

ROADKILL AND WILDFLOWERS: LAND-BASED APPROACHES TO
SETTLER NATURALIZATION

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of
Master of Arts
in
Native American Studies

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

May 2022

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DEDICATION

For the hardwood forests of my youth,
And the mountains which pulled me West,

And all the plants and animals that gave their lives for me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thank you to my partner Avery, who has supported me in a multitude of ways throughout this process. She is the human equivalent of a hillside of flowering arrowleaf balsamroot, the most joyful of wildflowers. Avery has dedicated immense energy and time to editing this thesis, and as such, her spirit is also embodied by this work.

I would also like to thank each member of my graduate committee, who are not only exceptional scholars but more importantly, exceptional people. Thank you to Mark Fiege, who has mentored me since my freshman year of college, the most transformative period of my life.

Thank you to Kristin Ruppel. Your dedication to building community, improving the lives of others, and to justice for people and the land is a beautiful expression of what it means to be a caregiver.

Thank you to Florence Dunkel, who never ceases to amaze me with her passion for education and for using her skills to create a more equitable, ethnorelative world.

Thank you to Jill Falcon Mackin, who has made me feel accepted and understood. Though our time together has been brief, I am beyond excited to see what the future holds.

Thank you to my family: Nancy, Steve, Jen, Anne, Graham, Kylee, Jocelin, Gabe, Jess, Chad, and Carter. I love you all. To my friends, Peter, Lenna, Ryan, Connor, Matt, and Will, thank you for all the memories, love, and wisdom.

Thank you to Michael Ridge and Amanda Barnett, Josh Mori, Callie Russell, Bruno Seraphin, Tom Elpel, Linwood Tall Bull, and Jason Baldes for your insights at various stages of this project.

And finally, thank you to the Department of Native American Studies, especially Pat and Lisa, who graciously helped me navigate the logistics of graduate school.

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ABSTRACT

Settler-colonialism is the process of severing relationships between people and the land. This ongoing process displaces well-established kinship networks between Indigenous communities and their other-than-human relatives, replacing them with systems of exploitation, settlers, and foreign ecologies. Decolonization, the philosophical counterpart to settler-colonialism, relies on the mending of relationships. This project explores the larger project of decolonization from a settler point-of-view and examines the complexities of navigating a colonial context not entirely of our own making.

Settler cultures fail to adequately situate people within the ecosystems of the places they now live, and the ecological and social consequences of this failure have been catastrophic. This piece explores the philosophical underpinnings of settler cultures, provides settler-colonial context, and examines the intersections of colonialism, culture, land, food, and conservation.

I propose settler-naturalization as a framework for revitalizing cultures that integrate human communities within ecological systems, and posit that the practices of hunting, scavenging, and foraging are potential pathways towards settler-naturalization. I conclude that there is a need for new stories that embody the concept of naturalization and guide settlers away from narratives of displacement.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“The immigrant peoples of this continent need to figure out who they are, and to create a culture which belongs to them. Maybe they will end up adopting some of the aboriginal Indigenous peoples’ culture. Maybe they will become civilized, after all. I do not mean pow-wows and feathers, I mean the essential values and understanding of the land. When you have that deep gut feeling that you are a part of this land, then you will belong here and will know that the land is to be looked at with reverence and respect. You will understand what we mean when we say, ‘Grandmother Earth is not to be sold, and all things are connected’.” (Wub-e-ke-niew 1995, p. 72).

My creation story is one of migration.

I grew up with stories of distant ancestors buried in far-off places like Scotland, Northern Ireland, England, Wales, and Germany. I was also told of how more recent ancestors ended up here, on Turtle Island. There was a common thread to all those stories: displacement. My ancestors tried to carry their cultures with them as they left their homelands. These cultures themselves were cultures of displacement, resulting from thousands of years of colonialism throughout Europe.

I was raised in a culture that doesn’t have a name; a culture so nebulous that many wouldn’t even call it a culture, yet billions of people live by its tenets every day: capitalism, colonialism, consumption, exploitation, and domination. This culture wreaked havoc in the homelands of my ancestors and led to extreme inequality, religious persecution, widespread disease, environmental injustice, food shortages, war, and a variety of other forms of societal decay. The consumptive machine often runs out of fuel, as its desire to produce wealth has no limits. As such, there is always a desperate search for available resources.

To my ancestors, this continent was seen as an exceptional opportunity. It was a hopeful escape from the ailments of the Old World. The North American landscape was so vast and abundant in comparison to Europe that the potential for economic growth likely seemed limitless. So, they cut the forests, mined the earth, grazed the grasslands, and brought with them all the things they didn't want to leave Europe without. Soon enough, Turtle Island was transformed into the world that my ancestors were so desperate to leave behind. Yet, here, they were often the oppressors rather than the oppressed. The abundance they greedily consumed was the abundance cultivated for thousands of years by Indigenous peoples.

My life is a living example of the fulfillment of my ancestor's vision. Yes, every life has its challenges, but materially I am the beneficiary of generations of exploitation. I exist in this colonial reality as a settler on Turtle Island. My lifeway is out of balance; it destroys more life than it creates. Yet, the choices for alternative lifeways have become slim. We've all been forced to engage with the systems of Western civilization to some extent. We've lost the knowledge of how to care for ourselves, our communities, and the land. Water is from the tap. Food is from the grocery store. Heat is from the furnace. This culture insidiously strips us of the basic skills and knowledge of human existence to make us dependent on systems which exist far outside of ourselves and perpetuate the production of extreme wealth at the expense of people and the Earth. They poison the water and soil and kill the wildlife to ensure complete dependence. While settler-colonialism and my identity have benefited me in a multitude of ways, they have also left me a migrant, lacking a place-based culture that I fully embrace as my own and struggling with a trained disconnect from the rest of the natural world. For me, nothing has been more devastating than the sadness of watching the natural world shrink away before my eyes at

the hands of a culture that I, personally, did not choose to be a part of, yet still participate in daily simply by being alive. This culture, from the beginning, has been one that was destined to destroy itself. It pillages the land and rots the soul.

People in the dominant society are increasingly coming into the awareness that the visions and systems of Western civilization have led us towards undesirable ends (McKibben 2006, McNeill & Engelke 2016, Wallace-Wells 2019, Worster 2016). Of course, Indigenous people across the world have been resisting these visions for thousands of years as they understand natural laws and have cultures that align with them. Their voices have been silenced and their lifeways have been suppressed as a result. They are the greatest threat to the dominant culture's existence, and thus, they have been oppressed across the Earth. There are people of all races who are still speaking of a different vision for humanity, often in the face of violence and oppression. They speak of Community, Place, Reciprocity, Relationship, Equality, Balance, and Kinship. It's time to listen to them.

The primary goal of this thesis is to explore the complexities of settlers seeking a regenerative existence in the places they now find themselves. While we did not choose to create our current colonial reality, we have been left with its ongoing consequences and a responsibility to create a more just future. We have been left with the task of imagining an alternative way of life within our exceptionally messy current context, and with the task of establishing this alternative in the face of a dominant culture that has overwhelming momentum.

The theoretical framework underlying this thesis is settler-naturalization, which is the process of settlers learning to fill beneficial, reciprocal ecological and social niches in the places they now call home. To me, settler-naturalization requires simultaneously learning from

Indigenous communities and their cultures (to the extent we are welcomed), supporting the resurgence of those communities and cultures, studying the ecology of the places where we live, learning from the land through active participation, and culturally adapting ourselves to the places we inhabit. The first three chapters of this thesis will be focused on providing intellectual context for this framework, and the final two chapters will explore hunting, scavenging, foraging, and wildtending as pathways toward settler-naturalization.

Our world has already undergone an apocalypse. Countless waves have already smashed on the shores of oppressed peoples and the land. Millions of bison were reduced to near extinction (Isenberg 2020). Wild salmon no longer return to their natal waters (Lichatowich & Lichatowich 2001). Indigenous peoples were violently dispossessed of their ancestral homelands, stripped of their lifeways and cultures, and forced to watch their other-than-human kin slip into memories of the past. Anthropogenic climate change is just another wave. It's already hitting the shores of the disadvantaged. But now, the water is rising further inland, and the dominant society is finally being forced to stare down the consequences of disobeying natural law. Nature has unleashed a wildfire eager to destroy the disease of Western civilization, in hopes that cultures of regeneration will sprout from its ashes. Our collective duty is to revitalize those cultures in the places where they still exist and rediscover them in the places where they've been lost.

This thesis documents my attempts to envision a way that settlers, like me, can write new stories, stories that ground us in the land, hold us accountable to Mother Earth, and guide us forward in the work of decolonization. In the words of Robin Kimmerer (2013) in her best-selling *Braiding Sweetgrass*, "to be naturalized to place means to live as if this is the land that feeds you, as if these are the streams from which you drink, that build your body and fill your

spirit” (p. 214). For those of us residing on stolen Indigenous land, it’s time to take off our shoes, feel the earth beneath our feet, and find our place within the web of life.

CHAPTER TWO

DIVERGENT WORLDVIEWS: THE HUMAN RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE

Cultures shape human communities and inform their relationship to the rest of nature. Throughout human history, diverse Indigenous cultures have arisen across the world to align individuals and communities towards shared goals, values, and ethics within their spatial and temporal contexts. Through centuries of colonialism, fed by Western epistemologies, axiologies, and ontologies, many of these Indigenous cultures have been displaced and subjugated. In this chapter, I explore the role of culture in shaping the ways that humans think about and engage with the rest of nature. I argue for the resurgence of place-based, Indigenous cultures which rely on relational kinship networks that bind human communities to the land and to one another.

A defining link between Indigenous peoples is their unique spiritual, emotional, and physical relationship to the land (Goeman 2015). However, like all pan-Indigenous philosophical claims, this theory has proven itself to be both useful and harmful to Indigenous communities. In an attempt to highlight the complexities of Indigenous relationships to the land and shatter myths of the “noble savage,” Shepard Krech’s *The Ecological Indian* left some readers with the impression that the suite of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) held by Indigenous communities, which arose from experiences living closely with the land, are somehow less valuable in contemporary land management (Krech 2000).

The “noble savage” stereotype envisions Native Americans living in perfect harmony with their natural environment prior to being corrupted by the forces of civilization following European contact. This stereotype has been problematic for Native Americans as it places on

them the heavy burden of being ecological in a contemporary society that makes this exceptionally difficult. This stereotype is closely tied to the “pristine myth,” which imagines pre-colonial North America as a perfect wilderness, absent of influence from humans, rather than as a carefully tended landscape (Deneven 1992). This myth effectively erases Native Americans from the history of the land and downplays the extensive role that they played in shaping the ecological reality of North America experienced by Europeans upon arrival. While it is important to recognize the humanness of Indigenous peoples by doing away with the “noble savage” stereotype and the “pristine myth,” this should not negate the intimate connections that Native peoples have to their homelands nor the wealth of knowledge and wisdom these communities hold regarding land management and conservation (LaDuke 1999; TallBear 2000).

With rising concerns about climate change and other threats to local, regional, and global ecosystems, more and more people are turning towards the IK of Indigenous peoples for insights and solutions. Non-Indigenous people are also looking for pathways to re-establish a connection to their non-human kin and re-envision themselves within nature. Within the context of centuries of IK being extracted and used in perverse ways, Indigenous communities are increasingly focused on how to navigate the continued sharing of their cultures, knowledge, and wisdom in a way that protects the community, keeps sensitive information guarded from people outside the community, and safeguards against exploitation.

Many scholars are asking questions about IK, Native Science, and their relationships to Western science and contemporary land management. Due to the temporally substantial collection of data held in IK, Western scientists are increasingly seeking ways to extract and utilize information held by Indigenous communities about their ancestral homelands (Hatfield et

al., 2018; Hosen et al., 2020; Pearce et al., 2015). Yet these two ways of knowing are rooted in fundamentally different worldviews, which results in information being used in vastly different ways. Without an understanding of the place-based, relational foundations of IK, information held by Indigenous communities about the land can be misinterpreted, dangerously extrapolated, instrumentalized, and stripped of its meaning when appropriated by Western science.

Settlers looking to care for their relations are turning to Indigenous people and IK for guidance. However, Indigenous knowledge systems come with responsibilities. As ecosystems change, an aspect of developing relationships to the land is taking the time to make personal connections and participate in ecological systems. These relationships can arise from time spent directly on the land, learning and engaging through ancestral practices like foraging, hunting, and fishing. While learning information about certain plants, animals, and components of the ecosystem from IK holders may be helpful in this process, settlers must also learn the process by which the land shares this information, as, within Indigenous knowledge systems, all knowledge is context-dependent and arises from relationships. Choctaw scholar Dawn Hill Adams states, “In a relational system, participation - being in relationship with the thing you are learning about and to the knowledge itself - is essential to the learning process” (Adams et al. 2015).

Prominent Cree scholar Shawn Wilson illustrates key components of an Indigenous worldview through his discussion of Indigenous research methodologies in his 2008 book, *Research is Ceremony*. Though he uses the term “Indigenous” throughout the book, he now prefers the term “Indigenist.” He states that this change emphasizes that it’s a philosophical issue, not a claiming of ownership by one group of people. You can be a white Indigenist just like you can be a male feminist (Adams et al., 2015, p. 21). Wilson, alongside many other

Indigenous scholars, has pointed to relationality and relational accountability as two cornerstone aspects of an Indigenist worldview that inform things like Indigenist research methods, as well as an Indigenist understanding of humanity's role within ecological systems (Wilson 2008; Wilson et al. 2013)

An Indigenist philosophical approach to entering into kinship with the land denies dichotomies between humans and the rest of nature, recognizes the animacy and agency of the rest of nature, and seeks to honor the role of humans in the web of life. While rooted in common philosophies, an Indigenist approach differs from an Indigenous one as it does not attach itself to particular practices, ceremonies, languages, or other aspects of specific Indigenous cultures that arose within a specific spatial and community context.

In their 2015 article "Ceremony at a Boundary Fire," Wilson (Cree), Adams (Choctaw), and Ryan Heavy-Head (Blackfoot) discuss Indigenist knowledge and how it differs from Western ways of knowing. Through dialogue between the authors, stories emerge that begin to bridge the gaps between Indigenous and Western cultures and emphasize the roots of their differences. Below is a list of key components of Indigenist knowledge that the authors in Adams et al. (2015) provide:

- Indigenist Knowledge comes from the Land and has agency, choosing who it reveals itself to and under what circumstances;
- Indigenist knowledge is relationship-based and often intersectional;
- A value system based in beauty, utility, and service to the community, rather than knowledge for knowledge's sake, undergirds Indigenist knowledge;

- Participation, experience, ritual, art, and spirituality, as well as cognitive processes such as logic and reason, are important Indigenist ways of knowing (Adams et al., 2015, p. 30).

This list provides ample opportunities to juxtapose Indigenist knowledge with Western knowledge. From a western worldview, knowledge is seen as something that can be discovered, owned, and given, rather than something that has its own agency. Western knowledge is produced through scientific methodologies that strive for objectivity, separating the observer from what is being observed, seeking to avoid participation and relationship. While not exclusively different in this regard, Western knowledge systems do not necessitate that knowledge is to be of service to a community, and knowledge is often sought after for knowledge's sake or for individual profit. Indigenist knowledge is not exploitative, as it has an obligation to its relations. Perhaps the starkest difference between these two knowledge systems is their epistemologies. In Western systems, participation, experiences, stories, rituals, art, emotion, and spirituality are not deemed adequate sources of evidence and are neglected in favor of solely relying on cognitive processes such as logic and reason. Additionally, Western knowledge systems seek absolute truths about the world, uniting theories to explain the cosmos, while Indigenist systems accept context-dependency and the associated uncertainties.

Yet, for many, Western science has become a hopeful means to develop a deep connection with the natural world. Cultural historian Thomas Berry touches on the potential of Western science (and its barriers) throughout the essays in his well-loved book, *The Dream of the Earth*. Berry (1988) states:

A new intimacy with the universe has begun within the context of our scientific tradition. This is the most distinctive contribution presently being made toward renewal of our

presence to the earth. Science is providing some of the most poetic references and metaphoric expressions. Scientists suddenly have become aware of the magic quality of the earth and the universe entire... The very intensity of our inquiry into the structure and functioning of the natural world reveals an entrancement with this natural world. This attraction to the primordial splendor of the universe, however betrayed by our industrial exploitation, remains an overwhelming experience. We are constantly drawn toward a reverence for the mystery and the magic of the earth and the larger universe with a power that is leading us away from our anthropocentrism to this larger context as a norm of reality and value.” (p. 16)

Despite this new intimacy, Western science faces its own self-imposed barriers and has lost touch with aspects of the human experience that can aid in the expression of its findings. Berry (2000) says:

The difficulty presently is with the mechanistic fixations in the human psyche, in our emotions and sensitivities as well as in our minds. Our scientific inquiries into the natural world have produced a certain atrophy in our human responses. Even when we recognize our intimacy, our family relations with all the forms of existence about us, we cannot speak to those forms. We have forgotten the language needed for such communication... Emotionally, we cannot get out of our confinement, nor can we let the outer world flow into our own beings. We cannot hear the voices or speak in response. (pp. 16-17)

Berry, understandably, expresses some optimism in Western science. For many raised and educated in the Western tradition, scientific disciplines such as ecology, and even physics, provide a mechanism for the exploration of the natural world and a partial mending of our cultural estrangement from the rest of the natural world. Yet, without freeing itself from the restrictions of objectivity, human-nature dichotomies, and expressing its findings in solely intellectual, rather than emotional and spiritual ways, Western science cannot fully heal our contemporary disconnect from our other-than-human relatives.

To further understand the differences between Indigenous cultures and Western cultures, it is essential to investigate the religious and spiritual components of these cultures. Religion can inform how individuals and communities imagine themselves in relation to other humans, the

land, and the cosmos. Scholars from several disciplines have long studied the role of religion in the formation of culture, and they have articulated the stark differences between the many tribal cultures of North America and Western cultures.

The term religion often feels poorly suited to describing the spiritual life of tribal communities, as the term carries with it a variety of connotations and implies some separation of spiritual life from secular life. Thus, I will use the term spirituality when discussing the diverse belief systems of different tribal communities.

In his seminal work *God is Red*, which was first published in 1973, Vine Deloria Jr. argues that there are critical philosophical differences between Christianity and tribal spiritualities and that these differences influence the ways in which people engage with the land. One key difference between tribal spiritualities and Christianity is that tribal belief systems leverage spatiality over temporality, whereas Christianity is philosophically opposite. He states, “American Indians hold their lands - places - as having the highest possible meaning...Immigrants review the movement of their ancestors across the continent as a steady progression of basically good events and experiences, thereby placing history - time - in the best possible light” (Deloria Jr. 2003, p. 61). He argues that tribal spiritualities inherently tie people to specific places and ecological contexts, whereas Christianity places no spatial boundaries upon itself and relies more heavily on history and linear time. While Christianity has much to say about the afterlife, projecting forward to eternity, it has little to say about the actual experiences of life within spatial contexts.

According to Deloria Jr. (2003), a danger of “defining religious reality along temporal lines” is that, from this view, “earth simply does not matter” and “human affairs alone are

important” (p. 68). In juxtaposition, he defines tribal spiritualities as “complexes of attitudes, beliefs, and practices fine-tuned to harmonize with the lands on which people live” (p. 69). These spiritualities arise within specific places, and over long periods of time, they develop to help communities live within their unique contexts.

The spatial importance of tribal spiritualities can be demonstrated by each tribe’s deep connection and care for their sacred places. There are several well-known sacred sites across the North American landscape and thousands more that are less publicized. Many sacred sites have been desecrated by colonizers, and plenty more remain endangered. The significance of these places to tribal nations is well-illustrated by their persistent efforts to protect them from harm.

One of the more well-known sacred sites is Mato Tipila (Bear Lodge) - also known as Devil’s Tower. This place, which is sacred to the Lakota and the Northern Cheyenne, has been the center of conflict for years as the tribes have tried to protect the place from development for recreation, climbing, and over-use by non-native tourists and recreators. The Blackfeet Nation in Northern Montana has dedicated immense effort working to protect the Badger-Two Medicine Roadless Area, which includes the sacred Sweet Grass Hills, from oil and gas drilling (Corbin & Tindall 2019).

In Gregory Cajete’s seminal work, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, he supports the argument that there are fundamental differences between Indigenous relationships to land and Western relationships to land, and that these differences are consequential for both people and the Earth. Cajete proposes Native Science as an alternate lens that can guide us collectively towards a just and harmonious ecological future. To Cajete (2000), Native science is exceptionally inclusive - he states:

Native science is a broad term that can include metaphysics and philosophy; art and architecture; practical technologies and agriculture; and ritual and ceremony practiced by Indigenous peoples past and present. More specifically, Native science encompasses such areas as astronomy, farming, plant domestication, plant medicine, animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, metallurgy, and geology - in brief, studies related to plants, animals, and natural phenomena. Yet, Native science extends to include spirituality, community, creativity, and technologies that sustain environments and support essential aspects of human life. It may even include exploration of questions such as the nature of language, thought, and perception; the movement of time and space; the nature of human knowing and feeling; the nature of human relationship to the cosmos; and all questions related to natural reality. (pp. 2-3)

In this way, Native science not only encompasses Western science, but moves beyond its boundaries to include aspects of the human experience that cannot be measured, and does not concern itself exclusively with the Western scientific quest for pure objectivity. In fact, coming into knowledge through Native science relies on direct participation in natural processes.

In the first chapter of *Native Science*, Cajete uses the stories and symbols of different Indigenous cultures of the Southwest to illuminate the ways that spirituality influences the way Indigenous peoples understand their relationship to the land. A common thread of Indigenous creation stories is that humans are not regarded as the favored species of creation. Rather, humans are placed within the web of relations with the rest of creation, each component playing its own role in sustaining the others. Humans are not deemed an exceptional species. Rather, they are one part of creation, equal to or even inferior to, the rest of creation. Cajete (2000) provides a brief outline of many Pueblo creation stories:

The typical myth that deals with the stories of how people came to be and how they moved in the landscape is embodied in a very elegant way in the general pueblo story of emergence. Each Pueblo tribe has a different version of this story, and each story has a sacred quality. Consequently, only parts of the story can be disseminated to outsiders. The central story is told as follows: Humans came into this world, their place, after having evolved through three other worlds of being. Before they could come in, they sent messengers to ask the powers of this world if they could live here. As the people received the message that they were indeed invited to come into this earth they were very happy.

Their messenger, a sparrow, explained the rules they must follow, and those rules dealt with proper relationships... This Pueblo story is a tale of evolution, journeying, of learning about responsibilities to each other and to all other creatures inhabiting the world around them. (p. 37)

These stories provide the foundation of each unique community's relationship to the land and to other humans, and other stories build on the original instructions, sharing examples of characters who violated those instructions and the associated consequences. At the core, these stories carry with them responsibilities - reciprocal obligations that humans have with the rest of creation - and cement the importance of accountability to one's relations throughout the community consciousness. Cajete (2000) terms the idea that "humans are related and interdependent with plants, animals, stones, water, clouds, and everything else" as "natural democracy" (pp. 52-53). This definition of natural democracy adequately captures a fundamental aspect of an Indigenous cosmology that differs from Western cosmologies that have allowed contemporary society to turn living, spiritual beings into "dead matter, private property, commodities, or commercial resources" (Cajete 2000, p. 53). Cajete (2000) points to this different understanding of democracy, "that all of nature, not only humans, has rights," as the primary "cosmological clash between the foundations of Native culture and those of modern society" (p. 53).

Similar to Deloria Jr., Cajete highlights Christianity's cosmological view of God living outside the universe yet having dominion over it. Humans, who are spiritual beings before physical ones, are placed above the rest of creation. To fulfill their original instructions, they must transcend the physical restrictions of the material world and exercise dominion over the rest of creation, which was deemed spiritless, and existed solely for the use of God's Christian people. This cosmology has been repeatedly used to exploit and commodify the Earth, as well as to justify the violent dispossession of non-Christians, who were seen as inferior, from their

ancestral homelands. This is exemplified by the Doctrine of Discovery, the series of 15th century Papal Bulls and resulting policies and laws, which instructed Christian nations to colonize, exploit, and subjugate non-Christian peoples (Prucha 1995, pp. 6-7).

Other authors have noted that the cosmological foundations of Western cultures have inhibited the development of harmonious relationships with the land. Lynn White Jr.'s 1967 article, "The Religious Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" is perhaps the most famous articulation of this idea within the Western academy. His thesis is that Christianity is to blame for the Western world's project of dominance and exploitation of nature. White Jr. (1967) writes, "[Christianity] not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends..." and declared Western Christianity "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" (p. 1205).

White Jr. juxtaposes Christianity to "pagan animism," which, in his eyes, would likely include the many tribal spiritualities of North America. Tribal spiritualities largely viewed other than human nature as animate, whereas Christianity reduces other than human nature solely to its physicality and relevance to humans. The consequence of this, White Jr. (1967) posits, is that "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural object" (p. 1205).

In perhaps the most biting lines of the article, White Jr. (1967) describes the contemporary Western relationship to nature:

Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim. The newly elected Governor of California, like myself a churchman but less troubled than I, spoke for the Christian tradition when he said (as is alleged), "when you've seen one redwood tree, you've seen them all." To a Christian, a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien

to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly 2 millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature. (p. 1206)

As a strong counterpoint to the Western world's contemporary response to ecological issues like climate change, White Jr. (1967) doubts the efficacy of science and technology as solutions. He concludes:

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one... Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny. (p. 1206)

As a potential touchpoint for moving forward in this paradigm shift, White Jr. looks to Saint Francis of Assisi, who radically reimagined the Christian view of the human relationship to nature as one of "equality of all creatures" rather than "limitless rule of creation". He envisions Saint Francis of Assisi as a patron saint for ecologists. Nearly 50 years later, another Christian, Pope Francis, would also boldly attempt to trace the religious roots of our ecologic crisis. Similar to White Jr., the Pope seeks an alternate reading of the Bible for inspiration that could help humanity alter its present course in his 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home."

This encyclical provides an in-depth overview of our contemporary ecological crisis from scientific, as well as religious perspectives, highlighting the ways that environmental issues are tightly linked to social issues, and the failures of Western worldviews. This work diverges from other environmentalist literature, which often frames ecological issues socially, politically, and scientifically, but does not readily engage with their religious and philosophical roots. A central component of Pope Francis' (2015) encyclical is his claim that offers "We are part of nature,

included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it” (p. 139). Though this thought may be novel to many of his readers, this is exactly what Indigenous Scholars like Vine Deloria Jr. have been expressing to non-Natives for years. Pope Francis differs from Cajete and Deloria Jr. in his argument that Christianity has the capacity to be interpreted in alternate ways which can help humans reimagine themselves as caregivers of the land, rather than as dominators of the land. Healing the intellectual rift between humans and nature is undoubtedly an essential step towards addressing the culture, systems, and technologies that have led us to where we collectively stand. While there may be valuable philosophies that can be gleaned from the alternative readings of the Bible provided by Pope Francis, the primary value of this work is its articulation of the religious nature of our ecological issues to a wide audience.

The religious roots of our contemporary ecological crisis are perhaps best represented by the writings of Sir Francis Bacon, as his arguments for the scientific control of nature in service of human progress were largely inspired by Christian philosophical notions of human dominion. The moral framework of Christianity did not explicitly forbid a reductionist view of nature. In fact, it was easily utilized to support the rhetoric of domination. (Merchant 2010).

Deloria Jr., I believe, would assert that if Christianity is to have any chance of being helpful and relevant to solving contemporary environmental issues, it must give up global relevancy and absolute truths, and instead seek to ground itself within specific communities and places. To Deloria Jr., Christianity must allow itself to be redefined by local contexts. In regard to Christianity’s view of nature, Deloria Jr. (2003) states:

It is doubtful if Western Christians can change their understanding of creation at this point in their existence. Their religion is firmly grounded in their escape from a fallen nature, and it is highly unlikely to suppose at this late date that they can find reconciliation with

nature while maintaining the remainder of their theological understanding of salvation. (p. 90)

Ecosystems are spatially variable, and the boundaries of human life within different physical spaces vary as well. Solving issues like climate change, which are inherently global, will require society to heed the words of Pope Francis and Lynn White Jr. (and countless Indigenous people) who have eloquently illustrated the philosophical roots of our ecological crises. However, this will be most effective if efforts are localized - grounded in specific places and communities that collaboratively work to realign themselves.

Without romanticizing, there is much that Western civilization can learn from tribal cultures about how to build sustainable, adaptive societies. Authors, like anthropologist Howard Harrod, have attempted to document traditional tribal cultures for this specific purpose. In his book, *The Animals Came Dancing*, he provides detailed accounts of the ways different Northern Plains tribal cultures imagine the human relationship to other animals. Harrod posits that these cultures' underlying philosophies can be valuable to settlers in reshaping their own culture's view of other animals. He is cautious not to advocate for the direct appropriation of the cultural practices he describes. Instead, he seeks to illustrate a fundamentally different way of viewing animals than is well-represented in contemporary American culture, which he states is defined by "a sense of distance from food sources as well as a lack of ritual performance in relationship to them..."(Harrod 2000, p. xxv) The tribal cultures he describes, in contrast, view animals as unique, autonomous peoples that are sentient and have just as much a right to the land as human peoples. They are "complex transcendent others rather than resources" (Harrod 2000, p. 133). Adopting this worldview would have radical implications for how contemporary society engages with other animals.

In the chapter “Cree Worldview: ‘From the Inside’,” from the book *Sacred Ecology*, Fikret Berkes engages in the same project as Harrod in attempting to share the worldview and environmental ethics of tribal cultures with settler society. Berkes documents the ethics surrounding hunting in Cree culture. Their three primary tenets are: “a) it is animals, not people, who control the success of the hunt, b) hunters and fishers have obligations to show respect to the animals to ensure a productive hunt, and c) a continued, proper use is necessary for maintaining production of animals” (Berkes 2017, p. 80). From the Cree worldview, a way of engaging with the natural world arises that places the people in alignment with the ecological systems of which they are a part. Similar to other Northern Plains cultures, the Cree believe that “humans and animals are related, they share the same Creator. Just as one respects other persons, one respects animals” (Berkes 2017, p. 111). The different animals are described as their own peoples. The Cree are responsible for treating the animals with respect, and the animals have the obligation to nourish the Cree. In this way, there is human-nature reciprocity.

Harrod walks a fine line with his argument as he wants to avoid furthering colonial exploitation of tribal cultures. He states,

Direct appropriations by non-Indians run the risk of continuing a tradition of cultural imperialism that is grossly insensitive to the needs and perspectives of contemporary Native American peoples. Why should we in the non-Indian world continue to exploit Native American traditions when it is our own cultural practices that are mainly responsible for the production of present environmental concerns?” (Harrod 2000, p. 122).

To Harrod (2017), the significance of Native American traditions to Western society arises not from the “colonizing appropriation of these traditions but rather through allowing them to create cognitive and emotional dissonance in our present relations with the plant and animal sources of our lives” (p. 128).

In *The Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry also leverages Native American traditions to exemplify an intimacy with the earth that Western traditions have struggled to establish. He describes the Omaha ritual of announcing the presence of a newborn child to the entire universe, asking the rest of the natural world, the animals, lakes, plants, hills, etc. to make the child's path smooth. This ritual illustrates a humble human approach, recognizing that an individual's life cannot be separated from the rest of creation. He also makes note of the Haudenosaunee thanksgiving address, which is a ritual of gratitude for the web of life and all the beings within it (Berry 1988).

Harrod and Berry are in the company of many other non-Native authors who wish to engage tribal philosophies from a distance, using them mainly as a source of dissonance with their own cultures that they believe do not adequately imbue people with an ecological consciousness. Their work, which illuminates philosophical alternatives to Western cultures, is exceptionally valuable. Yet, readers may be left searching for pragmatic, more articulated approaches to embodying those philosophies. The importance of having specific practices (ceremonies, rituals, songs, languages, etc.) that can ground those philosophies into the daily lives of individuals and communities cannot be understated. While the principles underlying these practices are in essence what is most important, culture informs codes of conduct - the customs of a community. In order to change the way people physically engage with the land, customs must also change. Thus, the question arises, is merely examining Indigenous culture and philosophy from a removed position enough to inspire settlers to fundamentally change their behaviors, institutions, and systems?

F. David Peat, author of *Blackfoot Physics*, argues that direct relationship with and immersion into tribal cultures is more effective than distanced observation. Referring to other worldviews outside of one's own, Peat (2002) says, "One can no more understand them from the outside than one can describe the taste of an orange to someone who has never eaten such a fruit, nor a sunset to a blind person" (p. 10). This seems to be especially true for Indigenous cultures that are heavily reliant on participation within kinship networks. In response to the question of how one could begin to transform their worldview, Peat (2002) states:

The answer, I believe, is that we can come to some form of knowing, albeit in a strictly limited way, through an actual change of consciousness. If we remain as observers, objective scholars of another society, we will never enter into its essence. However, if we approach it in a spirit of humility, respect, enquiry, and openness it becomes possible for a change of consciousness to occur. As you sit with Native people, walk in nature, and spend time at sacred sites an actual transformation of consciousness takes place. For a time, at least, you can begin to hear, see, feel, touch, and taste the world in a profoundly different way. You can think and perceive with a different mind so that your ego can, temporarily at least, blend into that of other people. (pp. 10-11)

As Peat demonstrates, it is unfair to assume that the consciousness of those raised within a Western worldview could not dramatically evolve with substantial exposure to an Indigenous worldview and way of life. While one can gain an intellectual understanding of Indigenous worldviews through academia, there is no substitute for developing direct relationships with Indigenous people and the land.

Opinions on the subject of settler engagement with tribal cultures vary not only from tribe to tribe but also amongst their individual members. Deloria Jr., in *God is Red*, articulates that it is no surprise to him that many non-Natives, dissatisfied with Christianity, have gravitated towards North American tribal spiritualities. In describing this phenomenon, he states, "The quest is for the religious insight of American Indians and the feeling of authenticity that Indians project"

(Harrod 2000, p. 74). Similar to Harrod, he expresses hesitancy as he has seen the damage done by settlers to tribal spiritualities, particularly through New Age appropriation and commodification. His argument is that settlers wish to appropriate symbols, but do not wish to place them in context or do the difficult work of fundamentally changing the ways they live and envision the world.

Often, settler engagement of tribal cultures happens without the consent of the tribe, and without any meaningful engagement with tribal communities. In essence, non-Indians take tribal traditions and the things they deem valuable, but fail to support contemporary Native peoples, engage settler-colonial context, and strip traditions of their value by removing them from their spatial and communal contexts.

Thomas Berry provides examples of intimacy with nature found within other, non-Native American cultures, thus avoiding appropriation of Native cultures by instead looking into the Western tradition for answers. He points primarily to the transcendental and romanticist traditions arising in Germany during the late 18th century (Berry 1988). From these traditions, Berry claims, a uniquely American intimacy with nature came to life in the writings of Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir, and has carried into the works of several authors such as Aldo Leopold and Barry Lopez. To me, it seems that early transcendentalist writers were all reaching for an intimacy with nature held by Indigenous peoples across the globe, but they are tainted by their Western cultural assumptions of humanless wilderness. Authors like Leopold and more recently, Barry Lopez, slowly began to break down the human-nature dichotomies, feeling their way towards what I would describe as an Indigenous relationship to the land. In Lopez's writing, there is clear reverence for the traditions of

Indigenous peoples and he thoughtfully engages them in his visions for a renewed ecological consciousness (Lopez 1978). Looking to different cultural traditions for a broader understanding of the human position within the web of life is a valuable endeavor, but at some point, the philosophies derived from this reflection must be grounded into developed cultures that can guide the actions of communities within their own ecological contexts through practices, customs, and ceremonies. I would argue that the ideas we are searching for within the Western tradition are actually just pieces of Indigenous wisdom either appropriated through contact with Indigenous people through thousands of years of colonialism across the Earth, or distorted fragments of the Indigenous cultures of our distant ancestors. For many of us, the Indigenous cultures of our ancestors are deeply buried beneath generations of colonialism. Also, as with all Indigenous cultures, they are specific to a certain place. For those of us who are settlers, the philosophies of those cultures would be useful, but their practices (if they still exist) would not apply to the places where we now live.

Ideas, without rituals, ceremonies, and customs to ground them, cannot radically alter the course of humanity. Only well-developed cultures can stand strong against the political, economic, and technological momentum of the modern world, which relentlessly commodifies and exploits the natural world. Indigenous nations, with spiritualities and cultures that dictate certain obligations to the land, are time and time again at the forefront of the resistance to the exploitation of the land and people. Settler-states, like the United States of America, knew this and realized that the only way to quell Indigenous resistance to Western visions of progress was to inflict monumental wounds on Indigenous cultures - their rituals, ceremonies, customs, and languages - through policies of assimilation. These policies, though they dealt significant blows

to tribal communities and cultures, did not entirely succeed. The worldwide resurgence of Indigenous communities and their cultures offers hope for a different future. More people living within these cultures means more resistance to settler-colonial systems of exploitation and hope for the restoration of loving relationships between human communities and the land.

A common thread between many settler authors who examine Indigenous cultures is that they often frame their questions within the context of how Indigenous philosophy could be useful for transforming the dominant culture and could be used to solve issues within the dominant society. Thus, they engage with Native people and their cultures, but still rely on the assumption of the continuation of the settler-state and Western culture. Thus, as will be articulated in the following chapter, I argue instead for settler naturalization.

Deloria Jr. (2003) concludes his book *God is Red* by stating:

The future of humankind lies waiting for those who will come to understand their lives and take up their responsibilities to all living things. Who will listen to the trees, the animals and birds, the voices of the places of the land? As the long-forgotten peoples of the respective continents rise and begin to reclaim their ancient heritage, they will discover the meaning of the lands of their ancestors. That is when the invaders of the North American continent will finally discover that for this land, God is red. (p. 296)

Place matters. Each ecosystem across the globe has a unique culture that arises from the land and flows through a community of people. Continuing to try to displace these cultures in favor of colonial, migratory cultures that maintain no fidelity to a certain place will continue to create imbalanced, unsustainable human communities.

CHAPTER THREE

SETTLER-NATURALIZATION

In their (2012) article, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that decolonization must bring about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life, that it is not a metaphor for other things that can be done to improve our societies and schools, and that making it a metaphor is harmful to Indigenous liberation. They develop and support this claim by describing settler “moves-to-innocence” that avoid the most uncomfortable aspects of decolonization and shift guilt away from settlers, working to ensure settler futurity rather than Indigenous futurity. One of the moves-to-innocence they refer to is “free your mind and the rest will follow” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 19). While acknowledging that decolonizing the mind is an important first step, Tuck and Yang (2012) posit that this approach to decolonization may be a settler move-to-innocence as it allows “conscientization to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land.” Further, they state, “Until stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism” (p. 19). These statements are accompanied by a critique of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the seminal work by Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire.

In this work, Freire describes three groups of people: the oppressed, the oppressor, and “those who suffer alongside [the oppressed] and fight at their side” (Freire, 1996). Tuck and Yang argue that this third group of “enlightened” individuals invokes a settler fantasy of “mutuality based on sympathy and suffering,” another move-to-innocence. Further, they demand that decolonization must necessarily be “unsettling” and that settler moves-to-innocence are

mere attempts to avoid the discomfort of repatriating land and the foreclosure on settler futurity. The work of decolonization then is in service of an “Indigenous futurity.” In a later publication, Tuck juxtaposes settler futurity, which necessitates the erasure of Indigenous peoples and ways of life from the land, with Indigenous futurity, which “does not foreclose the inhabitation of Indigenous land by non-Indigenous peoples, but does foreclose settler colonialism and settler epistemologies” (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 80).

There have been increasing calls from Indigenous people, such as Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer, for settlers to develop their own authentic relationships to the places where they live and enter into reciprocity with these places (Kimmerer 2013). To Tuck and Yang, this process of “mak[ing] the settler indigenous to the land he occupies” is a continuance of settler colonial erasure and is placed under the category of “playing Indian” (Tuck & Yang 2012, p. 8). Within “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” there is a section dedicated to the desires of settlers to become Indigenous and “play Indian.” Tuck posits that projects seeking to teach settlers how to become Indigenous to place are “a problematic point of evidence about the reach of settler-colonial erasure” and a means for settlers to be made innocent or escape the unsettling work of decolonization.

But what is playing Indian? This question is exceedingly complex, as is demonstrated by Phillip Deloria’s classic 1988 book *Playing Indian*, which examines the multitude of ways that American society and culture has been shaped by ideas about Indianness, and the act of Indian play. As more and more settlers become aware of the exploitative nature of capitalist-colonial systems, people are looking for pathways towards practices and a larger culture that can act as an alternative to mainstream lifeways. As such, people continuously gravitate towards romanticized

visions of Native people and cultures that they believe can serve as ideological counterparts of contemporary American lifeways. Yet, our society continues to utilize other stereotypes and ideas about Native people to justify land dispossession and the continuation of colonial oppression. In both cases, “playing Indian” is a dehumanizing endeavor that has real legal, social, economic, and political consequences for the way that the United States engages within Tribal nations and Native American people.

Robin Kimmerer (2013) in her best-selling book *Braiding Sweetgrass* engages with the idea of settlers becoming “Indigenous to place,” writing:

Like my elders before me, I want to envision a way that an immigrant society could become indigenous to place, but I am stumbling on the words. Immigrants cannot, by definition, be indigenous. *Indigenous* is a birthright word. No amount of time or caring changes history or substitutes for soul-deep fusion with the land. Following Nanabozho’s footsteps doesn’t guarantee transformation of Second Man to First. But if people do not feel, “indigenous,” can they nevertheless enter into deep reciprocity that renews the world? Is this something that can be learned? Where are the teachers? (p. 213)

These concerns, however, do not halt Robin Kimmerer in attempting to imagine an alternative future for immigrants to Turtle Island. She proposes the idea that settlers, like plants, could become “naturalized” to a place. Plant species that are considered naturalized often are edible, or medicinal, and serve a purpose for people and the land, even though they are not Indigenous. Because of this, they belong here in North America and have been accepted as a part of the ecosystem. Kimmerer (2013) describes this as follows:

Our immigrant plant teachers offer a lot of different models for how not to make themselves welcome on a new continent. Garlic mustard poisons the soil so that native species will die. Tamarisk uses up all the water. Foreign invaders like loosestrife, kudzu, and cheat grass have the colonizing habit of taking over others’ homes and growing without regard to limits. But Plantain is not like that. Its strategy was to be useful, to fit into small places, to coexist with others around the dooryard, to heal wounds. Plantain is so prevalent, so well integrated, that we think of it as native. It has earned the name bestowed by botanists for plants that have become our own. Plantain is not indigenous but “naturalized.” This is the

same term we use for the foreign-born when they become citizens in our country. (pp. 212-215)

The vision of settlers finding ecological niches in their new home, and finding ways to be useful, rather than destructive, is what I call *settler-naturalization* throughout this thesis. Clearly, this idea arises from the generous, ground-breaking work of Robin Kimmerer, which has given hope to many people, including myself. Settler-naturalization is closely related to the idea of settler-assimilation, which I imagine as the historical counterpart to settler-colonialism, where settlers learn to operate within pre-existing Indigenous ecologies, rather than attempting to displace them with settler ecologies.

The arrival of immigrants on the shores of Turtle Island did not have to result in the subordination of Native peoples and their cultures, genocide, and the wide-scale exploitation of ecological systems. There were distinct historical moments where it actually appeared that the only way for certain groups of settlers to remain here would be through their voluntarily assimilation into Native society. When confronting the perilous conditions overseas that they had left behind, and in many cases, the toxicity of their own settlements, the lives and cultures of Native people likely looked quite appealing to settlers. However, as they gained strength, largely resulting from the early generosity of Native peoples, they held strong to central components of the colonial cultures they carried with them across the ocean. It is important for settlers to realize that the colonization of North America was not a predestined endeavor, guaranteed to lead us to our present realities. It could have been different. There was another choice.

Settler-colonial cultures and immigrant societies wreak havoc on the land and Indigenous societies. Without the energy provided by fossil fuels, the ability of these societies to colonize and exploit was somewhat constrained, yet they still managed to do exceptional damage. With

access to fossil fuels, the entire Earth has been radically transformed within a blink of an eye (McNeill & Engelke 2015, Worster 2016). We are all victims of our society's insidious Indigenous erasure that leads us to believe that the world we now occupy is the same as it has always been, and that Western civilization has been a process of linear progression, always improving as it moves into the future. History has been far more complex and progress has not been linear. Yet, this all depends on one's values and worldview. If you value intact ecological systems and the well-being of Indigenous nations, this last 500 years has been apocalyptic. If you value material wealth, convenience, and inequity, then you may feel otherwise.

It is in moments of crisis that people are most willing to reconsider their guiding philosophies, systems, and practices (Nash 2005). The early years of North American colonization represented one of these moments, but colonists eventually chose to double-down on the cultures of their former land, rather than adapting to their new home (Cronon 2003). We are in another moment of crisis as a society, with awareness growing of the social and ecological costs of colonial-capitalism. We still have a choice. We could open our eyes to the self-destructive tendencies of Western civilization, and openly engage the possibility of naturalizing ourselves.

Without a strong, place-based culture that can align human communities within the context of particular ecosystems, there will be a constant inability to achieve true sustainability and resiliency. This has been demonstrated by settler society, which mindlessly carries out the destruction of all people and the land through the daily manifestations of ungrounded, migrant cultures. Those of us who are aware of the toxicity of settler-colonialism should strive to create a meaningful alternative for us all to turn towards. The seemingly insatiable desire of Americans

(and people across the globe) to “play indian,” is enough evidence to claim that if people were presented with something different, many might be willing to shed their current worldview and culture. Of course, this would take time and must include the unsettling and uncomfortable aspects of decolonization, namely rematriation of land, resources, power, and control.

In his article “What is Radical Imagination? Indigenous Struggles in Canada,” Alfred (2010) asks a similar question to Kimmerer’s about the potential for immigrants to become naturalized:

Would it be possible for people cultured in the North American mainstream to reimagine themselves in relation to the land and others and start to see this place as a real, sacred homeland, instead of an encountered commodity destined to be used and abused to satisfy impulses and desires implanted in their heads by European imperial texts? (p.1)

In his conclusion, Alfred (2010) provides some potential first steps towards naturalization:

Radical imagination is simply Euro Americans deciding to leave the old visions of conquest and privileges of empire behind and focusing on their responsibilities as human beings today. Learn the history of this land. Find your own place and that of your family in the story of North American colonization. This will tell you what you need to do to make amends for that history and point the way to grounding yourself as a true person of this place. Ask Indigenous people about the promises that were made by your ancestors, the commitment that allowed for your existence here, and then decide to honor those promises right here and right now in the best way that you can. Live up to the basic tenets of universal concepts of justice: do not tell lies. Give back what you have stolen. (p.4)

Kyle Powys Whyte’s (2018) article titled “White Allies, Let’s Be Honest About Decolonization” is useful in further examining the complexities of settler-naturalization. He begins the article by defining what it means to be a settler, stating, “Whether one participates in settler colonialism is not entirely a matter of when or how one’s ancestors came to the U.S. Having settler privilege means that some combination of one’s economic security, U.S. citizenship, sense of relationship to the land, mental and physical health, cultural integrity, family values, career aspirations, and spiritual lives are not possible—literally!—without the

territorial dispossession of Indigenous peoples.” Thus, if you are not Indigenous to North America, you are a settler. Whyte claims that there are two common approaches settlers take towards allyship. The first is the “romantic” approach. The second is the “same-boat” approach.

Whyte (2018) states that the “romantic approach assumes that lifting up Indigenous wisdom and spirituality constitutes action” and the problem with this approach is that it “does not necessarily confront ongoing territorial dispossession and risks to health, economic vitality, lives, psychological well-being, and cultural integrity that Indigenous people experience.” In essence, this approach appreciates Indigenous wisdom, but fails to engage the complexities of settler-colonial context and does not wish to engage with the lived experiences of Indigenous communities or their claims to sovereignty and self-determination.

The same-boat approach makes the same mistake. Whyte describes this approach as attempting “to create solidarity through claiming that Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmentalists should not distinguish their efforts. In this view, environmental issues threaten us all, and we should converge around common problems that affect all humanity, instead of wasting dwindling time on environmental racism.” To illustrate the problem with the same boat approach, Whyte (2018) says:

The conservation movement has been as damaging to Indigenous peoples as extractive industries. National parks, ecological restoration projects, conservation zones, and even the uses of certain terms—especially “wilderness”—are associated with forced displacement of entire communities, erasure of Indigenous histories in education and public memory, economic marginalization, and violations of cultural and political rights.

The same-boat approach confuses Western environmentalism as allyship and does not recognize the tight linkages between settler-colonialism, conservation, and environmental injustice.

Although conservation, in some ways, stands in opposition to the settler-state’s commodification

of other than human nature, it has still been a powerful mechanism of colonialism (Dowie 2011).

In keeping with Tuck and Yang, Whyte (2018) states, “One can’t claim to be an ally if one’s agenda is to prevent his or her own future dystopias through actions that also preserve today’s Indigenous dystopias.” In this way, settlers cannot be allies if they wish to ensure settler futurity rather than Indigenous futurity. This includes trying to maintain Western conservation fantasies wilderness, or nature without humans, as this idea perpetuates colonialism. Allyship requires a willingness to abandon settler-colonial culture in favor of true support for the renewal and flourishing of Indigenous peoples and their homelands. It means relinquishing the idea of being able to pick and choose the aspects of decolonization that are most comfortable to settlers while delegitimizing other claims and efforts.

I greatly appreciate the contributions of Kyle Powys Whyte’s article. I am, however, still left with questions. Allyship requires settlers to abandon settler-colonial cultures and worldviews. As such, many settlers who strive to be good allies sit in the uncomfortable middle-ground where we do not belong amongst communities that embody whiteness and settler cultures, but we also have no claim to Indigenous identity or another well-developed culture we can respectfully engage to guide our lives. Living in, rather than running from, this discomfort is essential. To reiterate Tuck and Yang (2012), decolonization (and allyship) must necessarily be “unsettling.” Nonetheless, I think it is critical that settlers begin organizing, collaborating, and radically imagining alternatives that can dismantle settler-colonial structures and ground us to the places we now call home. Discomfort should be motivating, rather than stifling.

Allyship implies that settlers belong to their own distinct community (the settler-state), but they actively support Indigenous peoples and decolonization. True decolonization, as Kim Tallbear (2019) argues in her article “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming” requires an abandonment of hope for the continuation of the settler-state and progressive politics in favor of “caretaking relations,” which is an Indigenous paradigm and implies the return of Indigenous relationship to ancestral homelands. Tallbear (2019) concludes her article with this powerful paragraph:

The twenty-first-century mantra must be to kill the settler and save us all. Or as my Indigenous studies colleague and Lakota relative Nick Estes put it in an email to me, we must commit ‘settler ontocide.’ This does not, of course, mean literal killing. It means ridding ourselves of the category of the settler along with its discourse of white supremacy and assertions of an inherent right to these lands and waters. This distinction is so obvious to Indigenous thinkers and the Black decolonial scholars we also cite, but as Menominee scholar Enaemaehkiw Kesīqnaeh writes, the settler has ‘a deeply ingrained fear that in the revolution all that they have done will be visited back upon them by the global majority with great ferocity.’ How lacking in imagination and radical hope is the settler and his state. (pp. 38-39)

If the category of settler disappears, what new category arises? I propose settler-naturalization as a possible framework, where immigrants to this continent can respectfully assimilate into Indigenous society and begin to embody reciprocal, place-based cultures. Thus, the category of “settler” can begin to fade and the category of “naturalized” can emerge. Settler-naturalization does not absolve settlers of their privileges within settler society, and thus it should not function as a move-to-innocence that removes the obligation to carry the heavy load of decolonization. Only when settler privileges cease to exist can we begin to fully rid ourselves of the category of “settler.” For now, settlers will need to make a home in the discomfort of decolonization, in a way that can aid in our collective healing, while simultaneously exploring what it could mean to place ourselves within the ecological, cultural, and historical contexts of the places we now call

home. This *must* be a collaborative effort that ensures justice, while avoiding the continuation of cycles of oppression.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELATIONAL CONSERVATION

The North American landscape has been radically transformed through the process of settler-colonialism. The abundance of life held by the continent prior to the mid-19th century is likely unimaginable today. Millions of bison roamed the Great Plains, passenger pigeons clouded the skies, and a seemingly endless wave of salmon and steelhead still flooded coastal rivers. The lifeways of hundreds of sovereign tribal nations across the continent perpetuated this abundance. By the early 1900s, much of this abundance was diminished. Hehaka Sapa (Oglala Lakota), also known as Black Elk, described this phenomenon to John Neihardt (2014), saying:

Once we were happy in our own country and we were seldom hungry, for then the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds lived together like relatives, and there was plenty for them and for us. But the Wasichus [Whites] came, and they have made little islands for us and other little islands for the four-leggeds, and always these islands are becoming smaller, for around them surges the gnawing flood of the Wasichu; and it is dirty with lies and greed. (p. 6)

As Black Elk describes, Native peoples were forced onto reservations and wildlife came to rely on relatively small, fragmented pieces of remaining habitat. Slowly, as Americans began to realize the consequences of overexploitation and sought to protect and regenerate some aspects of pre-colonial nature, the conservation movement arose. In this chapter, I will explore contemporary conservation as it relates to environmental injustice and settler-colonialism, outdoor recreation as a settler-naturalization mechanism, and ways that conservation is being reimagined to be in service of Indigenous resurgence.

As Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte (2018) eloquently argues in “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice,” settler colonialism is intimately linked to environmental injustice through its severing of relationships between people and land. It poses a threat to society’s collective continuance, defined as “a society’s capacity to self-determine how to adapt to change in ways that avoid reasonably preventable harms” (p. 131). Whyte develops this claim by articulating the ways that settler colonialism seeks to replace Indigenous ecologies with settler ecologies through the erasure of Indigenous peoples and their relationships to land. Conservation is a primary mechanism of what Whyte coins as “viscous sedimentation”, or the “constant ascriptions of settler ecologies onto Indigenous ecologies fortify[ing] settler ignorance against Indigenous peoples over time” (p. 138). He goes on to say that “sedimentation renders settler populations unwilling to accept Indigenous peoples as adaptive people with long *and* continuing histories in North America” (p. 138). The forced removal of Indigenous peoples from conserved spaces like National Parks, the Western idea of “wilderness,” ethics like “Leave No Trace,” the continued suppression of contemporary Indigenous access to public lands, and the lack of representation in these spaces are all examples of viscous sedimentation that work to create ignorance of the displaced Indigenous ecologies in order to cement the legitimacy of settler ecologies and land ownership in the minds of the majority.

While conserved spaces in the United States cannot be separated from the history of colonialism and dispossession, without them, many of the defining features of the Indigenous North American web of life may have been lost to early American ideas of progress. In his recent article, “Yellowstone Confronts Its Past,” author Todd Wilkinson (2021) eloquently captures this complexity:

[Yellowstone is] an enduring reference point for the atrocities of colonialism and the federally-sanctioned policies of genocide, land theft, and forced assimilation into the melting pot of the US for indigenous people. On the other hand, Yellowstone in its own way also stands as a fluid, evolving, radical counterpoint to Manifest Destiny that did—and still does in a 21st century way—seek to exploit, monetize, appropriate, privatize, tame and develop as much of nature as possible.

Of course, the American conservation movement, which led to the creation of parks like Yellowstone, would have never been necessary without the ecological threats posed by settler colonialism. This landscape was already being cared for by several tribal nations prior to the arrival of settlers.

To early Euro-Americans, the way that Indians engaged with the land was seen as “savage” and “animal-like” in juxtaposition to their own pastoral visions for civilization. Because Native peoples lived as a part of natural systems, rather than subjugating and dominating the land, they were deemed to be subhuman. In addition, wilderness was imagined as a Godless, threatening place. The fact that Indians viewed these places as their home only perpetuated the idea that they were heathenistic. In essence, by casting Indian country as “wilderness,” Euro-Americans deemed dispossessing Native peoples of their homelands as morally justifiable. This argument is well-articulated in Mark David Spence’s seminal work, “Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks.” In Spence’s (1999) introduction, he states:

... Americans generally conceived of the West as a vast "Indian wilderness," and they rarely made a distinction between native peoples and the lands they inhabited. Consequently, the earliest national park advocates hoped to protect "wild" landscapes and the people who called these places home. Preservationist efforts did not succeed until the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, when outdoor enthusiasts viewed wilderness as an uninhabited Eden that should be set aside for the benefit and pleasure of vacationing Americans. The fact that Indians continued to hunt and light purposeful fires in such places seemed only to demonstrate a marked inability to appreciate natural beauty. To guard

against these "violations," the establishment of the first national parks necessarily entailed the exclusion or removal of native peoples. (pp. 3-4)

The claim that interactions between Native peoples and their homelands violated the preservation ethic was another means to justify further dispossession of Indian land in service of expanding state power. In reality, wilderness (at least in the United States) has never been managed to be entirely without humans, but some spaces have, in practice, been managed for the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples and their ecologies (Dowie 2011).

Today, American engagement with protected landscapes, like National Parks, is primarily through tourism and outdoor recreation. Conservation organizations, like Protect Our Winters, rely heavily on slogans like “protect your playground,” which illuminates how many people view conserved spaces. To many, protected nature is imagined as a space for recreation, and, as such, human engagement should be limited to recreation. A relationship with nature that arises primarily from recreation is a radical divergence from the relationship formed with nature throughout human history. In reality, “wilderness”, meaning spaces devoid of complex, life-sustaining interaction with human beings, is almost entirely *unnatural* (except, perhaps, in Antarctica). As is illustrated in Kat Anderson’s book, *Tending the Wild*, Indigenous peoples shaped this continent through a myriad of thoughtful practices that allowed for the sustenance of diverse life and abundance for their tribal communities (Anderson 2013).

Conservation, if defined as protecting and caring for ecosystems and ensuring long-term ecological well-being, is an ancestral component of Indigenous cultures - not a novel practice of 19th and 20th century America. However, contemporary conservation elicits dichotomous visions of land in which some spaces are heavily dominated by human forces and allocated solely for human activity, while other spaces are conserved. This version of conservation, like

the settler-colonial forces of rapid ecological transformation that inspired it, is a relatively recent paradigm. Presently, the appropriate human uses of conserved spaces are often limited to natural resource extraction, tourism, and recreation. They are not meant to be the centers of daily human life. Yet, conserved spaces also exist for ecological reasons, including the protection of habitat for wildlife, securing important ecosystem services, and maintaining biodiversity. The extent to which the land is altered by humans has always been spatially variable - but prior to colonization in North America, the norm was the integration of human systems into particular ecosystems in ways that perpetuated both human and other-than-human communities. Contemporary society operates in the extremes, with human spaces like cities creating landscapes with little evidence of Indigenous ecologies, and other places that are deemed more “wild”. In these “wild” places, the ethic of “Leave No Trace” has largely been adopted to guide the actions of individuals.

According to the Center for Outdoor Ethics (2022), the 7 Leave No Trace (LNT) principles are:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimize campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors

For the most part, these are entirely reasonable principles that are useful for ensuring recreationists engage with nature in a way that isn’t explicitly damaging, though it makes no mention of the environmental externalities of things like gear and travel. Yet, the underlying

philosophy is that the ultimate way for humans to engage with nature is to not engage at all, and if one does engage, they should “leave no trace.” LNT perpetuates the myth that humans are inherently detrimental to natural systems and does not inform users that their obligation to the land goes far beyond simply *avoiding* damage. This ideology is at the core of Western environmentalism. This myth ignores and erases the long history of Indigenous caregivers, who certainly have made mistakes, but continuously have found ways to maintain biodiverse, healthy ecosystems. In fact, 80% of the world’s remaining biodiversity is maintained by Indigenous peoples (Garnett et al. 2018).

Instead of solely trying to determine how to leave less of a negative impact, perhaps we should be asking how we can leave an even larger *positive* impact. The ultimate irony of LNT is that, for many people, the principles only apply when recreating. Thus, the standards do not apply to the extensive amounts of carbon used to fuel outdoor recreation nor the excessive consumption that defines much of contemporary American life. Humans, especially recreators, will *always* have an impact. The question is: what type of impact will that be?

LNT and the ideas of wilderness prime many recreationists for a colonial relationship to the land - they both actively discourage practices of kinship, which inherently includes reciprocity and accountability. Instead, there is a sense of entitlement to conserved spaces, and because of the Indigenous erasure perpetuated by environmentalism, conservation, and Western land management institutions, there is no understanding of the settler-colonial context of what many deem to be purely recreational spaces. Euro-American culture, and as a result the culture of outdoor recreation, does not instill obligation to the land. Outdoor recreation, at its best, serves

as a mechanism for deepening the relationship and connection people feel to the rest of nature.

At its worse, it is a tool of furthering dispossession and cementing settler-colonial structures.

Outdoor recreation is always a “take,” regardless of whether it is a consumptive use like hunting and fishing, or a non-consumptive use like skiing, climbing, or biking. The latter activities provide the user with an experience - often an emotionally and physically fulfilling one, and for many of us, a spiritually fulfilling one. Thousands of people entering mountain ecosystems every day, all year long, has a measurable impact on the land and the other-than-human beings that call those areas home. Oftentimes, I hear conservationists declare that humans need to stay out of wildlife habitat because it’s “their home, not ours.” This dialogue is concerning to me. Humans are a part of nature just as wildlife is - in fact, the places that we deem human spaces are (or at least used to be) wildlife habitat as well. Today, we simply deem some places sacrifice zones and other spaces wildlife habitat. Experiences in these places, amidst the larger community of nature, are an essential reminder of a radical alternative to the contemporary realities settlers have created on the North American continent. Yet, concerns about humans encroaching on the few remaining tracts of intact wildlife habitat that remain in the wake of hundreds of years of settler-colonialism are entirely valid.

Recently, in a last-ditch effort to prevent local extirpation of the range’s bighorn sheep, wildlife managers proposed potential restrictions to backcountry skiing access in the Teewinot mountains (also known as the Tetons). The reaction to these restrictions was mixed, but many in the backcountry skiing community spoke strongly in opposition to these regulation changes. To be fair, the plight of the bighorn sheep in this range is only partially the fault of backcountry skiers. The majority of the blame falls on extensive development in the sheep’s historic winter

range in the Jackson Hole valley. Now, the remaining bighorn sheep are forced to winter high in the mountains, where unfortunately they are regularly disrupted by more and more skiers, pushing deeper and deeper into their habitat. Scientists have provided evidence that limiting backcountry skiing in the core habitat of bighorn sheep may help the sheep population partially recover. Like any science, there is no certainty. Rather than being willing to take this chance, to protect a relative that is as integral to the mountains as the rocks or the snow, many have shown that they still embody the colonizer mentality that nothing should be off-limits and that they have a right to conquer these spaces. Outside Magazine posted a controversial article on the conflict, titled “In the Tetons, Backcountry Skiers Might Have to Sacrifice Their Terrain to Bighorn Sheep” (Hansman 2021). The title alone captures the general mentality of many outdoor recreationists: the land is “theirs” and they are the ones “sacrificing.”

Pro skier Hadley Hammer, a settler who grew up in Jackson Hole, wrote a piece that diverged from the opinion of many other skiers. While she also failed to consider that the people Indigenous to what is now Jackson Hole likely have plenty of thoughts about the conflict, she did capture the idea that the Teewinot range is not a place solely for the enjoyment of humans - it is a diverse, life-giving ecosystem.

Hammer (2021) says, “For as many closed signs as I see, I know there are a lot of open ones left. It has been a privilege to access and ski [Grand Teton National] Park, but the sweet would turn sour if that privilege led to the extinction of a local animal population, even if it wasn’t the root cause.” We are gifted with being able to play amongst the rest of nature and receiving the associated emotional, physical, and spiritual fulfillment, and gifts require reciprocity. She continues:

If backcountry skiers, proclaimed lovers of nature and conservation, aren't willing to sacrifice for the sake of wildlife, it makes me think that all flora and fauna is doomed. If "we" aren't willing to take a gamble on science that, of course, isn't perfect, doesn't include some major players, but does stand on years of research, then what other groups will? If we only associate responsibility to causality, spend our time blaming instead of taking action, and refuse to share, we might as well get in line behind the sheep for extinction.

With this, she captures the essence of contemporary outdoor recreation - user groups who proclaim to love nature but are generally unwilling to practice restraint. There is much to learn from the Indigenous caregivers of these landscapes, who have a long history of restraint in their relationships to the land - creation stories, ceremonies, customs, and rituals, which all place restrictions on the ways that humans should engage the rest of creation, and describe the importance of ongoing reciprocity within a relationship.

As described in Berkes' *Sacred Ecology*, a central tenet of the Cree worldview on hunting is that continued use is essential to sustainability; just as resources can be used too much, they can also be used too little (Berkes 2017). To what extent does this ethic apply to recreation, which is only one aspect of the human experience and relationship to nature? Certainly, humans have always recreated on the land, but it's an entirely recent approach to use recreation as the primary definition of the relationship between humans and other-than-human nature. Yet, this is how I would define much of what is happening in mountain towns, like where I live in Bozeman, Montana, and certainly Jackson, Wyoming.

What if instead of people defining themselves solely as recreators, they instead imagined themselves as caregivers? In this reality, the ethic of reciprocity would guide "play," as well as all other human actions. Currently, outdoor recreators take a lot and give very little. They say they love the land, but does the land love them? If reciprocity was used as a guiding ethic for outdoor recreation, backcountry skiers in the Teewinot would be not only be obligated to support

the proposed skiing closures, but also reinvest the energy that they receive through their playful experiences in the mountains towards endeavors like supporting the restoration of bighorn sheep habitat, or the rematriation of land to their original Indigenous caregivers. Seeking balance, which often requires restraint, is a good first step. But that alone is not enough.

Outdoor recreation, with all its current shortcomings, has the potential to create a meaningful initial relationship between people and the land. If that relationship evolves in a way that increases one's understanding of their interconnectedness to the rest of nature and the larger settler-colonial context, there is hope for a shift in our collective ecological and social consciousness. Currently, settler-colonial culture underlies outdoor recreation, just as it underlies the rest of our contemporary society. This culture is at the root of the entitled attitude of many outdoor recreators. The project then is, what does decolonized "play" look like? Indigenous people like Lakota pro skier Connor Ryan are attempting to answer this question. In a profile of Ryan in Powder Magazine written by Paddy O'Connell (2020), he is quoted:

Advocating for the environment and climate, ceremony takes that to a whole new level because it allows you to see how dependent you are on everything for life. I want my culture to live on. I want my sport to live on... I realized the two purposes could be married. I need to connect to the land because I am Lakota; it's a principle of my culture and who I am. The way I do that is through skiing.

In his environmental advocacy, Ryan is reimagining conservation and recreation. He is actively Indigenizing these efforts, while inviting non-Natives to begin their own journey of coming into reciprocity with the places they claim to love. Sports like skiing have historically been, and in many ways continue to be, colonial forces that undermine Indigenous ecologies. But, as Ryan advocates, skiing has the potential to teach people how to have an Indigenist understanding of their place on the land. With millions of people recreating in conserved spaces every year, these

activities, if framed through an Indigenous lens, can be powerful mechanisms of settler-naturalization.

If, as Kyle Powys-Whyte describes, settler-colonialism is the severing of Indigenous relationships to land, then decolonization is, at least in part, the restoration of those relationships. Thus, decolonized conservation is relational conservation - it depends on intimate, reciprocal relationships between people and the land. Across North America, Indigenous peoples are leading and collaborating on several relational conservation projects that diverge from the Western approaches of settler-state land management agencies and NGOs as well as actively fighting for the rematriation of their ancestral homelands. The article “Return the National Parks to the Tribes,” published in the May 2021 issue of *The Atlantic* by Ojibwe author and historian David Treuer provides an excellent primer on land rematriation and the settler-colonial context of the National Parks. He argues that America’s National Parks should be returned to federally recognized tribes because these landscapes were often sites of violent or coercive dispossession, they are still spiritually and physically significant to tribes, and they are currently being managed inadequately by the National Park Service. Similar to Mark David Spence, Treuer (2021) claims that “The American West began with war but concluded with parks.” To Treuer, wilderness conservation was a primary mechanism of dispossession.

The parks have more ecological integrity than other, non-conserved spaces. In places like Yellowstone, ecologically and culturally important species like bison persist on the landscape. The presence of diverse, other-than-human kin, as well as the continuation of critical natural processes, make the National Parks essential to the revitalization of tribal cultures and the

restoration of ancestral relationships. Perhaps one of the most profound thoughts in Treuer's (2021) article is that:

[Native American] survival hasn't mattered only to us: As the efforts to assimilate us largely failed and we remained, mostly, in our homelands, Americans have gradually assimilated to our cultures, our worldview, and our modes of connecting to nature. The parks enshrine places, but they also emphasize and prioritize a particular way of interacting with the land. In the nation's mythic past, the wilderness may have been a dangerous environment, something to be tamed, plowed under, cut down. But that way of relating to the land is no longer in vogue. For many Americans, our wild spaces are a solace, a refuge—cathedrals indeed. America has succeeded in becoming more Indian over the past 245 years rather than the other way around.

As this quote demonstrates, people are growing increasingly aware that our collective ecological futures rely on the strength of Indigenous nations and cultures, which continue to provide a radical alternative to the ecological approaches of Western civilization. Returning the National Parks is not only an opportunity to ensure justice for the original caregivers of the land but also an opportunity to demonstrate an Indigenized approach to conservation at a large scale.

Treuer attempts to make his proposition palatable to a broader swath of the American public by stating that “the transfer should be subject to binding covenants guaranteeing a standard of conservation that is at least as stringent as what the park system enforces today, so that the parks' ecological health would be preserved—and improved—long into the future” and that “the tribes would continue to allow universal access to the parks in perpetuity.” He continues: “[Federally recognized tribes] would govern these beautiful places for ourselves, but also for all Americans.” While I understand his tactic, clearly tribal management of the National Parks would require a substantial paradigm shift. Is it truly best for the tribes, or for the parks, to continue allowing millions of tourists access year after year? The management of National Parks for the benefit of tribal nations and the health of ecosystems may be well-aligned, but I would

argue this is in stark contrast to the current desires of the American public, who generally have not done well with conscious restraint, balance, and reciprocity. The American relationship to land must evolve from solely recreation and tourism to a healthier, more holistic relationship that inspires us to carry an ecological consciousness beyond the borders of protected areas, and into our daily lives and our communities. This relationship could arise from active participation in ecological processes, and a reimagining of protected nature as a home, rather than a playground. This can happen if settlers step back, and allow tribal nations to take more of a leadership role in guiding our ecological futures. Not only can the parks be healing for tribes and the beginning of justice, they can also act as spaces for settlers to learn and begin the process of settler-naturalization. In this way, the National Parks could transform from spaces of entitled recreation to places of cultural renewal, healing, education, and collective organization towards larger societal paradigm shifts.

NDN collective, an Indigenous-led non-profit, has been a leading force in the fight for land rematriation in recent years with their LANDBACK campaign. They describe LANDBACK as “The reclamation of everything stolen from the original peoples: land, language, ceremony, food, education, housing, healthcare, governance, medicines, and kinship” (NDN Collective 2021). Healthy landscapes are essential for this reclamation. Unlike Western conservation, the protection and care for land does not necessarily mean limiting human engagement solely to tourism and recreation. While the goals of maintaining ecological integrity may be the same, Indigenous-led conservation recognizes the important ecological role of humans on the land. While some spaces, because of the ecological legacy of colonialism, may need to be approached with a great deal of restraint to allow for sufficient recovery from overuse, the end goal is

balance and reciprocity. The link between interpersonal relationships and ecology is strong. Healthy landscapes lead to flourishing communities, and flourishing communities can sustain healthy landscapes.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROADKILL

“On Eating and Drinking”

Then an old man, a keeper of an inn, said, Speak to us of Eating and Drinking.

And he said:

Would that you could live on the fragrance of the earth, and like an air plant be sustained by the light.

But since you must kill to eat, and rob the newly born of its mother's milk to quench your thirst, let it then be an act of worship.

And let your board stand an altar on which the pure and the innocent of forest and plain are sacrificed for that which is purer and still more innocent in man.

When you kill a beast say to him in your heart,

“By the same power that slays you, I too am slain; and I too shall be consumed. For the law that delivered you into my hand shall deliver me into a mightier hand. Your blood and my blood is naught but the sap that feeds the tree of heaven.

-from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*



Image 1 Vigilant elk in Montana's Paradise Valley

It was 7:30 am and the November sun had just begun to crest the Bangtail mountains and illuminate the Eastern slope of Cheétawaxaawe as we drove through the snowy canyon. My partner, Avery, and I were on our way to the local ski area. Our excitement built as the new day began to expose the several inches of new snow left behind overnight. Unfortunately, snow wasn't the only thing the daylight would expose.

I strained my eyes and saw something lying on the center lines of the two-lane state highway, then turned into an adjacent driveway, parked, and walked to the center of the road.

The deer, what looked like a 2-year-old doe, didn't move.

Dead, I thought to myself.

My first hunting experience was probably not much different from the average American kid's. It was December 2007, and I was 11 years old, visiting family in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan where my step-mom grew up. Her brother-in-law, John, like many other "Yoopers", is an avid hunter and fisherman and talks with a thick Canadian accent, ending most thoughts and questions with an "eh."

I had attended a weekend youth hunting camp with a friend the previous summer during which we took our hunter's safety course, learned about firearms and archery, and had the opportunity to do a little bit of shooting. This sparked some natural inclination towards the idea of hunting, yet I still felt a lot of resistance towards the idea of actually killing something. Previous attempts at killing something for food had been emotionally traumatic, and I wasn't entirely excited about repeating the experience. I was perfectly content to continue living in the blissful ignorance of eating meat from the store, far from any awareness of death.

When my uncle John got wind of my potential interest in hunting, he kindly offered to take me with him on a grouse hunt. I hesitantly agreed, not having any intention of shooting anything.

We loaded up his truck with a couple of shotguns - a 20 gauge for him, and a 410 for me - then left Iron Mountain and headed North. I'm not entirely sure where we went, but I do remember driving past North Dickinson County School in the tiny town of Felch, MI, where John grew up. We stopped at the gas station and loaded up on soda and candy bars. The rural AM radio, which fluctuated between the gospel and local ads for pasty shops and taxidermists, filled the gaps in conversation.

We drove down forested country roads, John's eyes bouncing back and forth between the road and the woods. He told me to keep an eye out for grouse, so I did. Though to be honest, I don't think I had ever seen a grouse before and as such, wasn't entirely sure what I was looking for. Though the trip was slow (and at times, boring), I remember being rather content snacking on candy and listening to John's hunting and fishing stories.

My eyelids were getting heavy, and I could feel the hope for a successful hunt quickly dissipating. The dialogue went from, "Can't wait to bring home a few grouse for dinner! I always find em' around this spot!" to "I'm sure we'll turn up one eventually!" to "Well, ya know, it's getting later in the season and I'm sure all sorts of people were out hunting over the weekend. Let's give it another hour, how's that sound?"

John slammed on the brakes. Eyelids no longer heavy, I sat alert and confused. He reached behind his seat, pulled the 20 gauge from its case, and slid a shell into the chamber. The

driver-side window came down, his barrel went onto the car door, then, with intention, he pulled the trigger.

Casually, he got out of the truck, walked off into the woods, and came back holding a dead grouse by the neck. I had forgotten we were hunting. I never even saw the bird before hundreds of lead pellets went soaring towards its head.

Did he seriously just shoot that bird from inside the truck? I thought.

The next thing I remember was driving back towards town, the winter sun already set but leaving behind a soft blue light hanging onto the leafless hardwoods overhead. John stopped on the side of the dirt road.

“Hey, wanna shoot that stump?”

A blast and the light kick of the 410 into my shoulder.

I doubt John, or anyone, would’ve guessed that 10 years later I’d be spending 3 or 4 mornings a week bowhunting white-tailed deer along the snow-dusted river bottoms of Montana, silently (I’d like to think) moving through thickets of snowberry and chokecherry while dodging the sticky seeds of invasive houndstongue. Each morning, nearly two hours before “shooting light,” which is a half-hour before sunrise in Montana, I’d navigate my way through the dark to wherever I planned to hunt for the morning. Before leaving the car, I’d put on my always-leaky waders, as walking through the rivers was usually a significant part of the approach. Often, I’d have to bring a change of socks because the ones I had on would be soaked by the time I reached my destination. I would like to think that the discomfort of slipping off those partially frozen, soggy socks on frigid November mornings allowed me to build a little bit of character.

I felt like a total stranger to those woods. Alone in the dark, under the quiet of night, the slightest sounds would send a wave of fear rushing through me. This fear stayed with me until the sunrise would finally begin to sharpen the muddled shapes all around me. After a month of this routine without taking a shot at any deer, snoozing my early morning alarms became increasingly tempting. I was struggling to see how hunting could be considered “fun,” but, for the most part, I persisted.

Most of what I knew about bowhunting I had slowly figured out through online research, or what my friend, Jefferson would call “Uncle Youtube” and “Grandfather Google.” At this point, I didn’t have any friends that bowhunted. There was no wise old mentor there to guide me through the process. I had never personally killed anything larger than a fish. Despite relentlessly practicing with the compound bow I had bought off Craigslist a few months prior, and feeling decently confident in the consistency and accuracy of my shooting, the fear of making a poor shot and wounding a deer consumed me.

As I would try to fall asleep the night before a hunt, I’d imagine a deer walking out of the bushes in front of me. I’d think about how old that deer was, what it had been eating, and the path it took to end up 10 yards away and broadside. This deer was born and raised in the forest. The deer was the land, and the land was the deer. Its desire for life was no different from mine. I loved that deer, and I loved the land. Yet, in my half-conscious dream, I would let the arrow fly. The three blades of my broadhead would pierce the deer’s heart and it would die. Its blood would flash bright on the yellow backdrop of fallen cottonwood leaves. Its flesh would sit heavy and lifeless on the Earth, radiating heat into the crisp Northern air. It would never again strain its neck to reach the remaining chokecherries dangling from the branch, nor would it leave its tracks

along the trails that weave their way through the cottonwoods. It would no longer be needing its warm winter coat, the one that it grew with the assumption of enduring life.

For all I talk about the joy of just being in the woods hunting, of watching the chickadees pass from branch to branch, seemingly unaware of my presence, there is no denying that the goal is to kill. This is the ultimate paradox of hunting. You can passionately care for, love, and respect the animal, yet still kill it. To me, hunting becomes a tool of destruction when one does not center their experience on love and gratitude for the animals they are hunting. If love is the energy that guides us, then being a caregiver of these animals is a natural progression.

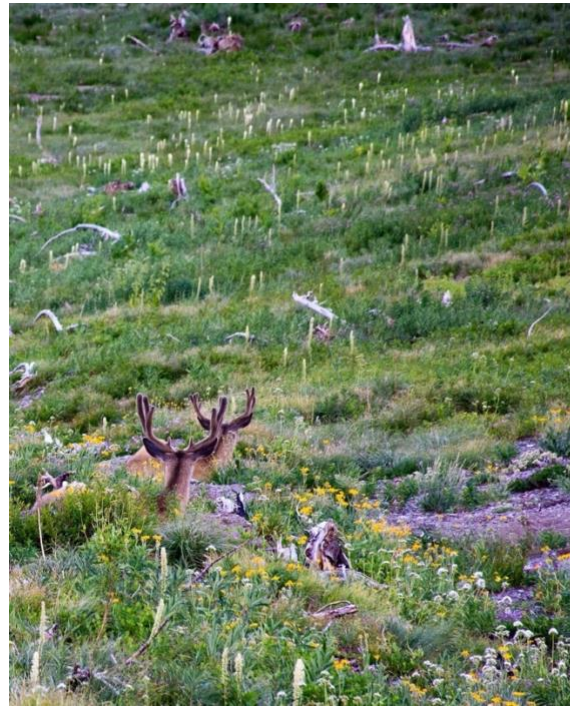


Image 2 Mountain whitetails in the alpine of Glacier National Park

My renewed interest in hunting as an adult started with scavenging roadkill. In fact, besides fish, roadkill deer was my first introduction to wild meat. I started eating roadkill as a way to learn more about nature, to utilize a less carbon-intensive food source, reduce my reliance on unsustainable food systems, and to honor the life of animals that were being killed. In states like Montana that have large wildlife populations and highways that often intersect migratory routes, finding dead animals along the road is a common occurrence. Often, these animals are left by those that hit them and they end up slowly decomposing in roadside ditches. Scavengers

regularly utilize this source of food, but not without risk. Other animals that are attracted to the roadways by roadkill often become roadkill themselves. In Montana (and most other states), it is legal to harvest roadkill, though there is usually a process for obtaining a permit to do so. It is also required that the entire carcass be removed from the roadside. Not only does the roadkill scavenger obtain free, wild, organic meat, but they also play a role in ensuring that other scavengers don't get hit along the road feeding on the carcass. Roadkill is a direct consequence of displacement of Indigenous ecologies and human development that does not acknowledge the sacredness of other animals or their right to exist on their ancestral homelands. Yet, when viewed through an Indigenous lens, it is important to adapt to the land as it evolves and to be ready to perceive opportunities when they present themselves.

While I may not be personally responsible for the death of roadkill animals, and I didn't go through the informative experience of hunting them, engaging with the rest of the process of turning their flesh into delicious, healthy food has helped me grow my love and appreciation for them. Harvesting roadkill requires one to engage the complex and ancient suite of knowledge held by each animal. For deer, this includes knowing how to tell if an individual animal is still safe to eat, how to remove the hide (with a special approach required if it is to be tanned), how to best remove all the meat from the carcass, how to separate larger components of the animal into more manageable cuts of meat, how to clean and preserve the meat, and how to cook the meat in a way that honors the life. On a basic level, being responsible for carrying the animal through this process requires one to spend a substantial amount of time physically engaged with its body. In this way, our lives become increasingly oriented towards the land. After starting to harvest roadkill and being exposed to that process, my interest in learning how to hunt grew and grew, as

it seemed like yet another opportunity to learn about, connect to, and feel at home in the place where I lived.

Hunting and scavenging can be acts of love that strengthen the bonds between individuals, communities, and the land, but this is not always the case. For those of us not raised in cultures that teach us about our obligations to our animal relatives, hunting can take entirely different forms, quickly becoming sports rather than lifeways. When hunting is done from a worldview that does not acknowledge the inherent value of other animals, and does not view them as sacred, hatred and ego begin to consume the practices and the relationships become increasingly one-sided - all take and no give. When I first went hunting with my uncle John, it certainly didn't radically alter my understanding of humanity's place in nature. If



Image 3 Gift from the sky: a common goldeneye duck

anything, hunting just seemed like an inefficient way to obtain food. There was no conversation about our obligations to the animals we hunt, no thank you to the bird that we had just killed; we simply came, took, and left. Perhaps the same end goal as my ancestors, obtaining food, but far from the same process.

Each time we eat wild food from the places where we live, we physically become those places. The flesh of deer, the bulbs of wild onion, and the flower buds of blooming yampa can be

found intricately weaved into the cells of my body. The goldeneye duck I took from the sky, the one that had traveled countless miles filling himself along the north country's rivers, lakes, and ponds before coming to land on a partially frozen cattail marsh far below the Tobacco Root Mountains, is the reason I can write this sentence. He's the reason I can walk through the snowy mountains on my skis, share laughter with friends and family, and experience the full magic of life. The gift of an animal's life, which allows me to live mine, feels like the most sacred thing in the world to me. The energy given to me by the duck was given to him by countless fish and insects. This life-giving energy that arises from the land is constantly moving from one being to another, connecting us all in the web of life. It is a daily reminder of our interdependence and responsibilities as caregivers.

This movement is so inherent to the human experience of life that, at times, it is entirely possible to forget its significance, especially as many of us become less and less connected to the process of obtaining and preparing food for ourselves and our communities. Losing touch with the sacredness of food is a quick way for a society to lose touch with the sacredness of the land. Once our personal and communal understanding of that sacredness is diminished, the human relationship with the rest of nature changes, and human action is no longer bound by obligations to the land and other beings who also rely upon its energy.

Today's hunting culture still relies heavily on narratives of human dominion, and the language used to talk about animals continues to subjugate them, rather than acknowledge them as relatives that deserve love and respect. In recent years, as more Black, Indigenous, People of Color, woman, and LGBTQ+ voices have been amplified in hunting spaces, the overall culture around the practice has started to shift. Ironically, BIPOC communities, which are inadequately

represented within contemporary hunting media, have some of the strongest hunting traditions. Many Indigenous people, for instance, because of their sovereign status, off-reservation treaty rights, and ongoing cultural traditions, continue to actively engage in ancestral hunting lifeways. Still, hunting remains overwhelmingly white and male; a staggering 96.5% of hunters are white and 90% are male (U.S. DOI et. al. 2016). Organizations, like Hunters of Color and Hunt to Eat, are doing incredible work to diversify hunting by addressing systemic barriers, changing narratives around why people hunt and fish, increasing diverse representation, and providing opportunities for mentorship. As is eloquently displayed in Carolyn Finney's book, "Black Faces, White Spaces," the natural spaces that all people should feel at home in have not and still are not safe and/or comfortable places for everyone. While I may have to worry about grizzly bears when I'm in the woods, I am never forced to think about how my race may make me vulnerable in those places. Not everyone has that privilege. Doing the work of fighting racism and helping to eliminate systemic barriers cannot be separated from the work of settler-naturalization. It should never be forgotten that our ability to hunt and fish is possible because of countless generations of Indigenous people who have stewarded this continent and the often flawed, but still important conservationists that worked to reverse the onslaught on wildlife that occurred during the first half of U.S. history. For those that can embark on the journey of participating in ecosystems through hunting, scavenging, and foraging, I am hopeful that if they are done with the intention of aligning ourselves with the land, they can be positive forces in the process of shifting our collective ecological consciousness and relationship to nature. Each unique ecosystem still holds the soil from which Indigenous cultures grew, and the land is still willing to show us how to be good relatives to the places where we live. This begins with

forming loving, reciprocal relationships that honor responsibilities between humans and the rest of nature. Hunting and scavenging can embody this process.

We walked closer to the deer lying in the middle of the road. Spilled blood contrasted against the yellow of the center stripe - front legs broken. Avery, with pity, went to caress the unmoving animal's side. Her fingertips made contact.

A feeble jolt of lingering life moved through the deer's body, and I caught the flash of her wide, fearful eyes. She was alive, but mortally wounded and unable to stand. Suffering.

We knew we had to kill her, but how? A knife had not been a part of our gear checklist for a day of skiing.

Luckily, within a minute, a car came rolling down the long gravel driveway. A mother, taking her kids to school, parked her old Chevy Suburban and came to greet us. Without hesitation, she retrieved a knife from her glove compartment and instructed us to grab the deer's legs to carry her to the side of the road. The deer writhed and kicked, landing a solid back hoof against Avery's groin as it relentlessly held onto life.

Should we kill it? I thought.

I could feel a growing tension inside of me. Logically, I understood the deer was suffering and would not be able to recover from being hit by the car. I knew the right thing to do was to kill it quickly, even if that meant we had to be the ones immediately responsible for taking its life. But being up close and watching the deer struggle against its fate tore at my heart.

Seemingly emotionless, the mother didn't show any hesitation and she did what needed to be done. As her young boys watched from a few feet away, her knife skillfully slid deep

through the arteries of the doe's neck. As the blood came flowing out, steaming as it contacted the snow, so too did the mysterious energy that imbues us each with life.

In the spring, the memory of blood will hang on the dark pink roadside geraniums, blooming from the snowmelt-swollen earth. Avery and I will be camping a few miles away,



Image 4 Venison backstrap and morel mushrooms

preparing to eat seared venison steaks with morel mushrooms, wild onion, and spring beauty bulbs. Before the first bite, we'll think back to that winter morning and we'll feel it all - all the sadness, pain, vulnerability, gratitude, excitement, and joy that comes alongside having a relationship with our food. We'll remember the mother and her kids driving away, and us being left alone with the dead deer. We'll remember sobbing together by her side, feeling the harshest pangs of grief as we came into the shattering

awareness of the direct consequences of "human progress" - the catastrophic and needless loss of our animal kin across the planet Earth. Then we'll feel grateful for the time we spent together, working with intention as we peeled back her hide and began to sever her body into parts, trying our best to maintain her perfection despite our lack of skill. When the joy of the first forkful of delicious food finally comes to our lips, we'll thank the land for its gifts and worship the creatures who gave their lives for ours.

CHAPTER SIX

WILDFLOWERS

“Along the Creek,” a poem by Jacob Zimmerer

November by the creek
Red, yellow, orange
below but not above
Stream edges
lined with nighttime freeze
A child and his mother
Crunching fallen leaves
Two years old
soon wet as can be
the mother worries
How long till he gets a cold?
Should it be time to go?
But the crayfish swim with each rock
he turns
And his instincts
Remain
Untamed
laughing and splashing
in Sacred water
that graces his face
his lips
Refusing to depart
Will he remember when he is old?
All his relations he came to know?
The water he drinks, the frog he nets, the crayfish that swims?
The apple tree, which feeds for free?
What about the groundhog that digs, the flies that bite, or the wasp that stings?
A beech, entering her winter's sleep
Loves to see
Reasons for hope along the creek

I parked the '88 Chevrolet and waded across the warm, stagnant, and algally abundant Sycan River, razor-sharp obsidian flashing amongst the river bottom cobble beneath. I climbed up the steep bank and proceeded across the meadow, whose grasses were already browned and withering in the mid-June sun, until I reached the edge of the ponderosa pine forest. Beneath the thick, dry pine duff, light gray pumice soil was darkened with ash. The understory was nearly lifeless. There were only a few currants and yellow violets, which were hardy enough to grow in the nutrient-deficient earth. Before long I started to near the top of the hill I had seen from the logging road. Occasionally I'd spot the large trunk of an older ponderosa and feel a jolt of excitement, but this wasn't what I was searching for. I climbed up a large boulder, now quite high above the meadow, hoping that this vantage point would provide a different view of the forest. Then, 50 yards away, shining in the afternoon light that had managed to slip through the canopy, I saw the sugar pine I was looking for and a big smile came to my face. I made my way to the tree as quickly as I could. Its enormous cones were strewn far from the trunk; I admired them glistening in the morning sun as they rested on their bed of fallen needles. They were just like the one I had in my childhood bedroom. I stood beneath the tree, looked to the sky, and felt small.



Image 5 A rare sugar pine along the Sycan river

It was the summer of 2021, and I was in the Klamath Basin of Oregon on the homelands of the Klamath tribes (the Modoc, Klamath, and Yahooskin-Paiute) visiting my friends Michael Ridge and Amanda Barnett of Walking with Western Wildflowers, a non-profit with the mission of tending the ancestral food gardens of the West. At this point, Michael had been living nomadically on horseback for eight years and Amanda for two. In the summer months, they travel across the landscape, harvesting and propagating roots, collecting, and planting native seeds, and documenting their efforts. In the winters, they set up a long-term camp, work on projects, and teach people a variety of ancestral skills, such as hide tanning and clothes making. These are all parts of what they refer to as “the hoop.” The hoop is their way of describing the Indigenous lifeway of the region which relies on seasonal rounds, or the intentional movement

from place to place to engage with a particular seasonally available food source. Traditionally, this included foods such as salmon, huckleberries, bison, biscuitroots, camas, and pinyon pine nuts. Across the West, there are different “hoops”, or available foods to eat and tend to, depending on the season and region. Unfortunately, many traditional foods of the region are no longer available in certain places, such as salmon and steelhead in Idaho, where fish numbers can no longer support substantial harvest. That said, the land offers abundance for those who know where and when to look.

We had been camping for a few days in an area known locally as the “tablelands”- a vast array of scablands interspersed with forests and wetlands. Our camp sat in the edge habitat

between lodgepole pine forest and a meadow, where Michael and Amanda’s horses had plenty of grass and nearby access to water, which was increasingly hard to come by after several months of drought conditions in the Klamath.



Image 6 Manders with her beloved horses

Not far off, I could see the last purple petals of spring camas flowers dotting the shady, wet edges of the meadow. Beyond that, there was a full display of Western wildflowers dancing in the light breeze.

In 1864, the Klamath Tribes signed a treaty with the United States that resulted in the tribes ceding 22 million acres, while retaining 1.5 million acres as a reservation that could be held for their people in perpetuity. The land of the Klamath Basin reserved by the tribe was rich in many ways. The abundant marshes held important ancestral foods and supplied water, the largest ponderosa pine forest on the continent lay within its borders, and vast expanses of volcanic rock fields were home to wild food gardens tended by their people for thousands of years. The tablelands, where we were camping, were a part of this reservation. Because of this great wealth, the Klamath tribes were one of the top targets of the 1954 Termination Act, which, despite the tribe voting against termination, stripped the Klamath, Modoc, and Yahooskin of their reservation lands, treaty hunting, fishing, and foraging rights, and all federal aid guaranteed by the 1864 treaty. Land that had been carefully tended by these people since time immemorial proceeded to be pillaged by the United States in a short-sighted, ecologically inept period of intensive resource extraction. Marshes were drained, poorly managed cattle-grazing abounded, and the forests were indiscriminately logged.

It wasn't until 1986 that the Klamath Tribes regained their federal recognition after years of dedication to the cause by tribal members. The Klamath were the only tribe to not regain any of their land in the restoration process, however, making them presently a "landless" tribe. Nonetheless, with the restoration of the tribe, their treaty rights were also reinstated, enabling tribal members to hunt, fish, and forage within the 1954 treaty area.

Much of my time in Oregon was spent learning about the wild food plants of the area. While the list of culturally significant edible and medicinal plants is extensive, the several species of biscuitroots (*Lomatium spp.*), common camas (*Camasia quamash*), yampas

(*Peridigion spp.*), Brodiaeas (multiple genera), and Sego lilies (*Calachortus spp.*) are particularly important. While in the Klamath, I had the opportunity to experience the abundance of some of these wild gardens and was introduced to the process of respectfully digging, preparing, and tending these different foods. All these species are perennials, and some (particularly the biscuitroots) can live for up to 100 years. These ancestral food gardens exist across the Pacific Northwest, but in the Klamath they have been extensively tended more recently than in many other places, within the last 100 years, as it was only 70 years ago that much of this area was the sovereign territory of the Klamath Tribes.



Image 7 Taste of the Klamath

The places with the most abundant food are geologically covered in what is referred to as “biscuitscab,” dense volcanic rock fields that are difficult to plow out and develop. These ancestral food strongholds can look inhospitable to those with an untrained eye, but there is life tucked in every crack between the rocks. Biscuitscabs are far from homogenous. In fact, there is

a plethora of transition zones with varying levels of rock, access to water, and even edges that are well shaded by patches of forest. Different plant species occupy each of these niches, and when the whole scabland is flowering, its beauty cannot be overstated. Food is everywhere you look.

When digging roots, each plant is respected as an elder that deserves great care, time, and love. Michael and Amanda graciously walked me through the process, explaining that it is best practice to extract the entire root without breaking it, as a sign of respect. The process begins with the use of a digging stick. Though the tools often used today are made of titanium, hardwoods formed the backbone of those utilized by tribal members across the region for thousands of years. The digging stick allows one to pry the rocks surrounding the root out of the ground and remove chunks of the often hard, blocky soil. Some biscuitroots, like *Lomatium macrocarpum*, can extend up to a foot deep and be the width of one's arm. To ensure that the root does not break, one begins digging well to the side of the root to excavate a rather large hole that gradually gets deeper, rather than intuitively digging straight down. While at first this approach seemed like far more work, it made it substantially easier to extract the root and reach its base without causing it any damage. Once the hole is started, a soil knife is used to dig deeper and do the finer-scale work required to free the root from its earthly home. After digging (and breaking) my first root, it was clear that this was a skill that could not be well-developed over the course of two weeks. Successfully harvesting convoluted roots without damage is a remarkable art. Even after digging roots for several days, I was still inefficient and breaking roots regularly, despite showing what I believed to be sufficient levels of effort and care. Not only does this

practice require great skill, it also can be quite physically demanding, with intensity varying by soil substrate and species.

After receiving the root, the rocks and chunks of soil are placed back in the hole. While appearing disorderly, the practice is filled with intention. By loosely returning the rocks and soil, without tamping it down or leveling the surface, you create an assortment of cracks in which neighboring plants can drop their seeds. In these cracks, the seeds are protected from sunlight



Image 8 Native seeds from the rim of Hell's Canyon

and have a higher chance of germination. Large quantities of roots are usually only dug while a certain species has ripe seed on its tops, so that the seed can be spread in the cracks resulting from its harvest. When roots are dug earlier in the season, collected seeds from

the previous year are planted in the cracks. In this way, there is reciprocity between the plants and the people who harvest them.

I have distinct memories of eating black raspberries along the grassy trails of local parks, mulberries from feral trees, wild blueberries from the tops of mountains in Maine, and all sorts of other foraged foods throughout my childhood. But it wasn't until I moved to Montana that I started to see myself as a forager. It seemed that all at once, I came into awareness that food was quite literally everywhere around me. This would've been common sense for my ancestors who were fully immersed in the responsibility of obtaining food, but for me, food was still something

that was grown on farms and sold at grocery stores and perhaps farmer's markets. I had been convinced that the only foods that were worth eating were the ones that had been domesticated and are currently being mass produced. I don't think I was alone in this mostly subconscious assumption. At this moment in my life, I felt more connected to and understood myself better than I ever had before. In many ways, my childhood was entirely oriented around food. Growing up, one of my favorite things to do was to cook, bake, and eat with my grandma, who owned both a bakery and a restaurant. While I never viewed myself as creative in most ways, food was where my creativity blossomed. As I grew older and my passion for the outdoors, ecology, and conservation grew, my love of food was placed in the periphery. Then, when I read the work of people like Robin Kimmerer and Sam Thayer, I began to see the intimate connection between the different aspects of my identity, my love of the outdoors and my love of food, and I've been obsessed with exploring that intersection ever since. It's now clear to me that food is the most fundamental link between humans and the rest of nature. As such, it is a powerful reminder of who we are and the interconnectedness of all things. Food, for me, has been the doorway to an expanded sense of community, one that includes our other-than-human relatives.

The first summer of my foraging journey, I was working full-time as an instructor for Montana Outdoor Science School and living out of my car in the mountains. While out on hikes with students, I'd take pictures of plants, then spend hours each evening pouring through plant identification and foraging books to identify them and gain a better understanding of their edible and medicinal properties. Once I was done identifying, I would study the books cover to cover, just trying to increase my familiarity with all the plants across the Rockies and Pacific Northwest. While I had been learning to identify wildflowers in the Rockies since high school

with naturalist motivations, the amount I learned during that summer of foraging far exceeded everything I learned in the years before. Like a burr on a dog, I was entirely hooked.

Foraging can be a beautiful, joyful way for someone to learn about and connect to the place where they live. Like hunting, when done from an Indigenist worldview, the practice can also be a pathway to settler-naturalization. Of course, plants can be overharvested, just like animals can be overhunted. However, in some cases, merely the *act* of foraging can increase the abundance of certain plant populations. If foragers also tend the plant populations from which they harvest, they can easily spread more life than they take. If we want a culprit for the dwindling abundance of wild foods, it would be far wiser to blame habitat loss before pointing fingers at foraging and regulated hunting.

In his book *Incredible Wild Edibles*, Sam Thayer includes an essay titled, “Ecoculture: Tending to Wildness.” Ecoculture, or “the management of natural ecosystems to enhance their production of useful products,” is understood by Thayer as a well-established practice of Indigenous peoples across the world (p. 432). Ecoculture may be a new term, but the concept is old. In this essay, Thayer makes an argument aligned with the one I’ve made throughout this thesis. In essence, we collectively need to naturalize ourselves to the ecosystems we live in, rather than continuing to try to turn these places into something they are not. Thayer observes that “Europeans came to this land wanting milk and cheese, but it wasn’t here, so they forced the land to make it. They didn’t ask the land what it had to give... Native ecosystems will not provide all the fast-food hamburgers we want, but they might give us something else, like salmon and camas” (p.432). Humans have always been a part of nature and manipulating our environments is entirely normal. However, not all manipulation is equal. Indigenous

manipulation of ecosystems is about increasing the natural abundance of ecosystems by thoughtfully tending them. Conversely, the goal of settler manipulation is to transform and replace ecosystems with foreign ecologies. We have tried to make the land be something that it did not evolve to be.

Thayer, too, recognizes that the roots of our ecological issues are largely philosophical, eloquently stating, "... ecoculture is based on principles that challenge some of the most fundamental ideas we have about the world, and our place in it. The greatest barriers to a new culture are not economic, practical, or physical; they are philosophical. We have been indoctrinated with the mythos of civilization since birth; ecoculture will make no sense until this is discarded" (p. 434). He substantiates several claims that challenge current dominant belief structures: nature contains good food crops, nature is productive, ecoculture is economically viable, nature is resilient, nature is flexible, and nature includes humans. These are the philosophical underpinnings of ecoculture. The widescale adoption of ecoculture as an alternative to current paradigms relies on the acceptance of these tenets. There is another path forward, but we will first need to open our eyes to its existence.

Foraging encourages one to align their life with the cycles of the land. When you live in anticipation of the foods of each season, it makes it difficult to want to be anywhere else besides home. Oftentimes, there is an ideal moment in time for the harvest of each food, and usually, that time is not predetermined. A great example is mushroom species like chanterelles and king boletes, two of my favorite foods in the world. In Montana, these species often emerge in the late summer and early fall. Each species has their own habitat preferences and require certain

environmental conditions for them to send up their fruiting bodies, which are the delicious mushrooms whom I love dearly. Some years, these mushrooms can only be found during a very short window of time while temperatures are above freezing, but not incredibly warm, and the mountains receive an adequate amount of rain. Watching the weather and spending time in the mountains is necessary if one wishes to experience the magic that is wild mushrooms.

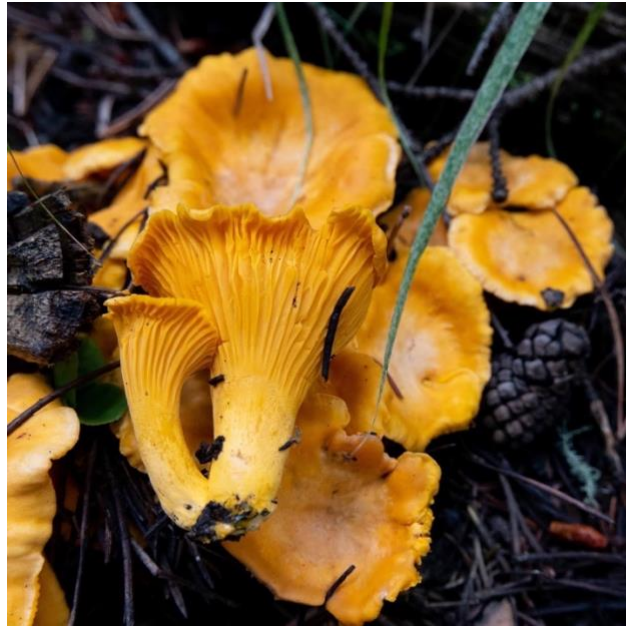


Image 9 Late summer chanterelles beneath a spruce-fir canopy

Last year was my first season digging fritillary bulbs, particularly what are referred to as yellow bells, and they taught me several lessons. During the month of April, I regularly visited canyons where I knew I could find healthy fritillary populations. While I did find some that were already flowering, I was usually having to get down close to the earth to find their distinctive leaves, just barely emerging from soils that were just recently exposed after a winter covered by snow. Fritillaries have magnificent reproductive strategies which provide opportunities for humans to easily propagate them. Each bulb from which the plant grows each year has several tiny bulblets clinging to the sides, which when separated from the main bulb and planted in the soil, will grow into their own plant the following spring. When digging fritillaries, one can harvest the main bulb, then take the bulblets and plant them in nearby suitable habitats where the fritillaries have failed to spread on their own. While this is a great way to care for them, planting

their seed is also important as the plants that grow from seed will have different genetics from the original plant. For this reason, I was dedicated to collecting fritillary seeds. This turned out to be a somewhat challenging task as I was unsure how long they would take to move from peak flowering stage to having ripe seed. I went back to the places where I harvested fritillaries once a week to check on their progress and it wasn't until late June and July that I finally started finding ripe seeds, and even then, it was quite difficult to find their dried-up seed pods low to the ground underneath several other herbaceous species that now covered the ground and hid them from view. While my initial goal of visiting these canyons was to check on their seed, I always came home with delicious food and developed a far greater understanding of the plant ecology of these particular habitats. Through April, May, June, and July, all sorts of different foods and medicines emerged: violets, beebalm, nettle, cow parsnip, wild onions, glacier lillies, spring beauties,



Image 10 Springtime Fritillary

biscuitroots, salsify, and several others all within a short distance of the yellow bells. Watching one place transform through time opened my eyes to the true abundance of the place I call home.

During the summers, I spend most of my free time in and around Yellowstone National Park. To many Americans, Yellowstone is the epitome of wilderness. It is in many ways imagined as a relatively untamed landscape and a place that tourists go to visit and observe, but very few people would consider it a human landscape. Nevertheless, Yellowstone is a place that

has been shaped by people for thousands of years. Thankfully, Yellowstone National Park still has many features of its pre-contact Indigenous ecologies. You can still find species like grizzly bears and wolves, which have been extirpated from most of their historic range, and the diversity of plants is an excellent representation of the Northern Rockies. While certain species may be less abundant than they were prior to colonialism, at least they are still there. In fact, Yellowstone is only missing one aspect of its Indigenous ecology.

It's missing its people.

Yes, there are millions of tourists who visit the park each year, but I would argue that almost none of them are fulfilling the ecological role of humans within the park.

While the regulations are grey, sustainably harvesting wild plants and mushrooms for personal consumption within the National Parks is a way to remember the role of humans on the land. When we walk down the trails and strip hundreds of fireweed seeds from their decaying stalks in the late summer in the park's northern range, placing them in the soil or simply casting them into the wind, I think the land enjoys us being there as much as we do. Simply being a human being and filling the ecological role humans evolved to fill in these places is an act of resistance to colonial paradigms of conservation that physically and psychologically separate humans from the land. These paradigms have created millions of tourists and recreationists, but very few caregivers.

I had traveled to Oregon to meet Michael and Amanda in person after following their life through social media and talking with them over the phone. When they extended the offer for me to visit with them, I leaped at the opportunity, feeling that time with them would provide new ideas about tending to the plants I forage and connection with like-minded people. I admired

Michael and Amanda and their full commitment and dedication to something larger than themselves. Their willingness to leave behind many material comforts in favor of a more intentional life continues to challenge me to do better. They aren't just people who dropped out of society to go live in the woods to escape the work of fixing societal problems. Instead, they create change everywhere they go, teaching people about wild foods, tending those foods, and providing an example of a different way of life. While much of their time is spent far away from cities and towns, when they gallop into town with their pack string they treat it as an important opportunity to spread the word about their mission. Clad in wide-brimmed hats and buckskin, they have no trouble catching people's attention. While their philosophical aims may differ from many of the people they encounter, these rural places still have a deep connection to horse culture, and Michael and Amanda's knowledge and commitment to life on horseback give them grounds for connection and respect. As such, many people they come across are inclined to perceive them favorably and provide some special accommodations.

It also helps that they are white. The places they ride through are some of the most hostile places in the country for people of color. They are strongholds of white supremacy, firmly seated in a state whose founders sought to establish a "white utopia" by drafting a constitution banning land holdings by Black Americans. Michael and Amanda acknowledge the privilege their race provides in these spaces. Their lifestyle, at this point in time, would be exceptionally dangerous and difficult for people of color. Yet, by utilizing their privileges, they can work to undermine the systems of white supremacy that dominate these landscapes and communities by teaching people about Indigenous ecologies and restoring them to the land, even if they need to be subversive in their communication of these goals.

Michael and Amanda are in a peculiar situation. Some tribal members across the region, whose ancestors held remarkable traditional plant knowledge gained through thousands of years of immersion, now have very little understanding of their tribe's traditional lifeways. This is the result of centuries of genocide, forced assimilation, lack of land access, and a variety of other settler-colonial mechanisms. In some ways, non-Native people have had more access to and ability to practice traditional plant knowledge than Native people over the last 100 years. In the Klamath Basin, there are several people who know the land well and can teach people how to gather traditional foods. Michael and Amanda are some of those people. As such, they have often played the role of reintroducing Native people to their plant relatives that they have been estranged from without their consent. Michael and Amanda play some role in facilitating the flow of knowledge back from the land to the people. Part of this is simply maintaining a white presence in places that may not be entirely safe for Native people. In the winter, they continue to share what they've learned by teaching people who are interested in learning other components of the ecosystem's lifeways, like hide tanning. They never charge for this knowledge. It is openly and freely exchanged. Always, learning is a shared process for them. While they may hold certain plant knowledge, neither of them grew up in an Indigenous community and they are always learning the cultural ways of the places they live from people who are Indigenous to those places. Whenever possible, they refer to the plants by their Modoc names, which they've learned from Modoc people. In the winters, they live in tipis. They often wear moccasins made from hides they tanned themselves.

Challenging questions arose following my time in the Klamath. Michael and Amanda are dedicated to naturalizing themselves to the places they live, physically and culturally. To many,

this appears as cultural appropriation. To others, they are respected and seen as valuable members of the community who are striving to utilize their privilege to support Indigenous revitalization. Some people hate them, and some people love them. When some community members welcome you and celebrate what you are doing, and others do not, what is the right thing to do? I was left without an easy answer.

After being with Michael and Amanda, I felt an overwhelming sense of obligation to be more active in my own reciprocity with the land. While I have often been stifled by fear of doing something wrong, or of not being good enough yet, they showed me that doing something is often much better than doing nothing. While Michael and Amanda have certainly made mistakes, they have also spread a lot of love and abundance through their efforts. Mistakes are inevitable. People will always find something to be critical of. These realities do not stop them from upholding their responsibilities to the land.

I came home and wrestled with my fears. I had been thinking about offering free plant walks around Bozeman for two years but could never find the confidence to do it. Michael and Amanda helped me to see that reciprocity isn't always as easy as plucking seeds from the plant you just dug and placing them back in the soil. Sometimes it requires us to fundamentally challenge our fears and beliefs. Sometimes it means opening ourselves up to criticism, mistakes, and even failure. I thought back to all the plants and animals I'd eaten in my life, all the water I'd drunk, all the beings that have nurtured me. I owed it to them to at least try to create a world where humans would once again show them the love and care they deserve.

I made a flyer for a plant walk and posted it in a Bozeman Facebook forum for hikers. The response I received was overwhelming; it was clear that people here were looking for ways

to diversify their participation with the land beyond recreation. Nearly 20 people showed up to that first plant walk, and when the moment came to begin, my love and gratitude for the plants of the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem carried me forward. I began by creating a picture of the intimate connection that the Blackfeet, Crow, Salish, Shoshone, and other tribes have to the place we were standing. I shared the history of how these people had their land, culture, and lifeway stolen from them, but how they are still caring for their ancestral homelands. Then, I told them what foraging means to me, and how it can be a way for each of us to learn about and care for the land. I told them about Robin Kimmerer and the tenets of what she calls the “honorable harvest.” I told them about the ways that I’ve found to show my gratitude to plants, and the importance of striving to use foraging as a way to be a caregiver. Then we carried on down the trail and I had the honor of experiencing the joy that results when people are introduced to their plant relatives for the first time. For many, this was the first time they tasted a wild onion, the first time they tasted the earthy sweetness of yampa or the complexity of a ripe wild strawberry. I felt like I was exactly where I needed to be, doing what I was meant to do.

Sam Thayer concludes his essay on ecoculture with words that capture what I believe it means to be a forager. He says:

Tending the wild landscapes from which we harvest is the natural inclination of the gatherer – an outgrowth of the appreciation we feel for the gifts that bless us. Don’t worry whether or not you are doing the right thing, or the best thing. Sometimes the only job to be done is gathering. You belong there, doing that. Gratitude will keep you straight, as it is the opposite of selfishness. Gratitude will keep your heart awake to the next and best opportunity to tend the land you belong to, to return the favors that it has bestowed upon you. When my children and I collected twelve gallons of acorns last October under the big red oak downhill from the chicken coop, there was nothing to repay at that moment but thanks. But the gratitude that I carry every moment for a lifetime of nourishment from nut trees - this is real and powerful. It is the force that planted a grove of nut trees over three acres of hayfield and pasture, and thinned out hundreds of aspen poles to release butternut, hickory, and oak to create a more diverse woodland, better for wildlife.

Some of us believe we are exiled from nature. It is a self-exile. Some of us believe that nature will not feed us. She will. Turn homeward and pray. Then do your work as a holyday.

Ash-blackened fingers loosely pack soil around the base of sugar pine saplings, which were carefully cultivated from hand-collected seed. Tears of loss feed them water. Hopeful hearts move the hands which plant them. This place is still alive. The people are still alive. The sugar pine along the Syca - the one that drew me in from the road - I wonder if it survived? 413,000 acres burned, and they called it the Bootleg Fire. Extreme drought. Profit-motivated mismanagement. The place we camped, talked, laughed, ate, planted, and slept - all of it burned. A landscape desperately seeking healing, consuming itself in the process, provided us another chance. An opportunity to nurture, rather than exploit.

Michael and Amanda walk across the burnt ground, still planting seed as they move. Small gestures of care tie them to the future. They stop and begin to dig. In the soil, they spell out two words with their shallow trenches. In the trenches, they plant the seeds of the foods that have sustained people here for thousands of years. While it may not change the world, they know that the simple act of giving life in a world that has been engineered to take it away is something worth celebrating. They may never see the plants when they are finally mature and are ready to be eaten, but that's not necessarily the point. The words they spelled, soon to be delineated by lines of bright, spring flowers, will remind those who pass through that this place is not a wilderness. It is a home. It is a garden. It is sacred. The words will clearly read, "EAT ME."

I can only hope that people will recognize these words for what they are: both a gift *and* a responsibility.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

We need stories for the future - stories that can guide us away from cultures of colonialism, and towards cultures of kinship. It is time to shed our immigrant identity and allow ourselves to become one with the place that nourishes us. We must heal the wounds of colonialism and give back what we have stolen. Hopefully, Indigenous peoples will be as generous to us as they often were to our ancestors, choosing to end cycles of oppression, rather than giving settlers the same treatment given to them.

I grew up with the saying “you’re either the hammer or you’re the nail” driven into my psyche. This saying taught me that oppression is inherent, and we each need to choose whether to be the oppressor or the oppressed. This is the foundation of Western culture; everyone is striving to become the hammer and doing whatever they can to ensure they never become the nail. What people often fail to realize is that being the hammer comes along with its own sickness – a sickness that destroys the spirit and isolates us. It requires the rejection of our humanity, and willing blindness to injustice.

I wrestled and played football as a kid, and I was often encouraged to inflict pain on the opponent and express dominance over them. I was told to be the hammer, and I could not do it. I thought I was weak because I didn’t want to hurt anyone.

I just don’t have it in me to be the hammer.

Yet, here I am, the hammer. Without my choosing, I embody a system that oppresses people and the land. Every day, I feel the pain of this reality, because I choose not to ignore or deny it.

This is the reason people in this country so vehemently deny the reality of oppression. If they were to accept it as truth, they too would experience the sickness of the oppressor. They fear that acknowledgement is an admission of guilt that will turn the tides of oppression back upon them and their families. Thus, it is easier to hold strong to the claim that we live in an equitable and just society, or, to convince ourselves that we are always the oppressed.

I don't want to be the hammer or the nail.

I do not want to engage a system that commits violence against my kin.

I want a future that does not mandate oppression, but rather mandates kinship, with reciprocity as the guiding force. I want to help create that future.

We need new stories, but perhaps the stories we need most are the old ones. One story that has grounded me in my work is "The Anishinaabe Prophecy of the Seven Fires," originally published in *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* by Edward Benton-Banai (1979) (See Appendix). From my interpretation, this prophecy illustrates that if we hope to avoid further destruction and death at the hands of Western civilization, settlers must learn to live as a part of this place and abandon settler-colonial culture. We stand at a choice between two roads. Will we continue down the road of self-destruction, where we prioritize material wealth, convenience, power, and control? Or will we choose the other road where we fight for Indigenous liberation, learn to live another way, and walk forward, together, in peace, love, and kinship?

With all the damage done to Turtle Island and its people by settler society, it's easy to feel as if there is something inherent to the settler that causes destruction. At times, I've struggled to shake this feeling. Is it possible for me to unlearn the culture I've been exposed to since my birth? Is it possible for me to learn something new? When my friend Jefferson first shared this prophecy with me, I was overcome with emotion. Not only *can* settlers learn another way, but, in fact, we *must*.

Settler-colonialism was a choice. My ancestors could have chosen to assimilate themselves into the diverse Indigenous societies of the continent and operate by the rules of this land. We still have a choice; we can naturalize ourselves and light the eighth and final sacred fire.

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APPENDIX

THE ANISHINAABE PROPHECY OF THE SEVEN FIRES

The following prophecy is from *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* by

Edward Benton-Banai (Benton-Banai 1979):

The first prophet said to the people, “In the time of the First Fire, the Anishnabe nation will rise up and follow the Sacred Teachings. They will serve as a rallying point for the people and its traditional ways will be the source of much strength. The Sacred Elders will lead the way to the chosen ground of the Anishnabe. You are to look for a turtle-shaped island that is linked to the purification of the Earth. You will find such an island at the beginning and end of your journey. There will be seven stopping places along the way. You will know that the chosen ground has been reached when you come to a land where food grows on water. If you do not move, you will be destroyed.”

The Second Prophet told the people, “You will know the Second Fire because at this time, the nation will be camped by a large body of water. In this time, the direction of the Sacred Teachings will be lost. The traditional ways will diminish in strength. A boy will be born to point the way back to the traditional ways. He will show the direction to the stepping stone to the future of the Anishnabe people.”

The Third Prophet said to the people, “In the Third Fire, the Anishnabe will find the path to their chosen ground, a land in the West to which they move their families. This will be the land where food grows on water.” Elders have determined that this food was wild rice.

The Fourth Fire was originally given to the people by two prophets. They came as one. They told of the coming of the light-skinned race. One of the prophets said, “You will know the future of our people by what the light-skinned race wears. If they come wearing the face of brotherhood, then there will come a time of wonderful change for generations to come. They will bring new knowledge and articles that can be joined with the knowledge of this country. In this way, two nations will join to make a mighty nation. This new nation will be joined by two more so that the four will form the mightiest nation of all. You will know the face of the brotherhood if the Light-Skinned Race comes carrying no weapons, if they come only bearing knowledge and a handshake.” The other prophet said, “Beware if the light-skinned race comes wearing the face of death. You must be careful because the face of brotherhood and the face of death look very much alike. If they come carrying a weapon, ... beware! If they come in suffering, -- they could fool you. Their hearts could be filled with greed for the riches of this land. If they are indeed your brothers, let them prove it. Do not accept them in total trust. You shall know that the face they wear is the one of death if the rivers run with poison and fish become unfit to eat. You shall know them by these many things.”

The fifth prophet said, “In the time of the Fifth Fire, there will come a time of great struggle that will grip the lives of all Anishnabe people. At the waning of this Fire,

there will come among the people one who holds a great promise of great joy and salvation. If the people accept this promise of a new way and abandon the old teachings, the struggle of the Fifth Fire will be with the people for many generations. The promise that comes will be a false promise. All those who accept this promise will cause the near destruction of the people.” When the era of the Fifth Fire came to pass, a great struggle did indeed grip the lives of all Anishnabe people. The light-skinned race launched a military attack on Anishnabe people throughout the country, which was aimed at taking away their land and their independence as a free and sovereign people. It is now felt that the false promise that came at the end of the Fifth Fire was the materials and riches embodied in the way of life of the light-skinned race. Those who abandoned the ancient ways and accepted this new promise, were a big factor in causing the near destruction of the Anishnabe people of this land.

The prophet of the Sixth Fire said, “In the time of the Sixth Fire, it will be evident that the promise of the Fifth Fire came in a false way. Those deceived by this promise will take their children away from the teachings of the Elders. Grandsons and granddaughters will turn against the Elders. In this way, the Elders will lose their reason for living -- they will lose their purpose in life. At this time a new sickness will come among the people. The balance of many people will be disturbed. The cup of life will almost be spilled. The cup of life will almost become the cup of grief.”

At the time of these predictions, many people scoffed at the prophets. They then had medicines to keep away sickness. They were then healthy and happy as a people. These were the people who chose to stay behind on the great migration of the Anishnabe. These people were the first to have contact with the light-skinned race. They would suffer the most. When the Sixth Fire came to be, the words of the prophet rang true as children were taken away from the teachings of the Elders. The boarding school era of ‘civilizing’ Anishnabe children had begun. The Anishnabe language and religion were taken from the children. The people started dying at an early age -- they lost their will to live and their purpose in living.

In the confusing times of the Sixth Fire, it is said that a group of visionaries came among the Anishnabe. They gathered all the Elders of the Sacred Teachings and told them that our traditional ways were in danger of being destroyed. The Elders gathered all the sacred bundles and the scrolls that recorded the ceremonies and placed them in a hollowed-out log from the ironwood tree. Men were lowered over a cliff by long ropes. They dug a hole in the cliff and buried the log where no one could find it. It was in this way that the teachings of the Elders were hidden out of sight, but not out of memory. It was said that when the time came that the Anishnabe people could practice their religion without fear, that a little boy would dream where the ironwood log full of sacred bundles and scrolls was buried. He would lead his people to the place.

This seventh prophet who came to the people long ago was said to be different from the other prophets. He was young and had a strange light in his eyes. He said, “In

the time of the Seventh Fire, a new people will emerge. They will retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail. Their steps will take them to the Elders who they will ask to guide them on their journey. But many of the Elders will have fallen asleep. They will awaken to this new time with nothing to offer. Some of the Elders will be silent out of fear. Some of the Elders will be silent because no-one will ask anything of them. The new people will have to be careful in how they approach the Elders. The task of the new people will not be easy.”

The seventh prophet continued, “If the new people remain strong in their quest, then there will be a rebirth of the Anishnabe Nation and a rekindling of old flames. The Sacred Fire will again be lit.”

“It is at this time that the light-skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire – an Eternal Fire of Peace, Love, and Brotherhood.

But if the light-skinned race makes the wrong choice of roads, then the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back to them and cause them much suffering and death to all the Earth’s people.”

Traditional people from all Nations have interpreted the ‘two roads’ as technology and spirituality. The head-long rush for technological development has left the Earth seared and in danger of destruction. It is time for the Anishnabe to share our traditional ways of living in harmony with Mother Earth with all the other races of the world. We must help them to choose the right road for the good of us all.