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Indigenizing Restoration: Indigenous Lands before Urban Parks

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ABSTRACT

Climate change and human activities continue to result in negative environmental impacts that alter land productivity, ecosystem health, and their potential land uses. However, these environmental impacts are being addressed through land restoration frameworks that do not include the robust narrative on the links between land and Indigenous peoples. This link between land and Indigenous peoples is not visible in restoration frameworks owing to the linearity of these frameworks and their deep roots in Western science. In this article, the authors contend that restoration projects must incorporate indicators that reevaluate restoration through an Indigenous lens. Through a literature review and their ongoing restoration project, they identify three major indicators that are important to incorporate in restoration: ecocolonialism, kincentric ecology, and environmental narratives. They apply these indicators to provide the historical context of their ongoing field site, Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center located at Discovery Park, the largest urban park in Seattle, Washington. They conclude that incorporating these three indicators into restoration frameworks not only indigenizes restoration but also can help create more effective solutions to environmental problems persisting for decades in unhealthy ecosystems.

Climate change and human impacts are known to impact Indigenous peoples first. Indigenous peoples are already confronting the impacts of climate change and human impacts, such as sea level rise that results in flooding for coastal communities, and ocean acidification that impacts shellfish and other aquatic sustenance foods (Abate and Kronk Warner 2013; Ramos-Castillo et al. 2017; Reo et al. 2017). Climate change coupled with the impacts of settler colonialism introduced overexploitive and extractive methods into Indigenous lands. This makes Indigenous peoples vulnerable to climate injustice (Roosvall and Tegelberg 2018). Indigenous peoples have been environmental stewards that have effectively managed their lands to sustain their livelihoods, before, during, and after colonialism (Hossain 2012; Tsosie 2013; Marchand et al. 2020). This includes continuing to manage their lands as climate change continues to affect their land and water ecosystems. Despite Indigenous people representing about 5% of the world's population and occupying 20% of the world's land area, they manage and protect 80% of the world's biodiversity (Cochran et al. 2013; Stevens 2014). This is a major reason that incorporating Indigenous peoples in restoration frameworks is crucial.

Unfortunately, Indigenous peoples continue to be left out of restoration discourses owing to the linearity of those frameworks. Since restoration frameworks are developed by Western knowledge systems, they do not include the holistic lens that Indigenous peoples continue to use. These systems continue to ignore Indigenous ways of

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knowing because they are heavily rooted in the scientific method of hypothesis testing (Kronik and Verner 2010; Berglund et al. 2013). This scientific philosophy requires forming knowledge that is validated through Western credentials, thus dismissing Indigenous peoples, who have a long-history of first-hand observations and knowledge formation regarding their natural resources and environment.

Restoration in National and Urban Parks

To further understand the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from restoration frameworks, we must revisit the history of national and urban parks, which have excluded Indigenous peoples since their establishment, because of the ideologies introduced by manifest destiny and settler colonialism. During the 1870s and 1880s, when Yellowstone National Park was created, Indigenous peoples were forcibly removed and relocated. Following Yellowstone's establishment, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act in 1906 (Lee 1970), which gave presidents the authority to create national monuments to preserve areas of natural or historic interest on public lands. The purpose of the act was to protect prehistoric Indigenous ruins and artifacts; it also served to preserve pristine wilderness and nature, mostly fauna and flora. The protection of pristine wilderness and the natural elements of this setting—excluding humans—is what marked the establishment of the colonial restoration framework.

National and urban parks mostly operate under three restoration frameworks: extractive, aesthetic, and biotelic. Extractive restoration focuses on the products and revenue certain parks can provide. This ranges from natural forest products (e.g., berries) to recreational uses (e.g., hiking, social trails) (Miller et al. 2014). Biotelic restoration focuses on the protection of species and habitat and the exclusion of human interaction in such settings (Crowe and Shryer 1995). Aesthetic restoration, which was inspired by the aesthetic art movement, aims to preserve nature's beauty for the enjoyment of humans (Higham and Lück 2008). All three restoration frameworks were created after Indigenous peoples were removed from their lands. This removal is what created the separation between humans and nature that is still present today in restoration paradigms.

However, humans—in particular, Indigenous peoples—are essential to restoration, especially in a changing climate. Indigenous knowledge systems can create more effective solutions than those incorporated by the current restoration frameworks used by management agencies. Recent ecological research has also concluded that, when Indigenous peoples manage their forests and lands, land productivity is higher, ecosystems are healthier, and resource scarcity is a less likely to occur (Waller and Reo 2018). This solidifies the importance of incorporating Indigenous peoples into land restoration frameworks, especially in urban and national parks commonly used by the public.

Three Indicators to Indigenize Restoration

To "indigenize" restoration, Indigenous peoples require a seat not just at the table but at the head of the table. Just providing them a seat at the table leads to the continued stereotyping Indigenous peoples face in environmental discourse. One of the most known stereotypes is of the ecological noble savage (Hames 2007; Aftandilian 2011). This stereotype portrays Indigenous peoples as majestic creatures, as once described by early Western environmental explorers, that are in tune with nature (Ellingson 2001). To avoid these stereotypes, Indigenous peoples need to be granted leadership roles—this is what we mean by *indigenizing*. Indigenizing restoration refers to not just shifting restoration frameworks to include Indigenous peoples but transforming these frameworks entirely to remove the colonial structures they were founded on. Indigenizing restoration facilitates the integration of community-based approaches, cultural protocols (e.g., prayers and songs when introducing a new plant relative into a space), and community involvement (e.g., work parties).

Through our literature review and ongoing restoration project, we have identified three indicators to indigenize restoration (summarized in Figure 1):

1. *Ecocolonialism:* The history of how the relationships between land and Indigenous peoples have been impacted as a result

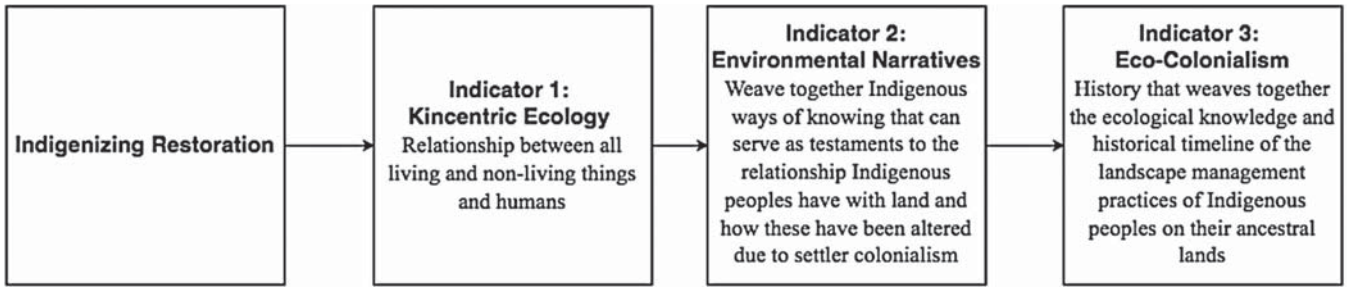

FIGURE 1. Indigenizing restoration indicators.

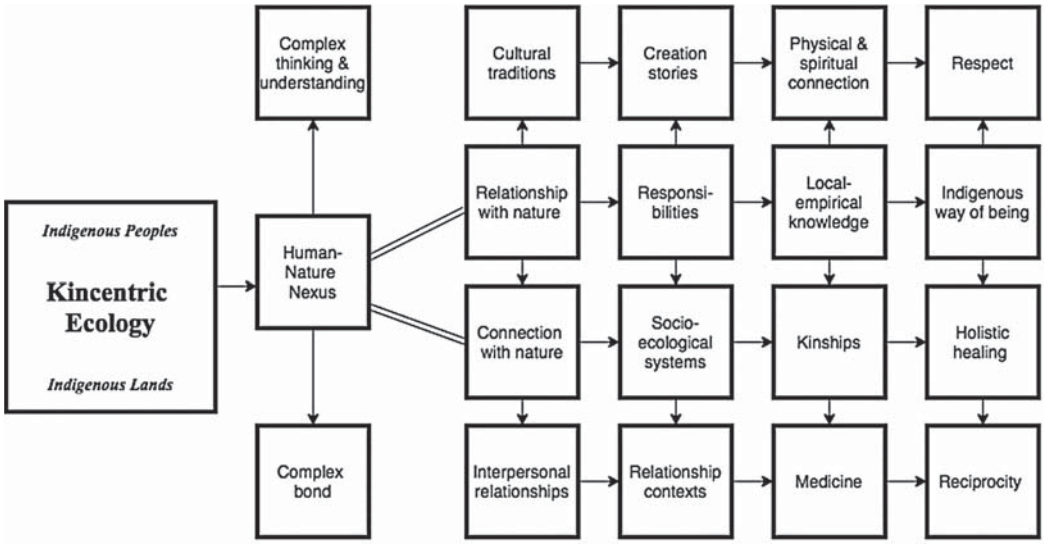

FIGURE 2. Kincentric ecology Indigenous model.

of settler colonialism. Ecocolonialism is a history that weaves together the ecological knowledge and historical timeline of the landscape management practices of Indigenous peoples on their ancestral lands.

2. *Kincentric ecology:* Kinships, relationships, and cultural connections Indigenous peoples have to land (Simmons 2013; Nelson and Shilling 2018). This approach can help us create more effective restoration frameworks and paradigms instead of having environmental problems persisting for decades in unhealthy ecosystems. Because it describes the intersections of Indigenous peoples and their relationships to the land (Figure 2), it is important to integrate kincentric ecology into restoration frameworks to help us create more holistic solutions essential to our lands, especially as we continue to experience impacts of climate change. Since kincentric ecology emphasizes the physical and spiritual connection to land, it is important to respect these complex bonds that are present among Indigenous communities (Turner 2005).
3. *Environmental narratives:* First-hand observations and knowledge formation regarding our local environment (Evering 2019). Environmental narratives weave together Indigenous ways of knowing that can serve as testaments to the relationships Indigenous peoples have with land and how these have been altered due to settler colonialism (Peterson 2000). Indigenous ways of knowing comprise many knowledge systems, because Indigenous peoples are not monolithic cultures. Their knowledge is place based, so their unique environments shape it. Settler colonialism impacted their knowledge systems when they were forced to relocate or were displaced from their ancestral homelands.

Our three indicators indigenize restoration by also linking restoration to resilience, which is integral to ecosystems and Indigenous communities,

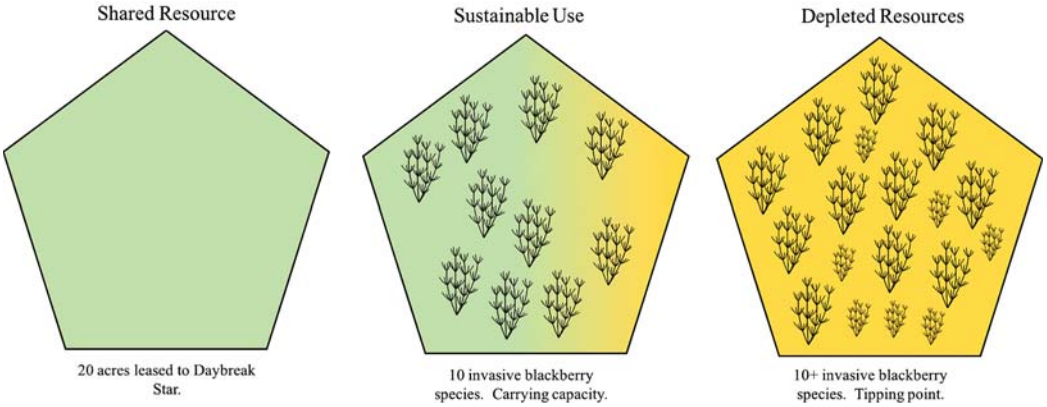

FIGURE 3. The tragedy of the commons.

especially as climate change continues to exacerbate land degradation. Discussions of Indigenous resilience have been common among many scholars (Berkes et al. 2003; Lin 2019). Resilience was first adapted to socioecological frameworks by Fikret Berkes (2017), who understood that it was necessary to explore and integrate resilience into socioecological systems to avoid another tragedy of commons (Olsson et al. 2004). The tragedy of commons results when a natural resource is depleted, as we have witnessed with salmon species in the state of Washington. Overharvesting and overextraction of a natural resource at a rate faster than it can be replenished depletes and collapses entire ecosystems (Hale and Wittusen 1971). Recent research has coupled the tragedy of commons with ecological tipping points (Wiens 2016). Both apply and integrate social, economic, and environmental factors. Figure 3 demonstrates how the concept of the tragedy of commons can be applied to invasive plant species tipping points in the 20 acres leased to Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center in Discovery Park, our case study for our ongoing restoration project.

Indigenous people's ability to preserve important elements of their culture through their Indigenous knowledge and oral history demonstrates their resilience. This is why their knowledge systems are able to adapt to new climates, spaces, and environments. Their adaptability and resilience are the main reasons that Indigenous peoples' teachings can serve as solutions to environmental degradation and crisis we currently face in a changing climate (Aftandilian 2011). Climate change is changing our environments and spaces; thus, if we want to adapt and mitigate climate change, Indigenous knowledge should be at the center of restoration frameworks. Often we speak about giving Indigenous peoples a seat at the table, but it is imperative that they sit at the head of the table. This allows them to lead their own conservation and restoration initiatives. We cannot ignore how Indigenous peoples are already facing the impacts of climate change and how restoration frameworks may or may not work. While climate change continues to be an inconvenient truth to some, it is a deadly and life-changing reality to Indigenous peoples (Wildcat 2009).

Links between Environmental Racism and Our Urban Park Case Study

It is important to acknowledge that urban parks, as natural spaces, were built to provide a pristine natural setting in cities (Maller et al. 2009). Most parks were established and created in urban environments following Western policies, management, and evidence-based scientific practices. As a result, urban parks have a long history of excluding communities of color—in particular, Indigenous communities (MacDonald 2018). This trend of environmental racism continues to place the greatest environmental impacts on communities of color. It also explains why power plants, factories, and other environmental hazards and polluting entities are built in close proximity to communities of color (Pulido 2015).

Our case study for our ongoing restoration project takes place at Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center (see Figure 4), located at Discovery Park, in Seattle, Washington. Daybreak serves as an urban cultural center for Native Americans in the Seattle area (Urban Indian Health Commission. 2007;

Monthan and Monthan 1978). It was officially built and opened in 1977, seven years after the occupation of these lands by urban Indigenous activists. When the military base was given to Seattle Parks and Recreation, comprising 534 acres, 100 urban Indigenous peoples under the leadership of Bernie Whitebear led a peaceful resistance movement to reclaim these lands (Reyes 2006). Because of the media and celebrity attention this movement received, Seattle leased 20 of the 534 acres to the urban Indigenous peoples (Parham 2018), under the auspices of the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, the nonprofit that oversees Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center. It is important to emphasize that, while Discovery Park is 534 acres, Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center was given only 20 acres, through 99-year lease signed with Seattle Parks and Recreation.

Regarding the history of urban parks within the Seattle metropolitan area, it is important to note that Indigenous peoples experienced environmental racism by being banned from entering the city through a law enacted on February 7, 1865, that made it unlawful for Native Americans to set foot in the city limits—thus removing Indigenous peoples from the environmental discourse that emerged in Seattle (Buerge 1992). Seattle was built for the settlers, and not for the original peoples of these lands. Ironically, the city of Seattle tries to erase or hide the oppression enacted on Indigenous peoples in its history. It is highly advertised that the city was named after Chief Sealth, a Suquamish and Duwamish chief (Buerge 1992). However, this city does not acknowledge that he was not even allowed to step foot within the city limits. If this city continues to glorify Coast Salish cultures for capitalistic reasons (i.e., tourism), it should also include the Indigenous peoples of these lands and urban Native Americans in the environmental discourse that surrounds the environmental policies, laws, and regulations for the state of Washington.

During the enactment of the 1865 ordinance, Indigenous peoples were being forced into reservations based on the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliott. This treaty was not ratified until 1859, and even after its ratification, it was several years before any infrastructure was built on reservations (i.e., towns, government systems, etc.). Indigenous peoples were forced to leave their native and ancestral lands—landscapes they had managed for centuries. Even though the 1865 ordinance was dismantled in 1867, when the government of Seattle was dissolved, sentiment continued against Indigenous peoples. The city of Seattle was rapidly urbanizing during this time, and this contributed to the further environmental displacement of Indigenous peoples. This included the continued destruction of landscapes important to Indigenous peoples, including the Herring's House in 1893, where Chief Seattle lived. We can conclude that, throughout this part of history, there was a lot of environmental racism against Indigenous peoples. The question to ask today is, has anything changed for Indigenous peoples in the state of Washington?

FIGURE 4. Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center, Credit: Jessica Hernandez, 2020.

Seattle Parks established its first urban park in 1884—this 19-year gap between the formation of Seattle's first urban park and its exclusion of indigenous people from the city's limits demonstrates the continuing racism embedded in this city and its inhabitants against Indigenous peoples going back to the time when Seattle created its first urban park. This means urban parks were not designed to serve Indigenous peoples. This is rooted in the philosophy that Indigenous peoples had no rights to lands from which they had been dispossessed and the acceptance of Captain Richard Pratt's belief, "kill the Indian, save the man" (Zalcman 2016). This view was behind many of the forceful assimilation tactics used against Indigenous communities (Marchand et al. 2020).

However, Indigenous peoples continued to resist settler colonialism practices rooted in foreign policies and land claims on native lands. Today, Seattle Parks and Recreation oversees 400 urban

parks. One of these urban parks was the setting of the historical Indigenous-led activist movement. This movement took place during the early establishment of Discovery Park. The history of Discovery Park is unique: all 534 acres of this land used to be a military base, Fort Lawton (Sanders 2008). The fort was built in 1900 and named after Henry Ware Lawton, a veteran who served in the American Civil War, the Indian Wars, and Spanish-American War. In 1970 the army declared all 534 acres of Fort Lawton surplus land and granted this land to Seattle Parks and Recreation. Eventually, this land was named Discovery Park.

Because Discovery Park used to be a military base, the lands were environmentally polluted as a result of military activities and construction. These military activities, combined with the urbanization of its nearby Magnolia neighborhood, have extremely altered what once were lands formed by glacial deposits and included rivers where salmon migrated to their spawning grounds (Ashworth and Nelson 2014). While land restoration forces us to focus on invasive species and integrating more native species, we also have to incorporate the ecocolonialism practices on this land to ensure that it heals holistically. This means that there should be a shift from today's linear approach to one that is landscape based and links water and land using the holistic lens of Indigenous people as part of landscape restoration. Despite Indigenous peoples and organizations being physically present at Discovery Park, they are not consulted by Seattle Parks and Recreation when it designs and implementing its restoration or conservation practices (Thompson et al. 2015). This is no surprise, as urban parks in Seattle are rooted in postcolonial history that did not allow Native peoples to step foot in this city for decades. Since the lease was signed in 1970, Seattle Parks and Recreation has not had a major emphasis on implementing restoration or conservation projects on the 20 acres leased to the Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center. The lease does not define who has the responsibility to conduct restoration and conservation work there.

However, Discovery Park manages conservation and restoration projects on its entire 534 acres. Therefore, using a landscape lens on the 20 acres leased to Indigenous communities suggests that the Seattle Parks and Recreation is an important manager to integrate into any restoration and conservation efforts for the entire park. But these activities need to include the knowledge held by the Indigenous people who lived on this land and who continue to use a holistic landscape approach to their land management. Such an approach has been shown to result in resilient lands and water, which is essential for conserving and restoring highly altered lands that are less healthy.

Restoration Framework Utilized in Discovery Park by Seattle Parks and Recreation

Seattle Parks and Recreation's restoration and conservation efforts focus on vegetation restoration based on scientific evidence that does not include the landscape cultural attributes held by the Indigenous people who lived on these lands and managed them using a holistic landscape approach. A vegetation restoration focus follows a linear approach by focusing on removing invasive or nonnative plant species and planting native species in their place (Quillérou and Thomas 2012; Aronson et al. 2017). It focuses management to split the land into smaller land plots, derived from the Western notion of a *garden*, where a small piece of land is restored and nearby land is ignored (Daniels et al. 2016).

Restoring land through this garden gaze prevents us from creating a holistic conservation framework that addresses the entire park as opposed to smaller portions of it. Indigenizing restoration allows us to create and implement more holistic conservation and restoration initiatives to heal these severely altered lands. We need to start looking at the entire landscape, as every nonliving and living species in this park is an integral component of healing these lands through restoration and conservation practices. This relationship between all living and nonliving things and humans is known as kincentric ecology (Salmón 2000).

Through indigenizing conservation and restoration, we also address some of the layers embedded through settler colonialism present on Indigenous lands. For the Coast Salish peoples, Discovery Park was important because it is the location of their ancestral burial sites and migration routes to salmon. Integrating kincentric ecology and acknowledging the ongoing ecocolonialism

and environmental narrative important to specific landscapes also allows Indigenous peoples to practice their traditional environmental customs and life patterns that are not integrated or taken into account in land restoration and conservation work (Wehi and Lord 2017). Recent research acknowledges how traditional knowledge systems can help repair the damage that has been done in the land (Wehi and Lord 2017).

Next Steps and Conclusion

The negative environmental impacts that alter land productivity, ecosystem health, and the uses of urban parks are being addressed through restoration and conservation frameworks that are not as effective as they could be, owing to their focus on vegetation restoration and exclusion of ecocolonialism acknowledgment and kincentric ecology. In our case study, the restoration and conservation frameworks must be indigenized because of the importance of this landscape not only to Indigenous peoples but also to the previous salmon populations that used to frequent it. Given that Discovery Park is also the location for Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center, we advocate for conservation and restoration frameworks for urban parks designed by indigenous people who have a holistic approach to land and water management. Our continued collaborations with Indigenous people in the restoration and conservation of the 20 acres leased to Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center will allow us to continue adapting our indigenized framework to produce approaches where the lands can adapt to a changing climate.

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