

Racial Pageantry & Settler Responsibility

Amanda Shore

Presented at the 1st Annual SNARCon, hosted by SNARC (Students Advocating Representative Curricula) at University of King's College on January 16, 2016.

Today we are gathering on unceded, unsurrendered Mi'kmaq land, and I would like to thank the Mi'kmaq Nation for hosting us. What's more, today we are going to conceptually travel to Anishinaabe land bordering Lake Huron; to the respective territories of the Chippewas of Newash, the Algonquin, Magnetewan, Shawanaga, Ojibwe, and Mississauga First Nations.

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

As I continue to study land sovereignty in this region, I acknowledge my identity as a former camp staff member, an art historian, and a white Christian woman, and its impact on my research. As a settler Canadian woman I have participated in camp traditions which imitate, appropriate, and misrepresent Indigenous ceremonies, names, and cultural practices of dress and craft. I acknowledge that I have been a beneficiary of and a participant in colonial acts of appropriation, and I understand the privileged posture from which I stand as I pursue personal decolonization.

Speaking directly to settler Canadians, Paulette Regan says,

we have to be willing to be uncomfortable, to be disquieted at a deep and disturbing level and to understand our own history ... For it is in this space of "not knowing" and working through our own discomfort that we are most open to deep, transformative learning. The kind of experiential learning that engages our whole being.

Thoughtful embarrassment encourages me to centerpiece the voices of Indigenous scholars as I sift through early camp histories, ensuring that contemporary Indigeneity stands in conversation with imagined Indianness. I advocate for the presence of Indigenous educators in camp programming, and correspondingly, I ensure that Indigenous scholarship determines the direction of my argument.

This project is not an attempt to "rectify" particular camp traditions. Mohawk scholar and activist Taiaiake Alfred explains that often decolonization is conceptualized in policy as "restitution" as opposed to "reconciliation" or "recovery." Restitution is a situation in which the colonizer "recognizes" the state of the colonized, focused more on "rectifying" guilt and shame. This recognition is not mutual, and only reinforces a Hegelian master/slave relationship between colonizer and colonized.

Siksika artist Adrian Stimson calls this "the healing industry," a colonial project which hopes to amend a long history of trauma through a series of short-term, one-time processes. Due to the structure of summer camps as learning institutions for children, it is crucial that decolonization be a long-term project. With increasing numbers of returning campers, children have been performing and re-performing racial stereotypes for years, and the delicacy of a child's long-term psycho-social

development requires that change is instituted at a gradual pace in order to promote deep understanding.

At the turn of 20th both Camp Fire Girls and the Woodcraft Indians were organizations that resisted industrialization and promoting a "return to nature," embodying the ideals of antimodernism. In the face of emerging technologies and consolidating industries, psychologists and early camp founders feared that over-stimulation in urban settings would impact a child's development, and they prompted a retreat to wilderness. The paradox of antimodernism is that any antimodern retreat necessarily points back toward the modern city—the purpose of the withdrawal being to prepare the individual to return in health to urban life. Strikingly, at the same time that summer camps in Ontario were flourishing in 1920, the Indian Act was being amended to make residential schools mandatory for Indigenous children aged seven to fifteen. The same year that more white settler children than ever were retreating to nature, Indigenous children of the same age were being dispossessed from communities and ancestral lands, to be subjected to colonial violence.

As an entry point into the local histories of early Ontario summer camps, I'd like to introduce you to Mary S. Edgar, who founded Glen Bernard Camp in 1922. Edgar's father ran a general store in rural Sundridge, which he maintained through trade with Indigenous vendors on nearby reserves. Through her father's business pursuits, Edgar befriended the daughter of a Mohawk chief from a Six Nations reserve, Dawendine, who became a poet and performer and visited the camp often (fig. 4). When Anishinaabe Chief Mudjeekwis visited the camp's Council Ring he told stories to the campers and, standing before Edgar he said, "I honour now your chief, Her name in camp shall be Ogimagua, Children's friend, in happy memory."

The current director of Glen Bernard, Jocelyn Palm attests to still wearing Mary S. Edgar's dress at

the Glen Bernard Council Ring, and there is still a cabin named after Dawendine. That being said, Palm eliminated much of the camp's Indian programming in 1977. Despite attempts to carefully sanitize the camp's problematic programming, it is clear that Glen Bernard did not pursue long-term decolonizing initiatives, and Mary S. Edgar's stories of cross-cultural exchange are all that remain of these friendships.

Camps that encourage imagination and make-believe ought to be valued as fertile environments, and existing programming can be used to re-imagine and re-mythologize identities. Outdoor classrooms ought to continue to pursue transformative experiential learning, maintaining the social structure while slowly introducing new songs, dances, activities, and stories. Rather than silencing all conversations about Indianness out of shame and discomfort, camps ought to allow Indigeneity to be re-imagined through partnerships with Indigenous educators, and by declaring the cultural, spiritual and territorial sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.

For camps on treaty land, acknowledging territory is a powerful way of reinforcing the contemporaneity of Indigenous nations, as well as the complex histories of shifting borders in the region. Within wilderness education the vague notion of "nature" denotes untouched wilderness, and programs like Leave No Trace encourage "respect for our wildlands." By making the shift in language from "our wildlands" to "Anishinaabe territory," for example, a drastic conceptual departure occurs—a shift from inheritance to stewardship. When land sovereignty becomes the backbone to outdoor ethics in North America, strategies of wilderness preservation will be activated out of humility and stewardship rather than out of ownership and responsibility. What Métis scholar and artist Dylan Miner calls "the methodology of visiting" encapsulates the art of social relations and the art of kinship from a Métis world view; a kind of visiting that yields

rich inter-generational and cross-cultural exchange. By applying Miner's theory to outdoor recreation, campers would be taught how to be good visitors and good guests, rather inheritors or new-age settlers.

My recommendations for the Canadian Camp Association are that they support actional, as opposed to reactionary projects which seek long-term healing and empowerment of Indigenous educators. Actional decolonization will mean acknowledging territorial sovereignty over land, as well as cultural sovereignty over dress, ceremonies, names, and symbols. It will mean dismantling a white settler authority over woodcraft and environmental programming in order to bring forward Indigenous educators. Actional decolonization at summer camps will mean comprehensive education for camp staff. Once productive programming is underway, actional decolonization will mean instituting long-term "send kids to camp" programs for Indigenous youth. Actional decolonization will mean constantly unsettling, questioning, reformulating and rebuilding decolonizing initiatives, in order to ensure that they remain a permanent project.

A recent work by Ryan Josey has challenged me to recenter my idea of what it means to be a treaty person. His current body of work centers around translation, particularly the translation of queer experiences in relation to hetero- and dominant structures. His most recent work *Colloquialism* deals with translation as it relates to settler responsibility and is, in my opinion, among his most unguarded and risk-driven work yet.

Overlaid on a photograph of his grandfather and great-grandfather's wharf in Spry Bay, Nova Scotia are two rows of purple text painted in gouache. The two rows of purple text reference the Two-Row wampum: one of the earliest and most cited treaties between settlers and Indigenous

nations. This beaded belt consists of two parallel lines of purple wampum beads on a white background, symbolizing the British government and the Six Nations Confederacy each travelling down the same river without interfering with one another. Josey's text reads, "have you ever walked into a room and forgotten what you came in for?" describing a dull feeling of unease upon realizing one's own settler amnesia. This is a work which didn't strike me on my first encounter with it, but that still keeps me up at night, illustrating a nuanced feeling that I still can't quite put my finger on. I encourage other settler Canadians, particularly in academia, to pay attention to that dull ache of forgetfulness toward place and land—and to grapple repeatedly with the feeling of trying to remember something that you never really knew in the first place.

Thank you.



Ryan Josey. *Colloquialism*, 2015. Gouache on inkjet print. Varied edition of 7. 27 cm x 43 cm