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Introduction

In today's society, new means of escapism often arise as people try to cope with the technological revolution and the pressures it has on daily life. Escapism is not a new trend in American life either. American escapism is a term coined in reference to a dangerous tendency of the American public to take refuge in fantasy when reality becomes too dark to face. In the human experience, leisure and recreation are both aspects of escapism, but leisure activities only become part of escapism when these activities are less for the enjoyment of spare time and more of a necessity for people to function in their everyday life.

The rise of industrialization in American society created the need for an environment where people could remove themselves from the heavy expectations of a grown capitalist society. As capitalism and its effects took control over the American people, many yearned for a simpler time their ancestors had known, filled with frontiersmen and rugged wilderness. For over a century, nature has been valued and viewed as a haven in the American imagination. As America struggled with the effects of industrialization and the devastation of the two world wars, nature became more and more of a sanctuary to counter these traumas.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Americans have longed for uniquely American manifestations and expressions of culture. This yearning has been observed in the American literary transcendentalist movement, which centered on the experiences of individuals in nature since both nature and people were understood to be inherently good. The American tradition broke away from European schools of thought and cultural practices and found different groups to uphold those core values, such as children center nature refuges.¹ Childhood experiences often create the foundation for life and learning. There is a lack of studies on the developmental impact children may experience at camp in the historiography of summer camps in the United States. Many studies

1 Michael G. Kamme, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 62-64.

have centered on how summer camps forged a sense of nationalism, the correlation between summer camps and anti-modernism, and other socio-political issues that may stem from summer camps and neglect to address the physiological and mental components. The study of childhood development, specifically at summer camps, can provide insight into how various cultural and environmental factors have contributed to American society. This paper will focus primarily on the ideals surrounding the nature and operations of summer camps rather than the experiences of children summer camps have historically served. Though it is important to note that the summer camp industry, today, includes a diverse spectrum of experiences, the summer camp experience has ties to classism and a history of perpetuating segregation and colonialism. The objective of summer camps has been to serve children. This paper will underscore how the motives for serving children have changed over time. Moreover, while the reasons may be multifold, the objective of summer camps has been and continues to prioritize the well-being of those children it houses every summer.

This essay will argue that shifts in American society directly impacted the evolution of how summer camps nurtured their campers and how they facilitated the creation of an escapist environment. The constant, strong sense of escapism driving the popularity of summer camps was produced in different ways throughout history, informed by how Americans prioritized the importance of childhood. In addition, summer camps allowed children to process their emotions in a place that appeared to be fixed in time; summer camps emerged in the social landscape as temporary sanctuaries for children. This paper will follow a timeline starting in the late nineteenth century with the development of the first summer camps in the Progressive Era.² It will conclude in the mid-twentieth century with America's response to World War II and the profound impact the war had on summer camps while highlighting the benefits of outdoor education that contributed to the popularity of summer camps.

Historiography

Environmental historian Michael B. Smith's article, "The Ego of the Good Camper," illustrates the interworkings of summer camps, their social dynamics, and their function. He argued that summer camps were designed as a refuge with children's psychological welfare in mind. This design resulted from the post-WWII movement aiming to protect the mental state of children while providing a means of escapism from their struggles in the "real world."

2 The Progressive Era is a period in United States history spanning from 1890s to 1920, characterized by intense social activism and political reform to improve American society and counteract Industrialism.

He evaluated the period between the emergence of the American Camping Association's mission statements throughout World War II until the mid-1950s to show how these policies evolved to adhere to psychological principles for the well-being of American children. Smith noted that summer camps have a physiological effect on children by creating unique, safe environments with his theory on the psychopathic risk campers face while attending summer camp.

In her book *Children's Nature : The Rise of the American Summer Camp*, historian Leslie Paris examined how children developed a sense of community at summer camps.³ She noted that many Americans first experienced having a community they relied on for emotional support at summer camps. Through testimonials of campers and staff, she argued that the dynamics of summer camp, outdoor living, group activity, simple diets, and fresh air transformed the lives of campers.

The early movement of summer camps started as a result of welfare projects in major urban areas like New York City. In Julia Guarneri's article "Changing Strategies for Child Welfare, Enduring Beliefs about Childhood: The Fresh Air Fund, 1877—1926," she argued that the Fresh Air Movement of the Progressive Era inspired and evolved into the modern summer camp.⁴ With urban life being harmful to children and the constant pressures of industrial life and wealth inequality, New York socialites took it upon themselves to introduce the younger generation to a simpler way of living that once dominated American culture, or at least their imagination.

Barksdale Maynard's article, "An Ideal Life in the Woods for Boys' Architecture and Culture in the Earliest Summer Camps," highlighted the importance of education at summer camps provided to children. He did so by focusing on all boys camps in the Northeast during the 1880s. Maynard credited summer camps for fostering a positive influence and inspiration for these boys as they carried the skills learned in camp into the "real" world and careers.

Origin of Summer Camps (1880-1930)

Summer camps pride themselves on tradition and heritage; many adhere to the same principles under which they were founded. Organizers of many summer camps sought to create a space to embody more traditional aspects of American society based on ideas of a past centered on rugged frontiers and pioneering a new life. The original goal of summer camps was to provide

3 Leslie Paris, *Children's Nature : The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

4 Julia Guarneri, "Changing Strategies for Child Welfare, Enduring Beliefs about Childhood: The Fresh Air Fund, 1877–1926," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, no. 1 (2012): 27–70.

children with an opportunity to experience the America previous generations longed for by creating a physical place replicating the American frontier.⁵

The era of -isms beginning in the late nineteenth century encompassed massive global social, political, economic, and cultural changes. Many of these changes were due to imperialism, nationalism, liberalism, and capitalism, among other ideologies, which separated a new generation from their ancestors' simpler ways of living.⁶ Many believed the new sprawl of urban development took away the freedoms the frontier had offered. Camping advocate and former camp director R. Alice Drought believed democracy was to blame for softening its citizens by providing higher standards of living.⁷ To combat the loss of traditional American values, New York City Progressives started a welfare movement, the Fresh Air Fund (FAF), pioneered by Reverend Willard Parsons.⁸ The Rev. Willard Parsons grew up on a farm in Franklin, and throughout his life, he remained fond of the wholesome country life of his childhood. While attending Union Theological Seminary, he became appalled at some social conditions children suffered in New York City of the 1870s. Parsons witnessed what the children of Brooklyn tenements endured in the hot months of summer. In 1877, he began his plans to alleviate child suffering by creating the FAF.⁹

The foundation of the FAF marked the beginning of the summer camp evolution in the United States.¹⁰ Its mission aimed to whisk underprivileged kids from New York City away to host families in rural areas of New England for two weeks over the summer. The briefness of these social interactions had been strategically implemented to prevent children from becoming attached to their temporary homes, thus creating emotional damage.¹¹ Parsons wanted to offer these children a "socially healthier alternative to the city" and introduce them to simpler living away from poverty, strikes, riots, and the social stigma between classes, but Reverend Parsons adamantly insisted that the Fund could not to solve these issues directly at the source.¹²

5 Leslie Paris, *Children's Nature : The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 11.

6 The 19th and early 20th centuries were periods of massive and global social, political, economic, and cultural changes and developments. Imperialism, nationalism, Marxism, liberalism, capitalism, ideological totalitarianism, and globalism are just a few "isms" that the 20th century witnessed.

7 Alice R. Drought, *A Camping Manual* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1943), 4.

8 Julia Guarneri, "Changing Strategies for Child Welfare, Enduring Beliefs about Childhood: The Fresh Air Fund, 1877-1926," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, no. 1 (January 2012), 28.

9 Guarneri, "Changing Strategies", 28.

10 Fresh Air Fund abbreviated to FAF.

11 Guarneri, "Changing Strategies", 28-29.

12 Guarneri, "Changing Strategies", 42-44.

The precedence of temporary comfort and safe places for children began here. Early camping efforts still embraced traditional American values, but soon things like education and children's well-being became more of the driving force for wanting children to experience the natural world. Parsons and other socialites who sponsored the FAF hoped for the establishment of camping as a vital part of education.¹³ In their view, summer camps provided a wide variety of activities so that children experienced alternative forms of learning outside school curriculums. Camp education taught children how to properly socialize with people their age through group dynamics such as problem-solving. Former president of Harvard University, Charles Eliot, called summer camp "the most important step in education that America has given the world."¹⁴

The creation of the summer camp arose in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Middle-class Americans began to doubt the emerging growth of urbanization and industrial capitalism and fantasized about a sanctuary away from the pressures of their new reality by recreating an agrarian life in nature. Indeed, many Americans believed they could escape the burden of urban life.¹⁵ At the same time, other summer camps began to emerge as a social experiment to understand what types of human socialization were necessary for modern life. Removed from social actors that limited their agency, such as teachers and parents, children at the camp were free to socialize without those involved in their urban lives.

Camp advocates, like the Reverend Willard Pastors, believed children in environments where they were free to socialize how they pleased could develop more whole personalities and eventually contribute more to society.¹⁶ These two methods proved widely successful for the foundation of summer camps and sparked the establishment of more summer camps throughout the Northeast. Founded with a mission centered on bringing rural values to children's lives, Jackson's Mill State 4-H Camp in Weston, West Virginia, successfully applied these methods to their summer camp.¹⁷ Jackson's Mill State 4-H Camp, operating for over a century since its foundation in the early 1920s, has proved itself ahead of its time with the summer camp craze.¹⁸

13 Lloyd Burgess Sharp, *Education and the Summer Camp: An Experiment* (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 1930), 4.

14 Maynard W. Barksdale, "An Ideal Life in the Woods for Boys: Architecture and Culture in the Earliest Summer Camps," *Winterthur Portfolio* 34, no. 1 (March 1999), 3.

15 Michael B. Smith, "The Ego Ideal of the Good Camper' and the Nature of Summer Camp," *Environmental History* 11, no. 1 (January 2006), 72.

16 "The Ego Ideal of the Good Camper'", 74.

17 Courtney Fint, "Jackson's Mill State 4-H Camp: The Rural Summer Camp as a Cultural Landscape." *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 1, no. 1 (June 2004), 37.

18 Fint, "Jackson's Mill State 4-H Camp", 37.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there were fewer than one hundred summer camps in the United States, and by 1918 there were more than one thousand.¹⁹ Summer camps began to broaden the demographic of children they served, and by providing easier accessibility, summer camp enrollments rose. Summer camps were able to provide health care that was inaccessible to children living in the city because of their financial status and also their geographic location.²⁰ Additionally, new labor laws restricting child labor vastly changed the role of young people in society as children were required to attend schools.²¹ This newly allotted freedom from work provided children with free time, which previous generations never experienced. Becoming students rather than workers gave children more time to participate in recreational activities, like the FAF, which also provided constructive ways for children to socialize and pass away the time. Without this option, many children would likely adhere to deviant activities that served as a means to end boredom rather than beneficially releasing youthful energy. This legislation protecting the exploitation of American children significantly contributed to the cultural shift in Americans' understanding of childhood. In the eyes of many Americans, the early years of the social development of American children became important and something that needed to be preserved during the age of industrialism and urbanization.

At the end of the nineteenth century, summer camps predominantly served middle and upper-class White Protestant boys, but over the next five decades, they expanded their reach to other demographics such as girls, immigrants, members of religious groups, and ethnic minorities.²² During the Progressive Era, FAF staff used American rituals to assimilate immigrant children, keeping their overall systematic, professional approach.²³ An essential goal of the summer camp was to reinstate American traditions; however, this process was widely different from camp to camp.

One of the Progressive Era's most recognized children's organizations was The Boy Scouts of America.²⁴ The BSA provided a way for young boys to build character, be self-reliant, and become responsible citizens of the United States. Progressives these values could produce better members of society. While the FAF aimed to offer a temporary sanctuary for children to relieve themselves from the troubles of their daily lives, the BSA aimed to instill young boys with nationalistic and Progressive morals and values. The BSA used the mode of summer camps to teach the boys they served to be

19 Smith, "The Ego Ideal", 77.

20 Sharp, *Education and the Summer Camp*, 35.

21 Paris, *Children's Nature*, 4.

22 Paris, *Children's Nature*, 3.

23 Guarneri, "Changing Strategies", 55.

24 Boy Scouts of America abbreviated to BSA.

upstanding citizens and prepare them for the workforce. The BSA modeled summer camps after the United States military to achieve these goals and implemented rigid schedules and physical fitness exams.²⁵ However, because of their effectiveness in propelling boys into society as successful citizens, the BSA became a wildly popular standard model of summer camp operations.

Other organizations, such as the FAF, proved to be highly successful for families and socialites alike; however, some families' expectations for their children's time at the camp were not met due to neglectful host families or inadequate facilities.²⁶ Because summer camps grew rapidly, they often did not adapt to reform, and many camps operated under vastly different standards of operation. It was not until 1924 that summer camps faced significant reform targeting camp problems. The methods of caring for children received careful study through the Children's Welfare Federation.²⁷ The Fresh Air Fund's focus on ameliorating rather than solving children's issues and urban poverty explains how it survived without major reforms for so long.²⁸ It was their sense of creating a temporary environment that, in some ways, justified their lack of reform. However, had Fund focused its involvement at the root of social issues, the idea of the summer camp could not have been lost to other forms of welfare. An ACA survey from 1936 showed that many camps operated without meeting ACA guidelines, such as keeping camper medical records. Of the one hundred and seven camps the survey examined, eighty percent kept records, and only nine of the camps consulted the services of a psychologist through periodic visits.²⁹

Summer Camps WWI - WWII

Both world wars inspired many camp directors to redesign summer camps to create a more regimented and militaristic experience.³⁰ The focus on children's discipline became highly structured in camp life. Parents who sent their children to camp expected discipline regardless of whether or not they practiced it at home.³¹ World War II proved to be even more impactful to the dynamic of camping institutions in America. Due to the majority of men in their twenties serving in the war, many camp directors often had to make

25 David I. MacLeod, "Act Your Age: Boyhood, Adolescence, and the Rise of the Boy Scouts of America." *Journal of Social History* 16, no. 2 (December 1982): 3–20.

26 MacLeod, "Act Your Age", 40.

27 Sharp, *Education and the Summer Camp*, 21.

28 Guarneri, "Changing Strategies", 70

29 H. S. Dimock, *Putting Standards Into the Summer Camp* (Chicago: Reports of the Seventh Annual Camp Institute Under Joint Auspices of George Williams College and Chicago Camping Association, 1936), 7-9.

30 Smith, "'The Ego Ideal'", 77.

31 Drought, *A Camping Manual*, 7.

do with hiring staff in their forties or late teens instead of the young-adult campers administrators typically preferred.³² In addition to new staff, many camp directors added activities that aided the war efforts, such as growing their victory gardens.³³

The war years surged in advocacy from summer camps, with many theorists and supporters arguing that camps and nature were a way to help rehabilitate the youth unsettled by war. During the war, camps served as a refuge for children who sought to separate themselves physically from the war. Camp live excluded all mentions of the war. In 1942, the ACA published its wartime bulletin noting:

Summer camps tucked away in the hills are not only havens of physical safety, but the normal, happy life of these camps is the best antidote yet discovered for the nerve tension, emotional excitement, and hate endangered the war of nerves, and constant fear of attack experienced by those who live in cities.³⁴

Camp advocates such as Ross Allen argued that if camps removed children from the adult-themed discussion of politics, war, and current events, it would help preserve a healthy emotional state in children. By creating a mental diversion through camp activities and leisure, summer camps provided the escapist solution to the psychological toll war could have had on children. In 1942 one summer camp director went as far as eliminating mentions of war from parents' letters to their children as well as radio, newspapers, and discussions of war amongst campers in an effort to seclude them from life outside of camp.³⁵ The reformed summer camp recast itself as a site for children and a place that worked to preserve the innocence and mental state of the younger generation. Just as the war impacted American society, it also changed the social, physical, and psychological aspects of summer camp operations. The aftermath of the war ushered in a new era of summer camps that heavily focused on child psychology.

In the years after the war, multiple philosophies and approaches to camp operations forged new paths. The main new direction of summer camps converged the traditional camp movement of creating rustic sanctuaries for children focused on outdoorsmanship and education and the new reality brought upon the modern world. These post-war developments informed child psychologists William Morse and Fritz Redl, who observed that summer camps were not natural but created environments in the woods needing

32 Paris, *Children's Nature*, 267.

33 Smith, "'The Ego Ideal'", 82.

34 Smith, "'The Ego Ideal'", 83.

35 Smith, "'The Ego Ideal'", 83-85.

detailed guidance for children to grow.³⁶ Summer camps during World War II became a place where children could process the conditions and emotions of the real world without having to confront them directly. Outdoor educator Barbra Ellen Joy believed that “camp professionals had to embrace a healing and fortifying approach to camping.”³⁷

Given the origins of summer camps designed as a refuge from urban sprawl, it is not surprising that camp leaders in the mid-twentieth century, such as Kenneth Webb, 1964 Director of Farm and Wilderness Camps expressed ambivalence towards city life. What is surprising is how ideas about nature, childhood, and urban life have remained constant since the foundation of summer camps, especially in a society increasingly becoming mediated by technology.³⁸ Camping advocates believed that the life children experienced in urban and suburban America not only took away the experience of adolescent innocence but it also robbed children from creating the important core memories needed to harbor a well-rounded life.

While summer camps were a temporary home for children, the camp experience stuck with them for the rest of their lives. As Webb has noted, “such precious memories of a campfire or of other enchanted moments during the summer linger on long after the campfires are quenched and the feet of youthful listeners started on the trail of life.”³⁹

Summer Camps Post World War II and the Emergence of Outdoor Education

In the aftermath of the Second World War, summer camps again saw a surge in the number of campers. Due to economic changes linked to a booming economy and the rise in rural land values, summer camps became increasingly more affordable for the average American family. Paris stated that summer camps peaked in popularity postwar, with one in every six American children attending summer camp.⁴⁰ Affordability was not the only factor drawing the attention of parents. Summer camps’ new focus on education, science, environmentalism, and child development made them more appealing. Many parents saw summer camp as an opportunity for their children to continue learning in the summer, socializing, and learning other life skills.

36 Smith, ““The Ego Ideal”, 71.

37 Smith, ““The Ego Ideal”, 85.

38 Smith, ““The Ego Ideal”, 71.

39 Kenneth B. Webb and Susan H. Webb, *Summer Magic: What Children Gain from Camp* (n.p: Association Press, 195), 159.

40 Paris, *Children's Nature*, 225.

Americans in the mid-twentieth century started to advocate for more opportunities for outdoor education. Conservation activism brought the once unattainable benefits of natural environments to urban spaces. Conservation activism sought the protection of natural resources, plants, and animals. The movement encouraged the use of natural resources sustainably, the conservation of biodiversity, and wilderness preservation. In 1952, Cook County in Chicago sought to preserve over 45,000 acres of undeveloped land as an effort to incorporate outdoor teaching to the children of that metropolis.⁴¹ Theories of the benefits of alternative education centered in nature began to heavily influence parents' decisions to send their children to summer camp and practice outdoor education.

In an article for science teachers published in 1957, one teacher, Louis Rzepka, argued that nature enrichment children's educational process beyond the capabilities of a classroom and other forms of education, such as museums or zoos.⁴² Whereas field trips focus on one specific lesson, summer camps nurture children's innate curiosity. Rzepka reasoned that hands-on experiences created more meaningful connections between children and the subject they pursued, whether it was the geographic nature of the camp and surrounding area or their immersion into the local community.⁴³ Summer camps utilized alternative forms of education classrooms could not provide, and in doing so, summer camps connected children whose needs could not be met within the confines of the traditional classroom. As a result, beginning in the 1950s, many wilderness education programs were designed to provide general education, rehabilitation, and other enriching experiences for psychiatric patients, delinquents, and other individuals involved in management training.⁴⁴

While some articles support education in nature, such as Rzepka, there is a lack of child psychology research on children at summer camp, but there is evidence of outdoor education's positive benefits on a child attending summer camp. Outdoor education seeks to replicate the natural world through open-ended materials and physical factors, creating a more stimulating learning process. This is in line with outdoor education theory, which centered around the idea that children develop qualities such as environmental stewardship and critical thinking through more complex learning in a natural environment

41 Robert A. McCabe, "Outdoor Education Cook County Style," *The Wilson Bulletin* 64, no. 3 (September 1952), 174.

42 Louis Rzepka, "The Summer Camp and Childhood Education," *The Science Teacher* 24, no. 3 (April 1957), 130.

43 Rzepka, "The Summer Camp", 31.

44 John, H. W Hattie, Marsh, James T. Neill, and Garry E. Richards, "Adventure Education and Outward Bound: Out-of-Class Experiences That Make a Lasting Difference," *Review of Educational Research* 67, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 44.

that contributes to their physical and emotional well-being.⁴⁵ In all, outdoor education programs focused on the personal growth and effort exuded by students rather than the formal education experienced in the classroom.⁴⁶

One study understanding parents' perceived benefits of outdoor education linked learning and play environments centered in nature to significantly reduced stress levels in children. Additionally, the study showed improved attention and concentration abilities in children affected by attention-deficit disorder.⁴⁷ Finally, the study also showed the physical benefits of outdoor learning. At home, children's physical fitness had been limited to structured play such as youth programs and organized sports, but when in the outdoor education program, children's fitness levels and time spent exercising increased.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the emphasized developmental and social skills attracted parents' attention, contributing to summer camp popularity.

The socio-psychological physical impact of summer camps also attracted the attention of child psychologists. These professionals started theorizing about the elements of summer camps that made them attractive to children. After World War II and throughout the rest of the twentieth-century camp, rhetoric and programming emphasized the importance of mental health in camps. One theory behind this logic came from Barbra Ellen Joy, who argued that while a camper may be physically fit, if they suffered from some form of mental stressors, then issues with the authority figures in the camp, as well as other campers start to arise.⁴⁹ Focusing on positive mental wellness among campers helped camp administrators run camps more efficiently, benefiting staff and creating a lasting impression on the campers.

From the aftermath of WWII emerged an era where psychologists and mental health professionals deemed the generation that grew up in the war psychologically unwell and burdened with the effects of the war.⁵⁰ Many saw summer camps as a refuge where children could process these emotions.⁵¹ The appeal of an environment that combined safe space learning with the issues of the modern world while secluded from the stressors of homemade summer camp a vital role in the lives of campers in the mid-twentieth century.

45 Samuel F. Jr. Dennis, Alexandra Wells, and Candace Bishop, "A Post-Occupancy Study of Nature-Based Outdoor Classrooms in Early Childhood Education," *Children, Youth and Environments* 24, no. 2 (January 2014), 38.

46 Hattie et al., "Adventure Education", 47.

47 Lincoln R. Larson, Jason W. Whiting, and Gary T. Green, "Young People's Outdoor Recreation and State Park Use: Perceived Benefits from the Parent/Guardian Perspective," *Children, Youth and Environments* 23, no. 3 (MONTH 2013), 92.

48 Larson et al., "Young People's Outdoor Recreation", 91.

49 Barbara Ellen Joy, *Annotated Bibliography on Camping* (Chicago, Ill: American Camping Association, 1955), 65.

50 Paris, *Children's Nature*, 266.

51 Smith, "'The Ego Ideal'", 86.

While summer camps offered help to many campers, these safe environments had one unforeseen side effect. Summer camps incorporated and embraced their surrounding natural environments, but without the intervention and guidance from adults, children would not have been able to reap the benefits of nature. At the same time, summer camps had been completely removed from the real world, creating a social environment unique to each summer camp. While summer camp had been a temporary environment for children, the emotionally vulnerable experience they had at camp made camp a vital resource for their mental well-being. At camp, children had been able to escape the troubles of their home life and made meaningful connections to their fellow campers, staff, and environment.

Fritz Redl has noted that camp life has been a “psychopathological risk” because of the emotional dependency campers experienced after summer camp.⁵² Redl compared this summer camp phenomenon to the same experience of drug addiction. Just as drugs are a form of stimulation, summer camps have provided children with an intense emotional and physical experience that they can only experience at camp. In his article, Rendl warned of the effects of the relationship between camp and camper:

But just because camping is such a powerful drug, it also shares the properties of all other powerful drugs on the market. It is risky, if the wrong person swallows it, or if the right one swallows too much of it, or at the wrong time. In short, the camp itself is not only something through which children are supposed to adjust better, but also something to which they have to adjust.⁵³

The comparison between drugs and summer camps encompassed the fine line between summer camps and the real world seen throughout the history of summer camps in America. Summer camp has become a paradox fueled by the American people’s craving for escapism as a bridge between the modern and natural worlds. Like a drug, as Rendl put it, the summer camp served as a treatment for the growing societal problems caused by industrialism and urban development and expansion.

Conclusion

While isolated from the modern world, summer camps evolved due to shifts in American values and the various affairs that ignited them. The Progressive Era created a demand for a sanctuary away from urban life. The Fresh Air Fund pioneered by Reverend William Pastors gave way to the foundation of the summer we know today. The belief that returning to a natural environment held physical benefits gave way to a rise in the popularity

52 Webb et al., *Summer Magic*, 87.

53 Redl, Fritz. “Psychopathologic Risks of Camp Life,” *The Nervous Child* 6 (April 1947), 72.

of summer camps. Camp advocates and directors' usage of alternative forms of education laid the foundation for summer camps to evolve into dependable safe havens and mental health resources for campers. The lasting effects of the world wars required summer camps to adapt to the needs of society by working to persevere the innocence and curiosity of childhood and serving as a refuge from the dark reality of the modern world.

The ideology of outdoor education continued to nourish summer camps and benefit campers through alternative education that could cater to individuals' needs and provide support not found in the average classroom. The unique and complex summer camp environment does not fit solely in the modern or natural world but instead serves as a bridge between the two. Without proper precautions taken by summer camp staff and directors, campers may run the risk of becoming emotionally dependent on their temporary home away from home. Regardless, the history of summer camps is rich with ideologies centered on helping children nourish their self-confidence and physical and mental well-being, making sleep-away camp a cherished staple of American summers. The memories, experiences, and lessons of summer camp that campers carried into adulthood made summer camp a beloved nostalgic American tradition.

