of which continues to this day, in summer camps across America.

It is best to begin with further study of the Woodcraft Indians and Ernest Thompson Seton. Seton attempted to immortalize his work with the Woodcraft Indians in a series of books and manuals, including the 1903 *How to Play Indian* and *How Boys Can Form a Band of Indians*, as well as the 1906 *The Birchbark Roll of the Woodcraft Indians*.⁴¹ It was through these works that Seton inspired many camp founders to incorporate idealized and appropriated Native American activities into their summer camps, and many sources credit Seton for exerting a similar influence over the early Boy Scouts of America organization.⁴² This influence was due to a strong admiration of Seton on the part of Lord Baden-Powell, the official founder of the scouting movement in America.⁴³ Baden-Powell reportedly had read Seton's *Birchbark Roll of the Woodcraft*

⁴¹ "Ernest Thompson Seton's Life and Work." World Wisdom. 2008. Accessed December 10, 2018. <http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/authors/Ernest-Thompson-Seton.aspx>.

⁴² "Ernest Thompson Seton." New World Encyclopedia. August 2017. Accessed October 03, 2018. http://web.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ernest_Thompson_Seton.

⁴³ "Robert Baden-Powell." New World Encyclopedia. 2017. Accessed October 03, 2018. http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Robert_Baden-Powell.

Indians, and was in support of his ideas.⁴⁴ Seton writes about a failed ambition to unite the two groups in his introduction of *the Birchbark Roll*:

During the 13 years following 1902, the Woodcraft Headquarters was at Greenwich, Conn. In 1910, I was head of a committee that organized the Boy Scout work in New York. Its, aims and activities were nearly the same as those of the Woodcraft Indians, and I continued head of both, hoping to unite them as one body, being Chief Scout of the Boy Scouts of America. In 1915, I realized that this was impossible; their methods were too widely apart. The Woodcraft alone provided a plan of recreation for both sexes and all ages. The Boy Scouts no longer needed me, therefore I resigned from that group to devote all attention to the Woodcraft.⁴⁵

The momentary interwovenness of the early American summer camp movement and the early American scouting movement was due primarily to Seton's involvement in both.

It is necessary to take a moment to emphasize that the language used both by Seton and by most encyclopedias paints Seton as a benevolent ambassador of Native American culture. An uncritical reading of these sources could wrongfully lead one to believe that Seton helpfully enriched American summer camps and the Boy Scouts of America by instilling Native American culture in their traditions. One such example is an entry from the New World Encyclopedia: "Seton was Chief Scout of the BSA from 1910-1915 and his work is in large part responsible for the American Indian influences within the BSA."⁴⁶ In reality, Seton was born in England, lived in Canada for his adolescence, and had no demonstrable connection with Native American peoples besides a strong outside interest in an idealized and romanticized form of Native American culture.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "Ernest Thompson Seton." New World Encyclopedia. August 2017. Accessed October 03, 2018. http://web.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ernest_Thompson_Seton.

⁴⁵ Seton, Ernest Thompson. "History of the Woodcraft Movement." Woodcraft History. 2003. Accessed October 03, 2018. <http://www.inquiry.net/traditional/seton/birch/organization/history.htm>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopædia. "Ernest Thompson Seton." Encyclopædia Britannica. August 10, 2018. Accessed October 03, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ernest-Thompson-Seton>.

Seton gives evidence of his romanticizing of Native Americans in his *Manual of the Woodcraft Indians*: “The ideal Indian stands for the highest type of primitive life. He was a master of woodcraft, and unsordid, clean, manly, heroic, self-controlled, reverent, truthful, and picturesque always.”⁴⁸ Seton uses the past tense here. Consistent with other sentiments expressed in his *Manual of the Woodcraft Indians*, Seton often refers to Native American peoples as if they had vanished and that their culture was one of antiquity.

Disturbingly, Seton was not alone amongst his contemporaries in portraying Native Americans as a ‘vanished race.’ Edward Curtis’s famous photographs of Native American men and women have been widely criticized in recent years for being staged: “both imposing and reinforcing white notions of Native American appearances and culture.”⁴⁹ In his article in the *Journal of Western Archives* “Images of the Surreal: Contrived Photographs of Native American Indians in Archives and Suggested Best Practices,” Jones specifically points to “Curtis’ photograph of a line of Navajo riding away from the camera at sunset, a picture Curtis entitled “The Vanishing Race.”⁵⁰ Moreover, Curtis often ignored the unique complexities of the Native American cultures that he was photographing, imposing society’s patriarchal structure on tribes like the Crow tribe, who were fully matriarchal in structure.⁵¹ Curtis also represented Native

⁴⁸ Seton, Ernest Thompson. *Manual of the Woodcraft Indians: The Fourteenth Birch-bark Roll, Containing Their Constitution, Laws, and Deeds, and Much Additional Matter*. Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1915, 27.

⁴⁹ Sharp, Sarah Rose. "A Critical Understanding of Edward Curtis's Photos of Native American Culture." June 23, 2017. Accessed October 03, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/383706/a-critical-understanding-of-edward-curtiss-photos-of-native-american-culture/>.

⁵⁰ Jones, Zachary R. "Images of the Surreal: Contrived Photographs of Native American Indians in Archives and Suggested Best Practices." *Journal of Western Archives* 6, no. 1 (2015): 6.

⁵¹ Thackara, Tess. "Challenging America's Most Iconic (and Controversial) Photographer of Native Americans." 11 Artworks, Bio & Shows on Artsy. March 01, 2016. Accessed December 10, 2018.

American people as “irreconcilable with the forces of modernity,” as seen through the traditional and ceremonial dress he had them wear, when in reality people of Native American descent simply wore the common fashions of the era.⁵² These were the forces surrounding Seton at the time of his writing the *Manual of the Woodcraft Indians*; forces Jones and others speculate to be driven by the United States government, as it was far easier to appropriate the lands of a ‘vanished race.’⁵³

Much like the staged authenticity of Curtis’s photographs, it cannot be emphasized enough that the traditions Seton practiced within the Woodcraft Indians and explained in *The Birchbark Roll* and the *Manual of the Woodcraft Indians* are not legitimate Native American traditions. Seton’s ‘Indian Ways’ were appropriated conglomerations of images and stereotypes of a group of people persecuted and discriminated against by an imperialist society that idealized their culture while subsequently striving to erase it and assimilate its participants. It is necessary to keep this firmly in mind before delving into the traditions and activities of the Woodcraft Indians.

Beginning within the introduction of the *Manual of the Woodcraft Indians*, Seton defines a few terms that he will evidently be using frequently throughout the rest of the text. Terms like “redman,” “council-ring,” and “dancing- that is, ceremonial and folk dances, especially those that are native,” set the stage for the continued use of Native American culture as a motif around which Seton organizes his summer camp traditions.⁵⁴

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-challenging-america-s-most-iconic-and-controversial-photographer-of-native-americans>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Seton, Ernest Thompson. *Manual of the Woodcraft Indians: The Fourteenth Birch-bark Roll, Containing Their Constitution, Laws, and Deeds, and Much Additional Matter*. Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1915, XV.

Seton states that the camp used a totem pole as a signpost of sorts, “a permanent standard for displaying the emblem of the camp, etc., and for posting notices.”⁵⁵ This totem pole was quite likely the first of its kind in a place like Wyndygoul Connecticut, as totem poles are typically found within Native American and First Nations communities in the Pacific Northwest of America and Canada. Totem poles take up to nine months to carve, and depict myths, legends, and stories important to the community in which they are located.⁵⁶

One can see a larger metaphor in Seton’s use of the totem pole as a camp tradition for the Woodcraft Indians. While Seton understood that the totem pole was an important fixture within a community, often located centrally within a village, Seton transplanted this emblem from all the way across the country into the woods of his personal estate in Connecticut, and used the space reserved for carvings of important myths and legends to display mundane camp news and information postings.⁵⁷ The use of the totem pole as a Woodcraft Indians summer camp tradition is yet another example of a true Native American custom being manipulated to serve the needs of a summer camp fixated in the White, upper middle class reality.

The Woodcraft Indians were not alone in this manipulation. Pageantry and minstrel shows were common in American summer camps of the early 20th century. One such pageant, described by Leslie Paris, was an honoured tradition of Camp Mystic. Camp Mystic was an “elite private Christian girls’ camp near Mystic, Connecticut,” and was located on land that, according to the camp’s founder Mary Jobe, was where the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Alchin, Linda. "Native American Culture." Facts, Clothes, Food and History. January 16, 2018. Accessed October 03, 2018. <https://www.warpaths2peacepipes.com/native-american-culture/totem-poles.htm>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Pequot Native Americans made their last stand against a force of enemies consisting of the Mohegan tribe and white settlers.⁵⁸ Instead of merely informing her campers that they were standing on land that used to belong to the Pequot Native American tribe, Jobe found it appropriate within the realm of camp tradition to re-enact the demise of the Pequots with her campers in full ‘Indian’ costume. Moreover, Jobe took immense liberties with local history to place her camp, Camp Mystic, as the culmination of the heroic last stand of the Pequots. Paris writes:

Loosley based on the early-seventeenth-century demise of the Pequot tribe, the masque told of the pressures exerted by the competing Mohegan tribe and by white settlers, the 1637 treaty by which the land was ceded to the settlers, and finally, the ascendancy of Camp Mystic on the very hill where the Pequots had made their last stand.⁵⁹

There were many layers of racism inherent in Jobe’s decision to hold Camp Mystic’s Indian Masque. Romanticizing the desperate stand of a threatened people enough to re-enact it using a camp of young girls is problematic in its own right, as some girls were “savage Indian warriors” while others were “stern Puritan pioneers.”⁶⁰ In essence, the campers of Camp Mystic were re-enacting one of the many events in the systematic genocide of Native Americans in the United States in a gleeful camp tradition in which some girls re-enacted the killing of ‘Indians’ who were played by their peers. This was viewed by the adults in charge of Camp Mystic as a liberating and educational experience, as the young girls experienced fleeting freedom from rigid gender roles in their impersonations, however violent and racist, of male Native American warriors.

⁵⁸ Paris, *Children’s Nature*, 189.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Jobe's view that Camp Mystic was the natural peak of all history up to that point is equally disturbing. A member of the dominant white culture, Jobe is more or less suggesting that her camp 'ascended' out of the ruin of an entire community of Native American people, portraying the Pequot people as "the poignant historical losers in a story of progress culminating in the founding of summer camps."⁶¹ This view is a troubling echo of her society's tendency to view Native Americans as a "vanishing race," as shown earlier in the work of Curtis and Seton. Romanticising Native Americans as if they were merely a civilization of the past allowed Jobe and others to distance themselves from the ongoing struggle Native Americans faced on reservations across the country, underserved and discriminated against. Paris notes that traditions like Camp Mystics' Indian Masque perpetuated a false view of societal blamelessness, and "taught campers their place in a racial hierarchy while initiating them into a specifically American brand of racial nostalgia."⁶²

An additional layer of complexity behind 'Playing Indian' came through the inclusion of girls into the American summer camps of the early 20th century. Camps for girls, such as Camp Mystic, began to appear around the turn of the 20th century. Impersonating racial stereotypes of Native Americans served a different function for girls than it did for boys. Boys were said to gain 'manliness' from their experiences of their own "innate savagery," while girls were encouraged to experience their newfound freedom in relative moderation.⁶³ This can be seen in a camp for girls in Maine known as Camp Wohelo, founded in 1908.⁶⁴ Luther and Charlotte Gulick (known to campers by

⁶¹ Paris, *Children's Nature*, 198.

⁶² Paris, *Children's Nature*, 191-192.

⁶³ Paris, *Children's Nature*, 196.

⁶⁴ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 184.

their made-up ‘Indian’ names Timanous and Hiiteni) were inspired by Seton’s Woodcraft Indians to create a camp for girls, but tailored Seton’s teachings by focusing on crafts, thereby imposing western gender roles on supposedly Native American activities. This was likely done under Seton’s guidance, as the Gulick and Seton family knew each other through Luther Gulick’s involvement in the YMCA.⁶⁵ Van Slyck quotes a Wohelo camper as saying “the Indian woman was the artist and craftsman of the tribe. She made the baskets and pottery.”⁶⁶ Van Slyck affirms that, yet again, this statement is misinformed. Crafting was less a “universal trait of Native American womanhood,” and more an expression of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant ideals of femininity “projected upon the figure of the Indian Woman.”⁶⁷ In 1910, Camp Wohelo became known as ‘Camp Fire Girls,’ an organization that still exists under the name Camp Fire USA.

As Paris attests, 20th century American society’s interest in Native Americans was so disingenuous that it even went through fads of which stereotype of an ‘ideal Indian’ was in fashion at a given time. Summer camps traditions gradually adjusted to incorporate the stereotypical portrayal of ‘the Indian’ that was popular at the time. Though the “Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls continued to celebrate the Woodland Indian, Plains Indians were representationally ascendant, as the last and most resilient enemies of colonization.”⁶⁸ Stereotypical portrayals of Plains’ Native Americans became standard fare in summer camps, due in part to Wild West shows and the growing motion

⁶⁵ Beard, Alice Marie. "Historical Origins of Camp Fire." Accessed December 10, 2018. <http://www.alicemariebeard.com/campfire/history.htm>.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 185.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Paris, *Children's Nature*, 208.

picture industry that also adopted a stereotypical ‘Plains Indian’ as their only representation of Native American culture.⁶⁹

This is visibly seen in the emerging camp tradition of the 1930s of a live ‘Indian Guide’ who began to be seen as a staple on the staff of American summer camps. Indian Guides could either be of Native American descent or simply pretend to be, and had the job of educating white children on various elements of Native American culture, (to varying degrees of accuracy). Indian Guides, often dressed in stereotypical costume loosely based off of Plains Native American tribes, gave pre-existing camp traditions validity in the eyes of campers and their parents and imparted ‘authentic’ Native American lore to campers. This was done in a highly controlled and monitored environment, and the knowledge conveyed by individual Indian Guides was carefully selected to maintain a distinct narrative of racial hierarchy. Having an Indian Guide as a member of one’s summer camp staff was seen as a major marketing draw for prospective camp families, as their child would be receiving ‘cultural’ as well as outdoor education.

Van Slyck examines several pictures of the ‘Indian Guides’ of various summer camps of the thirties, an examination that yields varying results for how each summer camp approached the filling of the position of ‘Indian Guide.’ The most forward-thinking approach to the position was exhibited by Medomak Camp in Maine. As show in the photograph and through Van Slyck’s analysis, the Indian Guide “is pictured in modern dress, actively engaging with campers.”⁷⁰ It would be incorrect to assume that Medomak Camp had suddenly atoned for the racism inherent in many common summer camp activities by including a legitimate Native American individual on their camp staff.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness* 193.

Instead, there is evidence for continued (if not more subtle) racism in the tokenizing of the Indian Guide, who in camp brochures is not even called by his name. Medomak Camp takes ownership and possession of the man, calling him “our Indian” in a 1930’s brochure that advertised the many features of the camp to prospective parents who might wish to send children there.⁷¹

Treating a person in the job position of Indian Guide as if they were just another modern new feature of camp to bring in more campers wasn’t unique to Medomak. Other camps, like the Culver Woodcraft Camp, made sure to reassure parents that, even though their camp had an Indian Guide, a societal racial hierarchy was still firmly in place. This was done through the use of imagery and positioning in their camp brochures depicting Indian Guides.

Seated on the ground among the most familiar artifacts of Indian life- a drum, a bow and arrows, and a second feather headdress- the chief leans back on one arm to look up at the young white boy who stands over him... while the brochure promises that the white boy will learn much from the Indian at the Culver Woodcraft Camp, it also reassures parents, campers, and camp directors themselves that his racial heritage- supported by the military might evoked in his camp uniform- will allow him to maintain the superior position.⁷²

These racial fears, shown through the perceived necessity of arranging a white boy and a Native American in the fashion of the Culver Woodcraft camp brochure, were too much for other summer camps to grapple with. Instead, these camps filled their Indian Guide positions with white men who “felt they could claim both an in-depth knowledge of Indian cultures and a spiritual affinity with Indian life.”⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 193-195.

⁷³ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 195.

One of the most famous white Indian Guides was a man named Julian Harris Salomon, who traveled around to summer camps as a one-man show under his ‘Indian’ name of Soaring Eagle.⁷⁴ Though, by his own accounts, Salomon actually did travel extensively to visit Native American reservations, he maintains a sense of superiority over these cultures in his *Book of Indian Crafts and Lore*. Chapters such as “The Pony War Dance from the Culver Pageant” and “An Indian Dance at a Boy Scout Camp” hint at a less-than-anthropological motivation for preserving the dances, songs, and customs of Native Americans. Instead of preserving Native American customs in their own right, Salomon writes that he is explicitly writing his 400 page manual so that summer camps can imitate Native American customs, moulding them to their own agendas: “the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Camp Fire Girls have found in Indian lore an opportunity to enrich their programs in handicraft, pageantry, and ceremonial, and to give to their work more romance and color.”⁷⁵

Contemporary Summer Camps and Lasting Legacy

Upon realization of the racism contained in the history of American summer camps and their treatment of Native American peoples, it may be tempting to dismiss this knowledge as a thing of the past, infinitely unrelated to any sort of contemporary American reality. However, as the article from the opening of this paper suggests, racism against Native Americans in American summer camps is still widespread, often in ways that are unrecognizable without the benefit of background knowledge of the formation and traditions of early summer camps. Examination of the traditions of American summer camps in the later part of the 20th century until the present illuminates racism

⁷⁴ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 198.

⁷⁵ Salomon, Julian Harris. *The Book of Indian Crafts and Indian Lore*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1928.

against Native Americans; either blatant, or that lies just beneath the surface of nostalgic camp traditions.

The controversial Y Indian Guides and Indian Princesses serve as a perfect first example of a contemporary summer camp program that has retained its Native American stereotypes from its inception in the early 1920s. The Y-Indian Guides also serve as a valuable example of a contemporary summer camp: as they serve to deconstruct the summer camp experience, through providing weekend outdoor outings and offering summer camp at affordable rates with minimal time commitments. Outings take the form of weekend or day trips, and offer traditional summer camp activities at a price and time that working parents can afford. Programs like the Y-Indian Guides make camp more accessible and informal, yet still are valuable components in the realm of American summer camps.⁷⁶

A quick internet search of the Y Indian Guides is an early indicator of their place in the American psyche- either bitterly criticized for their refusal to drop their 'Indian Theme' or staunchly defended by those who praise the organization's development of parent and child relationships. After weeding through a multitude of websites from individual YMCA's and National Longhouse chapters and 'Tribes,' a shared chronology, mythology, and methodology of the Y Indian groups emerges.⁷⁷

The Y Indian Guides group was founded by Harold Keltner. Keltner was born in 1893, fittingly just as American summer camps were beginning to take hold.⁷⁸ Instead of

⁷⁶ Stassel, Stephanie. "Group Loses 'Indian' in Name, Not Spirit." Los Angeles Times. December 01, 2003. Accessed December 10, 2018. <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/dec/01/local/me-guides1>.

⁷⁷ "National Longhouse." National Longhouse. Accessed December 10, 2018. <https://www.nationallonghouse.org/>.

⁷⁸ "Brief History of the Programs." National Longhouse. January 12, 2015. Accessed October 24, 2018. <https://www.nationallonghouse.org/about-programs/basic-info/brief-history/>.

founding his own summer camp, however, Keltner became involved with the Young Men's Christian Association, the YMCA. The YMCA was not uniquely American; it had been founded in 1844 London by a group of drapers from rural England who wished to escape the evils of Industrial Revolution urban life through bible study and communal prayer.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the YMCA was widely popular, and took hold in America by 1851.⁸⁰ The organization later expanded to serve children, women, and families, and was continually looking for new programs to better do so. Keltner began his career with the YMCA as Program Director for its Buffalo, New York chapter, and was tasked with finding a way to strengthen father and son relationships in his community.⁸¹

It is here that the story of the Y Indian Guides seemingly takes a turn towards mythology instead of firm truths. Much like the stories Ernest Thomas Seton told of his encounters with and experiences living amongst Native American tribes, Keltner tells a story of his friendship and partnership with an Ojibwe Indian named Joe Friday. The National Longhouse Organization of Indian Guides recounts the friendship between Friday and Keltner in great detail. An examination of this 'creation story' of the Y Indian Guides is valuable, as it reveals Keltner's attitude about Native American peoples, and the language and detail used in the National Longhouse Organization's retelling of the story in 2006 illuminates the lingering biases still perpetuated by the program. One of the most obvious pieces of evidence of the continued racism of the National Longhouse Organization is the continued misspelling of Joe Friday's tribe, the Ojibwe Nation. The

⁷⁹ Tan, Denis W. "For Youth Development For Healthy Living For Social Responsibility." *Our History - A Brief History of the YMCA Movement*. 2018. Accessed October 24, 2018. http://www.mfldymca.org/about_us/history_national.php.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Brief History of the Programs." National Longhouse. January 12, 2015. Accessed October 24, 2018. <https://www.nationallonghouse.org/about-programs/basic-info/brief-history/>.

National Longhouse Organization spells Friday's tribe as "Ojibway" exclusively in their articles and group history, a detail representative of the general disregard of the necessity of authentic representation of Native American culture in the Indian Guide movement.

According to the 'Brief History of the Programs' section of the National Longhouse Organization's website, Keltner met Joe Friday after becoming stranded in a Ojibwe village following a poorly-timed honeymoon canoe with his father and new wife in the forests of Ontario, Canada. Keltner unexpectedly recognized a friend from Buffalo who was working in the village as a missionary, who introduced Keltner to "the missionary's first church member, a tall, Ojibway Indian named Joe Friday."⁸² It is interesting to note that the only Native American who seemed deserving of an introduction in this story was the only one in the village who had presumably converted to Christianity. Moreover, Keltner doesn't interact with any other Ojibwe people in his story, except Joe Friday's wife who is described as a "white, well-educated nurse."⁸⁴ Herein lies yet another example of inauthentic engagement with Native American culture; as Keltner interacts with Friday only after his religion has already been moulded and shaped to fit a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant reality. In other words, Keltner wasn't interested in learning anything about Native American culture from Joe Friday until he had first conformed to the same religion as Keltner. This is also another example of picking and choosing elements of Native American tradition to use as a summer camp theme, instead of attempting to appreciate it in its wholeness and educate children accordingly.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ The National Longhouse's incorrect spelling of the Native American Ojibwe tribe is preserved in that quotation, and appears incorrectly consistently throughout the entirety of the website.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Keltner is said to have spent many days with Joe Friday hunting and fishing and exploring in the Ontario wilderness. Nearing the end of their time together, Friday allegedly made a statement that, for Keltner, was the sole inspiration for the Y Indian Guides. Friday remarked to Keltner that: “The Indian father raises his son. He teaches his son to hunt, to track, to fish, to walk softly and silently in the forest, to know the meaning and purpose of life and all he must know, while the white man allows the mother to raise his son.”⁸⁵

This statement by Friday, whether real or fabricated, echoes the same societal worries that helped drive summer camp development twenty years prior. The perceived feminization of white upper and middle class boys due to their urban lifestyles and over-protective mothers once again drove upper-middle class white recreation professionals to the idealized nostalgia of a stereotypically Native American way of life. Accordingly, Keltner founded the first Y-Indian Guides tribe in 1926 in Richmond Heights, Missouri, with William H. Hefelfinger, a white man, as ‘Chief’ of the first Y-Indian Guide ‘Tribe.’⁸⁶ Joe Friday effectively assumed the role of ‘Indian Guide,’ speaking to the organization’s first participants about Indian tradition and lore. There are many parallels between Friday’s role in the early Y-Indian Guides and the role of ‘Indian Guide’ that existed at many summer camps at the same time, as Friday gave perceived authority and authenticity to the ‘Indian’ practices of the organization, while continuously being referred to as simply ‘the Indian’ or ‘the Ojibway man.’⁸⁷ Friday and other Indian Guides

⁸⁵ "Origin of the YMCA Indian Guides." Y-INDIAN GUIDES OCKANICKON - Home Page. Accessed October 24, 2018. <http://www.indianguides-ockanickon.com/origin.html>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Once again, consistently incorrect spelling is preserved

served a purpose for the summer camp to appear more authentic or education to perspective parents, rather than being treated as legitimate cultural liaisons.

The YMCA officially recognized the Y-Indian Guides as a YMCA program in 1935, and the program was timed perfectly to fill the needs of the post-war YMCA's shift to a family focus.⁸⁸ The Indian Maidens, a mother-daughter version of the Y-Indian Guides was formed in Indiana in 1951, the father-daughter Y-Indian Princesses were created in Fresno, California in 1954, and the Y-Indian Braves, a mother-son group was officially recognized in 1980 in Michigan.⁸⁹ All Y-Indian programs follow the same organizational structure:

The tribe is the basic organizational unit for Y-Indian program members. Parent and child attendance together is recommended for participation in activities. Tribal meetings are usually held monthly in different members' homes. One parent is selected as chief, and the various tribal offices are delegated to the parents and kids.

The Longhouse is the inter-tribal council organization that supports the program planning of the tribes; that coordinates special events, and that establishes policies and standards.⁹⁰

Though no one discounts the positive effects of fostering relationships between parent and child, the Y-Indian Guides' use of Native American terms and stereotypical dress perpetuates racism and biases through an inauthentic portrayal of Native American cultures and interests, which perpetuate racism and biases. For these reasons, the Y-Indian Guides and Indian Princesses have come under scrutiny, which began soon after the program's original founder, Harold Keltner, died in 1986.⁹¹ After Native American activists called for the group to end its use of their culture as a theme, the YMCA began

⁸⁸"YMCA Indian Guide Program Story." About Indian Guides - Scioto Longhouse. Accessed October 24, 2018.

http://sciotolonghouse.clubexpress.com/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=119891&module_id=27632.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Brief History of the Programs." National Longhouse. January 12, 2015. Accessed October 24, 2018. <https://www.nationallonghouse.org/about-programs/basic-info/brief-history/>.

to require all Y-Indian Guide tribes to remove the Native American titles, symbols, and stereotypical dress from their programming.⁹²

However, in 2002, a Christian organization named Lighthouse responded to this loss of ‘valuable Christian programming’ by founding a “new national, Christian, Indian-themed, parent-child program.”⁹³ The program ‘Native Sons and Daughters’ is run by a national subsidiary of Lighthouse called the National Longhouse, a name taken from a traditional building of Native American peoples of the East Coast of North America. The National Longhouse website addresses the fact that it provided a means for the continued existence of a program that risked extinction due to its racism against Native American peoples by stating that it “prevents similar mistakes from occurring as in the past,” by maintaining constant communication with both the Keltner and Friday estates as well as local First Nations groups.⁹⁴ One hopes that The National Longhouse Organization makes a greater effort in addressing these First Nation groups than they did in the continual misspelling of the Native American tribe of one their cofounders Joe Friday.

While it might be nice to assume that the story of the Y-Indian Guides ends with productive discussion with Native American groups and a new program direction, the reality is far more complex, such as is the reality of racism against Native Americans in many contemporary summer camps. A website named Ytribes, fully operational and updated as of 2018, provides a helpful directory of all current Longhouses and Nations of Y-Indian Guides, some who continue to operate under borrowed names of actual Native

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

American tribes, such as the ‘Pawnee Nation’ of Orange County’s YMCA.⁹⁵ Though by far not the only example, the ‘Pawnee Nation’ of the Orange County YMCA chose to name themselves after a group of Native American people from the Plains region of America, far from their area of coastal California, and far from a very real cultural heritage of a group of Native American people who are still having their heritage treated as an acceptable ‘theme’ in 2018.

Though the YMCA urged all Y-Indian Guide groups to abandon their use of Native American culture as a theme, many ‘tribes’ simply decided to ignore this request, either remaining as part of the YMCA anyway, splitting off independently, or joining groups like the National Longhouse. A 2015 article in the Chicago Tribune describes one parent of Ojibwe descent’s astonishment when she learned a popular neighbourhood parent-child group used their interpretations of Native American cultures like hers as a theme. The article includes excerpts of the letter of complaint she wrote to the YMCA: "I have looked up the information on the Indian Princesses and I find it to be extremely racist and offensive... The participants dress in Native American regalia, call themselves names based on real tribes, and drum and (chant) in a style they deem to be Native American."⁹⁶ The article goes on to quote various white “Chiefs” of the 2,500 strong La Grange Group of Indian Guides the concerned parent was referring to in her letter. These ‘chiefs’ vowed to continue to operate with the support of the YMCA or not, insisting that they intend no insult to Native Americans, and claiming that the Indian

⁹⁵ "Base Camp." Wilderness Expedition of the YMCA Adventure Guides. 2010. Accessed October 24, 2018. <http://www.ocpawnee.com/base-camp>.

⁹⁶ Keilman, John. "Indian Guides, Princesses Must Drop Indian Theme or Leave YMCA." *Chicagotribune.com*. November 03, 2015. Accessed October 24, 2018. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/la-grange/news/ct-ymca-indian-princess-met-20150918-story.html>.

Guides and Princesses programs provide valuable education on American Indian life, though individuals of Native American descent are quoted repeatedly throughout the article insisting that YMCA Indian Guides and Princesses programs provide no legitimate education on Native American heritage and customs.⁹⁷

In a more blatantly obvious instance of racism in a contemporary American summer camp, a local New Orleans newspaper reported in June of 2018 that the Kehoe France summer camp participated in the “disneyfication of racism” and indoctrination of local children into racist beliefs, after a parent saw racial slurs like ‘redskin’ ‘squaw’ and ‘featherboy’ as names for the Kehoe-France summer camp’s different age group divisions.⁹⁸

Examples like Camp Shi’ini, the Kehoe-France summer camp, and the Y-Indian Guides stand to show the continued perpetuation of racism against Native Americans in America’s summer camps, racism founded in the societal ideas and camp traditions of early camps, as shown in earlier sections. It would be improper to conclude without first adding examples of attempts and initiatives that exist to attempt to combat this racism. One such initiative is called the Kairos Blanket Exercise. This exercise, widely used in Canada, begins as “participants walk on blankets representing the land and into the role of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples by reading scrolls and carrying cards which ultimately determine their outcome as they literally ‘walk’ through situations that include pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization and resistance.”⁹⁹ The exercise, lasting about an

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ III, Wilborn P. Nobles. "New Orleans Parent Slams Kehoe-France Summer Camp for Use of Native American Slurs." NOLA.com. June 12, 2018. Accessed October 24, 2018. https://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2018/06/kehoe-france_summer_camp_slurs.html.

⁹⁹ "Welcome to the KAIROS Blanket Exercise™ Program." The Blanket Exercise. Accessed October 24, 2018. <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/about/#history>.

hour and a half was developed by and is run by “Indigenous elders, knowledge-keepers, and educators.”¹⁰⁰ In an article entitled “Respectful Approaches — Indigenous Culture Competency and Camp,” Dr. Stephen Fine of the American Camp Association writes that integrating Kairos Blanket Exercises into American summer camps is an authentic, respectful, and educational alternative available for camps that have traditionally used Native American culture as a theme.¹⁰¹ He also notes the ACA audio program “Skytellers,” an audio library of Native American oral history traditions as told by individuals of Native American descent, including Native American role models like Captain John Herrington, who was the first Native American astronaut in space.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, the continued advocacy for the adoption and implementation of such measures designed to eliminate racism against Native Americans from summer camps that have traditionally perpetuated it is fully dependent on widespread awareness that such racism currently exists. This awareness must be grounded in a firm historical understanding of the roots and sources of this racism, how common summer camp traditions have perpetuated racism, and an understanding that many contemporary summer camps continue to exhibit racism. Recognizing that racism against Native Americans has been exhibited in the founding of American summer camps, in common camp traditions, and in many contemporary American summer camps, is the first step towards establishing a standard of respect and non-appropriation in summer camps. It is only then that American summer camps will truly begin to deserve the fond place they inhabit within American popular culture.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "Respectful Approaches - Indigenous Culture Competency and Camp." American Camp Association. September 01, 2016. Accessed October 24, 2018. <https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/camping-magazine/respectful-approaches-indigenous-culture-competency-camp>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

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