

Naturalizing Whiteness:
The Politics of Landscape at Whitman College

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Kyla Suzanne Rapp has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Politics.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Part 1	
The Whitman Enclave: A “green oasis amidst the plains of eastern Washington”	5
Who Belongs on Campus?	10
“Behind the Scenes”: Producing Nature on Campus	15
Part 2	
Nature as Beauty, Nature as Scene, Nature as Leisure	19
The Wilderness: Another “Sanctuary of Illusory Innocence”	22
Who Belongs in the Outdoors?	27
Conclusion	33
Works Cited	35

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Introduction

Our Eastern Washington location — with its dynamic history, diverse population and inspiring physical landscape — is a source of strength and pride for the college... We have already taken steps forward in highlighting our region with the recent naming of our new mascot, the Whitman Blues. This is a nod to our location and the landscape that surrounds us, an important part of who we are as a college.

--Kathleen Murray
President of Whitman College
Nov 14, 2017

In 2017, after continued pressure from students, Whitman College officially replaced its previous mascot, the Fighting Missionaries, with a mascot named after the Blue Mountains which extend from Southeast Washington into Northern Oregon. This change was the apex of ongoing conversations about Whitman's colonial history and overwhelmingly white student body, conversations which most often land on a favorite solution: recruiting a more "diverse" student body or faculty. With this project, I argue that what is at stake in transforming or fortifying Whitman's role in colonization and racial hierarchy is not simply a lack of "diversity," but the *constitutive* elements of Whitman, produced by continuous physical and ideological work, which cultivate certain ways of being-in-the-world, *displace* others, and facilitate particular relationships between people and place. President Murray's opening quote appears in an article titled "Whitman Loves Walla Walla Community," representative of a recent effort by many administrators to 'pop' what is called the "Whitman bubble" -- a term intended to reflect the sequestered way Whitman students engage with the world, with little attention to what lies beyond the edges of campus. While most engagement with "the bubble" attempts to persuade students to make the *choice* to leave it by initiating relationships off campus, I intend to draw out the colonial, white supremacist stakes the college has in

reproducing this seclusion and ignorance, as well as the ways we are *already* deeply implicated in relationships of hierarchy, privilege, and exploitation between Whitman as a place and the landscape of which we are inextricably a *part*.

While names and monuments that directly evoke the romanticized legacies of colonizers are more obvious sites of scrutiny, this thesis will investigate how that which more easily passes as neutral or benign, such as the maintenance of “beautiful” campus grounds, an extremely popular Outdoor Program, or the way people understand “nature” itself, also generate belonging, safety, and growth for some members of the Whitman “community”¹ at the *expense* of others: indigenous, working class, and people of color, both on and off campus. Though often imagined as an ahistorical, apolitical foundation, the concept of “nature” is saturated with layers of human meaning, and has become an actor itself in the dynamics from which it appears to be an *escape*. As Mei Mei Evans elaborates, “...popular U.S. American cultural constructions of ‘nature’ serve to empower some members of our society while simultaneously disempowering others. Ideas of ‘nature,’ like representations of race, gender, sexuality, and class, are never neutral; they themselves create and perpetuate particular meanings” (181). I have thus chosen to focus on two particularly dense areas in which Whitman produces meaning, relationships, and physical manifestations of “nature” -- the maintenance of its campus grounds and its Outdoor Program (OP).

Through these two sites, Whitman College cultivates white subjects who are largely ignorant to the work, histories, and relationships which *produce* the nature they

¹ I will write “community” in quotations to denaturalize the imagined cohesion and unity between all different racialized and class-based aspects of people benefitting from, working for, and intertwined with Whitman College as an institution.

value and the places they inhabit. I argue that both Whitman's campus and the "outdoors" are *enclaves* in which white subjects pursue the preservation of a "nature" defined primarily by its beauty and its dissociation from race, class, and humanity in general-- in effect, only "preserving" the inspiration, relaxation, challenge, or "escape" needed to reproduce their own liberal white fantasy. This "nature" ideal which bolsters colonial myths of white innocence, mobility, and agency simultaneously makes invisible all other relationships people have with "nature": indigenous people displaced from "protected areas" and National Parks, people of color associated with backwards and "wild" nature, working class people who work on and with nature for a living.

I ground much of this research in the informal conversations I've had with my coworkers as a student employee of Whitman's grounds department. As part of this research, I attended one meeting of the Trees and Landscaping Committee (TLC) and conducted interviews with one longtime employee of the grounds department, one faculty member of the TLC, Landscape Supervisor Bob Biles, and five Whitman students highly involved with leading Outdoor Program trips, one of whom is also a tour guide for Whitman's Admissions Office. Additionally, I interviewed Brien Sheedy, Director of the OP; Stuart Chapin, Assistant Director of the OP; Lish Riley, OP Rental Shop Manager; and Bob Carson, retired geology professor and former chair of the TLC. I've included analysis of recent articles published in the *Whitman Wire* and promotional materials distributed by Admissions and the OP, which speak to both the popular and official narratives of these programs. With the exception of those more public directors I've named, I will refer to all interviewees with pseudonyms or anonymous descriptors, such as "OP Leader 1." The primary criteria I used to select interviews was level of

involvement-- length of time working for Whitman, number of OP trips led, or full-time paid staff positions-- and in the case of student OP leaders, I selected randomly between those most highly involved. In the end, every person I interviewed for this project was white, a factor indicative of larger dynamics which will become evident.

In Part I of this thesis, I examine what it is about Whitman's campus grounds that many people find so *beautiful*-- what legacies the landscape design draws from, what maintenance is required to sustain this beauty, and how that labor is concealed to produce the illusion of the campus as a sanctuary from history and the world. I then describe how the management of campus cultivates innocence, familiarity, and "belonging" for white students, while associating students of color with wild, suspicious weeds in need of surveillance and control. Finally, I illuminate some of the pervasive class dynamics between those who *produce* the beauty of campus, and those who *consume* it. In Part II, I move to the ways Outdoor Program leaders define "nature," pulling out numerous similarities between how "nature" is valued on campus and in "the outdoors." Then, I elaborate on the history and political implications of the OP's focus on nature as "wilderness," ending with analysis of "Leave No Trace," the ethic recreationists use to actively produce the landscapes they consider "primal" and "natural." Finally, I analyze how dominant Outdoor Program narratives of agency, risk, challenge, and mobility construct white, wealthy recreationists as the only subjects who *belong* in "nature." Ultimately, I write this thesis as a resource toward which people may turn in their future efforts to disrupt the colonial project of whiteness at Whitman College, especially where that project is concealed under a mask of "nature."

PART 1

The Whitman Enclave: A “green oasis amidst the plains of eastern Washington”

Compared to the dense forests embellishing the west coast, the foliage of Walla Walla leaves much to be desired. Regardless of the surrounding areas, the landscapers on staff at Whitman are determined to maintain its aesthetic appeal as a green oasis amidst the plains of eastern Washington...The landscapers' willingness to cooperate with Whitman's geographic context has created an outstanding park-like setting. Not only is it unique within Walla Walla, but its appearance exceeds that of many other college campuses (Wilson).

Well-advertised as having one of the most beautiful college campuses in the nation, Whitman's landscape is often described as “Edenic,” “beautiful,” and “lush” in the context of the arid Walla Walla Valley and the “barren” area surrounding it (“Green List”). OP Leader 5, a tour guide for Whitman's Admissions Office, notes that visitors to campus often remark that driving into town, “they weren't expecting Whitman to be so wooded... the Columbia valley is pretty bare, so they sometimes talk about how Whitman is this oasis.” The narrative of an oasis in the middle of an unforgiving and displeasing landscape re-enshrines a potent colonial story of white civilization “improving” naturally undesirable, barren indigenous land. This narrative, perpetuated by promotional materials, students, and visitors alike, makes invisible the processes of genocide and displacement which transformed this landscape from an uncomfortable, terrifying frontier for white settlers to a safe, pleasing place for them to “belong.” Emphasizing the oft-invisible work he puts into maintaining this “improved” landscape, Landscape Supervisor Bob Biles adds, “This is a completely manipulated environment, there is nothing natural here... It would have been like buffalo grass or something before, you know, people came.” This description envisions pre-colonial Eastern Washington as empty of humans and most other life-- covered only with “buffalo grass,” it is imagined as universally

unappealing and unlivable, yet ripe for beautification. The constant maintenance of this beauty is essential to attract students and donors to Whitman. Biles puts it this way: “If the administration said, ‘we don’t want grass, we don’t want lawns, we just want to turn the entire thing into buffalo grass,’ probably the bulk of people would come here and say, ‘this place is a mess.’” As the ceaseless promotion of Whitman’s place on lists of “Most Beautiful Campuses” attests, Biles is right.

A specific *type* of “nature” is evoked in descriptions of the Whitman campus’s beauty which draws from a legacy of “park” aesthetics, based in the racialized conviction that “exposure to the right kind of nature would ‘uplift’ individuals, making them healthy, morally proper, [and] socially responsible,” thus managing the “nature” in parks to produce secluded “natural, sanctifying, wholesome, and White,” spaces which would ward off the specters of untamed, corrupting nature and the “artificial, profane...and colored” city (Byrne & Wolch 747). This narrative which positions properly maintained and utilized nature against the dangerous, misutilized “wild” is part of a larger colonial teleology that imagines “the process of colonization as one stage in a teleological sequence leading to naturally dominant, Western landscapes” (Sluyter 411). The colonial project in the Americas thus justified its violent seizure of indigenous land based on white people’s “superior” capacity to maximize the cultural and economic value of “nature” -- whether that value was manifest in agricultural productivity, the aesthetic beauty of English gardens, or the management of parks for (white) recreation and leisure activities.

The narratives of oasis and improvement embedded in valuations of Whitman’s campus deeply echo the colonial legacy of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman themselves (after whom the college is named), whose mission involved not only a spiritual

conversion of indigenous people, but a forced transformation of their relationships to the natural world, including the enforcement of private land “ownership” and the “civilizing” of Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla peoples’ seasonal farming and foraging practices (Jeffrey 167). Though failures as missionaries, the Whitmans guided roughly one thousand white emigrants to the Oregon Territory which they portrayed as a colonial “oasis,” similar to how many depict Whitman’s campus today (Karson 63). As a whole, the colonial invasion of the United States profoundly reshaped relationships between plants, people, and place, physically and psychologically rooting European colonization in agriculture, the planting of gardens, and the manipulation of landscapes to fit certain ideals (Mastnak et al.). Francis Bacon, for example, described colonization as a massive operation of “planting and ‘displanting,’” uprooting indigenous plants and indigenous people alike-- a process which required physical and ideological work with people and plants to ensure the *displacement* of indigenous peoples and the successful *placement* of whites in the land (Mastnak et al. 364).

While the appearance of Whitman’s campus landscape follows a deep history of colonial nature “improvement” in the occupied United States and is highly mobilized for fundraising and admissions purposes, it also forms the mundane backdrop to students and faculty members’ everyday lives. If one walks around this campus every day, curated beauty eventually becomes banal, “perfection” a norm, immersing students and faculty in an aesthetic world which shapes their subjectivity and sense of place. Biles says that his job is to make the campus “look perfect,” which for him, means that Whitman “should be a spectacular, subtly beautiful place where it’s a joy to be outside,” so that when people “move through the space there’s a kind of graceful elegance—simplistic, peaceful, but

colorful.” The grounds crew is held to a very *particular* type of “perfection”: beautiful but not flashy or ornate; joy-invoking and colorful but also peaceful; spectacular yet subtle. For Biles, this aesthetic attempts to reflect a broader Whitman ideal: unlike some colleges where “everything is really manicured and looks really formal,” he says, “we’re not that formal here. We like elegance, and we like to be a little bit sophisticated, but we’re not all prim and prissy. So [we create] a little bit more of a wild look, let plants kind of grow the way they were meant to grow.” Biles partially refers to the lack of electrically sheared shrubs and hedges around campus-- an aesthetic which may appear “less formal,” but which doesn’t necessarily require less human labor to manage. In fact, when it comes time to prune a small grove of Yew bushes on the south side of the Science Building, as I did with a coworker this fall, it takes much more time and precision to trim each branch manually to the exact juncture of last year’s growth to *hide* the cut you’ve made and “organically” vary the lengths of each branch, so they seem “natural” but still take on a “simple, elegant,” shape. The “subtlety” the grounds crew strives for, therefore, is in effect the masking of their own labor, the invisibility of their own inextricable human presence in the campus landscape.

But for what purpose? Why work so hard to produce “simple elegance” only to conceal that work? I argue that this is an integral aspect of producing Whitman as an *enclave*. Rob Nixon refers to the South African game reserve as a spatial and temporal enclave, “a charmed space that is segregated, among other things, from the history of its own segregation” (184). His analysis resonates with Whitman’s campus, as Jacqueline Rees-Mikula’s recent thesis notes, because “both spaces are situated on lands bearing deep scars ‘of enclosure and expulsion,’” whose integrally violent existence is then

branded an “oasis” -- to some (18). Central to maintaining the charmed space of the enclave is “the labor-intensive production of labor’s illusory absence,” -- a process which produces “a sweat-free, soft-focus, natural tranquility that appears at once effortless and untouched by human history” (Nixon 184). These decontextualized enclaves are characterized as exceptionally beautiful or peaceful specifically because they protect their inhabitants from the “violent and political circumstances” of their own presence, in an artificially constructed “sanctuary of illusory innocence” (Nixon 187). Dave Larson, a staff member of the grounds department, recalls that in his 25 years working at Whitman “not much at all” has changed about the campus landscape, securing its status as a “timeless island,” a “free-floating Edenic enclave of natural time, unmoored from historical memory” and sealed off from any racial or political changes occurring “outside” (Nixon 181). This stability psychologically roots Whitman students, staff, and administration in the “safety” of the enclave where, even as the long-standing names of the campus newspaper and mascot are changed, the materiality and affect of campus does not.²

A central goal of maintaining the campus landscape is thus concealing and re-branding the history of this place, to immerse students in a space where they can relax, study, and most importantly, not be “bothered” by the outside world. For Bob Biles and other grounds crew staff, even the ebb and flow of Walla Walla’s seasons are an obstacle to overcome, insofar as they are held to an everyday standard of aesthetic “perfection,” which, implicitly, does not involve the “dreariness” of hibernating annuals nor the

² In 2016, *The Pioneer* changed its name to *The Wire*.

gradual decomposition of fallen leaves in flower beds (Larson). Biles adheres quite fastly to a landscaping concept called “four seasons of color,” which means that

“We try to pick [plants] so that there’s something happening all year round. In the spring for example, we like to have lots of early bulbs coming up-- tulips, daffodils, crocus-- so that immediately out of winter, there’s something to brighten the campus up. It’s been foggy and cold and nasty, and people are just hungry for some color... Toward the end of the summer, a lot of the perennials start to look a little bit bad, so that’s when we plug in some of the annual flowers, so you have this bright, cheery look during the summer” (Biles).

The constancy actively pursued by this approach further produces Whitman as an enclave-- within its spatial limits, plants are introduced and trimmed according to the perceived psychic needs of settlers at all times. “Spectacular beauty” becomes an everyday norm, and the inspiring revitalization of “nature” a dependable resource for students and faculty. The grounds crew puts in enormous effort to make sure that nothing disrupts this enclave, nor the seemingly self-sufficient subjectivities it produces. During school breaks when many students and faculty catch up on rest or visit family members, the grounds crew amps up their efforts, completing projects which might make more noise or draw more attention to themselves than usual, such as downing tree branches in high foot-traffic areas or operating the woodchipper. The function and value of “nature” is instrumentalized to draw potential students and donors to Whitman, as well as to maintain a productive, peaceful, aesthetic enclave for students and faculty-- keeping them oblivious to labor and history which cross and permeate the edges of the enclave, connecting it inextricably to that which is pushed out of sight.

Who Belongs on Campus?

This type of highly managed, regulated, and surveilled landscape does not universally cultivate comfort, relaxation, and appreciation in all members of its

“community,” however. Zygmunt Bauman’s metaphor of the “gardening society” describes how modern modes of political and cultural domination nurture certain (racialized, and class-based) people as “good plants,” cultivating them into proper citizen-subjects, and deems others “useless weeds,” targets for surveillance and elimination. By focusing on that which is cultivated and beautified, the violence enacted against those ‘others’ is naturalized as necessary or even mundane-- “weeds must die not so much because of what they are, but because of what the beautiful, orderly garden ought to be” (Baumann 92). Thus, while the enclave produces rich, visceral imaginations of a place outside its own history, characterized by peace, tranquility, and beauty that reflects fantasy more than history, it makes other aspects of place *invisible*: enclaving is a process of both “sanctuary and trespass, memory and amnesia, visibility and invisibility, looking and looking away” (Nixon 176).

When describing the style of Whitman’s campus landscape, one faculty member of the Tree and Landscaping Committee, Katherine Holmes, emphasized safety and familiarity: “I see this as vaguely nostalgic for East Coast gardening. As people came from the east to the west, they brought the plants that were familiar to them...For a lot of students and more importantly, parents, I imagine they feel safe.” In this analysis, Holmes evokes Whitman students and their parents as people who would identify (subconsciously, if not consciously) with the colonial project of white settlers who planted gardens to “establish rights of possession and to nurture civilized dispositions that would legitimate those claims” (Moore et al. 9). Holmes’s association of westward movement with feelings of safety and familiarity for parents of Whitman students, however, tells a particular story of whiteness and comfort that does not apply to

indigenous students for whom Manifest Destiny more likely evokes genocide, nor for students of color whose families were deliberately excluded from those “rights of possession,” or were forced to work for no or miniscule wages to “nurture” them. Given numerous recent instances of racial profiling on campus Whitman by Whitman security staff, the question becomes particularly potent: which students, faculty, and staff find this open, mostly-white, manicured space familiar and safe, and which members of the Whitman “community” are marked out-of-place by Whitman security patrolling campus for “suspicious activity” and “loitering by unknown figures”? (Johnson, Chapman).

Along with the narrative of the “civilizing,” enriching potential of natural areas comes the intimation that if physical spaces are *not* actively pruned, maintained, and “opened up,” they will entice or even cultivate undesirable, out-of-control, or criminal behavior-- or people. In 2011, then-Director of Security Terry Thompson reported that one area of campus was “overgrown with all sorts of plants...It was just an invite for somebody to get raped down there. So the grounds crew came in and totally remodeled it. To try to eliminate cover for criminal activity” (Chapman). Bob Biles describes that all the trees on campus are “upskirted” -- pruned waist-high above the ground “so people can’t hide in the shrubs and the bushes.” He takes a walk with security staff every few years and makes adjustments when they note that “somebody could be lurking or hiding in there and then spring out and cause some chaos.” As the narrative goes,

“Poorly lit areas or areas hidden from public view can also exacerbate the problem of criminal activity by non-students on campus. Thompson explained how crime in Walla Walla can spill into areas such as Isaacs Avenue, the Glover Alston Center- a frequent destination for homeless campers- and even the heart of campus...Whitman security maintains a strict policy of approaching any suspicious non-students and making bystanders aware of their presence. At night,

they target any activity in dark or hidden areas such as the amphitheater”
(Chapman).

Criminality is understood spatially as something that does not originate from Whitman as a place, but is brought by *outsiders*, that will “spill” into the protected space of campus if it is not pruned or patrolled thoroughly enough. It is deeply significant that when Whitman security is concerned about “crime” on campus and people associated with criminality, they connect it to dark, hidden, or “overgrown” areas of campus and call in the grounds crew, who thus serve not only a beautification or fundraising function, but an ideological, policing function. These profiling cases are not anomalies nor peripheral misunderstandings. They are as integral to the project of producing the Whitman enclave as is the pruning of “overgrown” bushes to produce a “safe,” “familiar,” surveillable campus happily reminiscent of westward-bound colonization.

As these processes produce an unwelcome space for students of color in which there is no room for darkness, ambiguity, or difference, they simultaneously “root” a particular white subjectivity-- specifically in *trees*. Over the past several years, Biles’s favorite mantra, “you can’t manage what you don’t measure,” has manifest in a digitized map of every one of the campus’s nearly 1600 trees. These trees receive individual “programs” for their growth developed by Whitman’s arborists, who make “strategic adjustments” to the tree over a given set of years, ensuring that all “structural issues” are resolved-- that the tree grows according to *plan*. Their lives and deaths, in this context, are explained in terms of “performing,” “succeeding,” and “failing,” -- prescribing value only in terms of how well the plants adhere to their predetermined purpose in the picture designed for them (Larson). Timothy Mitchell argues that this way of interacting with the world-- as a *picture*, as a *plan*-- was developed as a distinctly European *colonizing*

subjectivity, largely in the context of colonial Egypt. For Mitchell, “Colonial power required [colonies] to become readable,” “picture-like and legible,” an ideal violently deployed to more easily control the lived space of Egyptians (33). The physical colonization of Cairo, for example, involved “the opening up of main streets and new arteries, the creation of squares and open places, the planting of trees... and regular cleaning and watering” (Mitchell 65). Whitman itself is designed to feel “open,” its landscape composed around one large central lawn, ringed with large oak and elm trees pruned as to ensure proper “definition”: the legibility and visibility of trees’ internal structure, the absence of anything messy, ambiguous, or obscured.

Biles notes that “there’s a lot of emotion tied up in trees” for many faculty, administrators, and students, specifically because their long lifespans afford a sense of permanence and belonging reminiscent of colonists who planted trees to naturalize the existence of whites in the new world (Mastnak et al.). A poignant example on Whitman’s campus is the American Liberty Elm, a disease-resistant breed which Whitman purchased to replace some of the long-removed elms which used to line Boyer Avenue. The story told by the Liberty Tree Society evokes nostalgia for a “purely American” past, rooting the importance of the trees in foundations of nationalism, patriotism, and colonization:

“American elms have been prized for their towering beauty, deep shade and commanding presence since colonial times. Once a rallying point for America's earliest settlers, the strength and character of the American elm has become synonymous with the spirit and determination of the people who built this nation” (*Liberty*).

The elm is named after “Liberty Tree,” a poem by Thomas Paine, which mythologizes the elm as a metaphor for the success of European settlement. In the poem, the tree is seamlessly, supernaturally inserted into the ground by an otherworldly source,

invisibilizing the very real, present, and continuous violence required to maintain the colonial project of “planting and displanting” plants and people. It reads, “...The celestial exotic struck deep in the ground/ Like a native it flourished and bore/ The fame of its fruit drew the nations around/ To seek out this peaceable shore” (*Liberty*). The beauty and fruits of the tree are mobilized as proof that it was meant to grow here, and in turn mobilize other Europeans to join the colonial project, just as the beauty of Whitman’s campus-- especially its trees-- draws people to the college. In this narrative, the loss of these trees to disease is akin to the loss of reliable American identity itself, disrupting the security of a deeply rooted landscape, namely that of a well-to-do small town street in a white, middle-class neighborhood, much like Whitman’s Boyer Avenue. Whitman and the Liberty Tree Society both undertake a project of planting permanence, ensuring the continuation of the colonial project-- through the perpetual “belonging” of white settlers-- far into the future. By maintaining the campus landscape as an elm-rich, romanticized colony, the narrative goes, “we have a chance to ‘make history’ and leave a ‘living legacy’ destined to be long-remembered by future generations!” (*Liberty*).

“Behind the Scenes”: Producing Nature on Campus

Everything is behind the scenes for the students. When you walk into a classroom, the lights are on, the monitors work, the computers work... And that’s all done by people who work at the physical plant. You don’t see that... Everything is just nice and taken care of. And that’s what you pay for, in part, when you come to school here (Biles).

Biles’ analysis reveals so much about labor dynamics at Whitman: a large class of workers are employed to perform physical (immanent) labor so that students and faculty can focus on more highly paid and prestiged intellectual (transcendent) work, embedding hierarchies of burden and priority in the campus landscape. He and other grounds staff

don't have the luxury of experiencing an enclave; in fact, Biles makes it very clear that there is nothing eco-archaic or sweat-free about this landscape: "There's nothing natural on Whitman College's campus... The little college creek isn't natural, it is man-made, every single tree on campus was planted by man...This is a completely manipulated environment." Biles tells a memorable story of when former college President Tom Cronin refused to authorize the removal of 60 campus trees whose condition deemed them dangerous for passersby. As the arborists predicted, a storm came that winter and blew down 57 trees in one day, leaving the grounds crew with the now- hurried task of chopping, chipping, and hauling each tree off campus-- all because Cronin didn't want to uproot the stability of attached faculty members who were "emotionally tied to those trees" (Larson).

For this reason, Larson considers it extremely important to clearly communicate when and why trees are being removed, so that people "don't think we're just chainsaw-hungry individuals that are trying to destroy their beautiful campus." This anticipated perception of the people who actively *produce* the "beauty" of the campus grounds as potentially dangerous to its sanctity is steeped in the history of labor, class, and exclusion. As both Rob Nixon and Roderick Neumann concur, subjects "unable" to appreciate nature from a distance and participate unquestioningly in the conservation of an aestheticized nature are demonized as threats to "nature" itself. In practice, the closest channel for communication about tree removals and other changes is the Trees and Landscaping Committee (TLC), an advisory board comprised of roughly equal numbers of faculty and grounds staff. Many of the projects proposed by the committee and the Office of Sustainability attempt to ensure that the campus *looks* exactly the same,

maximizing only the “environmental efficiency” of its maintenance. Bob Carson, who chaired the committee for 25 years, explained that in order to ensure minimal use of herbicides and fertilizers, “every once in a while, we ask for an audit from the grounds crew,” emphasizing that this type of surveillance is necessary in order to ensure the crew’s adherence to environmental values presumed to be *outside* their realm (Carson). While the “we” Carson invoked presumably refers to the whole TLC, it fundamentally divides the group between those serving as moral authority and those whose actions are under question. Larson fervidly elaborated on this dynamic:

“I’ve always thought it *unique* that you could have professors sit in on a Trees and Landscaping Committee meeting and try to say what should or shouldn’t be done with the campus landscape or trees...We’re professionals. We’ve studied this, we’ve worked with it. How does somebody that has not done the maintenance and the trimming have a say in how things should or shouldn’t be done? I feel like if that can work for you guys, why can’t it work for me to tell you what I think should be taught in your classes?”

This dynamic in which the interests and expertise of grounds staff are deprioritized and undervalued is highly present in the design process: contracted architects propose landscape plans that are “continually overplanted,” according to Biles, because “it makes the landscape look like it’s more finished and more mature” right away. This initial image is all designers are held to, incentivizing initial aesthetic judgment over considerations about the long-term embodied maintenance of that landscape. Grounds staff must repeatedly advocate for themselves in these situations: “We’re continually fighting with them on spacing and types of plants. We want fewer plants with more spacing, because it’s a lot easier to take care of and less physical maneuvering to do. It’s like, give us a break!” (Biles). Larson adds, the design “might look really cute and beautiful when it’s first put in, but 5 years down the road, how easy is it to maintain that landscape? Since we do maintenance, we know what it takes.” While white-collar

planners design the landscape as a *picture* from a position outside it-- as a part of the colonial subjectivity Mitchell describes-- grounds staff exist *in* that landscape, in real space and time, maneuvering between tightly-packed shrubs to rake leaves, physically transplanting wilting bushes that have been planted too closely together to receive adequate sunlight.

While a picture is a snapshot, frozen in one moment of time, “nature” is not: it is enmeshed in layers of history whose implications some actors bear more directly than others-- several grounds staff members have worked at Whitman for over 25 years. At the same time, Whitman facilitates zero responsibility in students for the long-term implications of the changes they advocate-- we are simultaneously encouraged to “get involved” in the community *and* expected to move away after four years. Biles frequently receives “environmental” complaints and suggestions from students. He explains,

“One of the things that’s really hard about students, because you’re transient, is it’s really hard to get a grasp of the bigger picture of what we’re doing. Typically, [students say,] ‘we want to put in a low-water landscape, a xeriscape. And that’s fine to want to do that, but they don’t realize that xeriscaping takes a lot of work. You use a lot less water, but they’re always higher maintenance, especially when you start using native plants...We have basically 6 full time people to take care of an 80-acre campus. And we have to take out the garbage and shovel snow and keep the place clean and maintain the trees and the yards and the flowerbeds.”

From Biles’s perspective, the desire to plant native species or low-water landscapes is a self-serving, feel-good move for students; it aesthetically instrumentalizes indigeneity to fulfill their desire to occupy a place that seems more “natural,” while directly creating more work, with no corresponding increase in pay or hiring, for grounds staff. Those who Whitman positions to *consume* nature make endless suggestions about processes they know little about and are not personally responsible for *producing*. This blissful ignorance of the labor involved in maintaining an enclave is in no way harmless nor

inconsequential-- it reproduces differential burdens and benefits of “belonging” between members of the Whitman “community.”

PART 2

Nature as Beauty, Nature as Scene, Nature as Leisure

Even given the enormous amount of work channeled into producing a natural enclave of “labor’s illusory absence,” many OP leaders expressed their dissatisfaction with Whitman’s campus compared to their own nature ideal of “wilderness,” or the “outdoors.” In fact, many claimed that though they think Whitman *attempts* to create “a place where you could escape on campus,” the embeddedness of campus in “civilization” disqualifies it from being *true* nature, which many people defined as a *space* into which one escapes, “a place of reflection or beauty” (OP Leader 2). OP Leader 4 elaborates, “My relationship to nature here [on campus] is just so diminished having all these people around... Ideally, I would say this nature is just as nice as *that* nature, but it is the fragmented-ness of being in a city that makes it have less of an effect on my emotions.” Yet, by simply disidentifying with “civilization” in the pursuit of purer, newer, or more beautiful nature, this recreationist and others do not fundamentally critique the campus enclave, but rather pursue their own, more effective “sanctuary of illusory innocence.” Upon analysis, OP leaders and the campus landscape designers actually have very *similar* nature ideals in mind. The route OP Leader 5 follows when giving Admissions tours intentionally avoids parking lots, roads, and residential areas because too many cars and buildings “disrupt” the “beauty” of the campus. Tours instead focus on the particularly “green,” “verdant” areas “away from loud, distracting noises” that Brien Sheedy, director of the Outdoor Program, finds “quite peaceful, because of the amount of vegetation and

the water.” OP Leader 5 adds, “there are “certain *parts* of Whitman that I think are really naturey and beautiful, like sitting by the creek,” but even those most remote and quiet spots still only *approximate* “true” nature. These two spaces, Whitman and “the outdoors,” work *together* as a false dichotomy to psychically cleanse, purify, and absolve recreationists who disidentify with the campus in favor of a nature further “away,” where they are made less known of the labor which produces their very positions.

Recreationists largely describe “nature” as the ultimate realm where human labor *is not*-- if Brien Sheedy doesn’t get his “nature fix,” he tells me, “I feel like I’m just working my butt off, and for what? For me, the answer to ‘for what?’ is for the opportunity to go out and do what I really like to do, which is to relax in nature.” This aesthetically-centered, leisure-oriented understanding of “nature” reflects what Roderick Neumann calls the “landscape way of seeing,” a historical development steeped in relationships of elitism, class struggle, and domination. The landscape way of seeing is “a conceptualization of nature that is largely visual, that treats nature as ‘scenery’... upon which aesthetic judgments can be laid,” an achievement made possible through “the removal of all evidence of human labor, the separation of the observer from the land, and the spatial division of production and consumption” (Neumann 9, 24). OP Leader 5, for example, emphasized, “I think that lack of human impact on [a place] or looking around and not *feeling* like there’s human impact on it makes it feel more like nature.” To her, what matters is only that she can escape into the *illusion* of a place untouched by humans.

Quite simply, Neumann argues, “the moral and cultural superiority of certain social classes [is] constructed, in part, on the foundation of a refined, aesthetic appreciation of nature” (23). In this way, one’s ability to deride the practical, survival-

based relationships that many indigenous people, farmworkers, ranchers, and others have with nature in order to step back and exert “all-encompassing visual control over a nature free of human labor” is the mark of many Whitman students’ whiteness and class privilege (Neumann 20). When I asked recreationists to describe an especially meaningful experience they had with “nature,” people overwhelmingly described arriving at a vista, an open space, overlooking a “pristine” landscape, with the world seemingly laid out before them. OP Leader 1 described running up a mountain and being suddenly surrounded only by “native species,” looking out over a valley blanketed by mist that “perfectly” blocked out all houses, telephone poles, and signs of “civilization.” This occasion momentarily allowed him to experience a colonial fantasy in which he was the only subject, positioned *outside* and *above* the world to consume its beauty from the ultimate *point-of-view* (Mitchell 23-28).

This understanding of “nature” does not apply to everyone who values being out-of-doors, however. Dave Larson, for example, considers himself to have a “personality and affinity for working outside, with both plants and people,” which he thought at one point may have led him to work for Outward Bound or a similar program, but instead led him to tree and landscaping work. While the narrative evoked by OP members makes a fundamental distinction between the “artificial nature” of campus, deadened by over-management, and the leisurely exploration of the “untouched nature” where Outward Bound-type programs operate, for Larson, both options are first and foremost *jobs*, and both are equally valid ways of being out-of-doors. From this, it’s clear that the definition of “nature” applied by recreationists is not universal: it is a settler fantasy of the *absolute*

outside, a place always overwhelmingly beautiful for white, wealthy subjects to explore, consume, or “protect.”

The Wilderness: Another “Sanctuary of Illusory Innocence”

The myth of the wilderness as “virgin” uninhabited land had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home. Now they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God’s own creation (Cronon 23).

While the Outdoor Program largely advertises itself as an opportunity to simply “get outside,” its leaders and staff largely associate the outdoors with only the “purest,” most remote nature-- “the wilderness.” Because it is understood as an identifiable *place* into which recreationists can enter and exit, this definition of nature as “wilderness” functions very similarly to Whitman’s campus itself-- as an enclave. For many of these recreationists, nowhere in Walla Walla even counts as “nature” -- OP Leader 1 remarks, “If I’m not outside-- if I have to stay in Walla Walla for more than three weekends in a row-- I can definitely tell that I need to get outside again.” Others concurred that the college itself is not in a good location for “outdoorsy” people, because even if it does “have a lot of cool places around it,” if we were located “in Portland or Seattle, [we] would be much closer to *nature*” (OP Leader 5). This enclave shields its inhabitants from the rest of the world physically and psychologically: when OP Leader 5 is “in nature” she says, “I don’t think about climate change or gas and oil or divestment-- like that doesn’t come to mind when I’m there-- it probably should, but it just doesn’t.” Yet, she elaborates,

“When I spend time outside is often when I have thoughts about inequalities-- like why does it matter? *This* is what it was like before we came. Why does there need to be an invisible line from one thing to the next-- especially if I’m hiking in

between one National Forest to another? There's no difference: this tree and that tree [are] the same" (OP Leader 5).

This recreationist sees inequality or oppression as a matter of "invisible lines" drawn between nations and people, which vanish upon entry into an "eco-archaic world liberated from history" (Nixon 194). This understanding conceals the real, tangible state violence which enforces borders and "inequalities," while positioning her own white mobility between wilderness enclaves as some type of solution. Though she may question borders dividing National Forests, her narrative enforces the fundamental border separating "nature" from "civilization." The experience she describes, of venturing into an original, ahistorical nature to rediscover her deepest, most profound thoughts, is rooted, in fact, in a *nationalist* colonial myth of "wilderness" "founded on the erasure of the humanity, presence, and history of Native Americans" (DeLuca and Demo 554).

As William Cronon argues, "Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, [wilderness] is quite profoundly a human creation... we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires" (69). These longings belong to a white, colonial consciousness which has, in the U.S., responded to any strain on white supremacy with "discourses of purity [that] placed diluted racial subjects and degraded landscapes into the same 'grid of intelligibility,' wherein understandings of and fears surrounding race... became the raw substance out of which wilderness as an idea and a landscape was forged" (Kosek 129). A long legacy of anti-immigration rhetoric compares the crowded, polluted, racialized city with images of open, spacious "nature," proposing recreational ventures into that "pristine" American wilderness as a ritual of re-whitening oneself (Kosek).

This “wilderness” is produced not only as myth, but as physical reality through land management processes not dissimilar to the planning and maintenance of Whitman’s own campus. Outdoor Program trips travel to “wilderness areas” managed by institutions such as the National Forest and National Park Services, which institutionalize ongoing American colonization by “preserv[ing] the memory of an idealized pioneer history as an encounter with ‘wilderness’ that was conquered by enterprising Europeans” (Neumann 30). In this way, the places Whitman’s OP supports and inhabits “...help conceal the violence of conquest and in so doing not only deny the Other their history, but also create a new history in which the Other literally has no place” (Naumann 31). As “representations of a harmonious, untouched space of nature,” National Parks “mask the colonial dislocations” they impel, and “obliterate” all evidence of those dislocations (Neumann 31). These nature enclaves are fantasies with material consequences, which shield those who wish to occupy them from what is physically and mythologically pushed out of their bounds.

Recreationists themselves also produce the “wilderness” they value, by following a set of Leave No Trace (LNT) principles. The purpose of LNT is to seamlessly maintain the “outdoors” as an enclave: beautiful, “wild”-looking, with no trace of its complicated past or present: the purity of the eco-archaic. In these particular places, by walking on rock instead of vegetation and packing out one’s apple cores, toilet paper, and humanity, recreationists attempt to absolve themselves of their whiteness, their privilege, and their deep implication in systems of displacement, exploitation, and violence. OP leaders and staff *overwhelmingly* cited “beauty” and “pristine-ness” as the reasons they leave no trace. “I feel good when I’m in a situation where I don’t see the presence of other people,

and I know that in order to keep it that way, I have to do these sorts of things,” OP Leader 4 explained. Brian Sheedy sums up his LNT ethic thus:

“We go to beautiful places, and we want that place to not be trashed and be just as beautiful when we go back again. Those places are as nice as they are because people before us have taken care of them and done the right things in terms of packing out their trash. I think the reason to learn LNT and practice those techniques is because you feel it’s the right thing to do, because you appreciate that place and the beauty of that location.”

Sheedy imagines the only “people before” him as fellow recreationists, which actively erases centuries of use and relationships between indigenous people and those places, as well as the tangible histories of colonization, industry, and farming which preceded the production of National Parks through federal government “wilderness landscaping” projects.

While OP leaders described LNT as a *universal* moral code of conduct-- simply “the right thing to do” -- one of its main effects is to divide the world between spaces worth preserving, and those where “leaving a trace” is permissible, simultaneously designating populations *for whom* nature is to be “preserved” at the expense of indigenous and working class people who use those places to gather food, live, and work. White recreationists congratulate themselves for keeping their trash out of “nature,” but that trash *goes somewhere*. In fact, the removal and processing of waste is a potent strain of environmental racism in the United States and globally, in which white, wealthy people successfully fight to keep toxic incinerators and landfill wastelands from being constructed in their neighborhoods and favorite “wild” places, ensuring the installment of those industries in *others’* communities, “out of sight and out of mind” (Pellow). OP leaders and staff largely adhered to a narrative of imminent threat to the “wilderness” to further justifies the inherent morality of LNT principles-- because “we don’t have that

much space that we can even practice LNT on” and “wild spaces” are those “affected the most” by climate change, we must protect their purity and “explore these places while they’re still there” (OP Leader 4, Sheedy.) This narrative demonstrates the clearly defined borders of the enclave in which LNT is practiced, and violently obscures that it is poor and people of color around the world who are *actually* placed in the most precarious, threatening positions by the ecological disasters, environmental hazards, resource wars, and displacement of climate change (Pellow).

The 7 main LNT principles themselves define certain practices as “high-impact” or “low-impact” based only on their consequences *within* a particular nature enclave. For example, Sheedy emphasizes teaching students how to properly operate their equipment “so they’re not having to chop down trees because they broke their tents, or they can’t get their stoves to work, so now they’re having to make fires to cook their food.” Low-impact practices, then, involve purchasing and using polyurethane and nylon tents and gas-burning camping stoves. While Whitman-Wallowa State Park itself is not the place where petroleum is extracted to produce butane gas for camping stoves, where Bauxite is mined for the aluminum used in tent poles, where wars are fought over petroleum, or where sweatshops exploit migrant labor to produce snow pants, these processes happen *somewhere*, and impact those who have no recourse to “purity.” Not only must we ask if it is *possible* to live within global capitalism and white supremacy, resource wars and indigenous genocide, and “leave no trace” -- but we must interrogate the dominant Whitman “outdoorsy” subjectivity who *desires* this escape from their own impact into fantasies of “untouched wilderness.”

Who Belongs in the Outdoors?

I have thoughts about the outdoors. A majority of these thoughts are questions. Why would I spend time and money physically risking my comfort and health? More importantly, I never felt that I belonged outdoors... Growing up in urban, working class, immigrant neighborhoods, I never felt a claim to anything in nature.... Even in nature, I could never just exist.”

I thought that [groups of white recreationists] looked strange, too casual about the snow around them. They were comfortable, like they had some claim to that land. They always smiled politely at us brown kids as we stumbled and made our way down the path, as if to say, ‘Look how cute they are—I wonder what kind of outdoor urban exposure program they’re part of.’ In this moment, I felt I had to explain the presence of my brown body outside on these uncharted paths.

Gladys Gitau ‘15

Many white recreationists with the OP described feeling happier, more unencumbered, or more ‘like themselves’ in the “the wild” -- largely, as Nixon argues, because “they can experience their whiteness as an unselfconsciously unclassified state,” and thus “have less troubled access to sublime natural absorption in a post- or neo colonial environment” (185). As OP Leader 4 strikingly put it, “I think I’m often less content here [than when I’m on a trip]. I feel like this is not the place where I belong... [When I’m hiking], I feel like I belong in those places more.” Additionally, she says, “a lot of what makes a place beautiful to me is... having somewhere feel really really scary, that I’m unwelcome there,” feeling like “everything was out to get [her],” but ultimately staying long enough to overcome her sense of “unwelcomeness” in favor of comfort, appreciation, and beauty (OP Leader 4). This colonial narrative romanticizes the experience of an outsider entering an unfamiliar, untamed space that is not theirs, imposing their presence long enough to *achieve* “belonging” just in time to leave in search of new places in which they might become “welcome.” As Gitau, a Whitman graduate, points out, the implications of white people feeling “comfortable,” like they

belong in a “nature” that only exists because indigenous people and local working people were violently removed from it, are undoubtedly colonial, and have real psychological and gatekeeping effects on students of color who are unable to ignore these implications.

Despite minimizing claims among Whitman recreationists that the only difference between them and “non-outdoorsy” people is a matter of “personal taste,” Bruce Braun argues that the narrative structure of outdoor recreation, adventure tourism, and nature exploration “designates a discursive order in which [people of color] have no proper place” (180). White folks, through adventure activities and other adrenaline-boosting, danger-facing outdoor recreation ventures, constitute themselves as subjects with the ability and agency to *take* risks-- to make the conscious *choice* to put themselves in precarious and treacherous situations of their own will. This subjectivity is always contrasted against narratives of people of color as perpetually *at risk*-- stable, static, passive, always *subjected to* outside forces (Braun). White, wealthy Whitman students must *manufacture* experiences where they can feel fear, discomfort, and challenge because these hardships are not present in their everyday lives. OP Leader 4 explained that “the wilderness” is compelling because it allows her to momentarily escape from her own pervasive agency and control over her own life-- “so much of our world is based on trying to make everything go our way, so [I like feeling] like I’m not in charge.” Another recreationist, writing for the *Whitman Wire*, advises potential OP leaders to “remain wary of a sort of culture shock they will experience,” because “the backcountry brings with it an entirely new sense of non-familiarity” and “discomfort” that requires one to “remain aware of their surroundings, potential risks and the inevitability of mistakes” (Ali). To learn from recent protests at Whitman is to conclude that discomfort, risk, and constant

awareness of the dangers of one's surroundings are not *novel* feelings for many students of color on campus (Johnson, Yee). In many ways, OP trips are an act of renunciation of the privilege that pervades recreationists' lives, for whom belonging is an everyday *given*, for whom clean clothes, hot food, a warm bed, and personal safety are so secure that to be without them is seen as an exciting "experience" rather than an everyday reality.

In many ways, Whitman recreationists make the specificity of these desires for risk, discomfort, and beauty invisible by presenting the OP as a *universally* beneficial service which nurtures intrinsic, "primal" human connections to nature-- which, in reality, are only available to privileged, white subjects. Many OP leaders floundered when trying to communicate about race, suggesting, for example, that "the OP definitely struggles to like, I don't know, draw some of the international community," yet had no problem articulating their conviction that it is in *everyone's* best interest to "get outside" (OP Leader 1). In a morally imperialist, though well-intentioned way, many OP members rebranded the particular form of nature "appreciation" they value as a universally "healthy" practice. Sheedy largely portrayed the OP's mission as that of a missionary-like outreach program, enlightening underprivileged non-recreating students about how *good* it is for them. He says, "these are healthy lifelong pursuits we're turning people onto... the people who go on those trips get exposed to the natural world... they get exposed to an activity that can be good for them in terms of mind, body, spirit" (Sheedy). These sentiments place white recreationists in the position to "expose" others to nature, as though anyone who is not already an avid backpacker or skier simply does not *understand* the benefits of "nature" -- as though no other relationships with the natural world already exist.

Though recreationists imagine their own actions as a universal, inherent human response to “nature,” it becomes incredibly obvious when something or someone is “out of place.” OP Leader 1 told me a story about a time in nature he felt extremely frustrated:

“Sometimes when I’m out, I’ll see other hikers and I’ll feel like, ‘Oh there’s other people out enjoying nature like me.’ But with everything, it feels a little less wild every time. Especially with more people coming and stuff. [For example, you’ll be] rafting on the Salmon, you’re having a great time, haven’t seen anyone all day, and you’re so isolated and it’s so cool...and then two minutes later, there’s like a jet boat with like 20 dudes with shotguns shooting at things and drinking Keystone. And you’re just like, ‘Well there goes that ideal scene.’”

The wilderness enclave, apparently, cannot withstand any subjects other than the contemplative, individualistic male explorer, whose purpose for floating the river is not to hunt for food, socialize with friends, or have raucous fun. His description of the “dudes” who ruined his experience is highly class-descriptive, evoking distaste at “redneck” sensibilities, though presumably he may also eat meat, drive motorized vehicles, and drink alcohol-- just not in the nature enclave. Moments like this reveal tensions concealed by the narrative of “universality,” -- for recreationists, it is very apparent who does *not* belong in the outdoors.

A particularly potent example of these dynamics of belonging came in 2012 regarding conflicting claims to Spring Mountain in La Grande, Oregon, a significant cultural site to the local Umatilla tribe used also by the OP and others for recreational rock climbing. In a student-reported *Whitman Wire* article, Stuart Chapin emphasized that “openness and good will on the climbing community’s end will be an asset in maintaining access to the mountain”-- he even hoped to meet in person with representatives of the Umatilla to “demonstrate that [climbers] are totally willing to listen

and to do whatever we can to accommodate their interests;” in other words, to prove that they’re “good white people” in the hopes of securing their own interests in the area (Bishop). Another Whitman climber elaborated on this narrative of liberal whiteness-- a form of whiteness that “gains its political innocence precisely by disaffiliating itself from white supremacist history and practice, and, in so doing, reconfigures white people as the moral equivalents of non-white others in social and political space” -- by emphasizing how well climbers and the tribe were *working together* to replace old climbing hangers on the mountain (Baldwin 429, Bishop). So much visual, physical, and narrative work goes into producing liberal white belonging in “nature” -- the *Wire* article repeatedly emphasizes the length of time (“nearly twenty years”) Whitman has visited the site, and that it “presents the best outdoor climbing within a two-hour drive,” while offering no context (time immemorial) for Umatilla history with the mountain (Bishop). *Every* photo published in the feature depicts white climbers, such that recreationists seem an indispensable element of those mountains, laying inescapable visual claim to belonging.

Beyond individual mountains, Whitman produces subjects who learn that by “connecting” to an ahistorical and decontextualized nature, they can “belong” *anywhere*-- immersing themselves in white innocence in numerous nature enclaves while feeling no sustained responsibility toward any of them. Sheedy emphasizes that while he’s “climbed the highest peak on every continent” and has “been in very remote and surreal places on this planet,” he also enjoys “taking advantage of the beautiful places around here.” This colonial valuation of “place” which incorporates both appreciation of the ‘local’ and extreme mobility through travelling constructs the entire world as an open map of potential places with which to “connect.” OP Leader 4 elaborates,

“when I feel like I’m in a natural place, it’s sort of comforting because I feel like I both belong but I’m not necessary or purposeful. I feel like a big part of my relationship is to keep nature there, or to help other people to realize that they can also be a part of nature... I can be a part of it, and be in those spaces, and that’s comforting to me.”

Ultimately, she says, “I see myself as just a visitor.” Visitors feel entitled to enjoy nature but have no long-term responsibilities to the places they visit. This leader and others perceive their connections with the natural world as a *choice*, a comforting enclaved relationship into which they can seamlessly integrate. They engage to the extent that this relationship provides them with restoration, morality, excitement, or belonging, without any commitment, for they are not “necessary.” Similarly, while many Whitman students may love the beauty and opportunities on Whitman’s campus, they mostly understand it as an “oasis” in the middle of dry, uninteresting Walla Walla, far away from both the “happenings” of the city and from “nature” proper: roaring waterfalls, scenic coastlines, awe-inducing mountain ranges. So when the four-year window to live comfortably within the Whitman enclave passes and the option to stay in Walla Walla is less “idyllic,” many move away. These white Whitman students value a “nature” which ultimately facilitates their own colonial claims of “belonging,” in relationships of “appreciation” with no knowledge of history, “connection” without lasting commitment.

Conclusion

Quite fundamentally, I have intended to peel back several layers of colonial discourse and misleading beauty to demonstrate some of the ways Whitman’s campus is not, and never has been, an “oasis” nor the outdoors an “escape.” I do not intend to propose that Whitman students reading this thesis should abruptly cease finding

Whitman's grounds beautiful or renounce their backpacking trips, not because such actions are too extreme but because they are far too small. Given the tightly intertwined roots of Whitman College with colonialism, white supremacy, and class domination, not only is personal absolution through individual actions impossible, but any focus on escaping one's own implication in these foundations only reifies liberal white narratives of innocence and "purity."

To change this legacy is not a matter of incorporating more people into landscapes designed to evoke "purity" and "beauty" which omit their histories, deny their realities, and surveil their bodies in favor some superficial "diversity." It is a fundamental matter of what we-- as white people, as settlers-- are willing to "unsettle," uprooting even those things which may topple our own understandings of ourselves, our priorities, and what we find beautiful, fulfilling, or important. We must stop asking, "How can we bring in more people to make the Outdoor Program less white?" or "How can we plant more native plants to make the campus grounds look less manicured?" and start asking, how can I transform the relationships I have with people and place from within them-- not by simply bringing others in or keeping them out, but by interrupting the enforcement of boundaries between "inside" and "out," between campus and "the wild," between "nature" and "civilization"?

We must stop producing narratives and programs which imagine "universal" human values and desires in the form of whiteness-- which foster only those "connections" that reproduce elite morality, agency, and belonging. Instead, we must understand that the mode of "connecting" to nature that Whitman facilitates in fact *disconnects* us from the histories, meanings, and relationships embedded in landscapes

which were never pure. It is not enough for Whitman students, faculty, and staff to only change the way we *think* about “nature,” because colonial fantasies of beauty, protection and exploration are *physically* manifest in real places. We must unsettle the myth *and* material of these enclaves, knowing fully well that to dig up the roots and disrupt the growth of white colonial “nature” is to challenge the foundational existence of Whitman College itself, and the subjects it has cultivated us to become.

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