

# In the shadow of Chief Seattle: Reclaiming environmentalism from the ghosts of white settlement

Robert Jackson-Paton, Ph.D.  
White Privilege Conference  
Seattle, WA  
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Finding ground • Making space • Integrating movement  
Restor(y)ing • Decolonization • (Re)placing



honoring the Indigenous peoples...



The Seattle area is home to the Duwamish, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, Snoqualmie, Tulalip, and Puyallup Nations.

Chief Sealth (Suquamish). Namesake of Seattle.

...and keepers of this land



# My ethnoautobiography...

I am Robert Jackson-Paton.  
I was born in Philadelphia,  
Pennsylvania, in August 1968, the  
third son of a heterosexual couple.  
My family is from a predominantly  
Anglo-Irish Quaker ancestry dating  
to a 17th century presence in North  
America.  
I am the son of James Paton and  
Marjorie Pickett.  
I am the grandson of Russell Paton  
and Linda Chandler, Ernest Pickett  
and Pauline Hudelson.  
I am the great-grandson of James  
Paton and Agnes Singer, Warren  
Chandler and Ada Graham Meehan,  
Howard Pickett and Bertha Pitts,  
Chester Hudelson and Edna Frazer.  
My ancestors have lived in North  
Carolina, Indiana, Ontario, Canada,  
and throughout Philadelphia, and  
the Delaware Valley.



Linda Chandler, James Paton, Russell Paton



Pauline Hudelson, Marjorie Pickett, Ernest Pickett



Agnes Singer, Ada Graham Meehan, Warren Chandler



Howard Pickett, Bertha Pitts, Chester Hudelson, Edna Frazer

Coaquannok is the Lenape name for  
Philadelphia, where I was born: "the  
place of the long trees."

I came of age on Huichon Ohlone land  
in the San Francisco Bay Area.

I began to learn how to "see" the land  
at Wy'east, near Portland, Oregon and  
at Timbisha, unfortunately named  
Death Valley.

I now live in Comancheria in the  
shadow of Quanah & Cynthia Parker,  
in Dallas, Texas. It's wonderful to be  
back in the Pacific Northwest, once  
again honoring the peoples of Puget  
Sound.

This is not, and cannot, be a definitive  
introduction. It is a beginning, about  
my beginnings. But rather than make  
no attempt, because it will be  
somehow incomplete, or inaccurate, I  
begin with what I have, knowing that  
there will always be "something left  
unfinished" (Santos, 1999).



who are we?  
pair & share activity

tell your ethnoautobiography

- ecological, ancestral, historical, gender, etc., identity
- story of family migration(s), including deep ancestral, childhood, or coerced, moves from places.



# all about me

Ph.D. in Human Science  
Saybrook University, San Francisco

Dissertation title:  
Restor(y)ing environmentalism:  
Decolonizing White settlers in  
the United States:  
(Re)placing posttraumatic  
settler disorder

Research interests:  
**Cultural Ecology:**  
relationships between  
culture and nature

**Decolonization for Whites:**  
healing (from) White consciousness  
and settlement

**Other Ways of Knowing:**  
alternative descriptions of  
self/world



Finding ground; Making space; Integrating movement



# Settlement Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Covered Wagon

Robert Jackson-Paton, Ph.D.  
White Privilege Conference  
Albuquerque, NM  
29 March 2012

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\*yes, there is music playing



# Overview

- ◆ Introductions;
- ◆ Chief Seattle: not about HIM, about White environmentalism;
- ◆ his words extol the virtues of an ecological mindset;
- ◆ White romance and stereotype;
- ◆ Color of money: settlement privilege and environmentalism;
- ◆ shadows of White conquest and the environmental movement;
- ◆ environmentalism neglecting to account for settlement privilege;
- ◆ environmental decolonization practices;
- ◆ reclaim our humanity and relationship with the natural world.



# Chief Sealth (Suquamish/Duwamish)

- ♦ born c. 1786 during settler trade appearances and resulting epidemics;
- ♦ died 1866, at approx. 80 years old;
- ♦ important — and complex — leader;
- ♦ gave his famous farewell speech at 1884 treaty council of Point Elliot;
- ♦ words written down by Dr. Henry Smith, which were first published in 1887.





# Chief Seattle

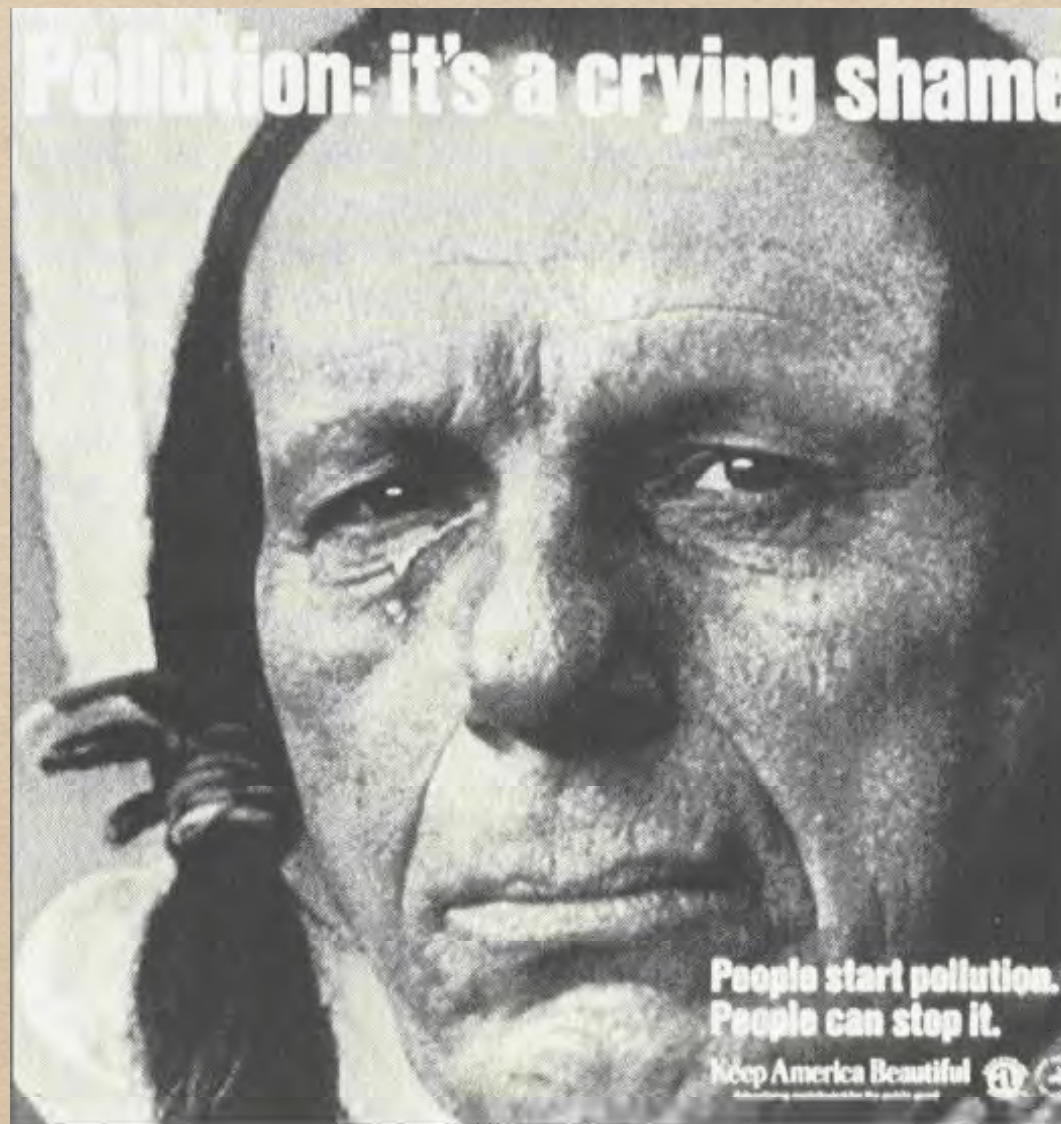
- ♦ words revised by Ted Perry in 1972 for a film about pollution;
- ♦ lasting origin of environmental stereotype: Playing Indian.





# Playing Indian...

(Philip Deloria, 1998)



*Iron Eyes Cody*







# Settling the land

“Pakeha [Whites] do not know how to weep for themselves or their past. The grief of settlement eludes them.”

--Stephen Turner, 1999





## Dialogue prompts...

“Forgetting settlement is also not to know oneself, not to be fully alive to the experience of place.”

--Stephen Turner (Pakeha), 1999

“Knowledge of places is closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person.”

--Cornel Pewewardy (Comanche), 1997

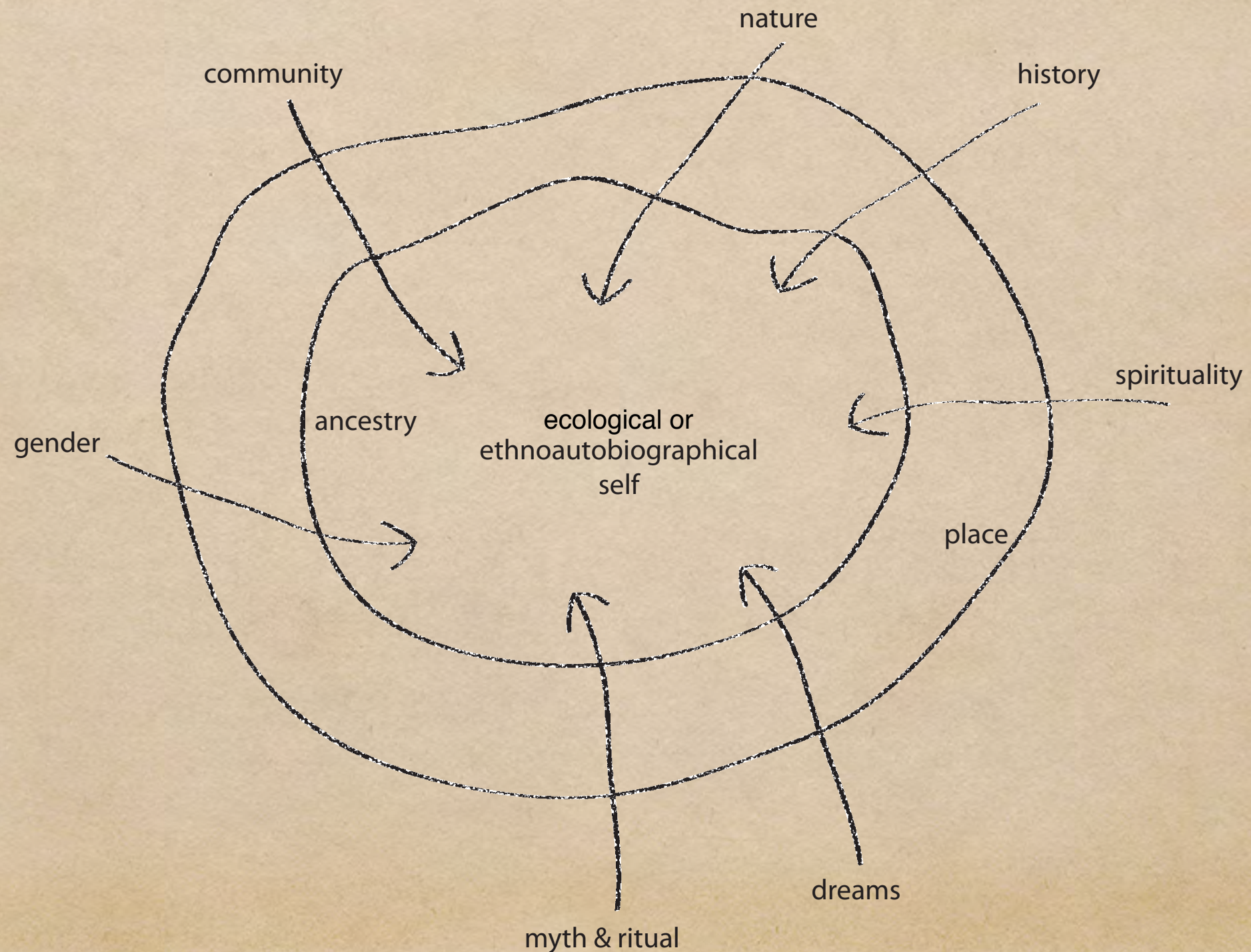


## environmental decolonization...

- ◆ who are we?
- ◆ where are we?
- ◆ why are we here?
- ◆ who else shares this place with us?
- ◆ do we know who they are/were?



# ethnoautobiography





where are we?

“What kind of impression do you make on the ground?”



Tamenend, Coaquanok



Nuadah (Cynthia Ann Parker), Comancheria





Cottonwood Creek, Dallas, TX



# Settlement privilege; or, Unpacking the invisible covered wagon...

- ♦ access to the land base;
- ♦ wealth and resources;
- ♦ so-called public land (wilderness, national parks, national forests, etc);
- ♦ place names and language survival;
- ♦ environmentalism perpetuates invisibility of Native peoples.

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## some next steps in environmental decolonization...

- ♦ UNDRIP adoption
- ♦ Native Science conference at Pitzer College (right now!)
- ♦ Bioneers: Indigeneity program
- ♦ Finding sacred ground app (SLFP)
- ♦ 2014: 150th of Sand Creek massacre and 50th wilderness act!
- ♦ (un)settlement conference
- ♦ exercising ghosts of place
- ♦ more...

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# connections...

Bioneers: (n.d.). "Indigeneity program": <http://www.bioneers.org/programs/indigenous/indigeneity-program/>

Indian Land Tenure Foundation: <http://www.iltf.org/>

Indigenous Environmental Network [IEN]: <http://www.ienearth.org/index.html>

National Native News: <http://www.nativenews.net/>

Native American Rights Fund (NARF): <http://www.narf.org/>

Sacred Land Film Project: <http://www.sacredland.org/>

Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR): <http://www.emu.edu/cjp/star/>



# Thank you!

- ♦ ṭig<sup>w</sup>icid (Lushootseed)
- ♦ ṭra (Comanche)
- ♦ Kuunda (Tewa)
- ♦ Pidamaya (Dakota)
- ♦ Migwitch (Ojibwe)
- ♦ Ahéhee' (Dine)
- ♦ Wa'-do (Cherokee)
- ♦ Pilamaya yelo (Lakota)
- ♦ ¡Gracias! (Spanish :)
- ♦ Go raibh maith agaibh (Irish)
- ♦ Giitu (Saami)
- ♦ Shukran (Arabic)
- ♦ Toda (Hebrew)
- ♦ Merci (French)

<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/programs/elc/program>

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