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BRENT RANALLI

Thoreau's Indian Stride

Thoreau's college classmate John Weiss called Thoreau's walk a "grave Indian stride" (Harding 32). Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne, recalled it as long, ungainly, and Indian-like (Harding 78). Frank Preston Stearns, son of abolitionist George Luther Stearns, recalled it as "the long step of an Indian" (Harding 78). What on Earth did they mean? Were these merely figures of speech? Thoreau's contemporaries agreed that the celebrated, self-styled "saunterer" had a distinctive gait, a "peculiar stride which all who have walked with him remember," in the words of Franklin Sanborn (Harding 98). Did it really resemble a Native American gait? Is it even meaningful to speak of a distinctively Native American gait? What would nineteenth-century Euro-Americans of Eastern Massachusetts, so far from the frontier and with so few opportunities for first-hand knowledge of Native lifeways, understand to be the most salient features of an "Indian stride"? And what does unpacking the mystery of his "Indian stride" tell us about Thoreau?

This essay is the third in a series devoted to these questions. The first essay, published in the *Thoreau Society Bulletin*, analyzed the literary evidence describing Thoreau's own peculiar gait. The picture that emerges from the reminiscences of a dozen contemporaries is of "a uniform, confident, long-legged stride, carriage erect, arms clasped behind or straight by his side, at a pace that was brisk but did not require any extraordinary exertion for one so physically fit" (2). The second essay, to be published in the *49th Parallel*, a journal of North American studies, explores the world of Native American walking biomechanics. Drawing from a wide variety of sources, including explorers' writings, ethnology, and Natives' own accounts, it shows that there are in fact three features that can be considered characteristic of a Native North American gait: (a) stepping on the ball of the foot (or the whole surface of the foot) rather than rolling from heel to toe; (b) pointing the toes straight

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ahead or slightly inward, rather than outward; and (c) placing the feet along a single straight line under the body's center of gravity, rather than placing them at hip width and shifting weight from side to side. Though there must also have been considerable historical variability in walking styles, these three features are attested with remarkable consistency across genres, across time (from the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century), and across the diverse array of cultures spanning the continent.

In this third essay in the series, we are now in a position to answer the question: What did Thoreau's contemporaries mean when they said he walked with an "Indian stride"? We start by asking: Did Thoreau's gait include any of the three biomechanical features that are distinctive of an authentic Native North American gait?

The Footstrike

Our sources say that Native Americans tended to land on the ball of the foot (a "forefoot strike"), or flat-footed ("midfoot strike"), rather than landing on the heel and rolling forward ("heel strike"). When it comes to *running*, the forefoot and midfoot strike are widely used throughout the world among cultures that don't wear hard-soled shoes. Physiologists like Harvard's Daniel E. Lieberman, observing that the forefoot and midfoot strike minimize the peak collision force between foot and ground, suggest that we evolved to run this way. In some parts of the world—e.g., in Japan as well as native North America—it has also been common to avoid the heel strike when *walking*. North American evidence comes from a variety of sources. One is *The Indian How Book* (1927) by historian and folklorist Arthur Caswell Parker, a member of the Seneca tribe and first president of the Society for American Archaeology: "Moccasins kept the Indian 'on his toes' a good deal of the time. He kept a springy feeling. In ordinary walking the heel was not thumped down first, but the ball of the foot, or occasionally the whole foot, planked flat upon the ground" (113).

Which type of footstrike did Henry David Thoreau use? An early Journal passage praising the heroic mode of life alludes to footstrike styles: "We should not walk on tiptoe, but healthily expand to our full circumference on the soles of our feet.... We should fetch the whole—heel—sole—and toe—horizontally down to earth" (1: 214, December 31, 1840). Evidently the mid-

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foot strike struck him as more manful than the forefoot. But if we want to know how he actually walked, another Journal passage is decisive: "[Other men] do not run their boots down at the heel as I do. How to keep the heels up I have been obliged to study carefully…I have managed to cross very wet & miry places dry shod by moving rapidly on my heels— I always use leather strings tied in a hard knot—they untie but too easily even then" (6: 36).

Thoreau was in the habit of landing on the heels, evidently with such force that he wore out the heels of his boots. Far from leading with pointed toes, or fetching the whole horizontally down to earth, he was flexing the feet so hard that his laces would not stay tied. Landing hard on the heel could have been a factor in the knee trouble he experienced later in life (Harding 103). And, being utterly conventional in Euro-America, a heel strike would explain why the dozen friends and neighbors who described Thoreau's unique walking style say nothing about footstrike. It was not in respect to footstrike that Henry walked like an Indian.

But before we move on, one more source must be acknowledged. Charles D. G. Roberts, a Canadian man of letters, wrote in 1899 of Thoreau's "long feet that come down noiselessly and flatly on the twig-strewn forest paths, like an Indian's" (12). This description of Thoreau's gait was not included among those analyzed in my *Thoreau Society Bulletin* article because it is not a first-hand account. Since no known first-hand account corroborates the idea that Thoreau landed with a flat foot, we must infer that Roberts was embellishing what he had read (i.e., that Thoreau had an Indian gait) with his own personal knowledge of what constitutes an authentic Indian gait.

The Orientation of the Toes

Our sources indicate that Native Americans commonly walked with toes pointed straight ahead or turned slightly inward, rather than turned outward. In Northern climes, this foot orientation was indispensable for walking with snowshoes. (If the toes are pointed outward, the snowshoes cross.) The practice is attested among Southern tribes as well. Wilderness skills gurus explain that it provides greater balance and agility and keeps the foot from snagging on obstacles. Furthermore, the straight or slightly turned-in orientation of the foot lengthens the stride. As explorer Johann Kohl reports, citing the authority of a

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Canadian voyageur: "the Indians, at every step, covered an inch more ground than the Europeans who turn their feet out" (8).

In fact it was the out-toed gait of early modern Europeans that today would be considered exotic. In seventeenth century Europe, an exaggerated out-toed stance, suitable for sweeping bows, was considered proper courtly etiquette. The "flunky pose" (as later writers called it) became military fashion, and the general public too came to consider toeing out a sign of good breeding. By the late nineteenth century, the flunky pose had come under assault by scientific medical professionals, who blamed it for incapacitating soldiers on the march, and for everything from corns, ingrown toenails, and bunions to spreading feet, arch problems, and general aches and pains. By the early twentieth century, the exaggerated European out-toe had effectively been stamped out (see Reynolds, Harris).

Did Thoreau "toe in" like an Indian? Again, the first-hand accounts are silent on the question, which would count as evidence against Henry's gait having this (to contemporaries) exotic characteristic. And feet turned inward in true Indian fashion would probably not have been compatible with the impression his gait made on some contemporaries as soldierly or gentlemanly.

Further indirect evidence for the negative comes from Henry's own Journal. In 1858, Thoreau attended a lecture by a visiting "Chippeway" [*sic*] Indian. His detailed notes include the following: "Indians step with the feet straight, but whites, who toe out, seem to have no use for any toes but the great one in walking" (X: 293). Thoreau gives no indication that he recognizes anything like his own walking style in this description of the second feature of an authentic Indian gait.

Foot Placement: In-line or Alternating

Our sources tell us that it was a common Native American practice to place one foot directly in front of the other in a straight line beneath the body's center of gravity rather than to place them hip width apart and shift the body's weight from side to side. This is very different from the way moderns walk, and might even be unique among world cultures. Wilderness-skills experts credit the Native in-line stride with providing exquisite balance and control. "If the Indian were turned to stone while in the act of stepping, the statue would probably stand balanced on one foot" (Kephart 180). And like a straight foot, the

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in-line stride minimizes opportunities to trip or get caught in underbrush. More than just a technique of the feet, the in-line step involves the whole lower body. Multiple sources attest that the Native in-line walk is a "swinging" gait. The practitioner "walks with a rolling motion, his hips swaying" (Kephart 179). And this hip action—swinging forward with each step—further lengthens the stride.

Did Thoreau place one foot directly in front of the other? Did he swing the hips?

Here we have some additional primary source material to consider. The testimony of Rose Hawthorne Lathrop given in the original *Thoreau Society Bulletin* article (and repeated in the first paragraph of this article) was a third-hand account. The cited source is a newspaper description of a lecture given by Mr. Lathrop, in which he described his wife's childhood memory of Thoreau. Happily, a first-hand version is also available.[1] Rose Hawthorne Lathrop's own words were published in 1891, three years before her husband's lecture. Rose Hawthorne Lathrop states of her nine-year-old self: "I noticed with transfixed pulses that he strode, clothed in exaggerated dignity, with long steps, placing one foot exactly before the other according to the Indian fashion" (26). This first-hand account could be taken as evidence that Thoreau really did walk with an Indian in-line stride. But there are reasons to doubt Rose Hawthorne Lathrop's memory, and the weight of other evidence is strongly against it. Of the three biomechanical features of an Indian gait, the in-line stride is by far the most exotic and would probably attract the most notice. As Benjamin Thatcher writes in his 1833 *Indian Traits*, "in the gait of the Indians [the in-line stride] is something so peculiar as to enable a person who is in the habit of seeing them to distinguish one of them, at a considerable distance, from a white man" (1: 27-28). If Henry had placed one foot directly in front of the other when he walked, and swung from the hips, we might expect these details to have been at the top of the list in most accounts of Henry's distinctive gait. But outside of Rose's account they do not appear at all. Furthermore, swinging hips would (like the Indian in-toe) be incompatible with the soldierly and gentlemanly bearing that feature in several accounts.[2]

Rose's account, like many of the others, was written down decades after Thoreau's death. Rose was acquainted with Thoreau for only a short time, when she was a young girl between the ages of 9 and 11 and he was in declining health, away in Minnesota, and then dying of tuberculosis. In Rose's account, her first and most vivid impression of Henry—a dread-

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ful, awe-inspiring experience—was part and parcel of the dread and awe of her adjustment from the robins and daisies of England to her new and "wild" surroundings in Massachusetts. Thoreau in this first meeting was a "strange being, native to harsh America"—so in the mind of the young child and in the significant memory that grew up around it, the strange being took on "native to America" qualities—including, apparently in retrospect, qualities of an authentic Native gait. The account is dreamlike and fantastically grotesque. Thoreau's feet were fantastically long ("interminable"). He had a "vaguely large nose that finally curved to his chin." Though Rose stationed herself at a "retired spot" for safety as he walked from door to gate, by a "roguish turn of the path" he came right upon her—close enough that she could study his eyes. These "created a thirst in me for the dreadful," and featured irises "bordered by heavy dark lines, like a wild animals [sic]." In addition to the fantastical quality of the account that suggests significant exaggeration in the remembering and the telling, it is unreliable in other respects. In particular, Rose repeats as settled fact the rumor that Henry's Walden experiment was entirely dependent on "Mrs. Thoreau's loaves of bread, faithfully supplied."

A Dead End?

On balance, we are left to conclude that Thoreau's "Indian stride" most likely had none of the three features of an authentic Native American walking gait. In that case, what did Thoreau's contemporaries mean? We have already seen reason to doubt specifics in two accounts (those of Charles D. G. Roberts and Rose Hawthorne Lathrop). Could it be that we need to take *all* of this talk of Henry's "Indian stride" with an even bigger grain of salt?

Henry prized what he considered Indian virtues (stoicism, hardiness, skill in woodcraft, etc.) and cultivated a reputation for possessing them. Emerson, William Ellery Channing, and others continued to fan this conceit after Henry's death. Henry's kinship with the Indian became part of his mythology. It is quite possible that Weiss and Stearns, like Lathrop, were simply projecting this hazy mythology onto their memory of Thoreau's gait.

But we can do better than that. Even if Thoreau's gait did not possess the three features most distinctive of a Native gait, it was nevertheless a striking gait, and something about it

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may have conformed to Euro-American notions of an Indian stride. To tease this out, let us step back and adjust our lens, taking in a broader view with a softer focus. Let us ask not how Natives actually walked, but what non-Natives in the late nineteenth century *perceived* in a Native stride.

The Literary Indian: Long Stride, Fast Gait

All three of our informants were from Eastern Massachusetts, and they probably had only very limited first-hand experience with Native cultures. John Weiss published his memories of Thoreau in July of 1865, as the U.S. military was demobilizing in the South and preparing to finally crush all Indian resistance in the West. By the time the recollections of Rose Hawthorne Lathrop and Frank Preston Stearns were captured in writing in the 1890s, the remaining sovereign tribes, reduced by disease and warfare, had been herded out of sight and onto reservations. In the nation's consciousness the Natives had been finally and fully (or so it seemed) transformed from human neighbors and foes, to be befriended or feared, into pop-culture icons of the past, picturesque symbols of the romance of the open frontier.

Fiction writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries agreed upon a convention that "the Indian" (generally a solitary male) did have a special way of walking. He took long strides and he moved fast—evidence of more-than-ordinary abilities, perhaps, or maybe the hurried pace of one whose days of freedom are numbered, consistent with the dominant nineteenth-century Euro-American ideology of "savagism."[3] "'Don't be in thuch a hurry,'" one lisping protagonist calls out to an Indian companion in Bret Harte's 1883 *In the Carquinez Woods*, and he succeeds only momentarily in compelling his companion to slacken the pace of his "characteristic Indian stride." "'Stop!'" he shouts again (forgetting the lisp, apparently)—but the Indian "had already lowered his head and darted forward like an arrow. In a few moments he had...struck out in a long, swinging trot" (231-33). Writing in 1915, British politician and fiction writer John Buchan imagines an Indian war party passing stealthily by his white protagonist's hiding place: many were on horseback but "some were on foot, and moved with the long, loping, in-toed Indian stride" (212). In an 1895 novel loosely based on her own luckless marriage, writer Jessie Catherine Huybers Couvreur pictures a dissolute husband chasing after his distraught wife, who was "half walking and half running at ...an

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accelerated rate of speed.... 'The Red Indian stride!' he called out after her, laughing. 'I know what mood you are in when you put that on'" (30-31).

Though Bret Harte was a Californian, Buchan and Couvreur were British and had presumably had no firsthand experience with Native Americans when they wrote those passages. (Buchan later was dispatched to the New World to govern Canada on behalf of the crown.) Other Europeans and British subjects were similarly captivated by the idea of a uniquely Native American—or simply American—walking style. A British newspaper correspondent dispatched to interview Wilbur Wright on his European tour reported that as the aviator emerged from his workshop in the direction of the assembled press he "advanced with a long, slouching Red Indian gait" (*Kalgoorlie Miner*). A sports reporter ("Boxer-Major") covering an Australian boxing match reported that an American competitor "swung off with his red indian stride" at the sound of the bell, possibly using the colorful expression for no better reason than that the pugilist hailed from the romantic-sounding city of Indianapolis.

As filtered through the lens of Anglophone literary culture, then, an Indian gait was a fast gait with a long stride. The "literary Indian" gait appears to have some basis in actual biomechanics—we have seen that both the straight orientation of the foot and the in-line gait increased the length of Natives' stride. Some authors include additional detail that also rings true (e.g., "in-line" and "swinging.")

Thoreau's gait checks out nicely against the gait of the literary Indian. The unusual length of Thoreau's stride was the single most prominent characteristic of his gait. Of the twelve contemporaries whose descriptions of Thoreau's walking style are on record, seven specifically describe it as "long," and none suggest otherwise.[4] Thoreau himself alludes to the "wide intervals between the dots" of his regularly spaced footprints in the snow (*Walden* 265). And Thoreau's speed and stamina as a walker were legendary. Sanborn described Thoreau's stride as "brisk," adding that he "never seems tired" (Harding 147). Edward Nealy said that "he always walked with easy long steps; it would tire me well to keep up with him" (Harding 214). Channing testifies that rather than slackening his pace for a footsore companion, Thoreau would barrel onward alone—not unlike a character out of Harte or Couvreur (5). So in attributing to Thoreau an Indian stride, his contemporaries may have been

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truthfully reporting that he had a fast gait with a long stride, following literary conventions.

We might leave the matter there. But there are two more considerations that might help explain the comparison of Thoreau's gait with that of Natives'. These have more to do with the upper body than the legs and feet. It is just possible that in these two particular ways—in walking *posture* and walking *gaze*—Thoreau displayed genuine Indian traits, and that at least some contemporaries recognized them as such (or, at least, it is possible that these genuine traits gave the whole gestalt a flavor of "Indianness" that some contemporaries picked up on).

Posture

If we want to understand why Thoreau's gait was considered remarkable by his neighbors, it's worth our while to inquire about the status quo in his native Concord. What was the gait of a typical New England Yankee in the nineteenth century? "Historian of everyday life" Jack Larkin quotes a memoir from late nineteenth-century Central Massachusetts in his explanation of the Yankee gait:

> Like other rural Americans, New Englanders moved heavily. The great physical demands of unmechanized agriculture gave men a distinctively ponderous gait and posture. Despite their strength and endurance, farmers were "heavy, awkward and slouching in movement," and walked with a "slow inclination from side to side" (149-50).

Given the ponderous, swaying Yankee slouch, an Englishwoman in the nation's capital was easily able to recognize a New Englander among the Southern aristocrats "by his deprecatory walk" (152).

Natives, by contrast, had a reputation for walking erect. Explorer David Thompson, who spent time with the Piegan Blackfeet in the early nineteenth century, wrote in his memoirs:

> When on the plains in company with white men, the erect walk of the Indian is shown to great advantage. The Indian with his arms folded in his robe seems to glide over the ground; and the

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> white people seldom in an erect posture, their bodies swayed from right to left, and come with their arms as if to saw a passage through the air. I have often been vexed at the comparison (304-05).

Similarly, anthropologist Clark Wissler wrote: "The Indian walk would put the slouching gait of the white man to shame; it was on a level with the best military standards" (298).[5]

Thoreau was remembered for his erect and even military posture when walking. George Hoar commented that Thoreau had an "erect carriage which made him seem something like a soldier," and that this was the source of the nickname "Trainer Thoreau" given him by Concord schoolboys (Harding 109). His neighbor Mrs. Bigelow also described Thoreau as "erect" (Harding 211). Thoreau's erect posture could have been one factor in the perceived resemblance to a Native stride.

Often in connection with their erect carriage, observers frequently remarked on the grace and dignity of the Natives' gait. Thoreau too had a gait that was, if not graceful, at least dignified—his walk was said to be that of a "gentleman"—in contrast, we may presume, to the slouching, "deprecatory" walk of the typical New Englander (Harding 211). That too could have played a role in the perceived resemblance.

The Gaze

In a book on Native American woodcraft and hunting techniques, Allan A. Macfarlan describes the straight orientation of the foot and the forefoot strike and their advantages. But "it is not necessary," he assures the reader, "to walk exactly like an Indian." One can approximate the walk, and get the benefit of it, by simply walking more gently and deliberately. "Try to feel with your toes so you can withdraw your foot if you feel a noise-making obstruction underneath it. Without this ability, you'll have to look down much of the time to pick out suitable ground, and that will keep your eyes off the game. Some hunters seem to have 20/20 vision in each sole" (84-85). Modern wilderness skills expert Tom Brown reinforces this point in his instructions: "Let your feet become your eyes on the ground, and use splatter vision to take in the rest of the landscape.... If you ever feel insecure about taking the next step, or if you hit an obstacle with your foot, 'feel' your way ahead without looking down. Even

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though your gaze is fixed on the horizon, you should be picking up an impression of the trail ahead. As your walk improves, your body will 'remember' these impressions and move in response to the changing landscape" (93-94). Another contemporary wilderness skills guru, Tamarack Song, similarly tells his disciples to look ahead as much as possible, looking down only occasionally (depending on difficulty of the terrain). The head is to move independently of the feet.

In other words, the benefit that the practitioner of an Indian stride gets—besides balance, poise, and stealth—is that the feet "look out" for themselves, leaving the eyes free to take in the surroundings. And not merely to look around, but to take in the whole landscape at once with what Tom Brown calls splatter vision. "This technique was used by the native Americans to spot game, and is also used by most animals to spot danger. It is done by simply looking toward the horizon and allowing your vision to 'spread out.' In other words, instead of focusing on a single object, allow the eyes to soften and take in everything in a wide half-sphere. The effect is a little like putting a wide-angle lens on a camera" (39).

Thoreau may have witnessed his Indian guides using splatter vision in the Maine Woods. He describes Joe Polis in his canoe "looking far down the stream, and keeping his own counsel, as if absorbing all the intelligence of forest and stream into himself" (*Maine Woods* 253). Splatter vision allows one not only (as described by Brown) to track an animal's prints while remaining alert for the animal itself and to be alert for signs of danger, but also to remain oriented in the woods using tricks that Thoreau's guides withheld from him. ("I can't tell *you*," Polis answered to Thoreau, when asked how he could navigate in a straight line from any point in the woods directly to camp (*Maine Woods* 185).) Twentieth-century anthropologist Frank G. Speck records that Penobscots keep themselves moving in a straight line by—among other techniques—attending to the direction in which snow or rain is blowing and maintaining a visual line of sight along three trees at a time in the direction of travel (77).

Thoreau himself may have used splatter vision, or something like it. "Sometimes I would rather get a transient glimpse or side view of a thing," he writes, "than stand fronting to it.... It is worth the while to walk in swamps... to bathe your eyes with greenness" (J X: 164). At least four contemporaries remarked on Thoreau's ambulatory gaze: the coincidence that *all*

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three of the witnesses who commented on Thoreau's "Indian stride" were among them seems quite significant.

John Weiss recalls Thoreau walking about the Harvard campus with eyes that "seemed to rove down the path, just in advance of his feet" (Harding 32). Channing too recalled "his eyes bent on the ground" (17-18). We know that Thoreau had an uncanny ability to spot Indian arrowheads in the earth, but it is doubtful that he was hunched or doubled forward. As we have already seen, he was remembered for his erect posture.

While Weiss and Channing recall Thoreau gazing down at the ground ahead of him, others place his gaze higher. Rose Hawthorne Lathrop remembered Thoreau watching her as he passed, "the huge eyes at a slight oblique angle"; in the version conveyed by her husband, Thoreau walked with eyes "staring, as it were, in vacancy" (Harding 78). Frank Preston Stearns recalls Thoreau "looking straight before him, but at the same time ob-serving everything" (Harding 78). These accounts suggest splatter vision, a total awareness of not only the ground ahead but the whole landscape as it passes. It is just possible that this omnivorous ambulatory gaze, so much like a Native's, may have put his contemporaries in mind of an Indian stride when they saw Thoreau pass.

Conclusion

This study of Thoreau's supposed "Indian stride" recapitulates themes and findings from research by Thoreau scholars into the broader topic of the Concord philosopher's Indian interests and his relationship with Native America. Where Emerson had wanted to create a new national literature, Thoreau set his aim even higher—or deeper. He wanted to become native to the New World (Kucich, "Native America"). Emerson pointed toward Nature as the way forward, and Thoreau devoted himself to the study of wild nature and—as a mediating text—study of and self-modeling after the displaced peoples who had already been indigenous in his corner of the world (Willsky-Ciollo). Contemporaries recognized Thoreau's quest to internalize the Native and they attributed to him numerous Indian qualities, not only body techniques. Emerson called him a "sachem" and "more like an Indian than a white man" (Harding 121, 92). Channing said that he "held the Indian's creed" ("Thoreau" 341). George Willis Cooke called him "an Indian in his nature" (Harding 82). George William Curtis gave him credit for "profound sympathy" with

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the Indians, "of whose life and ways and nature he apparently had an instinctive knowledge" (Harding 74).

In truth, Thoreau did not possess the Indian bona fides with which his contemporaries were so ready to credit him. We may admire the diligence with which he studied Native culture, history, and language from books, the efforts he made to meet living Natives in Maine and Massachusetts, and the seriousness with which he *pursued* the project of becoming native or indigenous. But he never quite escaped his own culture's savagist prejudices. He fell far short of developing an intimate knowledge of and connection with living Native cultures, and even often failed to show them the respect they deserved.[6] (And even the end goal of "becoming indigenous" is problematic, as will be discussed below.)

Thoreau's diligence and imperfect success are evident in his study of Native walking biomechanics. He took detailed notes of what the visiting Chippeway lecturer had to say about the turn of the toes. He watched carefully how Penobscot Joe Aitteon stepped lightly when tracking a moose:

> He proceeded rapidly up the bank and through the woods, with a peculiar, elastic, noiseless, and stealthy tread, looking to right and left on the ground, and stepping in the faint tracks of the wounded moose.... He stepped lightly and gracefully, stealing through the bushes with the least possible noise, in a way in which no white man does, as it were, finding a place for his foot each time." (*Maine Woods* 111-12)

But Thoreau appears to have had little grasp of the actual biomechanics behind Aitteon's sure-footed gait. Like the Jesuit fathers (whose *Relations* he read so diligently), who could only say that the gait of the Algonkians of Quebec was "full of dignity and grace," Thoreau lacked even a vocabulary suitable to begin to characterize such a gait (Devine 554).

Despite the claims of some (e.g., Rose Hawthorne Lathrop), Thoreau never indicated that he consciously modeled his gait after that of the Indian. Taken together, the features of Thoreau's gait can best be seen not as an imitation of another's walk but as an expression of determined individualism.[7] Nevertheless, it was this very spirit of individualism and stubborn independence (marching to his own music) that prompted and enabled him to make the attempt to become indigenous—i.e., to

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try, audaciously, to step beyond the prosaic Yankee culture he had inherited and begin afresh with Nature. Furthermore, in Thoreau's mind, the solitary heroic quest to become indigenous may itself have seemed a sort of Indian feat. As prisoner of his own culture and its savagist ideology, Thoreau labored under the delusion that solitariness itself was essential to being Native (Sayre 11ff, 61).

This aspect of savagist ideology, and Thoreau's own propensity for a solitary path, tended to blind him to the communalism that was a major feature of Native American cultures (indeed, most non-Protestant cultures the world over). In other words, the spirit of stubborn individualism that was embodied in his walking gait could carry him out of his own culture in the spirit of exploration, but it stood in the way of a full appreciation or understanding of Native cultures.

Another tenet of savagism was that Native peoples were disappearing and would soon be gone (Sayre, Bellin, Schneider). Many public and private statements by Thoreau show that he had imbibed this dogma. The tenacity with which Yankees adhered to this view, despite the presence of Natives among them, is remarkable. It was not uncommon, as Daniel R. Mandell notes, for newspaper notices about the passing of a locality's "last Indian" to mention the deceased's children and grandchildren (190). A form of essentialism was in play. The "last Indian" of the village was the last who dressed and spoke and earned a livelihood in a way that met some preconceived standard of Indianness.[8] In reality, Native and other (Yankee, Irish, African-American, etc.) cultures in the region were all changing and adapting continuously, with porous boundaries. Body techniques illustrate this. Kephart's Euro-American "woodsmen" adopted both Native garb and Native walking styles as fittest for life in the forests of North America. And Natives adopted a heel strike when they crammed their feet into hard-soled boots and started walking on pavement.

But even as people adopt a new folkway, they do not necessarily forget the old. By a stroke of luck, when I had completed my archival research I had an opportunity to meet and speak with an Apache Indian with a professional interest in cultural preservation. He was a cultural ambassador on tour, giving presentations at public libraries. On a warm New England evening, while he mesmerized the crowd with stories, songs, dances, and crafts, my eyes kept straying down to his shuffling feet. Was he landing on the heel or toe? Were his feet turned in or out? After the performance I introduced myself and

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described my research interest in the differences between traditional Native and European walking styles. His response was simple: Yes, there is a great difference between Native and European walking styles. When you wear a soft moccasin, he said, indicating his own lightly shod feet, you cannot help but walk differently. You walk like an animal.[9]

The preservation of practices and cultural traits that constitute indigeneity is a major theme in Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Kimmerer, of Potawatomi ancestry, straddles the world of her Native heritage and (as a botanist) the world of European/cosmopolitan scientific method. In setting out to discover and reclaim her Native roots, Kimmerer comes to realize that her own parents, though living apart from other Potawatomi and not speaking the language, had nevertheless preserved core Potawatomi cultural values like gratitude and reciprocity vis-à-vis the living landscape, embodying them in practices and rituals—casual, semi-improvised—that effectively passed them on to the next generation (33ff). As a scientist and an individual raised outside a Native community, striving in pursuit of Native cultural wisdom—not only that of her own Potawatomi ancestors but of other peoples as well, to which she has no claim of membership—Kimmerer lays down an Ariadne's thread that the rest of us can plausibly follow. Kimmerer shows how it is possible to do conscientiously what Thoreau attempted clumsily—to go about the task of becoming indigenous, or at least naturalized (213).[10]

To become naturalized or indigenous to a place is not simply to ape the forms of one Native people or another; it is to enter into relationship with the landscape (Kimmerer 9). Even Native peoples themselves had to learn to become indigenous, as their stories illustrate (Kimmerer 205ff). Kimmerer's essays indicate in admirably specific and concrete terms what ethical principles would set moderns today on the path of becoming naturalized or indigenous, and what practices we might adopt. For our purposes, let us simply note that this is precisely the path that Thoreau chose for himself. Though eager to understand Native cultural history and learn what living Natives had to teach, his quest was not to become Massachuset or Penobscot. His sights were fixed on the local Concord landscape (c.f. Kucich, "Native America" 204). He was seeking a way into that landscape, bodily and scientifically and mythologically. He availed himself of whatever resources would help in that quest, and he understood very well that Native cultures were valuable resources.

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"As the world changes," writes Kimmerer, "an immigrant culture must write its own stories of relationship to place." Thoreau was attempting to fulfill that mandate. And he knew that those stories ought to be (in Kimmerer's words) "tempered by the wisdom of those who were old on this land long before we came" (344). If Thoreau had had more opportunities for contact with Natives, and if he had opened up more to them and they to him, he might have succeeded even better than he did at becoming naturalized in his home landscape.[11] So with the gait: A first-order approximation of a Native gait in the eyes of some (long stride, fast step, erect posture, splatter vision), for Thoreau himself it supported his identification with the savage solitary hunter on a quest. If he had had more opportunity to study, and if he had connected the dots already available to him, he might have been more conscious of ways in which his body techniques genuinely resembled those of Natives, and adopted even more features of an authentic Native gait—and perhaps scared away fewer animals, caught on fewer brambles, preserved the heels of his boots, and preserved his knees.

Kimmerer offers a botanical allegory. "Our immigrant plant teachers offer a lot of different models for how *not* to make themselves welcome on a new continent. Garlic mustard poisons the soil so that native species will die. Tamarisk uses up all the water. Foreign invaders like loosestrife, kudzu, and cheat grass have the colonizing habit of taking over others' homes and growing without regard to limits" (214). That list of sins sounds uncomfortably familiar. "But Plantain"—*Plantago major*, common plantain, another import from the Old World—"is not like that. Its strategy was to be useful, to fit into small places, to coexist with others around the dooryard.... Plantain is so prevalent, so well integrated, that we think of it as native." Botanists describe such a species—not technically native, but well integrated in the native community—as *naturalized*. "This is the same term we use for the foreign-born when they become citizens of our country. They pledge to uphold the laws of the state. They might well uphold Nanabozho's Original Instructions, too" (214). The instructions imparted by the Creator to Nanabozho, the First Man, in Anishinaabe tradition, were to "walk through the world that Skywoman had danced into life," and to "walk in such a way 'that each step is a greeting to Mother Earth'" (206). It was according to these instructions that the First Man of the continent learned to walk.

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Thoreau knew Plantain. It was his neighbor in Concord (PJ 5: 196). He recognized it as well in Ansel Smith's clearing deep in the Maine Woods. "It appears that I saw about a dozen plants which had accompanied man as far into the woods as Chesuncook, and had naturalized themselves there" (*Maine Woods*, 303-04). Out West on his journey to Minnesota, plantain was among the introduced plants "very common on prairie" (Corinne H. Smith's transcription, 86, 157). Plantain is visually unassuming—a ring of leaves low to the ground. The Latin name *Plantago* refers to the sole of a foot. Kimmerer notes that her people have a similar name for the plant: "White Man's Footstep." "It arrived with the first settlers and followed them everywhere they went. It trotted through the woods, along wagon roads and railroads, like a faithful dog so as to be near them" (213).[12]

A Tamarisk, Kudzu, or Plantain plant has a fixed essence. People do not. People can decide to behave like weeds or like good guests, neighbors, and probationary citizens. "After all these generations since Columbus, some of the wisest of Native elders still puzzle over the people who came to our shore: ...'The problem with these new people is that they don't have both feet on the shore. One is still on the boat'" (Kimmerer 207). Thoreau points the way toward naturalization as he steps deliberately into the landscape with long, even stride. But even he might have learned more, and not only from the Natives, but from White Man's Footstep, the humble common plantain on its own way to becoming naturalized. Plantain says: When you step on this ground, don't just pass over it like a stranger, but plant well the sole, your *plantago*. (Fetch the whole—heel—sole—and toe—horizontally down to earth.) Fill up a small space. Put down roots. And as a consumer of resources, mind your footprint.

Acknowledgements: The author wishes to thank the reviewers of the essay for their helpful suggestions.

Notes

1. Thanks to Lydia Willsky-Ciollo for drawing my attention to this additional source. It is excerpted in Sandra Petrulionis's anthology *Thoreau in His Own Time*.

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2. The closest we get to corroboration in other accounts is Isaac Newton Goodhue's description of Thoreau as "striding with duck-like legs" (Harding 217). This could be taken to refer to a waddling swing of the hips—but it could just as easily mean straight-legged or with toes turned outward, or merely awkward-looking. Another passage that could possibly be interpreted as supporting evidence for an in-line gait is Thoreau's reference in *Walden* to his footprints in the snow as forming a "meandering dotted line" (265).
3. As explained by Robert Sayre, savagism was a set of mutually reinforcing stereotypes, prejudices, and convictions, including that Indians were in essence "solitary hunters" and "superstitious pagans," that they were "not susceptible to improvement" and could only be degraded by contact with whites, and that they were "doomed to extinction" (6).
4. The complete list of informants and sources (other than the firsthand account by Rose Hawthorne Lathrop) is presented in the *Thoreau Society Bulletin* article. The following informants describe the gait as "long": William Ellery Channing, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop (both first-hand and via her husband), Frank Preston Stearns, Julian Hawthorne (twice), George Hoar, Edward Emerson, and Edward Nealy.
5. Although some sources speak of erect posture, others refer to a Native slouch. How to understand this apparent discrepancy? I would make three observations. First, as already noted, there was undoubtedly some variability among individuals and cultures. Second, in the firsthand reports of Native walking (as opposed to literary fiction, or descriptions of white men behaving like Natives), the erect posture appears to be much better attested than the slouch—by more than a two-to-one margin in the sources I have consulted. Finally, the two descriptors might not be mutually exclusive. One ethnographic report describes a Navajo slouch that is, paradoxically, also an erect posture:

> Both men and women walk erect with a long stride in a relaxed, loose-limbed fashion.... The shoulders of both men and women tend to droop slightly forward, arms hanging loosely. The head, however, is erect and the chest does not take the same hollow concavity that droop-

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ing shoulders and fatigue posture produces in whites (Bailey, 215-16).

6. Among writers most critical of Thoreau in this regard (correcting what may be seen as an overly sympathetic portrayal of Thoreau's Indian dealings by an earlier generation of scholars, including Robert Sayre and Richard Fleck), Joshua Bellin focuses primarily on the Indian Notebooks, Tom Lynch on Thoreau's interaction with his Penobscot guides, and Barry Kritzberg on Thoreau's journals and correspondence. Richard Schneider places Thoreau's anthropological prejudices in the context of the contemporary scientific literature that he consumed.
7. From the *Thoreau Society Bulletin* article: "He 'wanted every stride his legs made.'... Thoreau marched through life the way he sauntered and hiked across campus, around town, and through the woods: *with discipline and purpose, toward inner-directed goals along self-chosen paths*" [emphasis added] (1-3).
8. Or who was known to have sufficiently "pure" ancestry, or was in possession of a stereotypically Indian physiognomy.
9. As noted in the *49th Parallel* article, the biomechanics of a Native gait are indeed similar in some ways to the biomechanics of four-legged predators. An Apache-trained wilderness skills expert, for example, teaches techniques such as the "fox walk" and the "weasel sneak."
10. As this article also does, Kimmerer starts with a discussion of newcomers' aspirations to *indigeneity*, and eventually comes around to *naturalization* as the proper goal. "Like my elders before me, I want to envision a way that an immigrant society could become indigenous to place, but I'm stumbling on the words. Immigrants cannot by definition be indigenous. *Indigenous* is a birth-word." For a society to become naturalized to a place requires it "to throw off the mind-set of the immigrant," to orient itself with respect to the land as if indigenous (213-215).
11. On Thoreau's failure to learn all that his Penobscot guides were offering him, see Lynch. On the Penobscot guides' reticence, see John J. Kucich, "Lost in the Maine Woods."
12. In early April of 1842, Emerson notes this Indian name for the plant in his journal (8/232). His source is one of the volumes from the series on the natural history of Mass-

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achusetts that he had recently acquired and requested Thoreau to review for the *Dial*.

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