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ANCESTRAL DEVOTION, NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATION, AND THE CHALLENGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Scholars of religion and ecology have long recognized that some of the most biodiverse places on planet earth are "sacred groves." These places are protected from exploitation because they are understood to be the residences of ancestors and divinities. Many assume, following the lead of Lynn White, that the roots of environmental destruction lie in western Christianity's antipathy to place-based devotion.[1] As a medievalist, White focused on European lands. But the pattern he identified reached its apogee in the Americas, when Europeans claimed landscapes that were, from their perspective, devoid of ancestors. The colonialist "doctrine of discovery," notions of unfettered property rights, and plantation monocultures tended by enslaved Africans torn from their own ancestors—all flowed from the original breach of covenant with ancestors brought about by settler colonialism.

This is why Anna Tsing and Donna Haraway have suggested that our ecologically devastated age should not be called the "Anthropocene" but rather the "plantationocene." "Anthropocene" implies that all people are equally culpable; "plantationocene" highlights the violent disruption of three different relationships—between Europeans and nature, between Europeans and colonized peoples, and between Europeans and their own ancestors. Plantations, according to Tsing and Haraway, are characterized by "radical simplification; substitution of peoples, crops, microbes, and life forms; forced labor; and, crucially, the disordering of times of generation across species." It was "the radical interruption the possibility of the care of generations" that made the plantation, and

[1] Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

subsequently the rise of environmentally devastating forms of capitalism, possible.[2]

Because the three relationships were broken together, they must be mended together. The core insight of environmental justice is that care for the earth cannot be separated from justice for the poor, racialized, disabled and others who suffer disproportionately in a disrupted environment. The element I would add to this equation is that the twofold work of environmental justice is more likely to succeed if settler descendants embrace practices of ancestral devotion analogous to those that have long sustained indigenous communities. The Potawatomi biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer has pointedly asked whether American children of settlers and immigrants can "learn to live here as if we were staying?"[3] We can learn this best, I think, in concert with the ancestors.

An ancestral approach to conservation can also help us address what historian William Cronon has called "the trouble with wilderness." Noting the entanglements between wilderness conservation, manifest destiny, and white supremacy, Cronon has observed that "wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural."[4] The alternative to a wilderness ethic is an urban ecology that recognizes ourselves as at home in nature, and thus works to *restore* biodiversity in *every* landscape, and especially in the ordinary places where we live, work, and play.

What would it look like for settler descendants to honor the land by honoring ancestors? One intriguing case study can be found in the urban ecology of nineteenth-century Boston. Beginning with the establishment of Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1831, Bostonians transformed their ways of remembering the dead and then, by extension, their relationship to the more-than-human world. By the end of the century, the city was ringed with "forest parks" designed to offer hospitable spaces for plants, animals, and their human friends. All of these parks contained memorials to their creators' ancestors. Today, forest parks are oases of urban biodiversity and the sites of innumerable memorials.

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[2] Gregg Mitman, "Reflections on the Plantationocene: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing, June 18, 2019, https://edgeeffects.net/haraway-tsing-plantationocene/

[3] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2013), 207.

[4] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 80-81.

A few factors shaped nineteenth-century Bostonians' approach to the ancestors. On the timeline of history, this period stands midway between the beginnings of settler colonialism in New England and our own time. We remember them from the same historical distance as they remembered the Puritan founders. That distance is about seven generations.

The idea that seven generations have special ecological significance has been popularized by activists from the Haudenosaunee community.[5] The Haudenosaunee also venerate the white pine, a dominant species in the forests of both Haudenosaunee territory and New England. White pine live about seven human generations, or 200 years. To think about our seventh-generation ancestors is to think about people who might have been present when the tallest trees in our neighborhood first sprouted. To think about our seventh-generation descendants is to imagine children who might see the trees we plant reach their full height.

Ralph Waldo Emerson gave voice to this idea when he spoke at the dedication of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, inviting his fellow Concordians to "look forward" to when "these acorns, that are falling at our feet, are oaks overshadowing our children in a remote century."[6]

Seven generations also marks a period that stretches just beyond the reach of human oral memory. If we are lucky, we might as children hear our great-grandparents tell stories about their great-grandparents. But we are unlikely to know anything about the seventh generation. In the absence of specific knowledge, we may have a vague sense of their spirits inhabiting all of the landscapes that they inhabited.

But this is possible only if we inhabit the same landscapes. That is not the case for me or for many settler descendants, but it was true for many nineteenth-century Bostonians. These people embodied a paradox: they were keenly aware of their settler colonial origins, but that awareness was linked to a growing sense of nativeness in the landscape.

The Bostonians of two hundred years ago were also the first generation of Americans to realize that their ancestors had disrupted the landscape in ways that might threaten the well-

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[5] Christopher Vecsey, Robert W. Venables, eds., "An Iroquois Perspective," *American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 173-74.

[6] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Address to the Inhabitants of Concord at the Consecration of Sleepy Hollow," September 29, 1855, https://emersoncentral.com/texts/miscellanies/consecration-of-sleepy-hollow-cemetary/

being of their descendants. The specific problem was deforestation. By the nineteenth century, virtually all of the pre-colonial forest near Boston had been turned into residences, cropland, or pasture. Without trees, Bostonians had few opportunities to reflect on the ancestors who might have planted a seed or touched a seedling. And they were beginning to understand the ways trees can stabilize the climate by holding water.

The first to sound the alarm was educator George Barrell Emerson, who conducted a thorough survey of Massachusetts forests on behalf of the state government in 1846. Emerson explicitly cast the problem as one of intergenerational responsibility. Though there were plenty of trees further west, he wrote, it was still worthwhile to re-forest the "waste or worthless lands of Massachusetts" because "This is our native land. It is painful to break the chain of affection which connects us with it. It is painful to separate members of the same family." By preserving a healthy ecosystem, Emerson reasoned, Massachusetts could sustain a larger population and reduce the temptation for young people to migrate west. "Here we wish to live and to die; and when we die, we wish to be surrounded by those who are most dear to us."[7]

Emerson wrote those words fifteen years after his neighbors had found a new way to ensure that the dead would be surrounded by those most dear to them. In 1831, members of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society created the first "rural cemetery," Mount Auburn, on the banks of the Charles River. "Rural cemetery" is a bit of a misnomer: these cemeteries are planted on the edges of urban communities and seek to mimic the picturesque qualities of truly rural cemeteries. In such settings, graves could be interspersed with shade trees and walkways for outdoor recreation. The founders of Mount Auburn also established experimental gardens directly adjacent to the cemetery. Their vision was threefold: they wished to make death less frightening by connecting it with pleasant scenery; they wished to provide city dwellers with a place to enjoy the outdoors; and they wished to foster the well-being of trees and other plants through scientific research.

When Mount Auburn was consecrated, Judge Joseph Story explained the founders' motives in an address that invited Christians to emulate the ancestral rituals of their pagan predecessors. This address can almost be read as an anticipatory response to Lynn White. Mount Auburn, he explained,

[7] George Barrell Emerson, "*A Report on the Trees and Shrubs Growing Naturally in the Forests of Massachusetts* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1846), 36.

responded to universal religious needs that had been neglected by Christians. The strongest and most universal human feelings, according to Story, are the desire to "die in the arms of our friends" and "to repose in the land of our nativity." Such feelings are shared equally by "the Heathen, dwelling in the darkness of his cold mythology and . . . the Christian, rejoicing in the light of the true God." Without violating his hearers' assumption of Christian superiority, Story urged them to act more like the heathen. Non-Christians who supposedly lacked hope for life after death nevertheless "strewed flowers, and garlands, and crowns around [the grave]," so why should not Christians also "make cheerful the pathways to the grave"? Why, Story went on, "should we deposit the remains of our friends in loathsome vaults, or beneath the gloomy crypts and cells of our churches . . . [or] measure out a narrow portion of earth for our graveyards in the midst of our cities, and heap the dead upon each other with a cold, calculating parsimony"? Far better to honor the dead beneath the "lofty oak" and the "drooping willow," in a spot with "thick shrubbery to protect and conceal the new-made grave" and "the wild-flower creeping along the narrow path, and planting its seeds in the upturned earth."[8]

The ecological potential of rural cemeteries was expressed even more fully by an ambivalent champion of Mount Auburn. Thirty years after the cemetery's founding, nature writer Wilson Flagg was commissioned to edit a collection of essays and poems about it. By this time, the "rural" beauty of Mount Auburn had been marred by ostentatious memorials and elaborate railings around many of the family plots. And so Flagg designed his book as a "concealed satire," lifting up what Mount Auburn should have been rather than what it was.

His first essay in the book compared "Ancient and Modern Tombs" and concluded that modern, democratic memorials should be simple and natural. "Colossal" monuments were "the united work of despotism and slavery." Rural cemeteries represented a democratic alternative: In them, we "restore the remains of our friends to the bosom of the earth," covering graves with "the green turf and the wild flowers of the field."[9]

In another essay, Flagg explained that the reason people prefer burial "under the protection of trees" is that we wish to

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[8] Joseph Story, "An Address Delivered on the Dedication of the Cemetery at Mount Auburn, September 24th, 1831," https://www.mountauburn.org/joseph-storys-consecration-address/

[9] Flagg, "Ancient and Modern Tombs," *Mount Auburn: Its Scenes, Its Beauties, and Its Lessons* (Boston: James Munroe, 1861), 5-6.

associate our own deaths and the deaths of our friends with memories of comfort. He told a poignant story of meeting a grieving young woman "sitting upon a knoll, under a large tupelo tree, that spread its branches over the widening of a small stream in the valley." The woman explained that her sister had died three years before, and she chose to remember her by revisiting the place where they had so often gathered wildflowers. Flagg asked if the sister was buried nearby; the woman replied that she was not, but that she had transplanted several of the valley's flowers to the cemetery. "I think more of the flowers that spring up from her grave," she told Flagg, "than I should of the proudest monument that was ever carved out of marble." For Flagg, this story epitomized the symbiotic relation between love of nature and love of ancestors. When we walk through "the grove, the hillside, the path by the river," we are reminded of incidents in our friends' lives; and thus "the trees have a sacredness which is due to their alliance with the memory of our departed friends."[10]

When Flagg visited New England's older graveyards, he was continually impressed by nature's capacity to sanctify human memories. Flowers, he observed, "spring up with a singular charm around these old graves," not because they have been deliberately planted but because "many a pious mourner has bedewed them with tears." Even after the "sorrowing had ceased" because all the mourners "were gathered unto the dust, the flowers still performed their sacred office around the old forgotten graves, as if some unseen spirit still watched over them." Likewise, he went on, the trees in old graveyards "have extended their roots into the dilapidated mounds, and almost obliterated them." Lichens decorate the leaning headstones, "causing them to resemble the rocks in the solitary pastures," while "a profusion of wild shrubbery has diffused itself in irregular masses among the graves." By personifying nature's care for the forgotten dead, Flagg blended his own ancestral devotion with reverence for the spirits of more-than-human beings. He explicitly invoked the tradition of sacred groves, suggesting that towns ought to protect their old graveyards as "hallowed ground," because "the trees that stand there have formed a grove, which ought to be as sacred as any that were in ancient days consecrated to philosophy."[11]

In another essay, Flagg encouraged his readers to dispense with stone monuments entirely, and instead plant memorial trees for their loved ones. A memorial tree, Flagg suggested, would

[10] Flagg, "Rural Burial," *Mount Auburn*, 8-13.
[11] Flagg, "Old Graveyards," *Mount Auburn*, 114-19.

"awaken fresh memories of the dead" each spring, when it "put forth its leaves." The thought of having a memorial tree would reassure people that "after we are laid in the grave, we are still doing good to our fellow-men," since "a tree is constantly performing a useful office, in the economy of nature, for all living creatures." Flagg hinted that memorial trees would bring human ancestors, nonhuman species, and angels into a single spiritual conversation. "Trees, when thus consecrated, might be regarded as the medium of constant messages from the dead to the living, who might view in one of these trees the emblem of some of the transcendent joys of heaven. . . . The birds that sing in its branches do but communicate those pleasing thoughts that cannot be expressed in words, but serve to awaken in our hearts gleam of those joys which are felt by the blessed in heaven. When we sit under its shade in summer, we feel as if overshadowed by an angel's wings, so musically do the zephyrs, as they play through the leaves and branches, whisper of the world of the past and the heaven of the future." Perhaps, Flagg mused, there would be a million such trees in a century's time, and posterity would "revere the custom that had saved so many from destruction."[12]

Five years before publishing his book on Mount Auburn, Flagg offered the citizens of Boston another vision of how they might bequeath millions of trees to their descendants. In 1856 he prepared a "proposal to state and city governments" for the creation of "a forest preserve." Every city, he suggested should purchase "a thousand acres or more of wooded land . . . to be kept as a *preserve*, and to be used also as a place for the study of natural history, and for summer recreation." Each forest park would "be preserved from age to age, in its primitive state of wildness."[13]

Flagg was not quite the first Bostonian to dream of a thousand-acre, forested park. Nine years earlier, the abolitionist editor Elizur Wright tucked a similar proposal into the pages of the *Chronotype*, a newspaper he edited on behalf of the Liberty Party. In part, Wright's proposal was a reaction to the rural cemetery movement. The suburb of Roxbury, not yet incorporated into Boston, had just announced the creation of what would become Forest Hills Cemetery, soon the final resting place of many of Boston's capitalists and many of Boston's most radical reformers. As a cash-strapped activist who had already lost five children to disease, Wright was keenly

[12] Flagg, "Monumental Trees," *Mount Auburn*, 263-66.
[13] Wilson Flagg, "A Forest Preserve—A Proposal to State and City Governments," *Magazine of Horticulture* 22/1 (January 1856): 11.

aware that rural cemeteries catered mostly to the rich. Why not, he asked, use the proceeds from elaborate funerals to "give there a resting place for the poor as well as the rich clay?" And why not, he went on, "inquire if some better provision cannot be made for the comfort of the living in regard to rural enjoyment?" Wright observed that Boston Common was insufficient for the city's growing population, but that "a mile square park . . . five to ten miles from town" would be cheaply accessible by rail. Land there was still cheap, "and the fitting up would cost but little, for nature is what we want to get at."[14]

Wright's proposal came at a significant moment in American radical history, a time when abolitionists and white labor activists were trying to make common cause. Wright was a close ally of New York abolitionist Gerrit Smith, who had inherited a fortune from his land-speculating father. Working class radicals criticized Smith for the hypocrisy of opposing slavery while holding a monopoly on farmland. Smith decided his critics were right, and he began distributing his land to small farmers, both black and white. He and Wright then called on the government to distribute western lands to urban workers in small parcels of about 160 acres. This would eventually lead to the Homestead Act, but the original idea was more extreme. The homesteads Wright had in mind would have restricted titles, making them exempt from seizure for debt, and they could only be sold to other landless farmers. Wright envisioned dense neighborhoods of homesteads in the Midwest, with lands further west preserved for indigenous communities. He observed that only small farmers would have time to improve the soil with intensive manuring. This was a rebuttal to the then-common practice of acquiring as much land as possible, working it to depletion, and then moving further west.[15]

Wright's park proposal was shaped by his thinking about land redistribution. The common thread was the idea of a democratically-managed "public domain." By the 1840s, the federal government had a long-standing tradition of stealing indigenous lands and turning them over to land speculators or else using them for canals and other public works that would primarily benefit merchants and industrialists. Wright opposed all of this. He wanted the government to act only for the public

[14] *Chronotype*, September 7, 1847; reprinted in Ellen Wright, ed., *Elizur Wright's Appeals for the Middlesex Fells and the Forests* (Medford, Mass.: Medford Public Domain Club, 1893; republished by Ellen Wright, 1904), xxiv-xxv; see also Philip Green Wright and Elizabeth Q. Wright, *Elizur Wright: The Father of Life Insurance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), p. 311.
[15] Sean G. Griffin, "A Reformers' Union: Land Reform, Labor, and the Evolution of Antislavery Politics, 1790-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2017.

benefit, expressed in parks and homesteads. And he wanted to pay for it with an "honest direct property tax" that would shift "the burdens of government from the backs of labor, to that of capital."[16]

Wright and Flagg devoted the last decades of their lives to lobbying for forest parks, usually in the company of their friend John Owen. One observer described them as "a weird council of old Greek wood gods . . . not yet convinced that Pan was dead."[17] Their campaign's first success was a state law allowing municipalities to create their own forest parks. But that didn't work in Wright's own neighborhood, where the ideal land was distributed among five different towns. Fortunately, a new generation continued Wright and Flagg's work after their death. In the 1890s they created both the nonprofit "Trustees of Reservations" and the governmental Metropolitan Park Commission. These bodies were the template for all of the land trusts and state parks that now enhance American landscapes.

Wright and Flagg's primary activist strategy was to appeal directly to their neighbors. Dozens of wealthy and not-so wealthy people owned the land they hoped to turn into parks. Since many had houses just outside his envisioned park borders, Wright surmised that they would enjoy living near a park. At the same time, Wright and Flag tried to interest people who lived further away by offering to take them on "a ramble of four or five miles in pretty rough ways," with abundant "geological and botanical information."[18]

Wright and Flagg quickly learned that one of the best ways to interest wealthy neighbors was to appeal to their ancestral devotion. Late nineteenth-century Bostonians were fascinated by Puritan genealogy. The park movement gave them a chance to preserve locations that figured in their family stories. For example, in 1882 the philanthropist Thomas Gold Appleton put a marker near "Appleton's Pulpit" north of Boston, a rock from which his ancestor supposedly made a speech in defiance of British authority in 1687. Both the Trustees of Reservations and the Metropolitan Park Commission used this example to promote additional donations of historic sites, and other Appleton descendants contributed many pieces of land, including "Appleton Farms" in Ipswich and much of the land that is now Blue Hills Reservation.

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[16] "Direct Taxation," *Chronotype*, 23 September 1847.

[17] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, cited in *Appeals*, xli.

[18] The Park of the Future," *Boston Transcript*, September 25, 1877.

Elizur Wright, for his part, repeatedly told the story of how Middlesex Fells had been explored by John Winthrop and a few companions in 1631. They had given Spot Pond its name because of the rocky island in the middle, and had a meal of cheese on top of Bear Hill because they'd forgotten to pack bread. Wright noted that the name "Bear Hill" took on new meaning in the era of deforestation and proposed that it be renamed for Winthrop.[19] Luckily, that idea did not take hold, or else we'd now need to rename it to avoid honoring an enslaver and perpetrator of genocide.

Again and again, ancestral appeals were what clinched the deal for forest preservation. The *first* large forest park in metropolitan Boston was Lynn Woods, created on a spot revered by spiritualists because a seventeenth-century pirate had supposedly buried his treasure there. The first parcel of land owned by the Trustees of Reservation is known as "Virginia Woods" in honor of Virginia Tudor (1850-1886). Virginia's mother mourned her early death by donating the woods where she had played as a girl. Likewise, when the Trustees' founder Charles Eliot, Jr., died at age 38, he was memorialized with a stone tower in the Blue Hills park.

Visitors today encounter memorials that call attention to the people who preserved the parks and those who loved them later on. Walking the banks of the Charles and Mystic Rivers, one frequently encounters modest memorial benches or plaques for the neighborhood activists who tended walking paths a century after the river banks were first acquired by the Metropolitan Parks Commission. In Malden's Wedgemere Park, looking for a memorial to Charles Eliot, I also encountered an electrical box that had been painted with a mural honoring the park's founder Elisha Converse (of sneaker fame), as well as tree bedecked with colorful plastic trinkets in memory of a man my own age who had died young after a lifetime of enjoying the park. All the color reminded me that *everything* human can be at home in spaces that are also friendly to biodiversity.

I began by arguing that ancestral healing is an intrinsic part of healing from settler colonialism's violence against both land and people. It should be obvious by now that this is a very fraught process, because memorial making so often favors the ancestors of those who benefited the most from colonial violence. The memorials to Virginia Tudor and Charles Eliot reflect, in part, the extreme privilege of these two nature lovers. As children, Tudor and Eliot probably met one another at the coastal resort

[19] Wright, "The Legend of 'Cheese Rock,'" *Appeals*, 67.

town of Nahant. Today, Nahant is notorious for the extent to which its beautiful coastline is owned privately rather than publicly.

Likewise, many park creators honored their Puritan ancestors in ways that minimized those ancestors' violence against indigenous people. In 1889, the first president of the Trustees of Reservations, Senator George Hoar, acquired "Redemption Rock" in central Massachusetts because it was the place where his ancestor John Hoar had negotiated the release of Mary Rowlandson, who had been captured by Native Americans led by Metacomet, or "King Philip." A pamphlet, published on the occasion of Hoar's purchase, acknowledged that Metacomet's "friendship" for white settlers had been "repaid by ingratitude and wrongs," but nevertheless described him as a "bloodthirsty soul" who "was not satisfied with the amount of human gore he had spilt."[20]

Other memorials reinforce white supremacist notions of manifest destiny. One can, for example, take a long walk along the Charles River that begins and ends with memorials to Leif Erickson, the Viking explorer who might have but probably did not sail up the Charles in the year 1000. These are the work of Harvard chemistry professor Eben Norton Horsford, who obsessively glorified Viking heritage just as "race scientists" were beginning to promote theories of "Nordic" supremacy. Midway between the Erikson memorials, the Watertown Founders Memorial honors Puritans who planted their town on the banks of the river in 1630. A mural of Puritans and Massachusett people exchanging bread for fish highlights the possibility of interracial harmony but obscures the far more common pattern of settler violence. Only white people are named on the memorial, and just about every person who played a role in creating Boston's rural cemeteries and forest parks has an ancestor there.

Among the Watertown descendants were the Brooks family of Medford. Once the wealthiest family in Massachusetts, the Brookses had derived wealth from land theft, the use of enslaved labor, and selling insurance for ships that trafficked in slaves and slave-produced goods. The heirs to this wealth eventually transferred most of the family land to public ownership, spread across multiple parks as well as a garden cemetery. Here I found a few examples of the sort of memorials

[20] Samuel Hathaway, *The History of Redemption Rock* (Worcester: F. S. Blanchard, 1898), 5-6.

that might truly unite environmental justice with ancestral devotion and wild space conservation.

The Brookses themselves are buried in Oak Grove Cemetery. In keeping with Wilson Flagg's ideal, their modest granite slabs are overshadowed by a majestic beech tree. Just a few thousand feet away are two other memorials.

In 1888 Francis Brooks discovered indigenous remains in the land he claimed as his backyard. The first time this happened he gave the remains to Harvard University; the second time, he chose a more respectful approach, reburying the remains beneath a monument to Sagamore John, the leader of the local indigenous community just before the arrival of white settlers.[21] Several decades later, other members of the Brooks family gave the town a parcel of land including a brick wall that had been built by Pomp, an enslaved man claimed by the family in the eighteenth century.

The Brooks family never fully explained their reasons for memorializing Sagamore John and Pomp. As far as I know, these memorials did not come with any public apology. Still, they are powerful examples of what ancestral devotion should look like in the Plantationocene. Located at the heart of what was once one of largest slave plantations in New England, they remind their neighbors that the histories of colonial violence are not far away, but still living among us. They also connect neighbors to what ecotheologian Mark Wallace has called the "wounded sacred."[22] Both are in sites of ecological as well as social woundedness—the Sagamore John memorial is literally in the middle of the street; Pomp's Slave Wall is on a sliver of land between a road and a train track. It is filled with plants that might be deemed invasive species. But it is also a wildlife corridor that helps plants and animals move between the larger parks on either side. Together, these memorials invite New Englanders to continue the work of ecological restoration begun nearly two centuries ago. And they promise that ancestors, of all races and all species, will be with us in this work.

Still, it is noteworthy that neither the Brooks nor other park promoters seem to have reached out to members of the Massachusett or other indigenous communities to think together about what ancestral devotion should look like on

[21] Sara Georgini, "Pilgrims of Pompeii," *The Beehive*, 2 December 2016, https://www.masshist.org/beehiveblog/2016/12/pilgrims-of-pompeii/

[22] Mark I. Wallace, "Sacred-Land Theology: Green Spirit, Deconstruction, and the Question of Idolatry in Contemporary Earthen Christianity," in Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, eds., *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*(New York: Fordham, 2007), 291-314.

lands inhabited by Puritans for centuries and by indigenous people for tens of thousands of years. This is slightly puzzling, because some park promoters did have significant ties to indigenous communities in other parts of the country. Elizur Wright, for example, served on a federal commission that urged the government *not* to build dams on the upper Mississippi River, largely on the grounds that these would benefit timber tycoons at the expense of the wild rice fields of the Anishnaabe tribe. Wright also published articles in Boston newspapers urging his neighbors to protest the "projected crime" in Minnesota.[23]

Another park promoter with significant indigenous ties was the journalist Sylvester Baxter, who served as the founding secretary of the Metropolitan Park Commission, responsible for the practical work of transferring Middlesex Fells, Blue Hills, and other parks to public owners. A few years earlier he had served in a similar coordinating role for the anthropological and archaeological expedition to the Zuni tribe that brought many significant artifacts to Harvard's Peabody Museum, as well as a delegation of Zuni leaders to Boston itself.[24] That delegation was funded by philanthropist Mary Hemenway, whose son was one of the Metropolitan Park Commissioners and the donor of the western part of the Blue Hills.

Similar to Baxter, the journalist J.B. Harrison, who helped the Trustees of Reservations identify potential lands for preservation, had previously worked as an agent for the Indian Rights Association. That group sought to protect indigenous communities from the violence of white neighbors, but also pressured them to adopt "civilized" habits of agriculture and private landownership. Ironically, Harrison was an advocate of public landownership in Massachusetts and of privatizing indigenous lands in the West.[25] Both Harrison and Baxter exemplify what I call the "problem-solving" mentality that would come to dominate park policy in the twentieth century. Though they had genuinely benevolent intentions for both the land and the indigenous people who cared for the land, they tended to regard land and people as problems to be solved rather than as genuine partners.

[23] Elizur Wright, "The Mississippi Dams," *Boston Herald*, August 4, 1882, in *Appeals*, 138-44.
[24] Curtis M. Hinsley and David R. Wilcox, eds., *The Southwest in the American Imagination: The Writings of Sylvester Baxter, 1881-1889* (University of Arizona Press, 1996).
[25] Jonathan Baxter Harrison, *The Latest Studies on Indian Reservations* (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1887).

The problem-solving mentality came to dominate United States park and forest policy in the twentieth century, and it continues to shape mainstream responses to the challenge of climate change. We can see the problem-solving ethos in policies that rigidly segregate biodiverse parks from exploited industrial and agricultural spaces, in the tendency to blame the "overpopulation" of poor people rather than the consumption of the wealthy for environmental problems, and in the quest for purely technological solutions to climate change. Nineteenth-century ancestral devotion does not offer a fully-fleshed out alternative to any of that. But for those with ears to hear, it does offer an intriguing hint. Perhaps, if we attend more closely to our ancestors both human and more-than-human, we can find a pathway of partnership, kinship, and genuine justice.