

Unsettling Aldo Leopold's Odyssey

By Julianne Warren

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Abstract: U.S. settler-conservationists tend to consider ourselves more virtuous than compatriots who take Land as a warehouse. As detailed by Dina Gilio-Whitaker, however, white supremacy “is the thread from which the American social fabric is woven,” including conservation institutions. As author of *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey* (2026), I suggest a methodology for further surfacing race/ism (any oppressions) spun into the influential schemes of Aldo Leopold's best-selling *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), recently reissued in 2020. I decompose my own past scholarship focused on his “land health” concept, to which his “land ethic” pointed—a vision that, from its starting point, still ruthlessly relegates, appropriates from, and assimilates Indigenous Peoples. This methodology is informed by Robert Pogue Harrison's examination of living relations with the dead. It applies Kyle Powys Whyte's framework of reckoning through three issues “that complicate any attempt to compare versions of Leopoldian and Indigenous ethics” on the way to any possibilities of difference-respecting coalitions needing, in common, habitable geographies. I renew proposals of Leopold that, paradoxically, can support refusals of his oblitative constructions. Within Whyte's three arenas, I continue to unearth, detail and disavow my bio-cultural ancestral legacies violently silencing Brown, Black, and Indigenous Peoples, undermining Indigenous self-determination and relationships. Beginning to end, the flow itself of my writing wants to enact a corrective turn from conservationists'—also patriarchal—bad habit of over-listening to a few figures, then, controlling discourse at others' expense. Three concluding grassroots episodes, in which I participated, mean to hold space for Alaska Native-led rejoinders to, and, already-ever distanced from settler-colonialist presumption as attached to their own starting points and desired futures.

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My above un/learning converges with the simmering effects of having read, for me, a re-orienting 2015 essay by philosopher, environmental justice organizer, and Potawatomi relative, Dr. Kyle Powys Whyte – “How Similar Are Indigenous North American and Leopoldian Environmental Ethics?” Deep thanks, Kyle, for this essay of yours that emerged, years ago, after an NEH Summer Institute where we met. And, immense thanks for your many other brilliant and transformational writings (see <https://kylewhyte.seas.umich.edu/articles/>), for your time, honesty, and valuing respectfulness. Your expertise along with steadfastness in respect and caring unexpectedly effected an oasis of healing within the too-often hurtful reaches of academic norms. A huge and warm thank you for reviewing drafts, for our conversations, and for facilitating a working group of mutually supportive scholars with overlapping and intersecting interests. I sometimes still pinch myself, with gratitude.

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¹ At first mention, in parantheses or text, methodology after Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press (2021), 3-4. I aim to identify others, respectfully, in ways they publicly self-identify, and, where not self-identifying, as “unmarked” so as not to continue to presume currently still-dominating positionalities as norms.

Noah Schlager, Yale's announcement of your 2018 talk, "Hard to Catch: Unpacking F&ES's Colonial History," revealed how I still felt on guard in some ways about this process. Afterwards, your arguments, evidence, and thesis helped move me more wholly into my responsibilities to join in such unpacking. Thank you for that, and, with respect for your many complementary, ongoing works as a Mvskoke-Creek, Florida Catawba/Cheraw, Jewish and Euro-American descendant and writer, deconstructing colonial legacies within western conservation, and, in practice, also creating space for Indigenous food sovereignty.

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I wish to honor the many works of Chicana feminist writer and literature professor, Dr. Priscilla Ybarra, including your 2016 *Writing the Good Life: Mexican American Literature and the Environment*, which continues to permeate and remake the environmental humanities and

environmental movements. Over the years, hearing you speak and getting to cross paths at various conferences, too, has opened doors for me respecting Chicana Land-based histories, ethics, and knowledges as crucial for coalition-building and habitable futures. And, I have a lot more to learn. I am most eager for your forthcoming book, which, as you also have shared publicly, is taking up not only the environmental but also the Mexican American legacy of the Aldo and Estella Leopold family in relation to colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy.

With warm respect, Dina Gilio-Whitaker – scholar, author, educator, independent consultant, and Colville Confederated Tribes descendant – thank you for your several volumes including your 2020 book *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice from Colonization to Standing Rock*. Your luminary work is essential for understanding how white supremacy and patriarchy weave with U.S. settler conservation. During these Covid years, I have learned also from your bold insights in many webinars and talks across many venues. I can only hope that conditions and forces eventually allow pleasures of meeting in person. Please accept my heart-felt gratitude for your thoughtfulness and consideration in our ongoing conversations. I deeply appreciate your clear-sightedness in action and kindness along the sometimes bumpy way, forging onward with this manuscript and beyond and besides it.

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Introduction: Three Triads

Settler-colonizer conservationists in the so-called United States tend to think of ourselves as virtuous compared with business-as-usual imperialists. Surely it is better to care about rocks, soils, waters, plants, animals, and air than not to. Our caring efforts, however, fall far short of skillfully protecting ecological conditions requisite to the health of all beings, including all human ones. As detailed by scholar-educator and Colville Federated Tribes member Dina Gilio-Whitaker, white supremacy “is the thread from which the American social fabric is woven.”² And, the fabric includes settler-colonizer conservationists and our institutions. In this short monograph, I propose a methodology for surfacing such threaded patterns, in a firm but generous tone, in order to refuse race/ism³ (and other oppressions) and to do better. Doing better includes supporting potentially stable difference-respecting coalitions that engage our common need for a habitable planet.

On the one hand, some of us settler-conservationists have critiqued culturally *imagined* separability of ecologically interconnected “parts” as antithetical to habitable land communities. On the other, many have continued to relegate Indigenous, Black, and Brown communities from customary geographies, disrupting their co-constituted relationships; to appropriate lands and labor from their people; and to assimilate everyone into empire’s all-inclusive appetites. Settler-

² Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as the Grass Grows*, 99. I have more recently drafted another and shorter manuscript titled with a Patricia Grace quote – “Books Are Dangerous.” In it I read Leopold’s “land pyramid” and other expressions of food relations central to his core “land health concept” in *A Sand County Almanac* and central to my book *Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey*, in Gilio-Whitaker’s terms, as a “structure of genocide.” Saying a community is inclusive or expanding in that direction, does not necessarily make it so nor prevent it being a force of domination. Also, in terms of food relations, among a question set that I consider is: What potential is there, if any, for the land pyramid/land health structures to resonate with Indigenous peoples’ “collective capacities to self-determine how they adapt to metascale forces, from climate change to economic transitions” (versus dominate Indigenous ecologies) in Kyle Powys Whyte’s words (“Indigenous Food Systems, Environmental Justice, and Settler-Industrial States,” as also quoted in Gilio-Whitaker, 75).

³ See Shay-Akil McLean, “Social Constructions, Historical Grounds.”

colonizer conservationists have failed in good land-relations. We have not successfully learned to listen, to daylight, and to take up our proper “response-ability” in order to unravel white supremacy, with its array of associated, hostile prejudices. In *not* doing so, we continue to push dominated communities into the frontlines of harm. We continue, ironically, to stifle their many time-immemorial adaptive knowledges and “adaptivity,”⁴ lifeways, and imaginations, which are integral to everyone’s possible flourishing. Response-ability,” resonating with terms of Kim Tallbear, professor and enrolled Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, requires “visionary resistance” to and “deep narrative and ontological revision” of the settler worldview and practices of exceptionalism and ownership. It requires attuning with grassroots collective genius, or, thinking also with Dominican Republic-born writer Junot Díaz, “radical hope.”⁵ Such are responses I try to model here.⁶

In this monograph, I turn to these neglected tasks, in particular, by decomposing my own past scholarship on the “land health” concept of Aldo Leopold (unmarked, 1887-1948) and critiquing his envisioning concept. To the best of my lights, I try to do this, as I’ve heard Gwich’in elders say, “in a good way.” My methodology is partly informed by Turkish-born Italian literary scholar Robert Pogue Harrison’s examination of living relations with the dead. It is fleshed out by my own experiences as a scholar, writer, and activist. A polyvalent approach encourages conversations with biocultural ancestors authentically—that is, in terms avoiding rote repetition while allowing for the renewal or avowal of their past proposals as well as disavowals,

⁴ See Whyte, “Indigenous Food Systems.”

⁵ Kim Tallbear, “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming.” At the same time, it feels important to acknowledge past sexual assault allegations against Díaz, perhaps tied with abuse of power. My default is to believe and support victims/accusers when other evidence may be hard to come by, which it often is.

⁶ I discuss more about this in my recent talk, “learning dead birdsong, learning first to listen” re: colonizers un/learning for decolonization, listening for Indigenous refusals/rejoinders/calls-in to kinship relations/ &, settler response- abilities.” *Environmental Futures Lecture Series*, University of Colorado-Boulder, February 15, 2021 at <https://www.colorado.edu/project/environmental-futures/lecture-archive>.

a complex process that can engender positive rejoinders. My argument encourages renewing, for instance, Leopold's own proposals for authentic conversations and the ideals of intellectual humility and transformational insight. These ideals paradoxically reveal his cultural-ancestral race/ist proposals in order to refuse them. My argument foregrounds the analytical framework of Kyle Powys Whyte, Potawatomi Citizen Band member and philosopher-activist, which challenges the settler presumption to authority in "environmentalist" realms. My ultimate search is therefore for positive rejoinders to authoritarian voices.

Whyte reckons with three issues "that complicate any attempt to compare versions of Leopoldian and Indigenous ethics." This comparison draws out not only commonalities but "openness to differences" that must be acknowledged if would-be landkeepers are to come together across settler-colonialist and Indigenous ethical heritages. The three issues are: 1) opposite-direction historical land-ethical narratives; 2) mutually unrecognizable practices of ethical land relations; and 3) procedural privileging of the Leopoldian view, which takes itself as "a single starting point"⁷ (Leopold's phrase) for evaluating and/or translating others' norms. Whereas, Whyte's approach is to practice "reciprocal dependence in acts of interpretation connecting different ethics."⁸

Following from these three challenges, I unearth and detail instances within Leopold's writings—and my own—that continue to privilege white settler-colonizer conservationists while silencing others, making for biased, untrue histories and paradoxically unethical ethics. My discussion engages Whyte's three issues. I detail how: 1) a Leopoldian narrative calling for ethical progress encompassing "land" presumptuously erases and subsumes Black, Brown, and Indigenous Peoples and their kinship relations; 2) a Leopoldian evolutionary-ethical narrative,

⁷ Aldo Leopold, "Wilderness." In *A Sand County Almanac*, 200.

⁸ Kyle Whyte, "How Similar Are Indigenous North American and Leopoldian Environmental Ethics."

linked with eugenics, homogenizes the “human race” into a Eurocentric civilization that, nonsensically, requires corrections to self-ruinous land-use practices while brutally disrupting Native Peoples relationships, self-determination, and land-ethical norms; 3) a Leopoldian scientific-ethical vision of land health is enmeshed with discrediting, also to usurp, Indigenous knowledges, land-ethical practices, and Lands.

From beginning to end, my desire is to enact a corrective turn from the settler-colonialists’—also patriarchal—bad habit of over-listening to a few figures who then control discourse at the expense of others and their cultures. From situating Leopold’s geography in terms of Indigenous sovereignties to critiquing a settler-colonialist conservation legacy woven with threads of white supremacy, this work opens to positive rejoinders by bearing witness to—as an invited participant in—stories of particular Alaska Native and First Nation land protectors and their communities.

In my final chapter, in correspondence with Whyte’s three issues and Leopold’s three injurious trajectories, three episodes bring to the surface Indigenous-led rejoinders to empire’s business as usual, including Leopold’s references to Alaska’s “virgin wilderness” and its “unnamed” features. The three episodes orient to particular, recent events and look toward emergences. First, Gwichyaa Zhee (Ft. Yukon) hosted the first Arctic Indigenous Climate Summit in 2019, featuring reconnecting and healing colonialist-broken ancestral relations—the reverse of calling for a new land ethic. Second, a 2018 U.S. Bureau of Land Management hearing on oil drilling in Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit (the Arctic Refuge) featured Indigenous persons claiming their existence in their own languages and worldviews—stories—incommensurable with empire’s dominant narrative and language. Third, at another Indigenous-

led Land protection event, a Gwitchin story about energy and land relationships, put into English, that *sounds* familiar in Leopoldian terms yet calls for listening for differences.

In the end, I am proposing to settler conservationists that we learn first to listen. I propose listening for being called in and/or refused by those we have overshadowed. I propose listening for frontline rejoinders to domination as usual that, in whatever form, is business as usual. And I propose listening for our “response-abilities” against settler ontologies and for deeply revised understandings both of “radical” and “hope” coming together. Listening in all these ways may encourage re/turning toward frontlines’ starting points, toward cross-heritage coalitions, toward just, reparative, re/generative actions, toward re/making good relations.

Chapter 1: Not the Whole Story

Aldo Leopold was a visionary twentieth-century ecologist, conservationist, and author of the posthumously published *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). His “place-based” book—translated from English into fourteen other languages—has sold millions of copies. It remains a best-seller by anyone’s standards. Within one year, a 2020 Oxford University Press edition with an introduction by author Barbara Kingsolver (unmarked) was purchased by tens of thousands of readers. In Part I of *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold shares stories of land encounters between 1935 and the mid-40s. These occur as he practices “land health” with his family on a worn-out settler-farm in Wisconsin. In Part II, “Sketches Here and There,” Leopold discusses ways the U.S. mainstream industrial-capitalist culture is “out of step” with a “conservation” focus. The geographical scope of the book broadens in this section, and the tone becomes more straightforwardly argumentative. In Part III, “The Upshot,” Leopold presents a philosophical inquiry that links his “land health” idea and his “land ethic,” central to my own book. Leopold most succinctly and famously defined the ethical “right” in land-use as that which “tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.”⁹

Leopold’s parents were first cousins, both children of nineteenth-century U.S. immigrants from Germany. In 1887 Leopold was born in Burlington, Iowa. This city was built on lands in which Meskwaki and Sauk Nations’ had already been at home for millennia.¹⁰ U.S. forces had

⁹ Leopold, *Almanac*, 224.

¹⁰ These two Nations have a long history of alliance against invaders. After slaughtering Sauk farmers in Illinois in 1832 (the “Black Hawk War”), the United States Government officially forced them to move and combined them with the Meskwaki into the Sauk and Fox Confederacy. In 1845, the U.S. forced the Peoples to reservations in Kansas. By purchasing thousands of acres of their own lands from the U.S., Meskwaki have retained sovereignty within their ancestral territory. See “Meskwaki Nation,” About Us: History” and Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, 111.

genocidally appropriated these lifescapes barely a generation before Leopold's own forebears' arrived.

In 1909, Leopold graduated from the new Yale Forest School, occupying customary lands of several Algonquin-speaking Peoples, including Mohegan and Peekwot. That same year, he began his career as a forest and game manager for the United States Forest Service in the U.S.-dominated and denominated Territories of Arizona and New Mexico. While these two would become new States in 1912, they are the countries of dozens of other First Nations, including tribes of Navajo, Apache, and many Pueblos. Each has their own history of violent U.S. removals, warfare, and cultural dismemberments. Near the southwestern forests he worked in lived children and grandchildren of African slaves. These “Buffalo Soldiers”—all-Black, Jim Crow U.S. Army regiments—were stationed to the south at Fort Huachuca, near the Arizona-Mexico border, entangled in border fights including against Apache and Pancho Villa.¹¹ At work in this geography, Leopold helped define the “wilderness idea” in the U.S. and establish “Gila Wilderness Area,” the first official wilderness in the U.S. forest system.

In 1933, the year his formative *Game Management* textbook was published, Leopold moved his family to Madison, Wisconsin. He taught at the University of Wisconsin until his 1948 death. Far longer than “Madison,” the area has been Dejope of the Ho-Chunk Nation.¹² Ho-Chunk, Meswaki and Sauk, Navajo, Apache, the Pueblos. At every step in his career, Leopold is treading on Native land. But then the same is true of all of us white settlers. And many, if not most, other Native Nations everywhere have long resisted and endure as sovereign Peoples inseparable from their ancestral places.¹³

¹¹See Savoy, *Trace*, 142-147.

¹²“Ho-Chunk Nation” ; Maggie Ginsberg, “The Story of Madison’s Indigenous People.”

¹³ “Native Land Digital.”

For my own part, as a white settler scholar and author, I have long been a student of Aldo Leopold's maturing ideas about land-human relationships. This is evident in the care I took writing *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey: Re-discovering the Author of A Sand County Almanac*. In both the 2006 and 2016 editions, however, I left out the above acknowledgments and much else. *Odyssey* was first written as my Ph.D. dissertation after a 10-year gap between degree programs. On my book's tenth anniversary, it was republished under my new name, since it came after a divorce and a new marriage. The divorce, occurring alongside my doctoral graduation, also involved alienation from the fundamentalist religious culture on which I had submissively imprinted for more than thirty years. My entire support system, like the marriage, fell to pieces. This shattering had been precipitated by an all-too-familiar and ever-unique story—enmeshment with a man experienced at psychological and sexual grooming, a smart person I had started out my project trusting as a leading academic and mentor. The personal and professional fragmentation, over time and involving much (ongoing) healing work, paradoxically, has turned out to include a gift of (also ongoing) release from my former untenable worldview at the intersection of religious fundamentalism and both U.S. conservative and liberal slants on patriarchy.

Meanwhile, the 2016 anniversary edition of my book was amended with my updated Preface and a generous Foreword by the provocative climate change author and dynamic movement builder, Bill McKibben (unmarked). As McKibben highlights, Leopold “was clearly interested in wilderness.” At the same time, McKibben emphasizes that Leopold’s “land health” ideal “was a quieter vision of the world, and perhaps a more radical one” than his interest in wilderness indicated. Leopold, did, after all, come to recognize, McKibben notes, that “there was

no way to wall man off from the rest of the world.” Land health emerges, then, as a radical vision within Leopold’s and my own culture’s extractive worldview.¹⁴

As I argue throughout this monograph, however, neither Leopold nor I have been nearly radical enough nor rightly, when it comes to seeing and resisting sewn-in settler-colonialisms and white supremacy—“the thread from which the American social fabric is woven”¹⁵—that erase others’ views, particularly Indigenous worldviews. While Leopold’s twentieth-century vision incorporates coalition-forming within a fragmented settler-colonial society, the habit of *not* attending to differences between the underlying assumptions of the dominating culture and those marginalized and oppressed by it continues to destabilize grounds for real and lasting alliances toward shared goals.

Meanwhile, initiated by advice from his daughter, McKibben, characteristically modest, has been on a voluntary journey leveraging his culturally privileged standing toward fresh norms of equity. His actions include transitioning in July 2020 to “emeritus status” in 350.org, an influential climate organization which he co-founded, “to lower the volume” on his own influence while remaining supportive. Before that, as a best-selling climate author, he practiced not hoarding, “passing the mic” to those who—with their communities—are often most hazarded yet least heard by those doing the climate warming.¹⁶ More amplified are Native, Black and Brown persons, especially who also are women, youth, and/or LGBTQIA+ and disabled persons.¹⁷

¹⁴ Warren, *Odyssey* (2016), xi-xii.

¹⁵ Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long As Grass Grows*, 99.

¹⁶ Tallbear’s reflections on not “hoarding” but sharing, with consent, of bodies and other things: “On Reviving Kinship and Sexual Abundance,” 157. “Leveraging privilege” in such terms, I think, includes not hoarding “the mic.” In a terms of good relations, consensual sharing becomes the norm.

¹⁷ McKibben, “A Bomb in the Middle of the Climate Movement” and “The most important thing an individual can do, is be a little less of an individual.” See also “A Letter to My Colleagues at 350.org.”

Among a host of important voices, Mary Annaïse Heglar and Bernadette Demientieff are two to whom I regularly listen. Heglar is a Black woman speaking broadly as a “Public Climate Person,” in her words.¹⁸ While a writer-in-residence at Columbia University’s Earth Institute, her challenging reflections hit home to me as I, too, had been a New Yorker living through Superstorm Sandy. I taught on the New York University faculty during the 2012 storm, which certainly laid bare worlds of inequities. This included among students I knew.¹⁹ This, and the wider situation—people already in precarious living situations, many both Black or Brown and poor also facing electricity outages and an unsafe water supply, living in wrecked homes and facing catastrophic storm losses—broke through a buffer of my white privilege.

Climate stressors rise from and magnify the injustices, oppression, and griefs perpetuated by white supremacy.²⁰ This includes Black students assigned “staple texts” like Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac*, only to find their lived experiences and interests “left in the dust.”²¹ It includes criminalization of Black people outdoors, as in the infamous Central Park birding incident.²² In 2020, reflecting on Sandy’s lessons, Heglar reiterated how climate science supports “the severity of the injustice”—that is, those contributing to climate change the least tend to suffer the most. “Sure,” she says, “but it’s not the entire story.” How will various sectors—educational, recreational, economic—lean into what sciences help point to? There’s a place, scientist or not, Heglar explains, for anyone who “understands the concept of ‘no fair.’”²³ This “no fair,” as she

¹⁸ Heglar, “We Can’t Tackle Climate Change Without You.”

¹⁹ Those who had the resources could move to safer places and continue studying. Those without, including some non-U.S. students, were sleeping cold on cots in Kimmel Center. See Warren, “Connecting the Dots.”

²⁰ See Burton, “People of Color Experience Climate Grief More Deeply Than White People,” and Nieves, Cohen, Bruggers, Fahys and Lavelle, “There is No Climate Justice Without Racial Justice.”

²¹ Gatheru, “It’s Time for Environmental Studies to Own Up to Erasing Black People; Savoy, 33-34; Jones, “The environmental movement is very white.”

²² See Lanham, “Forever Gone” and Betancourt, “Christian Cooper.”

²³ Heglar, “Can’t Tackle” and “How We Can Build A Hardier World After the Coronavirus: Passing the Mic.”

stresses, includes understanding climate—really, everything connecting to land and to health—as “the Black issue it is.”²⁴

Heglar’s “no fair” is also the Indigenous issue it is. I left New York, occupying Lenapehoking, for the city of Fairbanks, Alaska on unceded ancestral lands of the lower Tanana Dene. This is where I first met Bernadette Demientieff, Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich’in and Director of the Gwich’in Steering Committee. GSC was formed within her Nation in 1988 for defending Izhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit, “The Sacred Place Where Life Begins” (in U.S. political terms, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal Plain 10-02 Area), against oil and gas drilling threats. Demientieff stresses what defending this sacred land means for her: “This is not just about a wilderness,” she says. “Of course we are all interconnected up here to our land, water, and animals. And, if our animals and our land is sick then we are sick.”²⁵ Conveying her elders’ message, Demientieff emphasizes that she is “not an environmentalist or activist.” She is Gwich’in, and this “is not just about protecting our polar bears but this is about Indigenous voices being ignored, this is about a whole identity, about a people’s entire way of life being destroyed for profit.”²⁶

In *Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey*, I developed Leopold’s settler-cultural critiques of harmful, profit-driven, industrial capitalist land relationships. He evaluated such relations not only as imprudent but also as ethically “wrong.” As a rejoinder, he offered a positive narrative of a necessary transition to healthful human-land relationships. This narrative, still considered visionary by some thinkers in environmental ethics, was based in evolutionary and ecological science. Furthermore, Leopold’s evidence-based knowledge was entwined with “love and

²⁴ Heglar, “We Don’t Have to Halt Climate Action To Fight Racism.”

²⁵ Demientieff, Rothko Chapel Oscar Romero Award Ceremony.

²⁶ Demientieff, “What Will It Take to Cool The Planet?: Pass the Mic.”

respect” for self-organizing, regenerative communities of soils, waters, air, plants, and animals, including humans. In *Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey*, I went to great lengths to detail how Leopold, characteristically teachable and eager to learn, both unlearned some settler-conventional ways to imagine land and learned some new ways to see it. In this regard, for example, the “biotic pyramid” symbol he helped detail portrays land as an “fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals.”²⁷ Moreover, “wilderness,” he claimed, is the “most perfect norm” by which to evaluate the healthy functioning of a human-inhabited land’s “biotic pyramid.” Wilderness protection, Leopold also argued, should be a common ground for scientists and recreationalists at odds on other points within settler-colonial society.²⁸

“Wilderness,” however, is a site of danger and disruption, as Heglar, Demientieff, and so many other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color underscore.²⁹ It is a place where Black persons’ continue to be vulnerable to racialized violence by white persons. It is an ongoing act of boundary-making with real-life consequences that eliminate Lands’ Native Peoples, disrupting time immemorial relations. As a concept by and for (largely able-bodied) Anglo-colonizers, “wilderness” cancels the all-too-real and still-unfolding histories of the U.S. Government’s murderous and otherwise forcible relegations of Indigenous people. This race/ist will-to-“keep

²⁷ For flows of energy, see *Odyssey*, xxx-xxxiv. The section “Enlarging the Concept, Rippling Implications” shows in more detail how the development and narrative of Leopold’s land pyramid symbol may have influenced/been influenced by scientific colleagues, including some nearby ones in Wisconsin. In this section, I also help stretch his image from sky to fossil hydrocarbon. I highlight how his land pyramid symbol may operate in relation to global climate change and fossil fuel burning. I note Leopold’s early awareness of these connections to land health and highlight how Leopold could have been more specific about how energy, soil, water, and the flows of the land pyramid connect not only directly but indirectly. I do that scientific connecting to underscore how the land pyramid concept remains supported by institutional science. Within the context of settler conservation, it may remain relevant. I also began and ended this section with reference to colleagues like Henry Fairfield Osborn, prominent proponents of eugenics, unfortunately, without offering pertinent criticism.

For her philosophical take on Leopold, community and energy see, e.g., Roberta Millstein, “Is Aldo Leopold’s ‘Land Community’ an Individual. In O. Bueno, R. Chen and M.B. Fagan (eds.), *Individuation, Process, and Scientific Practices*. Oxford University press, 2018, 279-302.

²⁸ Warren, “Science, Recreation, and Leopold’s Quest for a Durable Scale.”

²⁹ Dunbar-Ortiz, *Indigenous Peoples’ History*; Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*; Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long As Grass Grows*.

out” engaged Leopold’s employer, the United States Forest Service, and Leopold himself. In both editions of my book, I now see how I repeated cancellations of my ancestral- and self-incriminating histories as a settler-colonialist writer, and by such complicitous repetitions I was helping perpetuate a legacy of violent actions in the present. This story, not unique to me, illustrates how critiquing for-profit capitalism (or commodifying socialism, for that matter) in land valuations doesn’t necessarily reveal the linkages with U.S. white supremacy and settler-colonialism—its genocides, forced assimilations, land thefts, and essential slave labor.³⁰

I concluded *Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey* as a history of radical conservation work begun by Leopold but left undone at his death. For me at the time, land health was the dynamic ideal to which his land ethic pointed along with so many challenges ahead to enact it. Between 2006 and 2016, as I note in the Preface, I could detail all the more clearly how that must be true of my own work as well. Throughout that decade I had become deeply engaged, via 350.org and the broadening fossil fuel divestment movement, in intergenerational community organizing for system change. As a faculty member, this had meant becoming a better listener to youth, and for several years I was active in co-constituting my relations with students, both in the classroom and in climate justice actions.³¹ That decade’s experiences had also made salient to me related points in Leopold’s works. For example, it seemed important to note Leopold’s historic advisory role in launching the Conservation Foundation, because they later convened one of the earliest conferences on anthropogenic climate change. Leopold’s insight, during a world war, that “many conservation problems heretofore local will shortly become global,” appeared all the more

³⁰ See *Odyssey*, 171, 443 (Note 85). In depth, see Demuth, *Floating Coast*.

³¹ I moved from traditional lands of Lenapehoking New York to those of Tanana Dene Fairbanks, Alaska. Members of many Alaska Native Nations and relations lead in community here, including Inupiat, Yup’ik, and Gwich’in. I have been involved in grassroots community organizing in both geographies for over a decade.

relevant in the twenty-first century.³² I was compelled to explore how Leopold’s ecological concept of land—the land health focus of *Odyssey*—might remain germane, since it was not only temporally dynamic but also “spatially elastic.” His “biotic pyramid,” in this emerging view, linked naturally from local to world-wide scales and from fossil hydrocarbons underground to soils and industrial emissions of global atmospheric carbon bringing on global warming. Yet, besides recognizing that those “least responsible for escalating troubles”³³ were suffering first and most, I still did not directly face settler-colonialism and white supremacy.

In fact, I will point to a particularly glaring reprise of such harmful arrogance in the conclusion to the tenth anniversary edition Preface to *Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey*. In the 1940s, Leopold had called for a “new kind of [land-health-minded] people.” Uncritically, I followed in his footsteps to propose a “new name for this offshoot of our own evolving species [*Homo sapiens*]*—Homo generativus.*” Along with cringe-worthy hubris, implicit in that sentence is the ongoing erasure of ancient and still-living Indigenous Peoples, from whom lands have been stolen, and Black and Brown people, who have been stolen from lands world-wide. Yet more. In my academic training and in my own academic work, I had learned and propagated the institutionalized erasures of these erasures in settler-colonial story-telling. Meanwhile, many Indigenous cultures have long proven what to Leopold remained merely wishful thinking, that “they have no need of the word ‘conservation’” because they already “have the thing itself.”³⁴ Nor, it seems, do all systems and all Peoples require transformation so much as liberation.

It is now my “response-ability,” joining so many others, to learn how to do better. My doing better means learning first to listen.³⁵ My doing better includes commitments to go yet

³² *Odyssey*, xxiv.

³³ *Odyssey*, xxxv.

³⁴ Leopold. “The Farmer as a Conservationist.” In *For the Health of the Land*, 172.

³⁵ W.S. Merwin, “Learning a Dead Language.”

deeper and wider into my birth-culture's dominating—and routinely buried—assumptions. These assumptions have long structured relationships bearing injustice while undermining conditions of health and flourishing, and they remain still potently embedded in U.S. conservation, including its Leopoldian legacies. Still, Heglar holds space for anyone in the climate movement who “understands the concept of ‘no fair.’” Demientieff is likewise generous: “we [Gwich'in] don't only think about...our people,” she says, but also of “our human race” and “the many American people who deserve a chance at survival.” However, to leave out Heglar's summons to see climate as “the Black issue it is” and Demientieff's mustering non-Gwich'in to “stand with the Gwich'in Nation,” and not the other way around, would be to *not* hear them.

First comes learning to listen in a good way.

Chapter 2: Responsible Listening to Ancestors

Bernadette Demientieff's elders call her to "to go out and tell the world that we are here." They say, "Do it in a good way," and "That 'do it in a good way,'" she acknowledges, "that is a very simple sentence, but it's not always easy, especially when we are up against so much dishonesty and misleading statements from our own [U.S.] government."³⁶ To learn about and "stand with the Gwich'in Nation," as she calls for, however, I need to *talk back* to my own bio-cultural elders and ancestors who have stood against hers. At the same time, I want to do this with care.

At a glance, it might seem a faster route to racial and reparative justice, equity, and decolonization to turn the white supremacist, settler-colonial eraser around on my work and that of my forebears, including Leopold's.³⁷ Yet, as Harrison brings to insightful life in his *Dominion of the Dead*, deleting our culture-bearers could no more be done than canceling our birth parents. Each of us is layered with some heritage/s of shared assumptions and values that also define any norms of "virtue" and organize social institutions, including the institutions of conservation.³⁸ What else could explain our existences, whether we acknowledge ourselves and ancestors or not?³⁹ And how, other than owning offences, can any of us reckon and do better?

Only in rare cases might a person or heritage be so abusive as to not have some brightness, including ourselves as human beings who wish to live on. At the moment our wish occurs, so does the certainty of our eventual death. As much as we might try to delay that

³⁶ Demientieff, Rothko.

³⁷ See Sahagún, "John Muir's legacy."

³⁸ See Gilio-Whitaker, 92-95; Harrison, *Dominion of the Dead*, ix.

³⁹In a brutal irony, Alaska Natives in communities where racist colonizers have punished them for fidelity to ancestral identities in efforts to forcibly assimilate them into their own, suicide is 3.5 times higher than the U.S. national average. See "We Breathe Again."

certainty, the return to the company of our dead is inevitable. We can hardly escape them. But this does not necessarily lock rising generations into rote repetition of ancestral proposals. On the contrary, by facing them and disrupting our own willful ignorance, rising generations can make choices. By learning to listen on the way to understanding, a way of respect, we can choose with care. Otherwise, we walk down a one-way street of narcissistic authority—dead to living, elder to younger, colonizer to colonized, human to more-than-human. This one-way path, perhaps like the insatiable monster Windigo that mother, scientist-educator, author and enrolled Citizen Potawatomi Nation Robin Wall Kimmerer describes,⁴⁰ – deadends in the abuses of dominance. Listeners, however, can hear those voracities many predecessors have preferred to keep hidden. This includes logics of “settler-native-slave relationships” that erase their own tracks while leaving structures intact that erode land and violently eliminate Black and Native Peoples, as discussed by Black feminist philosopher Kristie Dotson.⁴¹ Listeners can bring the secreted into the open, and thus take responsibility.

Harrison gleans insights from within an ancient to modern, secular Western legacy that might help some of its bio-cultural descendents into a methodology for becoming better living relations, and, eventually, ancestors. Through “intercourse with the dead that is frank and ongoing with the past,” in Harrison’s words, some may move toward understanding what our predecessors are saying.⁴² To the degree that listeners hear and understand, we can flex

⁴⁰ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 303-309.

⁴¹ Black feminist philosopher Kristie Dotson makes a striking argument for ongoing settler-native-slave props that include “hiding the logic of [the violence of] elimination [of Black and Native Peoples as well as Land viewed as “resources”]...so as to extinguish its trail” i.e., “The ability to permanently disappear the capacity to track settler-native-slave relations, while leaving its structure of dominion and domination intact with a “New Indigenous,” is precisely the end of settler colonial aspirations. This place becomes unequivocally “home” in “On the Way to Decolonization,” 195.

⁴² My bio-cultural ancestors mostly were working-class craftspeople, farmers, with a couple of Calvinist theologians mixed in. Maternal and paternal lines arrived to Turtle Island North America variously from Friesland, Wales, and Germany. At most, seven generations of my family are buried in traditional Munsee Lands, northernmost of Lenni Lenape, aka the Catskills, New York. My uncle, John Burroughs (1837-1921), had a large platform as a writer from

responsible agency. We may, that is, discerningly say “yes” or “no” or “wait, I don’t know” (yet?) to repeating the pasts’ offerings. We may decide to disavow an old proposal outright, in whole or in part. We may decide to avow an antique pattern and practice it by rote, or we may update and renew it. In a third response, listeners may reciprocate with our ancestors by exchanging avowals and refusals for possible alternatives, filling imaginative voids with fresh options. In Harrison’s terms, we may offer “reciprocative rejoinders” to unwanted schemes, answering both coercive ancestors and those “who seek to make the historical present conform to an ‘outstripped’ past.” In any case, this conversational mode with the dead holds space and time for the living. In the present, we may perceive anew multiple pasts and multiple futures. Our perceptions hold open the possibility for complex, geographically particular reciprocities that produce echoing consequences across generations.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the fates of ancestors continually has yet to be decided by the descendants. “The old teachings,” Kimmerer highlights, “recognized that Windigo nature is in each of us...that we might learn why we should recoil from the greedy parts of ourselves.”⁴³ This applies equally to the institutions reifying greed. Reflecting on this might also support giving to others the consideration that we as individuals and communities would

this geography encouraging European settlers to root in and make home on their stolen Land. I have not yet learned about much more about my family’s particular roles in spreading killing diseases, genocide, and in any other ways relegating a great many citizens of a Native Confederation. Some Munsee citizens moved north beyond the U.S. border. A Munsee Delaware Nation community lives on today in London, Ontario, numbering in a few hundreds, compared to many thousands before European contact. See “Munsee-Delaware Nation, *nalahiya lenape*,” *Our History*. Others, after many trials, are members of Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians in Lands surrounded by so-called Wisconsin. See <https://www.mohican.com>. My close kin also were surely part of earlier years of growing the economic network, particularly tanning, dependent directly or indirectly on the enslavement of Africans.

⁴³ Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, 306. For a detailed look at a complex case of land-use conflicts and state (of Wisconsin) greed versus Anishinaabe treaty rights, differing worldviews, and Tribal-led Land protection organizing see Nancy Langston’s, “The Wisconsin Experiment,” *About Places Journal*, 2017 at <https://placesjournal.org/article/the-wisconsin-experiment/>.

like to receive, *perhaps* even in our most ardent disavowals.⁴⁴ Adding to the complexities of the living-dead conversational framework are paradoxes wherein ancestors' unacceptable, even egregious attitudes and behaviors flow in and out of acceptable, even excellent ones. I hear this paradox, too, in returning, yet again, to Leopold's legacy and to the broader U.S. conservation movement as a still-powerful institution today.

In *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, I include a story of Leopold's changing relationship with an early-career mentor. I repeat this story here in order to show respect for Leopold as one of my own most important early-career guides. By telling this story, I retrieve and avow how Leopold himself modeled respectful, compassionate, non-violent disagreement with his own mentor. The avowal in turn helps me, paradoxically, do likewise toward Leopold.

William T. Hornaday (unmarked) loomed large for Leopold as a young supervisor in the United States Forest Service (USFS). In 1915, Leopold was assigned oversight of the USFS work on game and fish conservation in District 3 of the American Southwest. Hornaday's *Our Vanishing Wild Life* (1913) stoked Leopold's passion. Responsively, he established so-called Game Protective Associations throughout the new states of Arizona and New Mexico and became a nationally recognized, award-winning activist for his work⁴⁵ In addition, the work led Leopold to write the first USFS *Game and Fish Handbook*. In this 1915 monograph, Leopold imitated Hornaday's words and combative tone. "If it is a crime to steal \$25," Leopold wrote, "what shall we say of the extermination of a valuable species?"⁴⁶ This kind of statement led me to assert, in *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, that "Leopold would remain firm in his belief in the goodness of life and in the wisdom of protecting it." But I also saw that Leopold parted ways

⁴⁴ The right to/necessity for violence, e.g. in self-defense or self-determination, is a related conversation, but one I do not engage here.

⁴⁵ *Odyssey*, 91.

⁴⁶ *Odyssey*, 94.

with Hornaday “on the best means of protecting wildlife.” To their intergenerationally shared concern over threatened fauna, Leopold brought a fresh iteration of training in an emerging profession—that of scientific forest management—plus innovation.

Hornaday’s protectionist view had been popular for much of the previous generation. It recommended captive propagation, predator control (e.g., killing wolves and hawks), and limiting or banning hunting in new areas of “refuge.” By the 1920s, various scientific conservationists were grumbling about other causes of population declines, mainly shrinking habitat, and the need to address them. In addition, hunters wanted to hunt and to have abundant game. Rather than merely expanding refuges where animals were protected *from* hunting, Leopold rejoined with the alternative that more, smaller refuges could protect game *for* hunting by encouraging the overflow of animals into surrounding areas.

In 1928, Leopold took a research position that allowed him to test the hypothesized consequences of his own proposal. He applied scientific forest management principles to wildlife. He interrogated the past and present conditions of animals and their habitats. Then, he asked what might have caused any changes in population numbers.⁴⁷ The collected evidence pointed to several habitat-related factors, besides hunting, that influenced game numbers. It followed that these other factors might be manipulated by refuge managers in order to increase populations enough to provide the desired overflow of “game animals” for hunters. Before Leopold’s new evidence was published, he paid a visit to Hornaday, 73 years old and bedbound.

⁴⁷ He also made analogies between plant and animal populations and human ones (*Odyssey*, 143). His line of questioning led him to wonder what defined “normal” land conditions. This turned out to be a pivotal question for him. Because the answer was complex, beyond full human comprehension and thus beyond control, Leopold shifted attention to lands’ self-organizing traits as a whole. He came to envision *Homo sapiens* (still racialized, especially assimilatively, in white supremacist terms) as, properly, in his words, “plain members and citizens of biotic communities.” When people synched harmoniously with the rest of lands’ self-organizing patterns they participated in “land health,” he described. And, he came to view this goal not only as prudent, but also as ethically “right” (For lengthy discussions, see *Odyssey*, Chapters 6 and 11).

Leopold wanted his elder to “know first hand” about his new work. He asked his old mentor to “give me a chance” for another visit, before declaring any potential disapprovals in public.

Hornaday, holding fast both to his opinion and to his respect for his young colleague, agreed.

Five years later, these contrary findings became embedded in Leopold’s *Game Management*, a standard university textbook for over a generation. Before the publication of the textbook, Leopold had again courteously communicated with his old friend and mentor. In an April 1933 letter, rebuttals to the side, Leopold thanked Hornaday for his past guidance. “My whole venture into this field,” Leopold said, “dates from your visit to Albuquerque in 1915 and subsequent encouragement to stay in it.”⁴⁸

If Aldo Leopold were still alive, I would ask him, in turn, “to give me a chance.” I would want to talk over any disagreements with my evidence-linked valuations opposing his works’ intergenerational bequest of white supremacist and settler-colonial assumptions. I would listen to hear his response. Whatever that might be, I would also thank him for his past guidance. “Dear Mr. Leopold,” I might write, “My whole venture into this field of expanding care for others, including inseparable justices—gender, racial, social, climate—dates from my attention to your ‘extension of ethics’ to ‘man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it.’”

I hear Leopold speaking from the dead, and I have listened to his voice long and hard. I have also heard it flowing through his daughter Nina Leopold Bradley (unmarked), my elder supporter while living, also now passed on.⁴⁹ These ancestral voices encourage me to stay in the ongoing conversation. Their voices encourage me to keep doing better. Now, “doing better”

⁴⁸ *Odyssey*, 103, 126.

⁴⁹ Warren, “Weeds and Seeds and Shovels.” In this piece, I quoted Leopold uncritically: “There were once men...” inhabiting the “Rio Gavilan” lands, he said, and I echoed him with “by ancient people,” referring to Apache and others and as if only alive in a past tense.

means saying “no, *and...*” to crucial aspects of that legacy. It means responding to Leopoldian proposals with avowals and renewals, but also with firm refusals to repeat ancestral structural-relational, settler-colonial oppressions. “Doing better” furthermore means first listening to Indigenous, Black and others oppressed by this dominating legacy, for their own refusals, rejoinders and possible callings-in to settlers enacting our response-ability.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ I further develop these aspects—Indigenous refusals, callings-in, rejoinders and settler response-ability—in a “listening first” methodology in Warren, “learning dead birdsong, learning first to listen.”

Chapter 3: Another Return, Revisioning

In the closing words of “Wilderness,” the essay Leopold had intended to conclude *A Sand County Almanac*, the writer projected a sweeping role of wilderness:

The ability to see the cultural value of wilderness boils down, in the last analysis, to a question of intellectual humility. The shallow-minded modern who has lost his rootage in the land assumes that he has already discovered what is important; it is such who prate of empires, political or economic, that will last a thousand years. It is only the scholar who appreciates that all history consists of successive excursions from a single starting point, to which man returns again and again to organize yet another search for a durable scale of values. It is only the scholar who understands why the raw wilderness gives definition and meaning to the human enterprise.”⁵¹

Although he does not refer to T.S. Eliot’s (unmarked) poem, Leopold’s conclusion resonates with “Little Gidding” (1943), where the poet feels a way through the world war’s violent disruptions. Perhaps like the aftermath of an air raid, the poem bestows a sense of strangeness on once-familiar things, pointing toward the resumption of more stable times in the midst of uncertainty:

⁵¹ Leopold, “Wilderness,” *SCA*, 200. Leopold intended his essay titled “Wilderness” to conclude *A Sand County Almanac*. In the wake of his death, however, colleagues and family members chose “The Land Ethic” to conclude his posthumously published book. If “Wilderness” had kept its ultimate place, however, its encouragement to see “the cultural value of wilderness” as a question of “intellectual humility” and to keep returning to it would have echoed not only from his corpus as a whole, but also from his most famous book’s last page. See Ribbens, “The Making of *A Sand County Almanac*.”

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁵²

In both texts, the writer returns to a “single starting point” for a renewal of previous experiences and, at the same time, a fresh start. A scholar-explorer, in another arrival, might come to see that the place of return is bombed beyond recognition, eroded into the sea, or, that it was only ever a poorly invented geography. Correcting for the latter surely calls for “intellectual humility” as well as a “deep revision” of humility itself and other relational values wrapped up with a deceitful fabrication.

Returning to the concluding words Leopold intended for *A Sand County Almanac*, leads again to paradox, one involving avowals, disavowals, and rejoinders. Retrieving Leopold’s adaptive process, I renew his “question of intellectual humility” in terms of teachability. Openness to un/learning led Leopold to some still-important even “radical” critiques of dominating culture. At the same time, following his footsteps, requires me, in this return to his “single starting point” to refuse that “raw wilderness” as an arrogance of colonialist fantasy rooted in white supremacy and manifest destiny.⁵³

My refusal also returns me to key norms that I failed to surface in my own past “land health” scholarship. As I grapple with shifting away from core assumptions of my ancestral-

⁵² T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *Four Quartets*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943.

⁵³ Justified by the “Doctrine of Discovery” by which European colonialists granted themselves rights “by discovery” superior to Native Nations rights of occupation and usufruct. See Gilio-Whitaker, 25; Dunbar-Ortiz, *Indigenous Peoples’ History*; Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future*.

ethical perspective, I turn toward keeping in focus the institution-structuring relationships between chattel slavery, land theft, eugenics, and genocide. On the way to exchanging these unjust ancestral proposals for just and caring alternatives, I listen for lived experiences and knowledges shared by Black and Indigenous voices.

Leopold spent his career as a scientist trying to unlearn destructive land-uses and learn how “to live on a piece of land without spoiling it.”⁵⁴ His adaptive process was part of a continuous cycle of hypothesis-making and hypothesis testing—a pattern of imaginative guessing and ground-truthing reality checks. Throughout his career, Leopold showed not only that he could change others’ minds but that he could also change his own as demanded by new, convincing evidence.⁵⁵ As his close colleague, the English ecologist and author, F. Fraser Darling, observed, Leopold “was always seeing and learning.”⁵⁶ Indeed, Leopold’s intellectual

⁵⁴ Leopold, “Engineering and Conservation,” in *The River of the Mother of God*, 249-254.

⁵⁵ *Odyssey*, 126. When Leopold was hired by the University of Wisconsin, Hornaday wrote complimenting him for helping in “the struggle to save American game and sport from finally going over the precipice, AD 1940.”

⁵⁶ *Odyssey*, xxix.

Anyone who has delved even a little into Leopoldian thinking has learned from historian and biographer, Curt Meine. I have learned a lot.

In his writings, Meine has viewed Leopold as “a mirror to our environmental responses,” (e.g., in “The Secret Leopold,” 2020), a person who changes, and a person who believes in and helps make change.

Some years ago I started noticing Meine’s repetition of references to the final paragraphs of *A Sand County Almanac*: “I have purposely presented the land ethic as a product of social evolution because nothing so important as an ethic is ever ‘written.’” Leopold compared that process to the emergence of the “Decalogue” of Moses (of Abrahamic religions), which, Leopold said, was not written by one person, but, “evolved in the minds of a thinking community.” For example, Meine (2020, 18) says, “Leopold was not alone in his prescient views. He was...part of a ‘thinking community’ that struggled to meet the conservation challenges of its day.”

Literally, on the eve of posting this, a new article by Meine has just arrived, “Land, ethics, justice, and Aldo Leopold,” 2022. I am still digesting it nor is this the place for a detailed response. Preliminarily and generally, however, I am hearing Meine, again, from a “thinking community” perspective, argue that any ethic composed “(however labelled) was not static and *could not be* exclusionary.” Meine says that the ethic’s “core tenets of ecological interdependency inherently subvert racist, classist, sexist, and white supremacist attitudes.” I can appreciate Meine’s wishes for these things to be so, and, what sound and look like his efforts to help bring them about.

At the same time, thanks to what I have needed/been also un/learning from/with others, I have come to believe that such wishes may actually obstruct the needed, additional “scrutiny,” which Meine, too, says he supports. Again, it can be hard to put one’s finger on. But, there is risk in “the thinking community” perspective, that is, of using it as a loophole to overlook the existing content of “The Land Ethic” and other Leopoldian conservation ideas that incorporate white supremacy and that still get read, are institutionalized, and are in other ways enacted. This is with ongoing violent consequences to Indigenous, Black and Brown and other persons and communities who, with their own re/generative Land relationalities, may actually wish to be “excluded,” yet, not be dominated.

humility, in many cases, might itself be another reciprocative rejoinder to his elders' and ancestors' imperial culture—challenging both how particular core cultural values were expressed and those very values themselves.

One example of how Leopold's fresh insights did not always challenge core cultural values emerges from that early disagreement with Hornaday. Leopold and Hornaday never disagreed over care for "wild things" and the need to protect threatened forms of life. Leopold was merely interested in updating his mentor's approach to doing so. In another instance, Leopold's ongoing self-education led him to quit participating in a wide-spread federal project to exterminate wolves to save deer. Leopold had both awakened to an individual wolf's beauty and learned more about ecological relationships of the species within their communities, a double insight recorded in "Thinking Like a Mountain." He understood that without wolves, deer

Meine does acknowledge, also quoting Whyte, the need for "careful consideration of potential differences" by people who subscribe to "different ethics." Meine does not quite dig into this, although the "moment is ripe," leaving it to others. Besides this, Meine still says that "'The Land Ethic' was nothing if not a call for expansive and inclusive participation in environmental stewardship" and that "the land ethic represented a move away from a colonial and anthropocentric view of the land, and toward something more aligned with Indigenous views...." This, I fear, at the least, veers dangerously close to assuming a "convergence view" in Whyte's terms (see fn 67), which hazards papering over those important differences in silencing ways that are not helpful to coalition-making.

On the other hand, in 2020, Meine contended that the current "situation ...will ensure that attention will continue to focus on Leopold...a unique medium through which to address recurring" matters of conservation. This perspective seems to veer dangerously towards, in Whyte's terms, a "translational view" (see fn 67), which would continue imposing Leopold on others who, again, at the very least, have no need of him. In 2022, though, Meine, turns to Leopold "not as an apotheosis of conservation but as an essential transitional figure within a still broader, ongoing movement informed by an ever-evolving ethic of care." Perhaps so. (Although, again, with what further caveats to protect against ongoing privileging of a spokesperson/s, such as Leopold/ians, that overshadows others? E.e., Would that be only one movement? Does everyone contributing belong or need to belong to a movement? Whose movement/s? What might be other, better questions?)

Not only do I agree with Meine, 2022, in supporting further scrutiny of Leopold and other dominating figures that may "further undermine their iconic status;" I also believe that dominating cultural habits that set up icons in the first place are problematic and require undermining on the way to stabilizing coalitions for abolition, decolonization in action, and good Land-Peoples relations.

I applaud Meine when he says: "The work of self-scrutiny applies to the present as well, in the active countering of the same elements of racism and injustice in our own lives that we identify in historic figures." Indeed, the work applies to surfacing historic white supremacy-colonialism to counter it now actively in personal assumptions about privileges, in still-dominating systems and structures, and in ethical, canonical, written, and procedural norms of U.S. conservation, its global influences, and elsewhere.

populations spiked and browsed their forests faster than plants and soils could regenerate, leaving all without sustenance, including human hunters. This new information informed but did not alter his pre-existing ethic of care.

At other times, however, what Leopold discovered through his “successive excursions” challenged deep-seated cultural assumptions or core values themselves. For instance, Leopold observed that severe erosion and other ill consequences of overgrazing eat away the sustaining capacities of the U.S. Southwest. A decade later, he witnessed the midwestern Dust Bowl, caused proximately by overheating. As he dug deeper into ultimate causes, his experiences led him to rebuke some of the major land-relationship assumptions of his settler-colonial culture. One of these assumptions was the prioritization of a commodity value of land to accommodate capitalists’ insistence on increasing wealth.⁵⁷ The standard of capitalism, Leopold came to understand, undermined not only long-term land-community health but also, eventually, the future profits and prospects of even the most comfortable elite.

Leopold often followed critiques of his bequeathed culture with impressive alternatives. His disavowals of historic cultural habits, as I detailed in *Odyssey*, were followed by series of innovative frameworks and methodologies from scientific forestry to game management, including the protective designations of refuge and wilderness areas. Moreover, his land ethic developed hand-in-hand with his intra-culturally radical vision of land health. Leopold took “wilderness,” in the latter case, to be the “most perfect norm” for land doctoring and, as we saw at the opening of this chapter, the “starting point” to which “man returns again and again to organize yet another search for a durable scale of values.”

⁵⁷*Odyssey*, 248.

Yet in none of Leopold's returns to "raw wilderness" as a values source did he humbly disavow the concept itself as an unverifiable abstraction, and for all his deep thinking he did not fashion a rejoinder that would transform the concept from its origins. Moreover, he did not refuse "wilderness" as involving rote repetition of his bio-cultural ancestors' violent removals of human beings other than white settler-colonials. He did not reject the arrogant cruelty to Indigenous Peoples nor the ways in which the U.S. economy has always been tied to African slaves working stolen lands.⁵⁸ To recognize this—happening right before his and other white settlers' eyes—would have meant another, a deeper, radical challenge to their and our own participation in the dominating cultural land-use assumptions, structures, and practices. It would contest, moreover, the founding U.S. national narratives underpinning dominating, settler scientific institutions and the conservation movement, and later, environmental and sustainability movements with ongoing consequences.

⁵⁸ Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature."

Chapter 4: Differences That Make a Difference

As part of his intellectual and ethical development, Leopold grew aware of power-diminishing fragmentation within the U.S. conservation movement in his lifetime. He saw, for example, the conflicts between sustained-yield foresters, ecological researchers, recreationists, and hunters. In addition to helping lead Leopold to perceive land elements as interconnected, the need to respect the differences in land-use emphases led him to try coalition-building. He thus did not urge merging “*organizations* so much as *rationales* for preserving wilderness.”⁵⁹ He proposed that a society at constant odds with itself might be grounded in a deeper, shared “durable scale of values.” Returning to this discussion now, yet again, there may be much in Leopold’s legacy to re-avow. At the same time, the ideas of durable scale and coalitions of interests raise questions of how best to orient within “differences that make a difference.”⁶⁰ Moreover, any good renewals of these ancestral proposals must first acknowledge their context as “the” manifest destiny realm of settler-colonial white supremacy.

If there is any chance of creating coalitions stable enough to support meaningful, just climate and land protection, colonizer-conservationists cannot mistake Heglar’s and Demientieff’s generous care for others as an excuse to forget that these land issues are Black and Indigenous issues. Again, it calls for Dotson’s keeping *in focus* “politics of elimination” of “settler-slave-native relations.”⁶¹ To make good relations, in other words, as Quechua descendent and collaborative researcher Andrea Vásquez-Fernández and Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation member and Canada Research Chair Cash Ahenakew pii tai poo taa (flying eagle) stress, potential non-

⁵⁹ Warren, “Durable Scale,” 99.

⁶⁰ Elena Ruíz and Kristie Dotson, “On the Politics of Coalition,” *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (July 2017): 2, 13. Also in Whyte’s chapter.

⁶¹ Dotson, *Decolonization*, 195.

Indigenous allies and accomplices with Indigenous Peoples will acknowledge the “incommensurability of clashing ‘notions.’” We will cease privileging “western” paradigms like “sustainable development” that reproduce settler-colonial exploitation of “Mother Earth,” of Native lands, and that lead to the genocides of Indigenous Peoples. Those calls seem applicable to traditional land-relational English-language terms such as “conservation,” “environmentalism,” or “wilderness protection,” and perhaps even the current terms “climate justice” and “just transition.” These authors also stress attending to “the limitations of what we cannot imagine from our entrenched westernized frames of reference and/or intercultural equivocality.” More exists in “desired futures” than anyone—particularly settlers— can dream up from a position within a dominating culture.⁶²

Directly regarding Leopold’s ongoing legacy in U.S. conservation, Kyle Powys Whyte specifies the need to daylight underlying Leopoldian assumptions in relation to Indigenous ones. He explains that while there is the chance of convergence of insights from distinct origins, such cannot be determined without paying close attention to incommensurabilities among “notions” and the challenges of translation. Here, too, such crucial differences, especially if left buried, will fester into ongoing silencing, violence, and bad history.⁶³ These hidden differences would undermine our chances for genuine and long-term coalitions.

With this in mind, Whyte details three pithy issues of deep comparison that “must be reckoned with.”⁶⁴ This would be on the way to bringing P/people(s) together around any genuinely complementary if not commensurate land-ethical orientations. One troubling

⁶² Vásquez-Fernández and Ahenakew pii tai poo taa, “Resurgence of relationality,” 65-70. Speaking in terms of “respect” and in the name of “sustainable development,” see Burkhart, *Indigenizing Philosophy Through the Land*; Whyte, “Indigenous Climate Change Studies” and “Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene.” See also Tallbear, “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming,” discussing Estes’s term “settler ontocide.”

⁶³ Discussed with Kyle Whyte, personal communication, 2021.

⁶⁴ Whyte, “How Similar Are Indigenous North American and Leopoldian Environmental Ethics,” 2.

difference is that Leopold's morally ascendant narrative of "all history" is the reverse experienced by many Native Peoples by force of colonization. This includes acknowledging a brutal irony, for Leopold's tale nonchalantly imposes settler-colonial guilt and possible "self-redemption" on many Indigenous Peoples whose land-ethical-kinship relations settler-colonials *are* guilty of systemically obstructing and often with "negative environmental consequences" for everyone.⁶⁵

Another problem is the incommensurability between how Leopold (and Leopoldian followers) and various Indigenous Tribes and First Nations enact(ed) their land-relational norms. This matter involves interrogating settler presumptions of likeness in the abstract that turn out to be incommensurable in practice.⁶⁶ For example, whereas Leopold's words and some of his projects challenge commodification, his home and work ventures do not model relations-structuring, economic, and justice-determined changes. On the other hand, Anishinaabe women elders' Mother Earth Water Walk, in courageously demonstrating their culture's self-organization of reciprocal responsibilities, effectively re-sets the unjust configurations of the dominating settler state.

A third comparison is between an epistemological framework that vests authority in Leopold's land ethic and other channels that represent equitable dependence upon Indigenous knowledge systems (e.g., for decision-making), on their Peoples' own terms. In Whyte's analysis, the institutionaled privileging of Leopoldian ethical norms such as land health, rooted in a wilderness concept—that is, land health as an unsubstantiated "common [conceptual]

⁶⁵ Some 370 million Indigenous persons "live on 22 percent of the world's land surface. These lands are tied to about 80 percent of the planet's biodiversity." Sobrevila, *The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Biodiversity Conservation*, xii.

⁶⁶ For a crucial discussion of "an ethic of incommensurability," read Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor."

ground”—is “even offensive.” As we will see, prioritizing the land ethic legacy sanctions ongoing colonial “cruelty”—to keep American environmental historian Bill Cronon’s (unmarked) word⁶⁷—toward Black and Indigenous Peoples, undermining their sovereignties.

All three of Whyte’s comparisons ask, more generally, *who* gets to decide? Who, with what values, is procedurally silenced (in advance) in decision-making processes, and who benefits from the silence? Further, what can we learn from potentially reciprocal (e.g., epistemic, intergenerational, ancestral, and kinship) dependencies? Broadly, these comparisons keep *in focus*, for the sake of refusing and reciprocally rejoinder, the U.S. settler agenda of 1) *relegating off Lands*, by murdering, abducting, or otherwise forcibly removing, Black and

⁶⁷ Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 15. Also see Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England*, 1989.

J. Baird Callicott also critiques “the received concept of wilderness” e.g., in “The Wilderness Idea Revisited” (1991) in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, Callicott and Nelson (eds.), 1998. Callicott then critiques it as part of the same troubling system that necessitates it in antithetical relation to “the concept of civilization” (339) while lifting up Leopold’s own re-envisioning of that civilization as towards “a harmony-of-man-and-nature conservation philosophy,” (340) which was also the development of his concept of “land health,” which might helpfully replace “the popular, conventional idea of wilderness” (355). Again, the land health concept is what my own past work has centered along with my admittedly similar hope. Callicott, too, discusses “American Indian complaints that the very concept of wilderness is a racist idea” and that the “wilderness condition” (e.g., in Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 1967), can’t be taken as uninhabited by human beings “unless one is prepared to ignore the existence of its aboriginal inhabitants and their works or to insinuate that they were not ‘man,’ i.e., not fully human beings” (351-352). Yet, as I formerly also had not, Callicott does not here discuss how the concept of land health, too, is woven with white supremacy, as I am detailing here.

Of important note as well—in his “How Similar Are Indigenous and Leopoldian Environmental Ethics,” 2015, Whyte leads up to the three issues “that complicate any attempt to compare versions of Leopoldian and Indigenous ethics,” which frame the present essay, by introducing a “convergence view,” represented by works of Callicott and Michael Nelson (and, Dan Shilling) and a “translational view,” represented also by writings of Callicott’s. The former takes would-be common ethical orientations within differing ethics – “Leopoldian or [specific] North American Indigenist ethics” – as possibly bringing people together. The latter takes Leopold’s “land ethic” (pointing to the land health vision), as being from a (supreme) Western worldview and assumed to be more (and/or more familiarly) scientific and more comprehensive, and, so, also “epistemologically privileged...because it is self-consciously self-critical” (Whyte citing Callicott, *Earth’s Insights*, 191). In Callicott’s translational view, Whyte points out, “the land ethic can interpret and evaluate all other ethics” thus bringing people together. Presumptions of commonalities and consent, however, without surfacing differences, going beyond “the abstract, and acknowledging the potential to not “immediately understand,” threatens to uphold dominant privileges and de-stabilize coalitions.

“Though these [convergence and translation] views certainly make interesting arguments about the possible of connections,” says Whyte, launching his comparative examination of “Leopoldian and Indigenist ethics, they should not—however—be taken as a cue for letting down our skeptical guard regarding just how similar the ethics really are.”

Indigenous Peoples; 2) *appropriating “resources,”* by stealing lands and their “natural resources” and other alluring elements of colonized cultures; and, 3) *forced assimilations of P/eople/s to “the”* (already privileged) “white” (Anglo/Euro and cis-het male-dominated) society.

Whyte’s three comparisons and these three interactively emergent foci provide the critical framework for taking up my own responsibility as a Leopold scholar and a maturing, unsettling settler. I support Whyte’s discussion by limning white supremacist and settler-colonial offenses in my ancestral and own past scholarship in order to refuse, in Harrison’s terms, continuing their repetition.⁶⁸ This is a strategy towards forming more stable coalitions of groups with common concerns and important differences on the way to desired futures.⁶⁹ My historical “excursion” includes, again, troubling and re-troubling “wilderness...a single starting point to which man returns again and again” and the durability of the “scale of values” rising from it.⁷⁰ In a concluding section, I reciprocate my bio-cultural ancestor’s unjust and unsustainable proposals with possible rejoinders. These are based on personal experiences of listening toward becoming a good-relation-in-action—in particular to Gwich’in and other Alaska Native Land Protectors.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Audra Simpson proposes “refusal” as a political strategy for Kahnawà:ke Mohawk speaking a “fear of disappearance” and “a form of sovereign authority” against settler colonialisms’ in *Mohawk Interruptus*, 19. I am only, just finally, coming to her work. An inkling occurs—perhaps, learning from Simpson’s, and, taking up Harrison’s “refusal” is, in other words, on the way to a political strategy for settler colonials towards our own (past and present), speaking a fear of eliminating others and disrespecting Indigenous sovereignty as well as of white supremacy’s pyrrhic victories.

⁶⁹ For reasons of biographical-chronological flow, I am treating the three comparisons in a different order than Whyte does in his essay. He enumerates 1) Differences in practices 2) Opposing historical ethical sequences 3) Privileging Leopold as interpreter and translator of Indigenous ethics.

⁷⁰ Powell, “Pestered with Inhabitants.”

⁷¹ Vásquez-Fernández and Cash Ahenakew pii tai poo taa.

Chapter 5: The Flip Side of Virtue

The narrative of Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, from the Foreword to the penultimate essay, "Wilderness," and the final essay, "The Land Ethic," is a tale proposing moral ascension. Settlers rise from land-conquering "pioneers" to conservationists, becoming "land doctors" for "land health," and promoting mental and spiritual health by expanding land community-mindedness. Leopold imagines a scheme, in Whyte's incisive words, that "will redeem members of a settler society from the historical destruction of the environment that they have caused."⁷² And Leopold nonchalantly imposes his colonizing narrative even on those Black slaves and Native Land-keepers, folded into that historical destruction, by tactics of relegation, appropriation, and forced assimilation.

In the Foreword to his best-selling book, Leopold introduces himself as part of (an already warm and well-fed) minority—those who prefer "wild things" over "progress."⁷³ Progress is defined as an increasing pile of money and the "property" it buys, including televisions and multiple bathtubs. The former encompasses winds, sunsets, geese, and pasque flowers. In "Wilderness," Leopold reinforces his arguments on behalf of these "wild things"—that is, for what is beyond human re/creation—as he had since the start of his career under the influence of Hornaday.⁷⁴ In "Wilderness," Leopold urges reasons for protecting wildernesses, "the raw material out of which man has hammered the artifact called civilization." According to Leopold's narrative, cultures of the "human species," perhaps inevitably, are hybridizing world-

⁷² Whyte, "How Similar," 13.

⁷³ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, vii.

⁷⁴ Cryer touches on the "racial animus" towards "Indians" and "Africans" in Hornaday's *Our Vanishing Wildlife* (1913), a book Leopold read and quoted from early in his career as highly influential. See "A Contradictory Ethos," 500.

wide. Encouraging the preservation of “certain values,” he assimilates various groups into a story in which pioneers, then, anvil-pounding laborers take pauses for rest.⁷⁵ In this “repose,” the builders of civilization should appreciate the “raw stuff,” while there is still any remaining. They should understand wilderness not only as an “adversary,” but as “something to be loved and cherished, because it gives definition and meaning to [their] life.”⁷⁶

The rest of “Wilderness” details several reasons to preserve “wilderness.” These include keeping “tag-ends” as “museum pieces” (for generations to experience “the origins of their cultural inheritance”); recreation (prioritizing performative facets of pioneering life);⁷⁷ preserving a scientific “base datum of normality...of how healthy land maintains itself as an organism”; establishing refuges⁷⁸ for especially large and threatened species (e.g., “Alaskan [grizzly] bears”); and, of course, to approach that “single starting point,” a source where the search for “a durable scale of values” re-sets repeatedly.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Leopold, *Almanac*, “Your Hudson Bay Indian now has a put-put, and your mountaineer a Ford” (193).

⁷⁶ Leopold, *Almanac*, 188.

⁷⁷ See also Cryer: “The frontiersman, who hunted for food or monetary gain, paradoxically served as the basis of a new citizenship closed to subsistence and market hunters. He also served as an ethos into which outdoor recreationists could slip, satisfying their contradictory desire to be more like the very people they were excluding” (498).

⁷⁸ Leopold doesn’t mention hunting overflow in this case.

⁷⁹ Powell, “More Trouble”: “By reiterating the myth of wilderness-as-Nordic-frontier Leopold helped perpetuate an enduring divide between America’s environmental movement and the nation’s nonwhite citizenry” (202). Powell, citing Leopold in the mid-1920s, relates narratives of wilderness to historical narratives of Malthusian overpopulation. He touches, too, on ties with eugenics discourses of the day and white supremacist racism e.g., against indigenous African communities whom Leopold excluded via analogy with deer who could not “self-improve” nor “self-limit.” See Leopold, “Pioneers and Gullies” (1924), in *River*, 106; Leopold, “Conservation in the Southwest,” *River*, 94. (This last title is a 1923 draft essay, unpublished until 1979.)

Meine in “Land, ethics, justice, and Aldo Leopold,” 2022, proposes that Leopold was not “a racist in his personal or professional life” yet was a “product of institutions and a society built upon foundations of colonialism, oppression, and the Doctrine of Discovery.” While, to my understanding, those of us, including Leopold, who are such products – having white supremacy, tooled with colonialism, woven with our privileges, senses of entitlement and other assumptions, and institutions – are race/ist (even if not “overtly”) in our cultural fibers, complicitly, by default. It is by ongoing un/learning and contributing actively to undermining those dominating norms, working toward the liberation of those whose oppression we participate in, that we colonizers may improve. And, in this way, also, as entangled with frontlines persons/communities, we also may become liberated from a terrible system. See Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, Great Britain: Profile Books, 2021 (first published 1957) with thanks to Kyle Whyte for introducing me to this work.

Also, I take Meine (and Lin) as acknowledging Leopold’s proximity to eugenics and eugenicists, in general, they seem to see more doubt as to its/their influences and apply more distancing-benefit to that doubt than

From this list, Leopold prioritizes one of his rationales for “raw stuff” protection: to keep a “laboratory” of healthy land “organisms” to study in order to diagnose lands “deranged” and “sickened” by pioneering and its aftermath and to guide efforts in healing them. For this purpose, Leopold proposes “two available norms.” The first is land so well-occupied by humans that even after centuries “land physiology remains largely normal.” Leopold claims to know of “only one such place” on the planet, naming “north-eastern Europe.”⁸⁰ Yet, on the following page, without so-exalting it, he describes another example—the trout-filled and mossy-banked “Sierra Madre of Chihuahua, never grazed or used [by settlers] for fear of [warring] Indians.” That is, although obviously well occupied by humans—Apache Tribes—readers are left to infer that Leopold relegates Apache outside his meaning of “human” in order to appropriate the flourishing area into what he calls the “Sierra Madre *wilderness*” [italics mine]. Leopold then praises this “wilderness” as “a norm for the cure of sick land on both sides of the [Mexican-U.S.] border,” and, moreover, a “good-neighbor enterprise.”⁸¹

The second “most perfect [land health] norm,” Leopold says, “is wilderness,” or, “virgin country.”⁸² As examples, Leopold defines swaths of so-called Canada and Alaska by quoting

do I. Meine, 2022, gives a couple of examples of Leopold’s ironic, sarcastic, or, (self-) mockery of the “Nordic...racial genius” and “our vaunted superiority” to destroy land, which he interprets as evidence that Leopold “was no admirer of eugenicist ideology.” (See below, Chapter 6). Again, perhaps not, yet, even if not, he still imposes superiority, and, as a “fellow traveler” with eugenics/eugenicists, in Prum’s terms, through this lens, important historical troubles surface, important for settlers to face, I believe, to take better responsibility in the present.

⁸⁰ Leopold’s naming “north-eastern Europe” here is odd in two ways. First, it is north-western Europe he points to in “The Land Ethic,” and that is also where he had made his own personal observations. Second, perhaps Leopold felt the lands along the Rio Gavilan across the U.S. border in Mexico were also doomed to industrial settlement. Yet, in other writings, he waxed eloquent about how these lands presented “so lovely a picture of ecological health” and “virgin stability.” He used the term “virgin,” though he knew these were human-occupied Lands, a fact which I also did not correct in *Odyssey*. See *River*, 239-244; Callicott, *Companion*, 281-288; Leopold, *Almanac*, 149-153. Leopold scary, “warring” Apache is a step in eliminating them from “virgin” landscapes while erasing their land-keeping. This reminds me of Deborah Bird Rose’s analysis of how in “Exodus 11:6-7”: “Dog personalities and diversities were suppressed to conform to an image of snarling, and the snarl was suppressed” in *Wild Dog Dreaming*, 33.

⁸¹ Leopold, *Almanac*, 197.

⁸² Leopold, *Almanac*, 196, 191.

(imperfectly and without crediting) poet Robert Service (unmarked): “Where nameless men by nameless rivers wander/And in strange valleys die strange deaths alone.”⁸³ Yet, to this day (Service’s gold “moilers” aside), “Alaska” is a geography, occupied by Russia and then by the U.S., that is unceded by Indigenous Nations—originating at least twenty local languages—who have thrived there for time immemorial. These Peoples have many names for themselves and for rivers and other features of their geographies.⁸⁴ With respect to Leopold’s list of wilderness’s “cultural value,” he concludes, “the ability to see them”—that is, also the ability to envision “land health”—again, “boils down, in the last analysis, to a question of intellectual humility.”⁸⁵

Values, renewed, leads me to avow my biocultural ancestor’s affection for more-than-humankinds, and I avow his human hearts-motivating resistance to commodifying-industrial extractive land wreckage. At the same time, values revisioned, I must refuse his presumptuous, grand narrative. For his is a story that builds from [colonizing] pioneer to [settler] laborer-in-repose, to land-wanderer and healer who gains “definition and meaning,” paradoxically, while condescendingly relegating, appropriating, and assimilating Native Peoples and their cultures and values. His tale also tacitly vanishes generations of enslaved Black lives, who are never even mentioned.

In “The Land Ethic,” Leopold offers a succinct yet detailed narrative of settler-colonial deliverance into the world of the land ethic. He expounds “The Ethical Sequence” with origins in “Odysseus’ Greece,” the hero’s killing of his wife Penelope’s suitors, and the murder of disloyal “slave girls.” From that violent beginning, Leopold sketches a three thousand year history of an

⁸³ Robert Service, “To the Man of the High North”: The nameless men who nameless rivers travel,/And in strange valleys greet strange deaths alone;/The grim, intrepid ones who would unravel/The mysteries that shroud the Polar Zone.”

⁸⁴Alaska Native Language Center, “Languages,” University of Alaska Fairbanks. Many are threatened and dormant via colonizers’ intentional actions, but many are undergoing renewals via language-keepers’ initiatives. See Baldwin, Noodin, and Perley, “Surviving the Sixth Extinction,” 201-234.

⁸⁵ Leopold, *Almanac*, 200.

extending “ethical structure.” Improving on the ancients, not only men, but, he implies, women and “human chattels” become morally “covered.” From relations between individuals, ethics expand from between individuals to between individuals society and vice versa in this story. The next needed extension, Leopold proposed, was from “man” to “soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land,” for which “wilderness” is the most perfect norm of settler-occupied land health. As seen above, this land health vision relegates Indigenous Peoples out of “wildernesses,” appropriates the lands they belong to, and assimilates diverse cultures into a tale of “world-wide hybridization.”⁸⁶ His historical ethical narrative of a much-needed moral ascension folds everyone, most without consent, into a necessary moral ascension.⁸⁷ “All [italics mine] ethics so far evolved,” Leopold writes, “rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.” A healthy “land community,” to Leopold’s developing perception, includes “*Homo sapiens*” not as “conqueror” but as “plain member and citizen.” “There is as yet *no ethic* [italics mine] dealing with man’s relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus’s slave girls, is still property. The land relation is still [from the ancient times of Homer’s Odysseus] strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.” “The extension of ethics” to “the land-relation,” Leopold proposes, is “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity.” “I regard the present conservation movement,” he writes, “as the *embryo* of such an affirmation” [of moral rights and wrongs in human-land relations].⁸⁸

At my earliest reading of *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold’s narrative trajectory sat uncomfortably with me. Schooled in Calvinism’s doctrine of original sin, I still questioned faith,

⁸⁶ Leopold, speaking of plants and animals, in “The Land Ethic,” *Almanac*, 218; of a “world-wide” narrative of inevitable “hybridization of cultures,” in “Wilderness,” *Almanac*, 188.

⁸⁷ Whyte, “How Similar.”

⁸⁸ Leopold, *Almanac*, 201-203.

generally and personally, in a story of collective human improvement. As a trained scientist, moreover, I understood that evolution by natural selection, after all, isn't about "improvement" of organisms per se, but about adaptive changes, across generations, of a population interacting within dynamic local geographies. From the start, I felt how Leopold, far from exhibiting "intellectual humility," was overreaching when he wrote in such sweeping terms. Though still ignorant of details I needed to know, and living under a master narrative I had hardly yet recognized, I already knew something was wrong.

As Whyte concludes in his reading of the narrative of moral ascension, "Leopold's history of ethics is based on a settler narrative that unfolds in the opposite direction of the historical narratives many Indigenous peoples would provide of their ethics." It would be a further brutalizing irony, therefore, for Indigenous Peoples with relations disrupted and land-care responsibilities obstructed by imposed settler-colonizer stories, experiencing violent consequences, Whyte explains, "to see themselves in Leopold's historic sequence because they do not see the progression of their societies as moving toward a land ethic; rather, the fear is that their societies are moving away from being societies in which their ethic is fully entrenched in their perceptions and lifestyles."⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Whyte, "How Similar," 2, 8.

Chapter 6: Who Inherits?

Leopold's grand historical narrative of self-redemptive cultural and moral ascension not only unfolded in the opposite direction to many Indigenous ethical trajectories under settler-colonialism, it stifled the latter in its sweeping claim to be telling "all history." Similarly, the idea of a common humanity—that is, as the "human race" or *Homo sapiens*—might be appealing in many ways and sometimes appropriate. But as I earlier acknowledged my own rote repetition of this affront, thinking as one humankind can also be a cover for a dominating culture systematically assimilating everyone into itself.⁹⁰

As Whyte underscores, it is important to face differences in order to disclose that which privileges systemic domination in order to refuse it. This questioning is critical, paradoxically, for those interested in eventually "coming together as people of all heritages," rather than systemically subsuming all peoples into a single line.⁹¹ When Leopold criticizes "mechanized man" for being "proud of cleaning up the landscape," he centers losses of diverse flora but not of human peoples.⁹² Unwittingly or not, he helps bind the violences of a white supremacist ideal race into normative notions of land care.⁹³ In Whyte's words, such are not provisions "many Indigenous persons [e.g, Pueblos, Apache, Ho-Chunk sovereignties in areas Leopold lived in] would identify with or find useful," to say the least, not to mention the implicit impositions on future generations of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ I find articulate expressions to think with in Claire Colebrook, "Lives Worth Living," 151-171. In one telling expression: "We seem to be poised, as liberal multiculturalism often is, between postracial claims for a general humanity...by erasing and exterminating others, and creating them *as other* by way of strategies of cultural erasure..." (167).

⁹¹ Whyte, "How Similar," 3.

⁹² Leopold, *Almanac*, 46.

⁹³ Powell, "More Trouble."

⁹⁴ Shay-Akil McLean, "Social Constructions, Historical Grounds"; Tallbear, *Native American DNA*; Dotson, "Decolonization," quoting Patrick Wolfe—"For Indians, in stark contrast, non-Indian ancestry compromised their

“Race,” to listen carefully, is a relatively recent invention of Europeans—Empire-driven and insatiable—to classify people as different groups of “others.” As a symbol, race sums up the “fundamental relation which unites colonialist and colonized,”⁹⁵ the latter perceived as both necessary and inconvenient to the formers’ desires. “Race,” according to Queer Trans masculine and genderqueer man (THEY/*he*) racialized as Black scientist Shay-Akil McLean, “is a product of racism, always.” It is also historical in the sense that “race/ism” as a socially constructed and learned system of thought and practices has not existed in all times and places. Since there is a before “race,” there might also be an afterwards. That is, a future unlearning, an abolishment of race/ism conjoined with decolonization, meaning land back.⁹⁶

Perhaps complexifying that challenge, in the nineteenth century, earlier ideas about “race” reified into “a scientific object of inquiry,” notes Kim Tallbear. This apparently helped trick focus away from race as “a problem of difference in power and resources” into wrong assumptions of race as “a problem of difference in phenotype and attitude,” in McLean’s terms. “Biology did not recruit race,” he stresses. “Instead, race and racism recruited biology” into its political aspirations. Since then, as Tallbear explains, this complicated, coproductive mix of “pervasive” racial attitudes has been systematically and resiliently reproducing shifting iterations of oppression.⁹⁷

Since the nineteenth century, these iterations of oppression, already enmeshed in ideas of national identity and big “S” scientific truth, have become entwined with Social Darwinism. Proponents of Social Darwinism cherry-picked heritable competitiveness (conceiving of it,

indigeneity, producing ‘half-breeds,’ a regime that persists in the form of blood quantum regulations. As opposed to enslaved people, whose reproduction augmented their owner’s wealth. Indigenous people obstructed settlers’ access to land, so their increase was counterproductive” (193).

⁹⁵ Memmi, “The Colonizer and the Colonized.”

⁹⁶ McLean, “Social Historical.”

⁹⁷ Tallbear, *DNA*, 33-34.

perhaps, as a fundamentally amoral attribute) from Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. They claimed winning heights of evolutionary advancement as "civilized" Europeans. This superiority was judged by a comparatively greater ability to control nature rather than to be controlled by it. As a fundamental aspect of the narrative, Darwin's cousin, also English, Sir Francis Galton, launched "eugenics," a science and social policy "aimed to improve the racial pool of humans through selective breeding."⁹⁸ The crafters of this insidious policy assumed their white Anglo-Saxon standards as supreme. Moreover, as evolutionary ornithologist and museum curator Richard Prum (unmarked) argues, in one way or another, between the 1890s and 1940s, "every professional geneticist and evolutionary biologist in the United States and Europe was either an ardent proponent of eugenics, a dedicated participant in eugenic social programs, or a happy fellow traveler. Full stop."⁹⁹ And the powerful influence of eugenics included Leopold, the evolutionary-ecological thinker. Although he stopped short of advocating for eugenics in ways that some of his closest colleagues did, nonetheless he was certainly a fellow traveler.¹⁰⁰

As with other power-hoarding strategies, the guises of eugenics can be altered as one or another becomes too obviously repellent. Its forms have included, for example, race taxonomies, evolutionary rankings, and stereotypes that privilege "stocks" of British and Northern Europeans in U.S. government and states' land laws, immigration, sterilization, and miscegenation policies.¹⁰¹ At the turn of the twentieth century, German-born American anthropologist Franz Boas and generations of his students helped influence racial thought, moving away from a Social Darwinist evolutionary march of culture from lower to higher stages of civilization. (But to

⁹⁸ Tallbear, *DNA*, 37.

⁹⁹ Richard Prum, *The Evolution of Beauty*, 326.

¹⁰⁰ See *Odyssey*, especially Chapter 8 and 394, note 95; 416-17, note 37; Powell, "Pestered," 219.

¹⁰¹ Leopold used the phrase "better human stocks" in *River*, 286. Among many sources for these many guises and programs, see Tallbear, *DNA*, 37; Estes, *Our History*; Alien Land Laws; and Penniman, *Farming While Black*.

capture the power of eugenics ideology, writing those terms as “Culture” and “Civilization.”) Boas-influenced anthropology instead conceptualized an historically conditioned plurality of cultures. At the same time, however, as Tallbear points out, although Boas generally opposed “biological determinism,” in a sense he helped reclothe it. That is, “cultures” could substitute for “biological heredity” as causing perceived racial differences and formations.¹⁰²

During the early twentieth century, some biological scientists found race categories irresolvable and backed away from the eugenics project. Many veered from “racial science” as such. This trend has continued into the present, along with more general agreement that race is socially constructed.¹⁰³ Already in the 1930s, as environmental historian Miles Powell (unmarked) discusses, many Americans, including Leopold, “were becoming more cognizant of the limitations of racial explanations for human identity and behavior.”¹⁰⁴ Then, too, Darwin’s work, particularly his provocative proposition that all life, including all human beings, emerged from some deep-time common ancestor, could lead to encompassing, kinship-based moral considerations. Increasingly, U.S. thinkers “tended to frame their discussions in terms of the welfare of the entire human species.”¹⁰⁵ This move toward an all-encompassing “human race,” however, was not necessarily as generous or benign as it might seem at first glance. As shown below, influencers “in charge” now tended to imagine the physiognomy of their entire species as looking like their own “fittest” face—a narcissism with ongoing assimilative force.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Darwinian natural selection blended with Mendelian genetics, giving rise to the field of population genetics. Population genetics focused on environmental adaptation, on the variation and evolution of human groups, and, once again offered “race” a new

¹⁰² Tallbear, *DNA*, 36.

¹⁰³ Tallbear, *DNA*, 37, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Powell, *Vanishing America*, 159.

¹⁰⁵ Powell, 159.

set of clothes. Even after the “racial horrors of World War II,” Tallbear explains, population genetics would infuse deterministic “molecular anthropology” practices that continue to serve white supremacist settler-colonialism.¹⁰⁶ The developing field of population genetics also intersected with the emergence of population ecology, a new field that studied the dynamic influences between environmental factors and local group numbers, whether of the same or different species.¹⁰⁷ Population ecology, especially the subject of population dynamics, engaged Leopold as he developed his theories of game management, also laying groundwork for conservation biology.

Population ecology, as Powell shows, was linked with Euro-Malthusian and race/ist arguments to human “population control in the developing [i.e., ‘Africa, China, India, Latin America’] world.” Such arguments have called for “wilderness” structured by limiting human population, and the arguments for wilderness are routinely commandeered by and for empire. Members of empire, weaponizing a wilderness concept, in other words, assume authority to determine not only how, and where, but who shall benefit from generative lands, if not “inherit the earth.”¹⁰⁸

In sum, “cultures,” “*Homo sapiens*,” and “populations” are more than common terms. They can become supremacy-laced surrogates for “race/ist” terminologies, co-produced by discourses in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Leopold’s writing often tracks with these terms, which may be read in ambiguous ways helping keep white supremacy hidden. Left unexamined, they continue to wield influence. Those of us who have looked to Leopold for

¹⁰⁶ Tallbear, *DNA*, 33, 38-39.

¹⁰⁷ Tallbear, *DNA*, 38; *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Population Genetics,” last updated July 5, 2012, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/population-genetics/>

¹⁰⁸ For discussion on pitfalls, see Powell, 222, 219.

guidance, in any number of intellectual and practical areas, may make the same assumptions and repeat the same baked-in offenses.

This sketch of intellectual history means that as part of my speaking back to Leopold, I must highlight the discomfiting subject of eugenics. The intellectual and social world of eugenics, as I argue here, is intimately entangled with Leopoldian science and ethics. And even as lately as 2016, I left the topic a mere footnote in *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*.¹⁰⁹ This chapter is an attempt to unsettle both Leopold and my own intellectual biography of him.

A most salient moment centers around Leopold's 1933 essay, "The Conservation Ethic," first published in *The Journal of Forestry*. Portions of the essay, with revisions that largely tighten his text, remain integral to "The Land Ethic" as it appears in *A Sand County Almanac* in 1949.¹¹⁰ In 1946, the 1933 essay was streamlined¹¹¹ and republished in *The Journal of*

¹⁰⁹ *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, 416, Footnote no. 37. Mentioned, later, in Qi Feng Lin's "Aldo Leopold's life-work and the scholarship it inspired." *Socio-Ecological Practice Research* 2(1):3-30, 2020. And, cited in Meine, 2022, footnote 11. Lin says, "There is no evidence that Leopold was aware of or acceded to this use of his article." At the same time, the article is in Leopold's files and is stamped "Library of Aldo Leopold." Others may wish to pursue more evidence one way or another. As I say, the publication deserves further analysis than I provide here. And, again, in any case, the "scientific racism"/eugenics lens provides useful insights into conservation's woven-in race/ism/white supremacy, including Leopoldian, to help see and refuse repeating it going forward.

¹¹⁰ Parts of the earlier writing were revised, mostly tightening prose without much change in meaning, and retained in "The Ethical Sequence" and in the latter part of "The Community Concept" (*Almanac* 201-203, 205-206). Also re-used were the metaphor for land-use problems as like "remodeling the Alhambra with a steamshovel" (*River* 185, "Racial" 276, *Almanac* 226) and this sentence substituting "land-user" in 1947: "As a [man] land-user thinketh, so is he" (which, though unattributed, echoes the title of James Allen's 1902 book *As a Man Thinketh*). Another unattributed quote, from Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Tristram," appears in both 1933 and 1947 but was deleted from the 1946 version. In the 1947 version (*Almanac* 205), Leopold added two states to a list and shortened a series of questions appearing in both 1933 and 1946 (*River* 183, "Racial" 277) on what would have happened if plant succession during colonization had been different. In the second paragraph of all three versions, "much less of justice" appears in 1933 (181) and 1946 (276) but is removed in 1947 (201). Meine makes comparisons in "Building 'The Land Ethic,'" in Callicott, *Companion*, 176-177. He does not include "Racial Wisdom and Conservation" there nor in the bibliographical appendix of his biography *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work*, 618-619.

¹¹¹ The ellipses in the 1946 version indicate removed sections from that of 1933. These removals range in length from two sentences to several paragraphs. Most of the published text was unrevised. Of note, however, is a difference between the 1946 and 1933 texts. In 1946, "Christianity" was substituted for "Democracy" defined by a purpose to "integrate social organization to the individual" ("Racial" 276). In 1933, Leopold had included both terms, but expressed "Christianity" as trying "to integrate the individual to society" ("River" 182). In 1947, in "The Land Ethic" (*Almanac* 203) Leopold substituted "Golden Rule" for "Christianity" while keeping his original definition of both Christianity's and Democracy's roles.

Heredity.¹¹² The re-publication with added framing could have been with Leopold's permission, since he kept a copy in his files. The essay bore a new title, "Racial Wisdom and Conservation." It now featured an editorial introduction, most likely by the journal's editor, the geneticist and demographer Robert Cook.¹¹³ It also included a new epigraph, by Swedish-born humanist and University of Chicago physiologist A.J. Carlson, a former president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.¹¹⁴ Coming so close to the end of Leopold's career, and having such a close relation to "The Land Ethic," the 1946 "Racial Wisdom and Conservation" can be read as Leopold's contribution to the field of eugenics.

The executive framing by the editor of *Journal of Heredity* deployed both direct and circuitous language. The editor is clear about the desire to stimulate and recruit others into a "popular" and "constructive interest in eugenics and the conservation of our race." Indeed, he cites Galton himself in recommending the need for an "awakening...akin to the religious," requiring the "promulgation of such a faith [in eugenics]." This need, moreover, is specifically

¹¹² This version, to my knowledge, has not been republished in any of several Leopold collections to date. Aldo Leopold, "Racial Wisdom and Conservation," *Journal of Heredity* 37 no. 9 (September 1946): 275-279; <https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AG65AV6OBR2TS18G/pages/AJBMVRXNINER7A8E> also see <https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AEF3LOH6K3J4BM8S/full/A5ZK3TWZX64PDD8C>

¹¹³ Cook's publications included a major work to the field of "population control." He also had worked at the Tucson Indian Training School, run by Presbyterians. I don't see Leopold listed in his personal correspondence, but the list includes at least one close colleague and friend, Fraser Darling. Library of Congress, "Robert C. Cook Papers," finding aid, Washington, D.C.: Manuscript Division, 2010.

¹¹⁴ Lester Dragstedt, "Anton Julius Carlson, 1875-1956, A Biographical Memoir," Washington: D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1961, 32 pages, <http://www.nasonline.org/publications/biographical-memoirs/memoir-pdfs/carlson-anton-j.pdf>. It is worth recalling that, in 1934, Sweden, Carlson's ancestral nation, enacted a law accepting "that quantity of population should not be bought at the expense of quality." See Powell, 219. Note as well, environmental historian Gregg Mitman's discussion, in a different context, relating British ecologist Charles Elton's influences on Leopold (they were also v/v), and Elton's "frigid tundra" field work: "The relationships between conservation and health that that Leopold articulated did not come into being solely on American shores" nor always from influences near in time. See "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in Environmental History," *Environmental History* 10 (April 2005), 184-210. Susan Flader in "Leopold On Wilderness," *American Forests* May/June 1991, 32-33, 66-67. In an introduction to a 1935 formerly unpublished Leopold's essay "Wilderness," Flader discusses the influences on Leopold of Mexico and 1935 Germany, "already entering the grip of Nazi militarism" on Leopold, in particular. She interestingly observes Leopold's resulting concern over "Germany's esthetic deficit...[stemming from] "from an excess of conservation" he wished to help prevent in "America."

addressed to “We people of the United States,” who are “a segment of this species of ours.” More indirectly, perhaps, the framing suggests that the members of this segment would need to “become wise,” as the epigraph by Carlson defined it. Wisdom, for the species, would be to “develop some control over his greed, his vanity, and his fears.” It would entail a cosmic-scale, deep-time context for “the human race.” And this wise subject would use “all of his influence, without violence or coercion, to prevail on his fellow man to follow his example.” A question here is who are these “people of the United States,” and how do they wield such wide and deep influence? Implicitly, the eugenics scheme envisioned by the editor appeals to a largely Anglo-Saxon, Northern European readership and demographic.

According to the editor, those who would “become wise” also must not “exploit” their “still unborn members” by saddling them with war debts, not to mention ruined land. This was especially crucial if conditions of inherited land shaped “social structure” (as well as cultural values) and the “continuity” of species, particularly an important segment of the human species. These are possibilities that Leopold floated elsewhere in his writings.¹¹⁵ According to the editor’s introduction, the awakening to faith in eugenics thus required a timely, motivating ethical vision, one that is both evolutionary (i.e., deterministic) and ecological (i.e., inter-relationally totalizing). The introduction proposed the ethical vision in Leopold’s essay with a tone speaking to a specific audience at a specific time. It begins with an epigraph eschewing fear, but it ends with a specter of nuclear apocalypse should “we” fail to influence enough adherents into “the new faith” and “a new ethic,” based on “the facts of man’s ecology.”

¹¹⁵ See Leopold, *Almanac*, concerning wilderness as “origins of their cultural inheritance” (188); Powell, 215; words in quotes appear in Leopold, “Ecology and Politics” [lecture notes], 1941, in *River*, 282, 285 ;” see also *Odyssey*, 248-249.

“Racial Wisdom and Conservation” deserves more analysis than I can provide in a purposely brief monograph. In general, however, the 1946 revision of Leopold’s 1933 essay contains a tension to highlight. On the one hand, is the still-lingering idea of a progressive, Social Darwinist march of culture. The narrative displays the evolution from “simpler [symbiotic] biological antecedents” to more complex and civilized ones, along with supposedly increased control over nature. On the other hand, however, is the reality of “our [U.S.] dominion,” in Leopold’s words, failing so badly at land use that the uninhabitable consequences of “a progressive mutual deterioration” of land community members could evict the nation itself. It had happened before, he underscored.

Furthermore, “wars and rumors of wars,” as Leopold put it in Abrahamic and apocalyptic terms, might also be said to herald an end to manifest destiny. Now, from his outlook in 1946, the appropriation and ruinous assimilation of the productivities, by “enslavement,” of so much of “a stable and constant earth” had left frightfully few “healthy” remnants to move on to. As if it is a late-breaking idea, Leopold suggests redefining “civilization” as “interdependent [human-land] cooperation.” As tempting as it is to avow the suggestion, it is necessary to point to what Leopold does not say and see. He disregards, in the breach between pride of empire and self-chastening reality, those many Indigenous Peoples whose civilizations were far from simple, who already are time-proven in adaptive, ethical land relations, and who are neither vanished nor superfluous.

What Leopold disregards is important, for in many instances he pursues a “land ethic” that is socially unethical. The pursuit raises questions that he knows are hard to answer. How, he asks, could some people “prevail” over others—who were not yet “improved”—“without violence or coercion.” How to prevail to improve misused land and protect the “still healthy”

remnants? How would “we the people” attune human population densities to the land’s “carrying capacity?”¹¹⁶ How would “the wise” convince “his fellow man” to join in protecting “wilderness,” the “most perfect norm” for “land health,” essential to the evolution of a land-ethical people?

Propositions to such troubling questions also are at best provisional, at worst untenable. In both the 1933 and 1946 versions of the essay, Leopold recommends tactics including economic and social pressures and potential political re-configurations.¹¹⁷ In another formulation, he proposes the “ultimate issue in conservation as in other social problems” is whether the “mass-mind” both desires and has the capacity “to extend its powers of comprehending the world in which it lives.”¹¹⁸ He nods to the “geneticists” who were looking into it, although he does so with “trepidations.” Importantly, Leopold acknowledges that “I do not know the answer,” among other things, regarding whether and how these scientists might help people and land-use improve. At the same time, in a line retained in “The Land Ethic,” he sees “the present conservation movement as the embryo” of the next advance in moral capacity of the human race.¹¹⁹ This advance, however it is to occur, is “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity,” he claims.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶See *Odyssey*, 45, 132. In “Song of the Gavilan” (*Almanac*, 154), Leopold warns against too many people. Powell also discusses this (220-221).

¹¹⁷ Leopold, *River*, 188. Discussed extensively in *Odyssey*, particularly Chapters 5, 8. See also Qi Feng Lin, “Aldo Leopold’s unrealized proposals to rethink economics,” *Ecological Economics* 108 (December 2014): 104-114.

¹¹⁸ Leopold, *River*, 192; “Racial,” 279; *Odyssey*, 249, 417 (footnote 37). As I discussed more extensively though uncritically in *Odyssey*, Leopold noted his belief, “even in dark times that there lay within human nature at least the ‘germ of a better order of things’” (*Odyssey*, 246; Leopold, *River*, 104). In the 1933 “The Conservation Ethic,” Leopold similarly referred to “that something—perhaps the essence of civilization—which Wilson called ‘the decent opinion of mankind’” that lay in “some sub-economic stratum of the human intelligence” (*River*, 189). I discuss some of his struggles to find a clear path forward as noted also by a former student in 1944 correspondence (*Odyssey*, 169-170).

¹¹⁹ In *River* (192) and “Racial” (279), Leopold raises the question of whether the “mass-mind” (referencing Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset’s 1930 *Revolt of the Masses*) wants to and/or can “extend its powers of comprehending...or, *has the capacity to do so*.” The “capacity” aspect he admitted to the hands of the “geneticists.”

¹²⁰ *Almanac*, 2013. In *River*, 182 and “Racial,” 276, the reading is “if we read evolution correctly, an ecological possibility.”

Leopold's reflections deepen regarding both land complexity and evolutionary co-agency. He considers ecological forces consequential to "rebuilding *Homo sapiens*." ¹²¹ The forces are enmeshed with the questions of *who* would be the "*Homo sapiens*" to "inherit the earth," and how that "we" would "*rebuild*" both the earth and its inhabitants. ¹²² "We are remodeling the Alhambra with a steam-shovel," Leopold repeats, in every revision. In various terms, he expresses the need not so much to put down the shovel as to use it and other tools more skillfully. In "The Round River: A Parable of Conservation" (1941), for instance, he considered a "human analogy" to a theory of plants and animals wherein having members "deviating from 'normal'" contributed to population resiliency. Leopold saw in this an "evolutionary mandate" against homogeneity "in physical and mental pattern."¹²³

Despite his sense of necessary diversity, both in physical and in mental realms, Leopold is repeatedly missing an array of human beings, cultures and their Land-keeping knowledges. He is not acknowledging these erasures, many causal, in a feedback loop between members of his dominant society and the ruination of their own "land health" foundations. Leopold's ecological-ethical vision, without respect for "differences that make a difference" makes discriminatory disavowals and positive rejoinders impossible. It tends to funnel efforts (necessarily ineffectual) toward the "less conquering" of "land communities" and toward myriad forms of dominion over a limited population/s of human beings perceived as non-conforming and thus threatening. ¹²⁴ These include, though are not limited to, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color intersecting with non-cishet-male and disabled persons, including, perhaps, in the words of Leopold's close

¹²¹ Perhaps, as he wrote later to his former student, even "rebuilding *Homo sapiens*." It is not clear that he meant by breeding. Often he talked in terms of "culture." But, as we have seen, "culture" holds as a surrogacy for "race." Leopold also talked in terms of how "we" could be about "improving ourselves," including "an internal change." See *Odyssey*, 266-267, 287-289.

¹²² Leopold, *River*, 185; "Racial," 278.

¹²³ Leopold, *River*, 286.

¹²⁴ Leopold, *River*, 183; "Racial," 277.

colleague William Vogt, “ecological incompetents.”¹²⁵ And, silencing people, unwittingly or not, silences a collective genius of radical possibilities¹²⁶ of re/generative lifeways that Leopold’s and other “normal” colonialists’ habits obstruct.

In all three versions of the “Conservation Ethic” essay, Leopold repeats an examination of settler history, telling about “the outcome of the Colonial migration” into the Ohio Country. He suggests imagining beyond human agency to undertold stories of soil and plant influences. He voices an abolitionist concern for “the enslavement...of earth.” But he also disrespects the sovereignties of Native Nations and does not mention the enslavement of Black people. Instead, Leopold asks how this settlement history would have been different if the lands that became Kentucky, having been abused by the pioneer, had responded by re-growing “some worthless sedge” rather than grazeable “bluegrass?” Would the United States have continued expanding, and would the “chain of events which on the Fourth of July we call our National Destiny” have played out just the same? It is a telling question. What he does not ask, though, is how the history of those same lands would have altered if the government of Boone and Kenton, leaders in U.S. genocidal militia against “the native Indians,” in Leopold’s words, had been properly tried and

¹²⁵ See Powell, 219. A law enacted in Sweden in 1934, which U.S. conservation colleague Henry Fairfield Osborn, Jr., promoted in his 1953 *The Plundered Earth*: “[o]ne of the major purposes of this unique program is to prevent the bearing of children by parents who are mentally incompetent or physically defective.” Also, although there are checks in Leopold’s work that could keep him/us from going so far here, yet, as Powell discusses, Leopold’s close colleague William Vogt suggested in *Road to Survival*, that the state remove support from land-ruining “ecological incompetents,” and, in Powell’s words, “let nature run its course.” The *Journal of Heredity* eugenics framing of Leopold’s evolutionary-ethical vision exposes potentially terrifying aspects of it as Vogt’s term seems to echo them.

With regard to eco-fascist “creep,” to guard against, and to express anti-ecofascism, there are crucial, rising (and, some creative) literatures that are pertinent to consider here and throughout this manuscript, which call for much more reflection and that I also am attending to. See, for example, April Anson, Cassie Galentine, Shane Hall, Alex Menrisky, and Bruno Seraphin, “Stemming the Creep of Ecofascism: A Primer,” at <https://www.asle.org/research-write/featured-research-projects/>. This includes identifying and de-bunking eco-fascist myths in environmentalism that “advocates or accepts violence” and “reinforces existing systems of power and inequality.” “Ecofascism,” defined by to Anson et al., “suggests that certain kinds of people are naturally and exclusively entitled to control environmental resources.”

¹²⁶ Thinking with Junot Díaz and Kim Tallbear here in terms of “radical hope.”

convicted of murder.¹²⁷ In his retelling of history, Leopold calls the invading forces—French, English, and American—by their names, but he does not mention the Shawnee and Delaware Nations. Again, it seems, in the poet’s words, they were “nameless men.”

In her telling book *Trace*, Lauret Savoy, geologist and woman of African American, Euro-American, and Native American heritage, underscores Leopold’s silence on U.S. slavery in “The Land Ethic.” Leopold’s “only reference to slavery, to human beings as property,” she writes, “was about ancient Greece.”¹²⁸ The “slave girls” at Odysseus’s banquet, property without rights. Why, Savoy asks, isn’t there a single reference in *A Sand County Almanac* to Africans enslaved in the U.S.? Why no mention of the strictly enforced racial segregation of the 1940s, manifest in the land ownership Leopold talked so much about? Why is there no mention of white violence against Blacks, hidden in dark farmland nights and wide-open in public eruptions in industrial towns and cities across the country? Savoy refuses to let Leopold off the hook for simple ignorance. Leopold, she points out, understood the power of various forms of elimination. He criticized it in relation to a kind of flower, but not in relation to an unfamiliar “human subspecies,” in his words. “A dead Chinaman,” Leopold wrote in “Prairie Birthday,” “is of little import to us whose awareness of things Chinese is bounded by an occasional dish of chow mein. We grieve only for what we know. The erasure of Silphium from western Dane County is no cause for grief if one knows it only as a name in a botany book.” Leopold worked hard to stave off grief for the flower, that is, at bringing awareness to Silphium. Savoy asks another question: “Why not know ‘things Chinese?’” And we can add here: Why not know Chicanx? African American? Wolof? Apache? Gwich’in? To be “oblivious”—whether to species of flowers or to human beings and cultures—makes it possible for “mechanized man,” in Leopold’s words,

¹²⁷ Dunbar-Ortiz, 71-76.

¹²⁸ *Trace*, 33.

again, to be “proud of his progress in *cleaning up* the landscape” [italics mine].¹²⁹ As troubled as Leopold is by such clean landscapes, his focus on master narratives influenced by eugenics tidies up thinking in unfortunate ways.

In general, besides some totalizing uses of *Homo sapiens*, when Leopold does acknowledge non-European “races” or “cultures” (or other surrogates e.g., “stocks,” “species,” “populations”¹³⁰), he tends to do so from a remove. In this way, faces become blurred beyond recognition and names forgotten—imagined into present and future non-existence.¹³¹ Again, eugenics can be understood as answering: *Who* shall inherit the Earth? And, relatedly, how could any group’s children ever do so if their would-be ancestors are killed leaving them unborn?

Over two decades before the *Journal of Heredity* publication, in the conclusion to “Some Fundamentals of Conservation in the Southwest,” Leopold had asked, “Granting that the earth is for man...what man?” He proposed a series of answers: “Cliff dwellers?...Pueblos?...then the Spaniards?...And now we Americans? Ours beyond a doubt!” He lists four cultures, but then he summarizes the history as involving “five races—five cultures.”¹³² Each culture before ours, he asserts, had thought itself “the pinnacle of creation,” and each had flourished.¹³³ Moreover, our “four predecessors...left the earth alive.” What had happened to them, then? Insufficient cultural

¹²⁹ Leopold, *Almanac*, 46.

¹³⁰ Leopold, *Almanac*, 286, switches among population, our social organization, human stocks, human culture, and our continuity within a half-page of university lecture notes.

¹³¹ I repeated the trouble in the first page of my 2006 Introduction evoking a past People (*Odyssey*, 3)— writing of “the ancient Pacquime People” who are, “at least in this moment,” referring to a photograph, making them appear historic and ghostly while not acknowledging ancestral and still-living Indigenous people like Suma, Conchos, and Eudeve, Apache of these lands.

¹³² Is this also a slanted reference (substituting five other groups) to the “five civilized tribes”—a settler-colonial grouping of Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole—forced to reservations in Oklahoma? Beginning in 1874, survivors of these Nations were dealt with as a single body by the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the U.S. Department of Interior.

¹³³ The following section—Refusal III—further explores the gap between knowing there were other Peoples who became so-called “extinct” (Leopold offers no explanation) while leaving the earth undamaged, and his claim that there “is as yet no ethic dealing with man’s relation to land” (*Almanac*, 203).

survival skills? Mixed into and/or outcompeted by superior “races,” perhaps?¹³⁴ Now, in any case, the others are dead, it seems, quoting U.S. editor and poet, William Cullen Bryant (unmarked) in *Thanatopsis*: “...all that tread/The globe are but a handful to the tribes/That slumber in its bosom...In their last sleep” from the “Barcan [North African desert sand dunes] wilderness” to “the continuous woods where rolls the Oregon...”¹³⁵ Skipping over further delving, he asks, probing: What sort would his culture be, evaluated by any successors? “Decently respectful of its own and all other life, capable of inhabiting the earth without defiling it?” Or like potato-bugs, perhaps exterminating the potato and thereby self-exterminating?

Leopold’s grand narrative once again hides crucial facts about enduring cultures in a white supremacist-colonialist haze. Myriad Pueblos had been invaded by Spanish colonial forces and relegated—against much fierce opposition—into towns. The U.S., also breaking the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, dispossessed many Mexican American families after annexing half of Mexico. As Priscilla Ybarra, a Queer Chicana Chicana literature and environmental literary studies scholar, writes: “Hidden in plain sight” is the “Mexican American identity” of Leopold’s own wife and children.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, the Pueblo cultures are still very much present and are still, like many other Indigenous communities, recovering and carrying their complex cultural knowledges and practicing long-run adaptive, working land-use strategies. The unnamed “race” of the five Leopold counted—didn’t he mean the Apache? Against their powerful resistance, the Apache Tribes were violently removed by U.S. Government agents to military reservations. Those government boundaries had also restrictively appropriated the areas of buffalo hunts when

¹³⁴ See also *Almanac*, 206-207: “The Pueblo Indians settled the Southwest in pre-Columbian times, but they happened *not* to be equipped with range livestock. Their civilization expired, but not because their land expired.” In another 1923 unpublished draft, “A Criticism of the Booster Spirit,” Leopold asserts, “That the Indian culture and ours should have been placed in competition for the possession of this country was inevitable” (102).

¹³⁵ Leopold, *River*, 96-97.

¹³⁶ Ybarra, “The Idea of Wilderness to Mexican Americans.”

there were still buffalos. Despite Apache compliance, in 1864, their citizens had been butchered by U.S. federal troops to make way for statehoods of the southwestern territories in which Leopold's career had begun. Though many fewer in number, they lived on, and do live on.¹³⁷ Who, indeed, will inherit the earth?

Throughout Leopold's career, Brown and Black peoples lived at home and beside him in cities and towns, deserts and forests, including what he had helped invent and set aside as game refuges and wilderness areas. And, in addition to repeating assimilative narratives of "we," there had been times in those earlier years that Leopold also had participated in efforts to relegate—to eject bodily—sovereign Apache from their customary lands, while also, it seems, appropriating some knowledge from at least one or more Paiute Tribes.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Dunbar-Ortiz, 136-138. Mark Trahant, "How Colonization of the Americas Killed 90 Percent of Their Indigenous People—and Changed the Climate." Powell also discusses race/ism regarding perceptions of "overpopulation" and includes Leopold's perceptions that "the characteristic number of Indians in virgin America was small" (Leopold, "Ecology and Politics," *River* 282) implying that, unlike European and Nordic land-users weren't capable of increasing lands' "carrying capacity" ("Pestered," 213).

¹³⁸ Native Land Map, <https://native-land.ca/maps/territories/southern-paiute/>.

Chapter 7: It Is Absurd

Leopold as much as anyone understood that thoughts have consequences. Indeed, I would almost say it became a mantra. “A conservationist is one who is humbly aware...that he is writing his signature on the face of his land,” Leopold wrote in the *Almanac* essay “Axe-in-Hand.”¹³⁹ In “The Land Ethic,” he put it directly: “As a land-user thinketh, so is he.”¹⁴⁰ “An ethic,” he explained in that essay, “presupposes the existence of some mental image of land as a biotic mechanism.” The popular “balance of nature” concept, Leopold suggested, was not an apt symbol because it conjured a too-simple and too-static weighing scale. A “truer picture” or “image” of land, he proposed—in his 1939 essay “A Biotic View of Land” and in the core of “The Land Ethic”—was a “biotic pyramid,” which became the organizing core image of land health to which the land ethic pointed. “We can be ethical,” Leopold asserted, “only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love or otherwise have faith in.”¹⁴¹ It follows, then, that *not* seeing, feeling, understanding, loving, or otherwise having faith in someone—whether “Chinamen,” Africans enslaved in North America, or distinct Indigenous Peoples—as they represent themselves—is itself an elimination with violent consequences. By depopulating wilderness, Leopold undercuts the ethical value of his “perfect norm.” As the wilderness concept goes, so goes “land health,” organized by its symbolic pyramid.

¹³⁹ *Almanac*, 68.

¹⁴⁰ *Almanac*, 188. See footnote 88. This idea (apparently a co-constituting one—as between humans and the rest of their land communities, perhaps merging—as discussed earlier) recurs in various expressions. In the 1933 and 1946 versions of “Conservation Ethic,” Leopold figured it this way: “the idea of a controlled environment contains colors and brushes wherewith society may some day paint a new and possibly a better picture of itself” (*River* 191; “Racial” 278). In “The Farmer as a Conservationist”: “The landscape of any farm is the owner’s portrait of himself” (*River* 263).

¹⁴¹ *Almanac*, 214.

In the section of “The Land Ethic” detailing “The Land Pyramid” Leopold explained that “soil-oak-deer-Indian is a [food] chain that has largely been converted to soil-corn-cow-farmer.”¹⁴² Humans were integral to Leopold’s ethical land health vision. Although Leopold studied and defended interrelations of soils, oaks, and deer along with “a new kind of farmer,” he did not, likewise, show faith in Native people, as valued and fully human members of long “lines of dependency” for re/generative Land-keeping. In this instance, the land pyramid is another version of the white supremacist and eugenics narrative, for the conversion of one chain into another explicitly assumes the elimination of Indigenous Peoples. Leopold’s norm as the ethical and practical standard for coalition-making is inapt. How could anyone expect Indigenous persons to express and legitimate, in Whyte’s terms, “their systems of ethics and knowledge production” through a Leopoldian lens. Any such expectation “grants unsubstantiated and even offensive privilege,” in Whyte’s terms, “in relation to Indigenous ethics.” Doing so, indeed, “will have already silenced them before dialogue has even begun.”¹⁴³ Where would be any common ground for reciprocity, procedural justice, or a stable coalition?

Leopold implicitly credited Apache Tribes’ resistance to colonial settlers for protecting Lands from the settlers’ land abuses. He did so shudderingly, however, in his 1937 essay “Conservationist in New Mexico.” “The predatory Apache of our Southwest,” Leopold wrote, “was early rounded up and confined in reservations, whereas across the line in Mexico he was, until his recent near-extinction, allowed to run at large. Therefore our southwestern mountains are now badly gutted by erosion, whereas the Sierra Madre range across the line still retains the virgin stability of its soils and all the natural beauty that goes with the enviable condition.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² *Almanac*, 215.

¹⁴³ Whyte, “How Similar,” 14

¹⁴⁴ *River*, 239.

Here Leopold relegates Apache to outside humanity as he does wolves. If allowed to “run at large,” “predatory” Apache prevent rapacious settlers, without the land ethic, from ruining the “virgin stability” of the Sierra Madre. As Mvskoke-Creek, Cheraw, Cherokee, Jewish, and Euro-American descendant, scholar and Native seed conservationist Noah Schlager argues, implicit in Leopold’s observations, as a Yale-trained forest manager, is the view that “a forest without Indians is better than a forest with Indians, which is better than a barren mountainside.” This valuation, present in the U.S. conservation movement from the start, Schlager stresses, is a political legacy with very real on-the-ground, anti-Indigenous consequences.¹⁴⁵

Schlager finds Leopold’s “most damning” remark in a 1909 letter to his brother (explicit content follows): “The only hunting I’ve done this month,” Leopold complained, “is for Indians. We caught a bunch in poaching and did some night-maneuvers—regular Daniel Boone style—but the s-of-bs got away from us. Old red and I chased them licked split plumb to the reservation line, but they foxed us for fair and got one of our horses to boot, Old Red buck I was going to buy him too, and sure hate to give him up.”¹⁴⁶ This letter also verifies that Leopold had known

¹⁴⁵Noah Schlager, “Unpacking F&ES Colonial History.”

¹⁴⁶ Leopold to Carl (brother), November 11, 1909, “Biographical materials: Family Correspondence 1909-1911 <http://digioll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/AldoLeopold/AldoLeopold-idx?type=turn&entity=AldoLeopold.ALBMCorr0911.p0028&id=AldoLeopold.ALBMCorr0911&size=L>, 25. Leopold’s language was especially raw in his youth and of note regarding the younger Leopold in relation to Indigenous people. In 1904, Santee Dakota man and scholar and author, Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman), gave a lecture at Leopold’s private high school. A seventeen-year-old Leopold reported on it in a letter to his mother, including his own recent play with a muskrat. This itself might have been encouraged by hearing Ohiyesa, who had recently published his own stories of outdoor curiosity (*Indian Boyhood*, 1902, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/337/337-h/337-h.htm>). According to Syd Beane, a direct relative to Ohiyesa, his ancestor didn’t want people to pretend at being Native. Ohiyesa wanted those with whom he shared his stories to “think like an Indian.” In Beane’s words, “Ohiyesa wanted the young people to bring back the values of the environment, to look at things from another world view. To be like an Indian, and help change things from being exploited.” (Vincent Shilling, “Native voice helped create the Boy Scouts,” Charles Eastman ‘Ohiyesa,’ September 20, 2020, *Indian Country*, <https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/native-voice-helped-create-the-boy-scouts-charles-eastman-ohiyesa?redir=1>). Tallbear highlights the real, violent danger, at the same time, of “playing Indian” if/when it becomes a quest to absorb any still-living, original inhabitants of North America (“Elizabeth Warren’s claim to Cherokee ancestry is a form of violence”).

“Eastman,” the seventeen-year old Leopold also reported, “ventured no opinions on the present status of his race, holding fast to his subject, or, the education of the young Indian, evidently as it was before the advent of white-demoralization, at least he did not mention the latter.” In other details, Leopold expressed what sound like troubling

that Daniel Boone was an “Indian-killer” when he mentioned him in “The Conservation Ethic” and, later, in “The Land Ethic.”

A particularly telling instance of Leopold’s anti-Indigenous relegations was his unsuccessful efforts to appropriate a 2,000-acre marsh within the Jicarilla-Apache Indian Reservation by designating it a federal bird refuge. A “paradise,” he called it, of “grassy shores...blue mountain sky...Just solid ducks.” He wanted to fence it, prohibit hunting, and trap out the predators. “Nobody lives there,” Leopold wrote, so “why not?...It will benefit all and hurt nobody.” By to “benefit all,” he meant to benefit a public beyond a group of “twenty wealthy Colorado sportsmen” who wanted it as a shooting club.¹⁴⁷ Leopold’s “nobody lives there” was to imagine the very real intended removal of Jicarilla Apache, whom he knew were at home with that marsh, in order to open the geography to “plain” settlers’ enjoyment. Here—in an almost poetic expression of Schlager’s thesis as well as of “The Biotic Pyramid” food chain conversion—Leopold imagined an old buck, a great oak, and the ancient masonry of an “old Indian”¹⁴⁸—now ghostly—flooded by energy as a wilderness centerpiece—a symbolic structure

stereotypes overlapping with pride and admiration. “He talks little,” Leopold wrote, “says a great deal to those who have understanding and nothing to those who have not” (himself evidently in the former category). Leopold quoted Eastman approvingly, “Nature is the gate to the Great Mystery.” “The words are simple enough,” Leopold concluded, “but the meaning unfathomable.” An unfathomable “Great Mystery” might have been akin to a sensibility that Leopold carried within him throughout his life. Maybe something like the appeal of Whitman’s “Vast Something” beyond words, although at least partially contained in Leopold’s use of “wild”—that which is uncreatable by human beings—which later became part of the his baseline for evaluating “land health” and “meaning to the human enterprise” (*Almanac*, ix, 201). And, there is teenager-Leopold’s P.S. touching on identity: “Ask Papa if he is acquainted with the cowboy cousin of whom I wrote [younger brother] Carl. As you say, the Ls [Leopold’s] are forging to the front in the Wild and Woolly West, as even Iowa is here called.” (Leopold to “My Dear Mama,” February 10, 1904, “Biographical Materials: Family Correspondence, 1848-1914,” <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/AldoLeopold/AldoLeopold-idx?type=turn&entity=AldoLeopold.ALBMCorr7814.p0111&id=AldoLeopold.ALBMCorr7814&isize=L,111-120>).

¹⁴⁷ Leopold, “Stinking Lake,” in *Aldo Leopold’s Southwest*, 25-32; see Cryer: “An examination of the *Pine Cone* further shows that Leopold’s sportsman-citizen ethos was used to exclude the state’s indigenous subsistence hunters, particularly Apache and nuevomexicanos, from a newly forming conservationist public that would steer regional environmental policy decisions for several decades” (490).

¹⁴⁸ The Rio Gavilan watershed: traditional lands of Indigenous Peoples—Paquime, Opata, and Apache—for at least a millennium. A Mestizo culture emerged after Spanish colonization and the Mexican nation state (Fleming and Forbes, “Following in Leopold’s Footsteps.”)

of a dynamic biotic pyramid. It is of course a symbol of land health. Leopold saw the buck and himself as “actors in an [eternal] allegory.”¹⁴⁹ Underpinning the allegory is the elimination of Indigenous inhabitants.

A third example of anti-Indigenous appropriation with assimilation is particularly knotty, explicitly involving Indigenous land and cultural knowledge. In this case, Leopold discredits Indigenous expertise while later taking credit for it. Leopold’s 1920 article, “‘Piute [sic] Forestry’ vs. Forest Fire Prevention,” was an unusually sloppy piece of work, full of both uncited and also ungrounded claims. The essay was laced with condescending inaccuracies regarding Paiute Peoples.¹⁵⁰ “It is, of course, absurd,” Leopold wrote, “to assume that [‘the California’] Indians fired the forests with any idea of forest conservation in mind.” Erasing the ethical-scientific knowledges of Paiute, Leopold alleged that all presumably Euro-settler “old-timers” knew that “the Indian” burned forests simply in order to get game to stand still. He followed this with still other affronts: “A bunch of deer with their heads in the air waiting for fire,” Leopold claimed, “presented an easy mark, *even* [italics mine] to the Indian’s bow and arrow.” It was, he continued, “this fact and not any desire for fancied forest conservation which caused the Indians to burn forests.”¹⁵¹ Alongside the slur on Paiute hunting skill and technology, this so-called fact Leopold asserted about fire was completely unfounded. Indeed, as Schlager points out, Paiute have a long oral history of intentional burns for fire management as well as for hunting.¹⁵² Leopold concluded his article with an accusation that the “light burning” practiced by Paiute had “destructive effects.” These included causing “valuable forests” to “revert to brush,” with

¹⁴⁹ *Almanac*, 151; Fleming and Forbes; *Odyssey*, 223-226.

¹⁵⁰ Also of interest is Brian John Lefler, “Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute) Ecological Knowledge of Piñon-Juniper Woodlands” and Jeremy Spoon, Richard Arnold, Brian John Lefler, Christopher Milton, “Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute) Shifting Fire Regimes, and the Carpenter One Fire in the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area.”

¹⁵¹ Brown and Carmony, *Leopold Southwest*, 142.

¹⁵² Schlager, “Unpacking F&ES Colonial History.”

destroyed reproductive potential. According to Leopold, it was prevention of forest fires by the USFS, for which he worked, that was now bringing back regeneration.

Four years later, Leopold revisited fire ecology in “Grass, Brush, Timber and Fire in Southern Arizona” (1924). He corrected earlier mistaken scientific assertions with quite brilliant analyses.¹⁵³ He admitted that “Indians kept the brush thin” with fires before “settlement of the country.” The method of light burning, Leopold explained, “gave grass the upper hand...this grass prevented [soil] erosion.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, although the landscape was altered, it remained intact and fertile. It was the settlers—as Leopold characteristically critiqued his own culture’s poor land-use—who caused the grass to be removed by “great herds of livestock.”¹⁵⁵ Grass had prevented fire, while grazing released ungrazeable brush and set fertility downhill, with ground succeeding into revivals of fire-vulnerable piñon woodlands, moreover, likely reducing some game numbers.

Leopold concluded with a sleight of hand that retrieved any credit he might have attributed to the Paiute. He wrote that “the *virgin* condition previous to settlement” was not a “climax” condition of forest, but “a temporary type due to some type of *damage*” [italics mine]. With this stunning phrasing, Leopold disappeared the Paiute, since “virgin” meant “uninhabited,” and ready for taking, to white conservationists. At the same time, he implicitly blamed the Paiute for a “damaged” landscape. But this directly contradicts what he had just remarked, “grass prevented erosion.” Leopold neither acknowledged nor apologized for his past mistakes and offenses. Furthermore, he appropriated and assimilated into his own work

¹⁵³ In both editions of *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, Chapter Two, I propounded this naive, hagiographical view.

¹⁵⁴ Leopold, *River*, 115-116.

¹⁵⁵ Leopold, *River*, 116.

supposedly “new” knowledge from the Paiute, who for many generations had collaborated with forces of fire-plant-soil interrelations.¹⁵⁶

Left unquestioned, Leopold’s claims perpetuate a swelling narrative of pioneer “cultural inheritance.” They keep hidden the many Indigenous histories of genocide and relegation from Lands appropriated, along with facets of culture useful for settlers’ purposes. These purposes included conservationist-designated “refuges” and “wilderness areas”—symptoms themselves of a commodifying, industrial society trying to redeem itself without attention to the buried intentions of its white supremacist assumptions. These purposes swelled into a would-be assimilating tale of settler-colonial moral ascendancy in Leopold’s evolving idea of “the land ethic,” rather than a story of a dominating culture discrediting (and appropriating) Indigenous “systems of ethics and knowledge production” while obstructing many Indigenous Peoples, with deeply adhering relationships, from enacting their own responsibilities.¹⁵⁷ These developed into Leopold’s land ethical vision of “land health” rooted in a base datum—wilderness—and symbol of land—the biotic pyramid—that eliminated a monolithic group he called simply “Indians.” As Whyte argues, “these issues complicate any attempt to compare versions of Leopoldian and Indigenous ethics” and “must be reckoned with by any actual attempts to bring people together around the idea of a similar orientation in the ethics” on the way to possibly bringing about any genuine, stable coalitions—if not “thinking Land communities”—of “people of all heritages.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Leopold, *River*, 115-116.

¹⁵⁷ See also Whyte, “Indigenous Environmental Justice.”

¹⁵⁸ *Almanac*, 225; Whyte, “How Similar,” 3.

Chapter 8: Outside the Moving Window

Two-term U.S. Poet Laureate and African American Natasha Trethewey summarizes my best intentions in a brilliant essay, “On Whitman, Civil War Memory, and My South.” “I am not interested in arguing the omissions of the past,” she writes, “only the [acknowledgement] of those omissions in the present.”¹⁵⁹ In a good way, I need Trethewey’s help in looking at my own work, at Aldo Leopold’s work, and acknowledging the omissions we have made. This study has detailed many such offenses and attempted to set them in the present in order not to repeat them in the future. Here, I underscore a pivotal, personal example of how complicit race/ism keeps hidden, until, intentionally, it is not.

In the first chapter of *Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey*, “Seed Plots,” I told a story about “America’s world poet,” Walt Whitman (unmarked), whom Leopold sometimes recalled.¹⁶⁰ The scene was Whitman’s first trip to the West, by train in 1879. He was headed to the new, 38th U.S. state of Colorado. Whitman, I wrote, “took in the colors and winds.”¹⁶¹ Out the moving window of the train, he “observed the flora, fauna, and people, and described what he called ‘America’s characteristic landscape.’” “Seed-plots of American character,” American historian Frederick Jackson Turner (unmarked) called the forests-turned-gardens, pioneers founding colonial settlements and the settler population expanding east to west. In Turner’s words, the typical settler displayed “faith in man, hope for democracy, belief in America’s destiny,” that would be, in clearer terms, belief in manifest destiny.¹⁶² If eastern forests were “seed plots of

¹⁵⁹ Trethewey, “Whitman,” 56.

¹⁶⁰ Poetry Foundation, “Walt Whitman,” last updated 2020, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/walt-whitman>; *Odyssey*, 229, 345.

¹⁶¹ *Odyssey*, 29-30.

¹⁶² Frederick J. Turner, “The Problem of the West,” *The Atlantic*, September 1896, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1896/09/the-problem-of-the-west/525699/>.

American character,” I suggested in this opening chapter, the West’s prairies and grasslands might have “fed the American spirit.”

What most impressed Whitman, the New Yorker, about the landscapes he was seeing for the first time, was “that feature of the topography of your western central world—that vast Something, stretching out on its own unbounded scale, unconfined, which there is in these prairies, combining the real and the ideal, and beautiful as dreams.” At the same time, Whitman was impressed by his perception of the “inexhaustible...capacity and sure future destiny of that plain and prairie area.” Whitman celebrated this “land of ten million virgin farms—to the eye at present wild and unproductive—yet,” he enthused, “experts say that upon it when irrigated may easily be grown enough wheat to feed the world.”¹⁶³

In response to the poet, I observed—shrewdly, I thought—that Whitman apparently had not perceived the “sleeping tension” between the heavy cropping of this “inexhaustible land” for “wheat to feed the world,” and, even were it inexhaustible, the need to keep the spiritual and “esthetic sense... [of] that vast Something.” “Was it possible to have both—commodity farms *and* the intangible essences, nature’s wild beauty *and* expanding wealth?” I wondered. “If the question earlier went unasked within Whitman’s musings, Leopold would address it in earnest,” I continued, launching the key thesis of my book. Leopold’s idea of “land health,” the centerpiece of his work and of mine, emerged from this “sleeping tension.”

Yet, like Whitman and Leopold, I did not see a whole picture. My argument excluded a fuller history. Like Whitman and Leopold, as I peered out the moving train’s windows, I had conceptually relegated, appropriated, and assimilated the Indigenous Nations, past, present, and future generations. I had ignored the abducted and enslaved Africans. I had omitted from my

¹⁶³ “America’s Characteristic Landscape” in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, 853, 864.

view out the window any of those others who did not conform with the supremacist norm for privilege. My omissions were rote, as invisible to me as I let them be. I could have done better.

Trethewey is both generous and acute in her reflections on Whitman. She discusses Whitman's "prediction that 'the real war' would not get into the books." He believed much of that real history was too unpleasant for settler Americans to stomach. She recounts Whitman's projection that generations later, "when the grave has quenched many hot prejudices and vitalities, and an entirely new class of thinkers and writers comes to the argument, the complete question can perhaps be fairly weighed."¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, Whitman's own war-time poem "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors," adhered to settler-comforting historical myopia. As Trethewey notes, Whitman "focuses on a 'dusky woman, so ancient hardly human,' and not black soldiers who were participants in the war rather than bystanders."¹⁶⁵ We can find similar dismissals in other poems. In "Yonnonndio," for example, the poet sees "Amid the wilds, swarms of stalwart chieftains, medicine-men, and warriors,/As flitting by like clouds of ghosts." These ghostly figures appeared to him, just for a moment, amid "cities, farms, and factories." They have no future, only a past.¹⁶⁶

In my book I perpetuated my cultural ancestors' imaginaries of vague, cloudy ghosts, disappearing memories, "nameless men by nameless rivers," conversions of "the [old] Indian" to "improved farmer." The imaginaries were part of, and perpetuated by, the master narrative incorporating both manifest destiny and eugenics. Both are based upon erasures that still menace now-living Peoples and their children. Like my biocultural ancestors, Whitman and Leopold, I paid keen attention to losses of Silphium, wolves, and soils' fertility, and I celebrated colors,

¹⁶⁴ In Trethewey, "Whitman," 56.

¹⁶⁵ Trethewey, "Whitman."

¹⁶⁶ "Yonnonndio," <https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/poems/340>.

winds, and the “vast Something.” The “vast Something,” in all these visions, is directly connected to Lands, east to west, that Whitman, Leopold, and I have envisioned as virgin or raw wilderness, as standards for settler-inhabited land health. In solidarity with radical hope’s deep revisioning, I now acknowledge that settlers stole and still profit from Lands that remain customary geographies of sovereign Indigenous Peoples. When Whitman arrived in Colorado, and when Leopold arrived in Arizona and New Mexico, it had been mere decades or less since this region, also explored and colonized by the Spanish, was then forcibly annexed from Mexico by the United States. What Leopold saw as previous races, Ancestral Puebloans until late thirteenth-century drought, and, generations of Arapaho, Cheyenne, Ute nations, diverse Pueblans, Navajo, Apache, and Paiute—these Indigenous Peoples are still here. Indigenous Peoples are still everywhere. As Ybarra discusses, Mexican Americans and Chicax also are still fighting, learning from/with/as “the peoples who embody survival and defiance” and “who have been able to endure for thousands of years.”¹⁶⁷ It is others’ cultural inheritances that the U.S. colonialist-empire unvirtuously and unskillfully occupies.

The ethical catastrophe not to see, not to love, is not a mistake, but my birth culture’s intentional colonialism married to white supremacy. When I do not follow the lead of my discomfort—for instance, in silently perpetuating the ancestral vision of an inevitable ascent of the “Anglo-Saxon character,”¹⁶⁸ in Whitman’s terms—the wrong adheres also in me. This race/ist reality was always integral, moreover, with the tension I felt between “wheat to feed the world” and the “Vast Something.” It has always been integral to Leopoldian schemes of land-

¹⁶⁷ Ybarra, “Mexican Americans.” She is discussing the legacy of Enriqueta Vásquez, Chicana feminist writer and activist.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Dunbar-Ortiz, 117.

health communities, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas, overseen by settler-conservation officers and “cleaned up,” ironically enough of former inhabitants.

Warning: moreover explicitly race/ist-violent content follows.

Thus Whitman: “The n-----, like the I-j--, will be eliminated; it is the law of the races, history.” “A superior grade of rats come and then all the minor rats are cleared out,” he continued. “We pant to see our country and its rule far-reaching. . . . What has miserable, inefficient Mexico to do with the great mission of people, the new world with a noble race?”¹⁶⁹ The words “noble” and “race” seem to echo from the end of “Conservation in the Southwest.” That unpublished essay, drafted by a thirty-six-year-old Leopold, concluded: “And if there be, indeed, a special nobility inherent in the human race—a special cosmic value, distinctive from and superior to all other life—by what token shall it be manifest? By a society decently respectful of its own and all other life, capable of inhabiting the earth without defiling it? Or by a society like that of John Burroughs’¹⁷⁰ potato bug, which exterminated the potato, and thereby exterminated itself?”¹⁷¹

Acknowledging omissions means acknowledging words and actions I/we wish we could omit. Surfacing wrongs in which, even as well-meaning settler-conservationists, we participate, we can choose to unlearn harmful, even brutalizing assumptions. We can choose to resist their rote repetition in acts of both personal and relational healing, helping transform our own

¹⁶⁹ Dunbar-Ortiz explains: Thirty-one years before his journey west, Whitman had been an outspoken supporter of the U.S. war against Mexico from whom such a large portion of U.S. southwestern states was wrested. Whitman had supported a U.S.-forced regime change in order to “bring out enterprise, open the way for manufacturers and commerce, into which the immense dead capital of...[Mexico]...will find its way” (117-18).

¹⁷⁰ One of my paternal family as well as a cultural ancestor.

¹⁷¹ Leopold. “Conservation in the Southwest,” *Leopold*, ed. Meine (224-36).

dominating institutions. We can support common caring in community and coalitions, enacting skillful love with reparative justice.

Chapter 9: Three Reciprocatve Rejoinders

Upholding common concerns without continuing to repeat past offences requires us settler-conservationists to listen for differences. This can help us face ancestors authentically, in Robert Pogue Harrison's terms, and in becoming the kinds of ancestors we'd like to be. Openness to difference, that is, can help guide choices between ancestral retrievals, renewals, and refusals, also reciprocated with rejoinders. That openness leads to offerings of positive alternatives. Intra-legacy and intergenerational conversations might also point the way to genuine coalitions, and, moreover, making good relations encompassing unity (versus universality) and plurality of thriving Earth communities.¹⁷² These may be sparked by recognizing, receptively listening to, un/learning from, and, consensually acknowledging and/or stepping back to unoccupy the possibilities of others'—particularly Indigenous—heritages. This may be on the way to “something like the abolishment” of “race/ism,” to break the relentless settler-native-slave triad,¹⁷³ to decolonize our bodies, our minds, and all Lands.¹⁷⁴ This might help ground any possibilities for future re/generative conditions of health and humankind's inseparable flourishing.

¹⁷² Kanngieser and Todd, “From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study,” 385-393; Tallbear, “Caretaking”; Whyte, “Indigenous Environmental Justice.”

¹⁷³ I am thinking here of Dotson, *Decolonization*, 196: “One decolonial goal in a US settler colonial society is “to break the relentless structuring of the triad—a *break* and not a compromise” (citing Tuck and Yang, 31, italics added). See also McLean, *Social, Historical*, 42, 43: “Race/ism then is a colonial breeding principle that governs and mediates lives through the active making and management of relational indexes of hegemonic difference. This entails an understanding of human genetic variation that is not driven by dominion-based logics.” And, “Where we start our story is central to our overall understanding of it...if race is socially constructed, there are times and places when race did not exist...” And, so, there can times and places when it may, again, not exist as such.”

¹⁷⁴ I acknowledge the many advocacy and decolonizing/anti-racist trainings and perspectives I received over recent years via labors with many Gwich'in Steering Committee and Native Movement grassroots experts. For more information, consult <https://ourarcticrefuge.org>; <https://www.nativemovement.org>.

With all this in mind, I bear witness to three brief, public episodes of settler-colonial listening to Indigenous voices, mostly from within an Arctic geography. These are Iñupiat and Yup'ik and Athabascan persons—including of Diné (Navajo) also Tohono O'odham, Gwich'in, Sugpiaq and Ahtna Peoples. Each of the three examples counters colonialist-white supremacist systematized habits of relegating, appropriating, and assimilating others. They might support more widely reorganized searches for multiple scales of values from starting points that may/no longer be called “wilderness.” These episodes offer rejoinders to Leopoldian ancestral proposals. Again, tracking with Kyle Powys Whyte's framework:

- I. Hearing Indigenous Peoples' own historical narratives of ethical trajectories since colonization.
- II. Observing enacted Indigenous Land ethical norms contrasting with colonial (English language translations).
- III. Practicing equitable co-respectful dependencies between Anglo- and Indigenous systems of ethics and knowledges.

In each case, I pay attention to incommensurabilities of languages and other cultural-translational challenges. It is important to remember that even when any of us try our best to understand each other, there is always the chance that we can't. This challenge of humility, too, might be part of Whyte's “coming together of people of all heritages” so as not to continue privileging a dominating group. It is akin to Harrison's caution to potential non-consanguineous relations who need to, but can't always, understand ways-of-telling. Humility points, again, to the insights of Robin Kimmerer. Her storytelling leads away from the hoarding disposition

whom she knows as Windigo, and, at the same time, away from settler-colonials presuming they can become “Indigenous” in their lifetimes. Kimmerer orients non-Natives, rather, towards a vision of “naturalizing,” as anyone would need to become a citizen of a foreign nation in a lifetime. Naturalizing to hers (and, Whyte’s) Citizen Potawatomi Nation, for example, would call for a commitment to uphold “Nanabozho’s Original Instructions,” she writes. While to “naturalize to a place,” Kimmerer suggests, would be a practice of give-and-take—reciprocities—as if your life and others’ depended upon it—body, mind, and spirit—across generations. It also would be, she says, to “know that your ancestors lie in this ground...to live as if your children’s future matters” inseparable from land—not lost, and found.¹⁷⁵

Reverse Historical Narratives: Many Named Nameless Returning to Many Languages

Leopold aimed to reverse his dominating culture’s land-ruining assumptions by redirecting its narrative of progress. Pioneers spread and hammered out “America” from “raw wilderness,” Leopold asserted. Now that new settlers were assured of “a good breakfast” and multiple televisions and bathtubs, he argued, survival relied on his assimilative notion of *Homo*

¹⁷⁵ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 214-215.

Something standing out to me afresh in Harrison’s reflections is how rooted in the future history is when, in the present, I face my dead and “shatter” against my own coming death or extinction. When I look ahead from this vantage, I can see myself in the company of my dead and the unborn. And, who are my dead and unborn? To be sure, they are biological and cultural relations. Yet, Harrison also discusses adopting (or, being adopted into) another’s traditions, if not communities and families. In this way a dedicated foreigner might gain entrance into freshly meaningful, urgently-needed life-preserving “coffers of legacies” (*Dominion*, 96, 97, 103-105).

A danger looms large here, however—the risk of furthering cultural appropriation and other ills. How, then, do we expect to unsettle the possibility of electing (if not being chosen by) non-consanguine ancestors? How do members of a colonizing culture, again, in Whyte’s words, challenge the systemic and habitual “resilience of settler privilege” upon/if finding a dearth of potential “reciprocal rejoinders” (Harrison, 102-103) among our own legacies? How not to offend when recognizing, finally, our need for the help of Indigenous Peoples’ land-flourishing knowledge and skills? (Whyte, “White Allies, Let’s Be Honest About Decolonization.”) Consent-based relating, for instance, is essential.

¹⁷⁵ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 214-215.

sapiens evolving their first land ethic. This, he went on to project, would likely occur stepwise, with moral regard expanding from relations of man-to-man and man-to-society to man-society-land-community relations. The ethically expanded community would further appropriate “tag-ends” of wilderness, out of which Native Peoples had been violently relegated, as the “most perfect norm” by which to gauge improvements in land use. For Leopold, Alaska was a vast, “virgin country,” casting a “spell of the Yukon” on millions of visitors. And many of those visitors, even today, may think Robert Service captured the spell in his account of lone, nameless men, nameless rivers, and strange valleys.¹⁷⁶

In summer 2019, along the banks of the Yukon River, I gathered with Indigenous people—many of whose names I already knew from living in traditional territories of the lower Tanana Dene Peoples and the Dena’ina Peoples aka Fairbanks, Alaska. Here, generations of Indigenous Peoples have lived from time immemorial on still-unceded lands, and they are still here. That June, I attended the first Arctic Indigenous Climate Summit organized by the Gwich’in Steering Committee directed by Bernadette Demientieff. It was hosted by her village of Gwichyaa Zhee (Fort Yukon, Alaska), one of some fifteen small villages of the Gwich’in Nation, spread along the vast arctic migration route of Vadzaih (the Porcupine Caribou Herd).¹⁷⁷ A bit of the heart of each one—Gwich’in and Vadzaih—is quilted into the other.¹⁷⁸ On the third

¹⁷⁶Service, “To the Man of the High North”; Service’s “Spell of the Yukon” also includes these lines: “There’s a land where the mountains are nameless,/And the rivers all run God knows where.”

¹⁷⁷ Gwich’in Steering Committee, “Arctic Indigenous Climate Summit Report: June 10-14, 2019.” Here is a story of how I experienced it: Julianne Warren, “Gwichyaa Zhee-A Climate Summit Journey,” drafted and vetted, 2019, https://theunfallensilent.org/wp-content/uploads/Warren_Gwichyaa-Zhee_2019.pdf.

¹⁷⁸ See Bernadette Demientieff’s statement before the U. S. House of Representatives in March 2019: “But my people have lived in this place for thousands of years, and the hearts of the Gwich’in Nation and the Porcupine caribou herd have been linked since time immemorial. Our creation story tells that the Gwich’in will always keep a part of the caribou heart, and the caribou will always keep a part of the Gwich’in heart. The future of the Gwich’in and the future of the caribou are the same. What befalls the caribou; befalls the Gwich’in” (Demientieff, “Gwich’in Leaders Travel to New York to Tell Banks: Defend the Arctic Refuge,” October 29, 2018.); See “Statement of Bernadette Demientieff...to the U.S. House...on H.R. 1146,” March 26, 2019.

day of the gathering, Enei Begaye, executive director of Native Movement, called participants together under an Octagon canopy. She invited us there to share in an activity created by Yupik elders of the Mamterilleq (Bethel) region. Begaye noted that she did so with the consent of Rose Domnick, whom she knew as one such elder and community leader, who had taught it to her. With Begaye's consent, I pass on this abbreviated depiction. The activity had much more to it than can be shared here.¹⁷⁹

Begaye placed a drum on the ground. This drum represents the core, she explained, beginning an ethical narrative that runs directly counter to the Leopoldian one. This core is everything that connects to Mother Earth. It centers many Indigenous worldviews, she said.

Begaye is Diné (Navajo) and Tohono O'odham. She/They married into the Gwich'in Nation. Earlier, Begaye also had retold a story passed on from some of her grandparents. She recalled them saying that when Dené (Athabascan Peoples) of the north and south meet—as in her marriage, and as in what is happening here at the Summit—it would mean the end of the world.¹⁸⁰ This would mean, they clarified, that so much change had occurred that the formerly recognizable world was finished. This finish, I surmised from Begaye's story-telling, sounded like the consequence of disconnections within Mother Earth, a severed core, empty of herself.

Back under the Octagon, Begaye lifted the drum from the ground and placed it aside. Without Indigenous values beautifully threading human activities into the weft of the Land, nothing holds the core together, they explained.¹⁸¹ The void left in the center was surrounded by

¹⁷⁹ Personal email, 12/11/2020. Thank you, again, Enei.

¹⁸⁰ “Ancient native prophecies say: When the Eagle of the North and the Condor of the South fly together, Indigenous peoples will unite the human family,” Clement Guerra and Sophie Guerra, directors, *The Condor and the Eagle*.

¹⁸¹ Acknowledging that binary gender terms are insufficient, e.g., the two spirit movement of Native American and Indigenous communities “encompassing Indigenous systems of gender and sexuality that exist outside and independent from the lgbtq+ system,” which were also disrupted by colonization (Native Movement, <https://www.nativemovement.org/nm-blog>).

a ring of children surrounded by a ring of women with an orbit of men behind them, having the others' backs, the backs of the outer ring exposed to outside the circle, beyond.

Begaye next asked the seated children to leave. Their departure, they explained, replayed the forced relegation of many of their grandparents and great-grandparents from their communities into distant boarding schools meant to assimilate them into English-speaking settler culture.¹⁸²

“What’s happening? Where are we going?” asked one child, distracted by a five-week-old puppy snuggling in their sweatshirt.

Then, Begaye walked around the circle, tapping shoulders. First the women, then the men. The tapped ones stepped away. This reenacted the further erosion of many Indigenous communities via historic and ongoing traumas. These included settler-brought diseases, murders, and kidnappings—especially of missing girls and women. The overuse of drugs and alcohol, suicides—especially of young men. Poisoned air and warming climate tied with stolen children, appropriated and looted lands, alienation from ancestral Land-valuing responsibilities, prohibited songs, stifled language, forced assimilation into a foreign tongue, forbidden country foods, shackled values and fragmented knowledge systems, shattered identities, griefs over lost loved ones.

As the circles broke apart, my throat contracted. I heard others quietly sobbing. This IS the end of the world. Words—“there is no core”—involuntarily, I felt, spoke themselves in my mouth.

¹⁸² In this Tanana Chief’s Conference video, Elder Luke Titus of Old Minto shares some of his experience of Wrangell Institute: <https://www.tananachiefs.org/legacy-of-our-elders/luke-titus/>. This informs the first episode of the Native-led PBS children’s series *Molly of Denali*, <https://nm.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/mod19-soc-grandpasdrum/grandpas-drum-molly-of-denali/>.

Begaye brought us back together to talk a bit more. Then we all took a break.

I walked slowly to the river and dipped my fingers into one small eddy. I heard this frontlines echo—“water is life.”

The representation of Mother Earth’s connective core by a drum felt carefully chosen. In positive decolonizing inversion—now the restless songs awake, Begaye encouraged. And, Native languages lead Indigenous Peoples back. “Iñupiaq values”—“respect for nature...respect for others,” the many reciprocities with Land and Mother Earth—“our sacred relationship with the bowhead whale, with our tuttu...it’s sleeping, that relationship,” said a young Iñupiaq woman named Siqiñiq Maupin, reclaiming Iñupiatun. Maupin urged that it is time to wake up and reconnect and protect what is left, while “we can still change, and we can still get our animals to be healthy again.” She continues. “But if we continue to go down the path that we know is not right in our hearts, we’re going to see changes that are irreversible, and that’s what pushes me.”¹⁸³

Within community, as Maupin helped me hear, many are healing back into the millennia-long old-new legacy of ancestral relationships in Arctic lifescapes broken by outsiders. It is not as if they are evolving toward some land ethic that Iñupiaq and other relations had never had.

For me, as an Anglo-settler, to be welcomed into this gathering of deep knowledge-sharing and feeling was a generosity that calls forth my own responsibility. I keep listening to learn how to be supportive in relations with Iñupiaq, Gwich’in, Diné, Tohono O’odham, and other Indigenous persons and Peoples on the way to Land and cultural rematriation and re/generative prosperity that somehow enmeshes all of us.

¹⁸³ Siqiñiq Maupin, “Summit”, 45. View also Warren, Maupin, Campbell, Manthai, “[De-centering] Aldo Leopold’s Legacy.”

Leopold's ethical vision projected a grand narrative of moral ascension that runs counter to many Indigenous stories of cultural-ethical continuity with the Land. It also perpetuated a manifest destiny project of genocide and relegation of Native Peoples into reservations (in Alaska, a complex organization of for-profit corporations and villages¹⁸⁴). By force, settlers tried to assimilate survivors into settler-colonial society and "white" notions of ideal humanity. These ideals echoed from supremacist culture, both in the land-ruining "progress" that Leopold critiqued and in institutions he helped invent: "game and wildlife," "refuge," "wilderness," and "land health." As Noah Schlager put it, white settler conservation embedded a violently anti-Indigenous narrative from the start—"a forest without Indians is better than a forest with Indians, which is better than a barren mountainside." These "dead," wrote Leopold, in reference to so-called "Indian races," "have laid them down/In their last sleep" in the "Barcan wilderness" and "continuous woods."¹⁸⁵ He and his improving settler-conservationist kind of people, Leopold proposed, would take over those places going forward—perhaps becoming plain members of land communities, while still dominating Black, Indigenous and People of Color, especially often women, LGBTQIA+, children, and/or disabled persons.

At a Bureau of Land Management hearing in Fairbanks in Winter 2018, Indigenous Peoples—including Gwich'in, Iñupiaq, and Ahtna—were very much awake to ongoing settler-colonial chicaneries. They were intent on Land-keeping their ancestral geographies by their own

¹⁸⁴ For example, Meghan Sullivan, "ANSCA: A complete or incomplete story of sovereignty," *Indian Country Today*, February 22, 2022, <https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/ansca-a-complete-or-incomplete-story-of-sovereignty>

¹⁸⁵ Leopold, "Some Fundamentals of Conservation in the Southwest," 236. He is quoting William Cullen Bryant's poem "Thanatopsis," itself embedded in the narrative of Manifest Destiny.

long-enacted cultural norms, including by their own languages, often incommensurable with English-word understandings.

“I talk from my heart,” said Neetsi’aii Gwich’in elder Sarah James. This hearing was focused on oil and gas leasing in Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit, the Sacred Place Where Life Begins. This coastal plain—Land never ceded to any colonial government—is the Porcupine Caribou Herd calving ground, which Gwich’in themselves know to keep from disturbing, even by their own presence. The flourishing of Gwich’in and vadzaih (caribou) is integrated spiritually, nutritionally, and culturally, as it has been for millennia, for time immemorial. The U.S. calls this the 10-02 area of the 19.5-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which was designated in 1980. When James spoke at the hearing in English, she explained, she spoke in her “second language.” Since colonization, she stressed, “Our people are living in two world [*sic*].”¹⁸⁶

In the colonialists’ world, the U.S.-designated Refuge contains the second largest area of designated wilderness—8.9 million acres. In the words of the federal Wilderness Act defining it, this is a place wherein “the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”¹⁸⁷ At the northern boundary of the Refuge, outside this wilderness area, is the 1.5-million-acre coastal plain—which the oil and gas industry believes will become lucrative. The plain is a relatively narrow band, sheltering the caribou calving nursery, between the Brooks Range and the Arctic Ocean. In 2017, Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski bypassed transparent legislative channels and attached a coastal plain drilling

¹⁸⁶ Sarah James, “In the Matter Of: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program Draft Environmental Impact Statement Public Meeting.”

¹⁸⁷ U.S. 88th Congress, Second Session, “The Wilderness Act, Public Law 88-577 (16 U.S.C. 1131-1136),” as amended September 3, 1964, <https://wilderness.net/learn-about-wilderness/key-laws/wilderness-act/default.php>.

mandate, Public Law 115-97, to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which passed.¹⁸⁸ This Public Law 115-97 presented the most urgent threat since 1988, when the Gwich'in Nation united in defense of Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit.¹⁸⁹

In 1988, Gwich'in elders had called for a feast bringing together all their Tribes, separated by U.S. and Canadian government boundaries, for the first time in a century. In James's words, her Nation was taking "a position as a people of the Land as they did before our first visitor came to our area." Gwich'in have gathered every two years since in defense of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which—because they are so interwoven—is also a defense of the Gwich'in themselves. The elders guided the Nation to form the Gwich'in Steering Committee, which Demientieff now directs with that prime purpose. It was, as James highlighted, "like a dream...like birth of a nation—reunited birth of a nation like we always happen before the border."¹⁹⁰

In 2012, the Gwich'in Nation unanimously passed Gwich'in Niintsyaa, their "Resolution to Protect the Birthplace and Nursery Grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd."¹⁹¹ This was an announcement "in black and white" to the "outside world"—made, as James put it, because "we can't do it by ourself...because oil is huge."¹⁹²

With a united voice against extractors, the Gwich'in Nation reaffirmed their resolve to defend their sovereign rights to "continue their way of life" against this next wave of colonial-capitalist invaders. As they note in Gwich'in Niintsyaa, this is a right "recognized and affirmed by civilized nations in the international covenants on human rights." Article 1 of the

¹⁸⁸ For background see Warren, "Faraway and Close: Training for Arctic Refuge Alliance."

¹⁸⁹ Gwich'in Steering Committee, *Gwich'in Niintsyaa 1988*.

¹⁹⁰ James, "Coastal Plain," 7.

¹⁹¹ The Gwich'in Nation, *Gwich'in Niintsyaa, 2012*.

¹⁹² James, "Coastal Plain," 8.

International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, ratified by the U.S. Senate, reads in part: “*In no case may a People be deprived of their own means of subsistence*” [underline mine]. This 2012 Gwich’in statement also concluded by resolving that the 10-02 area “be made *Wilderness* to protect the sacred birthplace of the caribou” [italics mine].¹⁹³

The document announced all of this to be read by mostly English-speaking outsiders, whose recent ancestors had punished their Gwich’in ancestors for speaking Dinjii Zhuu Ginjik, Gwich’in language. The colonizers also “renamed” vast areas of their traditional lands enacting appropriation and, most often, looting. With generations of forced assimilation and disruption of kinship relations, probably fewer than a third of Gwich’in people—most forty or older—speak Dinjii Zhu’ Ginjik, which is among the most globally “endangered” languages.¹⁹⁴

Following James, another speaker at the hearing also focused on translation—particularly on the incommensurability of meanings with very real, incommensurable consequences. Shawna Larson, a younger woman who is Sugpiaq on her mother’s side and Ahtna on her father’s, first emphasized: “We support Gwich’in People.” She added, “Those are our relatives. We support the Porcupine Caribou Herd.” “We heard a lot of the elders talking about how there is no way to express certain things in their own traditional language,” Larson continued. “There is no way to say it, really, in English.”¹⁹⁵

Larson then unfolded a story of how her traditional tribal council elders had asked her to help find a better English word than “subsistence” to describe their way of life. Because, Larson

¹⁹³ Gwich’in Nation, *Gwich’in Niintsyaa*, 2012. See Dementieff’s words: “This area is sacred to our people, so sacred that during the years of food shortage we still honored the calving grounds and never stepped foot on the Coastal Plain” (Dementieff, Statement H.R. 1146, 2).

¹⁹⁴ GTC Department of Cultural Heritage: Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute, “How We Speak,” <https://www.gwichin.ca/how-we-speak>.

¹⁹⁵ Shawna Larson, “Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program Draft Environmental Impact Statement Public Meeting,” transcribed by Mary A. Vavrik, Fairbanks, Alaska, February 4, 2019, 86-87. Story shared with Larson’s consent, Personal email, 5-13-22. Thank you, again, Shawna.

explained, the dictionary meaning is “to merely survive.” “We are not merely surviving. We’re thriving and we are living. We have a relationship with the Land,” she emphasized. So, she asked: “How do you say that in English?” She turned to other elders, she said. Trying to convey what she meant, Larson held up one hand to represent “this is the land and the animals” and the other to represent “this is the People.” She clasped her hands together and then asked them, “In our language, how do you say this?” One elder now responded, “Oh, oh, oh, oh. You can't. There is no one word for that.” He told her,

That's why we have stories. Stories make you feel. And what you are describing is a relationship. And that's the only way you can really know what and how you are interacting with the land and with the animals and with each other.

“We had these also, stories about our relationship with the animals,” Larson concluded her comment, “and it just makes me realize, a Westernized colonial view, world view, cannot be translated into an Indigenous world view. It just can't.”¹⁹⁶

Vásquez-Fernández and Ahenakew pii tai poo taa support the import of a word like “subsistence” in the BLM hearing. “Sustainable” and “development” combined, as they detail, are merely other terms for ongoing paradigms of colonial disrespect and exploitation as usual.¹⁹⁷ A rejoinder, hearing this, is to keep deepening reflections on how “wilderness,” “subsistence,” and many other English-settler words—words that Anglos so often expect Indigenous speakers to use—might not be translatable into their own ethical and knowledge systems.

¹⁹⁶ Larson, Coastal Plain Podium, 86-87.

¹⁹⁷Vásquez-Fernández and Cash Ahenakew pii tai poo taa, Resurgence.

In Gwich'in Niintsyaa, the Gwich'in Nation resolved, in English, on protecting their “subsistence,” linked with “human rights,” and used the term “wilderness” in defense of their way of life. In Dinjii Zhuu Ginjik, the coastal plain is called “Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit.” Does the term “wilderness” translate into what Gwich'in mean by their own name? And if not, how could it *not* somehow mean different cultural enactments of land relations? Recall how Whyte described the Anishinaabe women elders’ Mother Earth Water Walk in contrast with what Leopold modelled as a settler land conservationist. Moreover, as much as I lean in to respect the way Demientieff knows the heart of her People, herself, and vadzaih as part of each other, how could my relations with that place be anything like hers? How could any inheritance transmitted over less time than millennia? “*Indigenous* is a birthright word,” Robin Kimmerer writes.¹⁹⁸

A third woman, following and followed by many others, called Dinjii Zhuu Ginjik the “language of my soul.” Caroline Tritt-Frank, from Vashraii K’oo (Arctic Village), is a Dinjii Zhuu Ginjik teacher. “I think if they [oil and gas extractors] interfere with the caribou,” she explained, “that will destroy their [the children’s] language, their way of talking because everything that they use on caribou is used in Gwich'in. And so every single piece of the caribou has a Gwich'in name.” And this is what is passed on by elders who “usually speak about hunting.” “So,” she said, “I think the language is a major concern for me and the caribou that the elders live on.”¹⁹⁹

As I listened closely to the Alaska Native persons at this BLM hearing—I understood that they would never give up courageously defending something that did not translate into “subsistence.” It did not sound to me like Leopoldian “wilderness,” either. It sounded like the

¹⁹⁸ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 213.

¹⁹⁹ Mishler and Frank, *Dinjii Vadzaih Dhidlit*.

antithesis of Indigenous relegation, appropriation, and assimilation. It seemed to belong to desired futures. I heard it sounding more like “#LandBack,”²⁰⁰ like rematriated sovereignty and Peoples at liberty to make and keep up their own land-ethical relationships, their responsibilities. Riffing on Schlager’s thesis, maybe I was hearing a narrative something like: Indigenous sovereignty in sacred Lands without a U.S. federal wilderness designation is better than a wilderness designation, which is better than extraction like oil and gas drilling. Maybe it sounded something like everything—past, present, future—in Peoples’ own tongues. Maybe, attuning with Larson’s testimony, it meant Indigenous Peoples’ own ongoing stories.²⁰¹

There’s a Story (Not an Allegory): Reciprocity

In “The Land Ethic,” Leopold whited out “Indians” from “The Biotic Pyramid,” which he envisioned as an apt “symbol of land.” “Wilderness,” too, as a norm, placed Black persons, Indigenous persons and sovereign Nations outside the land-ethical practices to which land health pointed.

Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey has ambiguous meanings. One of its angles is an essay by Leopold titled “Odyssey.” That essay, like “Song of the Gavilan,” brings alive Leopold’s pyramid from “The Land Ethic,” which is “a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants and animals,” including “man.”²⁰²As we have seen, “man” means settlers. In his

²⁰⁰ Ybarra argues for coalition between “land banks” of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement--“to hold land communally by and for Chicanos,” in Enriqueta Vásquez’s words—and decolonization written as the current Indigenous #LandBack movement (“Mexican Americans”). Preferable to “the alternative. Wilderness sits there with its soul hollowed out, emptied of the peoples who help animate all relations there.”

²⁰¹ In 2019, the U.S. House passed the “H.R. 1146 Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act,” introduced by Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA-2), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1146> that would “amend PL 115-97 to repeal the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge oil and gas program.” The act does not refer to “wilderness.”

²⁰² Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” *Almanac*, 181.

“Odyssey,” Leopold portrayed complex ecological dependencies in an efficiently told story about two nutrient atoms. Each atom takes a contrasting ecological trip through the “[prairie] world of living things” before and after the pioneers become wheat farmers there. These latter clearly need to ascend onto the land ethical path. At the same time, as in some of Leopold’s earlier works, there is a generic, “Indian.” In this tale, he receives and redistributes nutrient atoms before becoming replaced. This Indian sounds like a spiritual animal, though not one capable of scientific nor land-ethical thinking. On the other hand, in “Song of the Gavilan,” “the old Indian” Leopold refers to seems to have been capable of good Land relations, but is already a ghost.²⁰³ In this narrative, Leopold takes up the now-vacated role of hunter within his “symbolic structure.” “Food is the continuum” flooded by the energy of “sunshine” in an ecological dreamscape. Leopold fears that soon other settlers will arrive with science, but not yet land membership, and destroy it. Leopold thus paints himself as a bow hunter who has happily exchanged a more certain venison meal for ethical restraint and care for future generations. He evokes Judeo-Christian biblical terms for his rightful belonging in an existentially alluring scene—“Dust to dust, stone age to stone age”—“but always the eternal chase!”²⁰⁴

The Climate Summit in Gwichyaa Zhee was the first place I witnessed Native experts—including elders and traditional hunters, some additionally trained in dominant science—hosting academic non-Native scientists. The gathering conveyed a powerful alternative to white privilege

²⁰³ In Leopold’s “Odyssey”: “An Indian eventually inherited the eagle’s plumes, and with them *propitiated the Fates*, whom he assumed had a special interest in Indians. *It did not occur to him* that they might be busy casting dice against gravity; that mice and men, soils and songs, might be merely ways to retard the march of atoms to the sea” (Leopold, *Almanac*, 106, italics mine). And, in “Song of the Gavilan,” while Leopold acknowledges the past earthworks of “men [in the thousands] capable of inhabiting a river without disrupting the harmony of its life,” he goes on to say that “science has not yet arrived on [that] Gavilan [river].” Paradoxically, he ends up critiquing big settler-colonial science as applied in unethical ways and expressing supremacy toward Indigenous Peoples in not questioning the implied assumption that science didn’t arrive until white people did (“Song of the Gavilan,” *Almanac*, 149-154).

²⁰⁴ Leopold, “Song of the Gavilan,” *Almanac*, 132.

and Indigenous erasure. “There’s these specklebellies...white-fronted geese...this heat, the sun, it’s driving them up north faster,” Gwich’in hunter Chuck Peter observed. “Soon as the river goes, boom they’re gone,” he reported. If life depends on food security, food security depends on discerning and adapting to changes in the land community. “We got to risk our lives...cause we gotta fight with the icebers in the channel breaking up,” Peter explained, “The ways the ice melts differently makes it riskier to follow them upriver.”²⁰⁵ A Gwich’in elder told the gathered group, “I’ve seen the changes...All the permafrost going...I’ll do more listening, but later on maybe I might find my way to talk, again.”²⁰⁶

Bernadette Demientieff often has stressed, “My elders are my scientists. They have warned us that this [oil and gas drilling] is not a good idea.”²⁰⁷ The Vuntut Gwitchin, across the border in Old Crow, have issued the first known Indigenous declaration of climate emergency, “Yeendoo Diinehdoo Ji’heezrit Nits’oo Ts’o’ Nan He’aa,” or “After Our Time, How Will the World Be.” This declaration emphasizes their and other Indigenous communities’ “vast and unique knowledge systems, practices and technologies for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change as the world’s most environmentally conscious inhabitants.” It strikes “the imperative that Indigenous peoples be central to every effort for mitigating and adapting to climate change at local to international scales.”²⁰⁸

At another land protection event, the young Vuntut Chief, thirty-one-year-old Dana Tizya-Tramm, shared a story “that puts all of this in focus,” he said. The elder’s story helps

²⁰⁵ Chuck Peter, Summit Report, 18.

²⁰⁶ Stephen Frost, Sr, Summit Report, 32.

²⁰⁷ Demientieff, Rothko.

²⁰⁸ Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Council, “Yeendoo Diinehdoo Ji’heezrit Nits’oo Ts’o’ Nan He’aa,” May 19, 2010. See also Gwich’in Council International, *Impact Assessment in the Arctic: Emerging Practices of Indigenous-led Review*, April 2018.

explain how “there’s a lot more to these lands [Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit] than oil and gas.”²⁰⁹ “We were driving up the river and going up to [the elder’s] camp,” Tizya-Tramm began,

And we passed a moose. And, as we turned the corner going around the next bend in the river, he told me, ‘you saw that moose?’ And I told him, ‘yeah.’ And he said, ‘that moose has been there my whole life.’ And we kept going. And I thought about it. And right away that moose looked no more than four or five years old. And I thought, what does he mean, ‘his whole life,’ he’s an elder?

But as I really began to unpack it, I realized what he was saying—that, that creek has always had moose in it. And, later on when we got to the camp, he said, ‘don’t bother that creek and the moose will always be there.’²¹⁰

In Tizya-Tramm’s story I hear that the moose was really there. The elder was really there. He, himself, was really there. Their ancestors’ bodies were in that ground. And future generations would be born there, passing along the river. “It’s actually all of us in there together,” Tizya-Tramm said.

Then, in another breath, “it’s hard to sit down with some of the staffers or representatives or others in oil and gas industry that look at the pure economic side of things.” “And this,” Tizya-Tramm continued, “is where rationality has an ability to pop in when it’s us versus them,” which he could not see in that way. Seeing land only economically, in terms of oil and gas, “in

²⁰⁹ Eva Holland, “Bringing Old Crow to the World,” *Uphere*, December 2019, <https://uphere.ca/articles/bringing-old-crow-world>.

²¹⁰ Dana Tizya-Tramm “The Truth About Seismic.” Stories of Tizya-Tramm shared with consent; Personal email 5/2/22. Thank you, again, Chief Tizya-Tramm.

my view,” Tizya-Tramm stressed, “I actually find a misappropriation of what the term *energy* truly is.” This is what the elder’s story put into focus, he explained:

When you go into this area [Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit], as fragile as it is, and a keystone in the arctic ecosystems—and, you go, and you drill there—yes, you can get your oil out of there, if there’s anything significant in there. But what you are sacrificing is a different perspective on energy because these [Porcupine Herd] caribou go to this area.

And, by the way, they are the last healthy herd of caribou right across all Canada. All caribou are historically in decline. And, this is the last healthy herd, the largest land animal migration in the world.

And they convert lichens and cottongrasses and different foods into nutrients that they lock into their bodies. And, they move across our lands delivering these nutrients to the Gwich’in Nation, the Indigenous Peoples, and to the bears and to the wolves. And they drive this huge, ancient ecosystem in which we are tied to.

And that is now being threatened without recourse or some actual tools to have some real considerations and some meaningful conversations on a level that will truly express the actual importance of this area.

To me, at least at first, it *sounds like* both Leopold’s biotic pyramid and Tizya-Tramm’s tellings mean similar things. Both seem to be imagining intergenerational hunts and flows of nutrients and energy through ecosystems. When I first heard Tizya-Tramm’s stories, I felt myself pulled toward an assumption of common ground between settler and Gwich’in ways and

understandings. Yes, I felt a definite pull. I felt the tug of my old colonizer habit of passing what I heard Tizya-Tramm say through the filter of what I thought I already knew. That pull was toward expectations for a Gwich'in perspective to be evaluated and legitimized according to my bio-cultural ancestor's rules. And then, I resisted.

Here are some ways I resist. I recall Harrison's suggestion that listeners can neither avow nor refuse and reciprocally rejoinder an ancestral proposal if they have either failed to hear it or do not understand the language in which the proposal is made.²¹¹ In the latter case, this may be a sort of refusal to/of the listeners. I hear Larson, echoing her elders: "There is no way to say it, really, in English." I remember McLean suggesting that if there was a history before race/ism, there is one afterwards. I deepen my hearing of Whyte's rejoinder to settler-colonialism—that is, "to respect differences and the possibility that [listeners] will not immediately understand what all the issues may be, no matter how well they think they grasp the premises of the ethic to which they are trying to compare their own ethic." I hear Dotson's prompts—to keep *in focus* the structural "settler-native-slave triad" that keeps privileging the colonizing system. I recall Ybarra underscoring how Chicana feminists and many others have not needed white conservationists' teachings when they can keep learning from/with/as "those who embody survival and defiance" and "who have been able to endure for thousands of years." I keep relearning how to listen, not only for avowable commonalities but also for differences—"intercultural equivocality"²¹²—between my biocultural ancestral claims to land ethics, land health, sustainability, and just climate action proposals, and those of Gwich'in and Black people/s, Chicana, and others. This is

²¹¹ Harrison, *Dominion*, 102.

²¹² Vásquez-Fernández and Ahenakew pii tai poo taa, *Resurgence*, 67.

necessary for any chance of genuine and durable coalitions between differing heritages. And finally, I feel the warning of Ruíz and Dotson against mistaking a coalition for a home.²¹³

²¹³ Ruíz and Dotson, *Politics*, 12. (Drawing from Bernice Johnson Reagon, 2000.)

Conclusion: “Where are the Stories that Lead the Way?”²¹⁴

“Nanabozho” is the name of Creator’s “First Man,” “the last of all beings to be created,” Robin Kimmerer shares with her readers. Perhaps to help Nanabozho refuse the great hoarder, Windigo, the medicine teachers of the North “gave him *Wiingaashk*.” The teachers gave this gift to Nanabozho “to teach him the ways of compassion, kindness, and healing, even for those who have made bad mistakes, for who has not?” The generosity of Kimmerer’s story-sharing is stunning and, likewise, challenging. “Can settlers be trusted to follow Nanabozho,” she asks, “to walk so that ‘each step is a greeting to Mother Earth?’” Kimmerer herself struggles with “grief and fear...behind the glimmer of hope.” “Together,” she acknowledges, “they try to hold my heart closed.” “But I need to remember,” she continues, “that the grief is the settler’s as well.”²¹⁵

Perhaps, Kimmerer suggests to settlers, listen to “White Man’s Footstep,” “the common plantain” who followed us to Turtle Island. This plant is also “a foreigner, an immigrant, but after five hundred years of living as a good neighbor, people forget about that kind of thing.”²¹⁶ Her generosity continues: “Plantain is not indigenous but ‘naturalized.’” We colonialists might “strive to become naturalized to a place. Being naturalized to a place means to live as if this land feeds you...to know that your ancestors lie in this ground...to love as if your children’s future matters...and the lives of all our relatives.” Perhaps, then, the “Second Man,” she says cautiously, “can enter into deep reciprocity that renews the world.”²¹⁷ To become Indigenous as her Potawatomi Nation has long grown to be, “is to grow the circle of healing to include all of

²¹⁴ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 207.

²¹⁵ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 212.

²¹⁶ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 212-213.

²¹⁷ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 213.

Creation.”²¹⁸ “Where are the stories that lead the way?”²¹⁹ With time as a circle, as Kimmerer’s elders teach, perhaps any willing Indigenous guides can help re/orient the unsettling newcomers to someplace more like home.

Many Indigenous Peoples have been cut out of Lands for centuries, reminds Kim Tallbear.²²⁰ Many of Nanabozho’s “instructions have gotten tattered along the way...forgotten,” says Robin Kimmerer. Or in the lesson of Enai Begaye at Gwichyaa Zhee, the core may be empty.

I think about the circle’s core, different pieces of Earth-into whole, healing as Siquñiq Maupin reconnects with tuttu and Iñupiatun. *Shalak naii*—Princess Dazhrai Johnson taught those of us gathered at that 2019 Climate Summit. She is Neets’aii Gwich’in, also retrieving her People’s language. She taught those of us gathered to repeat, “shalak naii.” Shalak naii, she translates, helpfully if not commensurably to English as “all my relations.”²²¹

“If you have a community who loves you,” Johnson says, “you know you can stand back up.” “We know in our hearts what we need to do. Believe in yourself,” her sister leader Bernadette Demientieff echoes. “Your ancestors are with you,” she urges. And I hear Kim Tallbear reminding us, “Humans learn from non-humans.” Perhaps Indigenous, Black, and settler-colonizer—perhaps from radical hope’s frontlines new terms will arise—will work out ways to call in and reciprocally relearn together. That could take us even beyond coalitions to good relations and to kin-making.²²²

²¹⁸ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 212.

²¹⁹ Kimmerer, *Braiding*, 207.

²²⁰ Tallbear, “A Sharpening of the Already-Present.”

²²¹ Princess Johnson, Summit, 29.

²²² See “inter-being-relationality” in Vásquez-Fernández and Ahenakew pii tai poo taa, *Resurgence*, 65-69; Tallbear, *Reviving*; Kanguieser and Todd, “From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study”; Whyte, “Indigenous Environmental Justice.”

Shalak naii—we could try.

Shalak naii might mean getting caught up in something not easy to walk away from. I hear my own biocultural ancestors' voices—Aldo Leopold and his daughter Nina's—encouraging me “to stay in it.”

Perhaps, too, that Leopoldian idea of wilderness as “a starting point”—a violent abstraction that never has really existed—could bring its earnest perpetrators, like myself, around to listen for this one—shalak naii—in searches for just, meaningful, and purposeful lifeways.

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