

BOOK REVIEWS

Terence Young. *Heading Out: A History of American Camping*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017. xi + 367 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, graphs, notes, and index. \$35.00.

I reached the age of nineteen before I first stayed in a motel or hotel. In contrast to childhood friends who spent their annual two weeks at “Summer Camp” sleeping in dorm-like cabins, my family drove every summer from California to Colorado and back, pitching our khaki-colored canvas tent across Nevada and Utah along the way. During the school year, we made camping trips to Yosemite, Sequoia, and Joshua Tree national parks. While in Colorado, we camped out near my biologist dad’s research sites. My sister took her first steps as a toddler by holding on to a tent pole and walking in circles around it. And one summer, we spent six weeks exploring from the Yukon and Northwest Territories all the way down the Rockies to Colorado. Despite traveling with two preteen daughters, my parents never once opted for the ease of a roadside resort or motel; rain or shine, and even in the worst of northern Canada’s mosquitoes, we camped.

So it is with great personal interest that I read Terence Young’s new history of American camping, *Heading Out*—and found that my childhood story is less unusual than it often seemed at the time. As amply documented in this volume, camping has been an increasingly popular venture across the United States since the 1860s. While camping for necessity’s sake (particularly in military campaigns) has ancient roots, Young places his starting line for camping as a form of leisure in 1869, with the publication of William H.H. Murray’s book *Adventures in the Wilderness; or, Camp-Life in the Adirondacks*, which triggered a stampede of new campers venturing into the woods. From there, his chapters explore moments of flux in camping’s history through key individuals or vignettes, tracing the rise of camping rituals both pre- and post-automobile, the Coleman company’s development of improved camping equipment, and the parallel expansions of trailer camping and backpacking through the 1970s.

Across these vignettes, Young’s analysis identifies three primary trends: camping, despite its romantic ambition to “get back to nature,” being rooted in the context of an ever modernizing world; camping as a form of pilgrimage, taking people out of their daily lives and transforming them in the process; and camping’s evolution through technological change. Among these themes, the freshest insight comes from Young’s exploration of the meaning of pilgrimage, as distinct from ordinary tourism. He argues that historically, camping is not fundamentally about relating to nature (as many might presume) but is more precisely based in campers’ quests for personal transformation through “roughing it,” outside of their usual urban and suburban routines (10, 303). Although technological changes have “smoothed out” those experiences, making camping outdoors ever more comfortable, safe, and predictable,

many of the individuals whom Young cites stress the centrality of “heading out,” away from the city, and returning refreshed and renewed. Indeed, it is from this pilgrimage aspect of camping that arguments arise about which form(s) of camping are the most “authentic.” Only a few months after its 1869 publication, readers of Murray’s book were already arguing over which Adirondack visitors constituted the “true” campers and which were mere amateurs, inadequately prepared for the challenges ahead (39).

By interweaving historical analysis with biographical sketches of individual authors or campers from each era, Young maintains a light, conversational tone that makes the book an easy and pleasant read. However, while successfully tying this more personal material to his three core arguments about camping, Young’s approach skims past some troubling aspects of Americans’ varied relationships with the outdoors. While he provides ample evidence of the ways in which camping was not only an activity for young men, showing perhaps surprising gender equality across its history, Young also alludes to some campers’ attitudes regarding keeping “undesirables” out of their favorite camping grounds (124, 134), but without much exploration of *who* those undesirables might be. Camping is often celebrated as a socially equalizing activity, yet these hints suggest that there are unspoken limitations on who can enjoy that equality.

Similarly, while he frequently observes that the U.S. camping public has not been a particularly diverse population, Young doesn’t ask questions about what that lack of diversity means—particularly in regard to “tramping,” later renamed backpacking, which has remained primarily a white and middle-class form of recreation (265). Given the frequent assertion that camping is a transformative activity, and particularly its connection with nationalism and instilling a sense of “being an American,” exploring the implications of this transformative power being available only to a subset of the population seems like a critical element of the story. Chapter 5, “Liberalizing the Campground,” does analyze segregated park use in the Jim Crow South of the 1930s, but Young doesn’t engage with the broader issue of assumptions about how camping “should” be done, or why so many other racial groups—not only African Americans—have not taken to camping recreation in similar numbers as white middle-class families until fairly recently. While the endnotes are full of recent literature regarding race and parks, such as Carolyn Finney’s excellent *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (2014), the book’s biographical approach lacks a more explicit engagement with the depth of this problematic aspect of camping’s history.

Lastly, I would have loved to see a bit more contextualizing of camping in the larger themes of public lands management—particularly during the era of rigorous predator control across much of the west, which not only provided greater quantities of game for recreational hunters to pursue, but also rendered many popular camping areas “safe” from some of the more unpredictable elements of the natural world. Young frequently notes the irony of camping’s contradictory nature—that campers seek to escape the regimentation and routine of their daily lives, yet also seek to control their experiences outdoors, often in campsites whose design is inspired by suburban development (166)—yet he doesn’t inquire as to how such contradictions might affect campers’ experiences or understanding of the natural world. By suggesting that nature can be “truly” experienced while remaining comfortable, safe, and undisturbed by undesirable people, camping has contributed to often narrow assumptions about what parks

and other camping areas “ought” to be like. While this kind of analysis might be beyond the scope of this particular volume, I hope there is a follow-up volume.

Laura Alice Watt
Sonoma State University

Robert Aquinas McNally. *The Modoc War: A Story of Genocide at the Dawn of America's Gilded Age*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. \$34.95.

The Modoc War is a devastating history of defiant indigenous resistance during the Gilded Age of the nineteenth century. McNally's fast-paced, blow-by-blow account chronicles the daring actions of Modoc freedom fighters, treacherous U.S. soldiers, genocidal American settlers, and hubristic military leaders that scarred the West during the “Indian Wars” of the post-Civil War era. But this is more than simply a long-overdue accounting of broken treaties, broken promises, and tragic removal in California. McNally also shines a mirror at us, demanding a reckoning for the demographic and cultural genocide that occurred in the Klamath Basin and across the American West.

Like our best historians, though, McNally never explicitly makes this demand. Instead, he simply weaves together an immensely complex set of cultures, characters, places, and histories, placing the Modocs at the center of this neglected yet important American story. In this effort, he picks up where other recent historians have recently taken us—the essential works of Benjamin Madley (*American Genocide*), Boyd Cothran (*Remembering the Modoc War*), and Brendan Lindsay (*Murder State*) come to mind—raising the issue of state-sponsored genocide against Native Californians. Genocidal intent, as these historians reveal, is evident in the racial terror unleashed by Gilded Age Californians, journalists, politicians, and soldiers. McNally employs these voices brilliantly but also evenhandedly in this riveting page-turner.

Broken into four parts, *The Modoc War* consists of a series of thirty-four short, punchy chapters that frame the short conflict (1872–73) but also the longer, deeper geographical and cultural contours of the Klamath Basin. McNally also takes us through the violent and tragic aftermath of the war, which amounted to the calculated near extermination of the Modocs. At every step along the way, he takes us deep into Modoc history as they retreated away from the U.S. Army and into “the Stronghold”—the cavernous, difficult terrain shaped by lava beds resulting from the Medicine Lake Volcano that bordered Tule Lake in Northern California. But this forbidding place was not just a strategic hideout, McNally writes. For the Modocs, “This Stronghold was more than strong. It was sacred” (16). The very name Modoc, in fact, is derived from *móatak* (tule lake). Thus, as with other indigenous nations who had their own strongholds resisting white incursions in the late nineteenth century (Canyon de Chelly for the Navajo or the Black Hills for the Lakota, for instance), the Modoc Stronghold provided both defensive advantages and deeper cultural meaning.

The Modoc War was roughly situated in the middle of the Indian Wars of the West, but as McNally shows, it served as one of the most captivating and consequential despite its isolated terrain. The war acted as a conduit for sensational journalism featuring war correspondents reporting in real time, thanks to the power of the telegraph. The outnumbered but recalcitrant