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“Somebody Bigger than You and I”: The African American Healing Traditions of Camp Minisink

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Abstract: Four hundred years after the first enslaved Africans landed on the shores of Jamestown, Virginia, it can be difficult to recognize the myriad ways in which the traditional healing processes of the Motherland are embedded in the day-to-day lives of African Americans. Much of what has sustained us through the insidiousness of systemic racism is sourced from the traditions of our ancestors: our faith; our creativity; our sense of community; our respect for elders; our food; and our connection to the natural environment. Employing a narrative form of inquiry, the authors dialogue and reflect on our histories at Camp Minisink, a premier African American camp servicing Black youth from New York City. We use our personal experiences as “Minisinkers” in the 1950s and 1960s, to unearth patterns of Africentric healing traditions embedded in our camp activities. The “*Minisink Model*”, unbeknownst to the thousands of children who grew up through the various camp programs, provided a multitude of safety and protective factors informed by these healing practices. The foremothers and forefathers of Minisink instilled in us the belief in a higher power; unconditional love; service; and family that continue to sustain us in our adult lives. This model holds promise for present-day organizations that are struggling to identify meaningful ways of working with African American families, youth and children.



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1. Introduction: In the Beginning . . .

*Who made the mountain, who made the tree?
Who made the river flow to the sea?
And who hung the moon in the starry sky?
Somebody bigger than you and I.
Who makes the flowers bloom in the spring?
Who writes the song for the robin to sing?
And who sends the rain when the earth is dry?
Somebody bigger than you and I. Lange et al. (1960)*

We were a singing camp. We were a dancing camp. We transformed throughout the decades from a colored, to a Negro, to a Black, and ultimately to an African American camp. We were a praying camp, gathering each evening in our rustic outdoor chapel on the lake. The hand-built pulpit, with large log signage overhead spelled out “*In the Beginning . . . God*”; we were a Christian camp. Yet, at our core, we were an African camp. Did the thousands of Black children who each summer eagerly boarded the busses to Camp Minisink in Port Jervis, New York realize this? Probably not. Did their parents equate the desire to get their children off the mean streets of Harlem, the Bronx and the other boroughs of New York City with providing them with an Africentric view of the world and themselves? Not necessarily. Did the founding mothers and fathers of this camping experiment, nestled in the Shawangunk mountains, intentionally create a process in which

their charges would be immersed in an ancient cosmos that has served to protect, heal and galvanize African peoples throughout thousands of years of grief, turmoil and uncertainty?

Those original leaders are now ancestors, having long departed from this plane; there is no way to ascertain what their thinking was at the time. Yet, the beliefs of the authors of this article, are that in their wisdom, they knew exactly what they were doing. As we reflect on our own life trajectories and those of many of our Minisink sisters and brothers throughout the globe, we are convinced that all aspects of our camp experience, grounded in African cosmology and its emergent African American traditions served as healing, safety and protective factors that continue to inform our adult lives.

In this article, the authors draw largely on our own experiences to excavate the Africentricity of the lessons we learned when we were campers at Minisink. Employing a narrative form of inquiry, we dialogued and reflected on our histories as Minisinkers in the 1950s and 1960s, and transcribed this information to identify emerging patterns. From an analysis of this data and our collective meaning-making we discovered five themes that frame the Minisink healing traditions, which we have coined the “Minisink Model.” They include (1) unity; (2) respect for elders; (3) collective work and responsibility; (4) faith and; (5) purpose. While these themes are in direct alignment with the seven principles of Kwanzaa (Karenga 2007), we highlight the unique ways in which Minisink actualized these traditions, long before the creation of this culturally informed holiday.

The use of a narrative approach is useful as it focuses on a specific context (Creswell and Poth 2017), such as youth in a camping experience. Relevant to the special edition of this journal, narrative histories can also disrupt dominant discourses by offering alternative meanings to the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Given the tradition of oral history in the African and African American experiences, there is nothing comprehensive that is *written* about Camp Minisink. Through the technique of *restorying* (Creswell and Poth 2017) we have organized our findings into the aforementioned framework of the Minisink Model, in the hope that it will be the first of multiple efforts to translate our oral history into written form. We believe the model not only shares the camp’s cultural history and legacy, but also provides a roadmap for relevant healing practices within many organizations servicing Black youth. This is of great importance to the authors, as we are all social workers who have at some point been involved with youth programs, especially those committed to Black children. Collectively, we attribute our professional choices to the lessons learned at Camp Minisink.

Throughout the article, we intend to expound on these factors and their impact on the Black children who benefitted from them. We will examine the healing nature of the many rituals we engaged in, from music, to dance, to creative arts, to nature and to the meals that we ate. As many contemporary service organizations struggle with how to best engage and serve African American children and youth, it is our hope that the lessons we learned through the Minisink Model can serve as a template for creating culturally grounded processes that contribute to these young people’s health and well-being and that are sustainable throughout the life span.

2. A History of Camping in the United States

Nadel and Scher (2019) provide a comprehensive history of the summer camp experience in the United States from the late 19th century to current day. They situate its origins within a time period where the country was transitioning from an agrarian to an industrialized society. Concurrently, child labor laws were shifting to accommodate the emergent notion of childhood as a distinct stage of human development with the requisites of play and recreation (Spensley 2020). With increasing numbers of European immigrants seeking new opportunities in America and African Americans moving north to escape Jim Crow segregation, urban settings experienced unprecedented growth. Compulsory education was now policy in the United States, but schools were not equipped to manage overheated classrooms in the summer (Nadel and Scher 2019). In addition, “city streets were dirty, unpredictable, rife with lurking adults and vulgar magazines” (Spensley 2020,

para. 4). The rural campsite, especially in the Northeastern section of the United States, where most were located, was viewed as a safe haven for children and a temporary reprieve from these concerns.

2.1. Segregation

Although smaller informal camps previously existed for wealthier, mostly Protestant children, the early 1900s ushered in more formalized, structured summer camp experiences. Reflecting the times, these new iterations of camps tended to be gendered, with boys' camps usually preceding the formation of girls' camps. Mixed gender camps were virtually non-existent. In addition, camps were organized along religious affiliations, with Jewish American camps being quite prominent (Nadel and Scher 2019). Camps were also quite racialized, with almost all early camps serving White children only.

2.2. Integration

Throughout the history of the United States, there have always been individuals and organizations committed to challenging the status quo and pushing the country to move closer to achieving its ideal of an equitable and just society for all of its citizens. Many Progressive Era reformers and those who followed them brought this same level of advocacy to the summer camp movement. The often decades-long effort to racially integrate summer camps was met with many setbacks. Bloch (2014) wrote that as was the case in many United States institutions and organizations, African Americans were marginalized and excluded from the camping experience. They were seen as "anomalies in outdoor activities and were treated like a rare species" (para. 5). In 1947, Camp Aldersgate in Little Rock, Arkansas received death threats because they promoted interracial harmony. Gunshots were fired into the campground. Wo-chi-ca (Workers' Children Camp) was an integrated camp that was very short lived (1934–1954). It was forced out of existence because it was supported by labor unions and the Communist Party. During its brief tenure, it was visited by such notable African American artists as Paul Robeson, Pearl Primus, Elizabeth Catlett and Jacob Lawrence (Kaye 2002; White 2015).

The Fresh Air Fund, which was established in 1877 was a primary source for impoverished New York City children having a summer camp experience. Until the early 1900s, through their homestay program, children were sent to host families, almost exclusively White and Protestant, in rural country settings to expose them to life outside of city environs. Similar to the concurrent Orphan Train movement (Chiodo and Meliza 2014), the Fund's motives were not completely altruistic. In fact, the desire was that as a result of spending weeks with these host families, the children would be desirous of leaving their urban lives of poverty and striving for more middle-class rural or suburban adulthoods. In an effort to be more in alignment with its mission, the Fund wanted to expand its reach to more Black and Jewish children who heretofore had been primarily excluded from the program. Recognizing that these children would not readily be welcomed into the homes of the host families, the Fund began collaborating with other organizations to create more traditional summer camps to serve them (Guarneri 2012).

More successful efforts to integrate camps were initiated by activists and social workers such as Vilona Phillippi Cutler, who was persistent in her work to integrate the services of the YWCA, including having its Oklahoma City Branch open its camp to Negro girls (Social Welfare History Project 2015). Camp Gaylord White: Union Settlement House in upstate New York also had moderate success in their initiative at integrating their girls' camp (Nadel and Scher 2019).

2.3. African American Response

Efforts such as those by Wo-Chi-Ca and Gaylord White and others were the exception rather than the rule. In fact, it was not until 1965 that the American Camping Association adopted a nondiscriminatory policy, although by this time 125 members opposed to desegregation had resigned (Spensley 2020). However, even with the advent of integra-

tion, African American campers still faced challenges in these environments. Angelica Holmes, Director of Camp Founder Girls in San Antonio Texas stated, “You’re just kind of told subliminally that we don’t really belong in certain spaces, that they’re not for us” (Gibbons 2019, para. 28). An African American Los Angeles physician’s reflection on his daughter’s camping experience captured this sentiment:

... We figured that a white camp would introduce her to the real world. The only problem is she had no protection at all. She called us crying every day about some new racial incident. Either they were making fun of her hair or laughing at the idea that she could tan in the sun, or telling jungle jokes, watermelon jokes, Martin Luther King jokes. And the last straw was the midsummer dance where all the boys were White and no one would ask her to dance. (Graham 2000, p. 53)

To redress the insults of segregation and the injuries endured with integration, industrious African Americans used their agency and their financial resources to establish summer camps that would be culturally sensitive and responsive to the emotional, psychological and educational needs of African American children. Mattie Landry, founded one of the first summer camps for African American girls in the United States, Camp Founder Girls. Of significance is the fact that it was founded in 1924 during the Jim Crow era (Gibbons 2019).

Camps that serviced the Harlem community included Camp Guilford Bower (renamed Camp Wallkill in later years), Camp James Farley, Livingston Manor, Fern Rock Camp, Mont Lawn Camp and ... Camp Minisink (Robertson 2018).

3. Our Roots ...

*“He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!”—(Markham 1921)*

The above-cited poem is one that older campers learned once we were accepted into the camp’s leadership development program. The words and the symbolism are quite illustrative of Camp Minisink’s inception and the incorporation of the African value of community. Minisink was founded in 1930, after the 1929 economic crash and at the beginning of the Great Depression. This was also during the early stages of the Great Migration, when thousands of African Americans fled the segregated Jim Crow south in search of better lives in northern and western cities (Wilkerson 2010). Contrary to their hopes and visions, their new environments were not especially welcoming or hospitable. While more subtle in its manifestations, systemic racism was still quite prevalent, preventing many African Americans from accessing resources, such as adequate housing, viable employment and social services. As indicated in the above-cited poem, the circle allowed some in, but excluded others. This was the experience of these new arrivals to cities like New York.

The New York City Mission Society (City Mission), founded in the 1800s, had several iterations before becoming the auspice of Camp Minisink. Committed to “eradicating the evils of urban life” (Miller and Miller 1962, back cover page), much like other social services of its day, the agency primarily sought to assist recent European immigrants. Its mission was undergirded by strong Christian values, with a significant amount of their endowment supporting a network of churches. In 1919, under the leadership of a newly elected president, William Sloane Coffin, the decision was made to expand its reach beyond those areas that it had been involved with, to date. As a direct result of the aforementioned Great Migration, the Black population in Harlem grew from 10% in 1910 to 70.18% by 1930 (Miller and Miller 1962). Expanding the agency’s work into the Harlem area made sense, especially since Black churches had been steadily following their parishioners to this community from such previous Black neighborhoods as the Tenderloin District, Hell’s Kitchen and Greenwich Village (Dubois 1901). Through its assessment of the Harlem Black churches, City Mission determined that they were thriving. Significant work was

being done with their adult congregants. Programs for children and youth, however, were missing (Miller and Miller 1962).

The seeds of Camp Minisink were planted when a member of City Mission's Harlem staff, Mrs. Alberta T. Kline's "aggressive and imaginative" leadership style greatly contributed to the expansion and influence of the agency's work in this community (Miller and Miller 1962, p. 153). City Mission was a pioneer in its vision to be more inclusive—"it drew a circle that took him in". It opened its doors to thousands of Black migrants from the south and their children. However, it was Mrs. Kline—later to be affectionately and appropriately called "Ma Kline"—who birthed Minisink and infused it with the time-honored healing traditions so rooted in African values and mores. It was she who had the vision of what was possible for the young boys and girls that American society was so easy to dismiss and marginalize. Equally as easy to dismiss both then and now, is the recognition that Black people are capable of accruing wealth and financially supporting their own communities. It was the financial resources of another Black woman that funded the purchase of the two hundred-and-fifty acre property in Port Jervis, New York ((Miller and Miller 1962) that would be home to Camp Minisink from 1930 until the late 1970s. Jane Oliver Thompson served as Mr. Coffin's maid for many years. Upon her death, she left half of her estate to City Mission. Mr. Coffin used the money to purchase the campsite "to be used primarily for the boys and girls of the Harlem area" (Miller and Miller 1962, p. 173). Before the first child set foot on the soil of Camp Minisink, we see African healing concepts being enacted that would shape so many lives in the coming decades. We see a calling on "ancestral memory that has enabled Black women to transform oppression into expressive strategies for healing and care" (Davis 2008, p. 177). How did a Black woman, a maid—at the height of the worse economic decline at that time—save and contribute money to an organization that she trusted to serve her people well? We see the African tradition of the much touted "village" raising a child through the "othermothering" of Ma Kline as she cared for and nurtured countless young boys and girls, as if they were her own. We see a vision that from a pragmatic stance was probably impossible. Additionally, we see an African cosmology that is reflected in the words of one of many songs we learned at Minisink, and in the title of this article, an ingrained, ancestral knowing—there's somebody bigger than you and I.

Earthy and Cronin (2008) highlighted that narrative analysis addresses a variety of approaches, including autobiographies, oral histories and storytelling. We use the process of restorying to analyze and discuss the findings, based on the authors' oral histories and recollections. While there is always the risk that restorying might skew the data, the greater benefit is that it offers the opportunity to deconstruct long-held discourses about certain phenomena. Inevitably, it changes the story that has existed to date. Our desire as we embarked on this project was to ascertain whether or not there was a narrative about Minisink beyond it being a nice camp for inner city Black youth. To that end we employed the analytical processes of recording, reading, analyzing and grouping the information. We did this separately and arrived at individual conclusions regarding the connection to African or African American belief systems and practices. We then exchanged information to compare and contrast our stories. Finally, we organized the information into emerging themes and patterns.

The section below highlights these discovered patterns. We use our reflective narratives to describe the impacts these activities and practices had on us during our camp experience and beyond.

The Minisink journey begins.

4. The Minisink Model

Somé (1993) in his discourse on power, healing and community offered a partial list of the characteristics of community from a West African perspective: (1) unity of spirit; (2) trust; (3) openness; (4) love and caring; (5) respect for the elders; (6) respect for nature; and (7) cult of the ancestors. Karenga (2007), speaking of the philosophy of Kawaïda from which Kwanzaa, the African American cultural celebration is derived, posited, "For

its ancient African rooted cultural teachings carry with them principles of thought and practice which not only guide how we relate among ourselves as families and communities and a people, but also how we relate to others, the earth and indeed the world and all in it" (Karenga 2007, p. 1). Accordingly, he also offers seven qualities that are largely communal in nature. The Nguzo Saba, or the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa, are: (1) unity; (2) self-determination; (3) collective work and responsibility; (4) cooperative economics; (5) purpose; (6) creativity; and (7) faith. These two conceptualizations can be woven into Mitchem's (2007) African cosmology framework of folk healing which posits that there is a connection between the physical, emotional and spiritual; a connection between the ancestors and their descendants; a connection of nature and humans; and a connection of humans with one another and the Divine.

Each of these theories was only publicly articulated during the 1990s and 2000s, long after the Minisink "rituals" and practices had been introduced and embraced by so many. Yet, these healing concepts are evident throughout the Minisink experience.

Unity

"If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together" (Mustapha 2020, p. 49)
(African Proverb)

"Ma" Kline. Daniel Taylor. "Thornie". "Burgie." They were the mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles of the Minisink family. The use of the word family is intentional as the notion of kinship was reinforced in many ways. Stewart (2007) described the concept of fictive kin as a phenomenon that can be traced back to West Africa where the community considered all of its members as part of the extended family. This tradition continued into the institution of American slavery, serving as a healing balm as families were forcibly separated through auctions, sales or death. Circumstances required individuals to form new familial relationships, especially to meet the needs of children and frail elders. Possibly drawn from a deep ancestral memory, being in community with others also served as a protective factor; a space in which to learn from others how to navigate oppressive forces; how to resist psychic, emotional and bodily harm. Add to the aforementioned the names of Helen Brodie, Mrs. DePass, and Roahl Aarons and we now have almost the full complement of elders who, in the African tradition were the camp *healers*, providing comfort, safety and solace on a daily basis.

As a co-ed camp (beginning in the 1940s) each girls' unit had a brother boys' unit consisting of the same age group. The camp consisted of eight units, four for girls and four for boys. They were considered brother and sister units. Two of the four girls' units were Hilltop for the youngest girls and Skyview for latency age girls. The remaining girls' units and all of the boys units' names were drawn from Indigenous terms. Historically, sleepaway camps have frequently used Indigenous people's terms and practices without permission or clear understanding of their significance. With an acute sensitivity to such cultural appropriation, William Burgie, one of the camp elders, studied Native traditions and beliefs on a Western reservation and was given permission by the elders to bring this knowledge to Minisink and to incorporate the lessons into the camp programming. Also most of those activities were initially overseen by an enrolled and registered elder of the Cherokee nation to ensure authenticity and a keen understanding of the meaning of the dances, rituals and other traditions we were engaged in as campers. Adahi ("lives in the woods" in Cherokee) for pre-adolescents, and Talahi ("among the Oaks" in Ojibwe) for adolescents were the two other girls' units. The corresponding brother units were Lakeview (from the Mohawk tradition), Pineview (from the Navajo tradition), Greenwood (from the Apache tradition) and Shawnee (a member of an Algonquian-speaking tribe originally from central Ohio). There was also a senior unit of campers known as Tapawingo (Mohawk Indian term meaning "house of joy"); the younger campers viewed "Taps" as their elders and all looked forward to the year they would become Taps in their own right. Male and female campers who were entering their junior or senior years of high school were selected to be in this unit. A year-long leadership program, it also served as a counselor-in-training program; summer camp activities were the culminating events for this entity. Taps also

referred to themselves as “brothers and sisters”. The camp elders created these structures and oriented us from as young as five to see ourselves as a unified family:

The sleepaway camping experience was my first initiation to a structured program away from home. Immediately at our arrival, Camp Minisink taught us responsibility . . . responsibility to our cabin-mates, unit, and fellow campers. These were attributes that we would later apply to our families and communities. Our belief in our individual and group selves was further enhanced by the chant of our beloved camp song ‘we are the B-E-S-T, BEST’, which we became hard-wired to believe and which would serve as a protective factor to carry us through in future hard situations. (Avon T. Morgan, Jr., personal communication, 15 July 2020)

Similarly,

As a child, it was very difficult to understand why my mother was always so sick. She was always in the hospital and I was terribly lonely. In addition I was the only Black child in my class and even then, somehow, I knew I was different. My mother died when I was 14 . . . My father, a WWII veteran was trying to grow a business and repair our house. I lived with my maternal grandmother who worked full time as a caseworker . . . I did not realize at the time that special accommodations had been made for me by my Minisink family. I just knew that sometimes when my cabinmates went home, I stayed at camp. Later, I realized that had it not been for my grandmother, my church and Camp Minisink, I could have been placed in foster care, even if only for a little while”. (Sharon Lockhart Carter, personal communication, 5 August 2020)

Kinship, whether through nature or nurture was a mainstay of Minisink. With its roots in Africa, the bonds of family which were transmitted to us in so many ways during our camping experiences, continues to be present in our lives today, even if we encounter a Minisinker that we may not personally know.

I was driving and happened to notice a car ahead of me with a license plate that read ‘Tap 57’. I thought to myself that must be a Minisinker. I almost caused a car accident as I navigated through traffic to pull alongside that car. I called into their window, ‘did you go to Camp Minisink?’ Their faces lit up as they nodded in the affirmative. I said ‘I am your younger Tap sister. I am Tap ‘67’. We had just enough time to agree to look for each other at the upcoming 90th camp reunion, before annoyed drivers began honking at us to move. (Robyn Brown-Manning, personal communication, 10 August 2020)

Respect for the Elders

“The elders of the village are the boundaries” (Mustapha 2020, p. 13)

(Ghanaian Proverb)

African American women, in particular, played key roles in establishing Camp Minisink’s foundation. The *othermothering* (Parks 2007) or community mothering or allomothering, with its roots in Africa is a defining feature of Black womanhood (Brown-Manning 2013) that was organically transmitted into the camp’s policies and practices. Parks (2007) identified the West African terms of *maum* or *mauma* for spiritual mothers. This honorific title remained during the institution of slavery where they were viewed as the matriarchs of the plantation. “Members of the community . . . were said to bow their heads and lower their voices in her presence” (p. 76). Memories abound of young campers paying respect in precisely this manner whenever the elders were nearby—never in fear; always in reverence. It is no accident that the woman handpicked by the City Mission Society to birth Camp Minisink came to be affectionately called “Ma” Kline.

The men were specifically tapped to provide direction and guidance to young male campers, who were especially susceptible to the draw of urban gang activities. In keeping with Africentric principles, young men were taught to have a strong self-esteem, to care for

their “brothers”, their family and their community, and to celebrate their Blackness. As in the African tradition and similar to the reverence for the *maumas*, the elders were the *otherfathers* for their charges and were held in very high esteem. A Congolese proverb reads “*The words of the elders become sweet someday*” (Mustapha 2020, p. 10). We listened and we learned. The Minisink Model taught us that “sitting and serving at the feet of the elders” is an obligation. In the African tradition, the elders are the “wisdom keepers”. They are the griots who pass on the lessons we are expected to master and in turn pass on to the next generation.

Collective Work and Responsibility

“Many hands make light work” (Mustapha 2020, p. 24)

(Tanzanian Proverb)

Social learning is adopted by emulating behaviors based upon a role model in which the subject mirrors the behaviors of that model. The three characteristics of social learning are (1) learning by imitation; (2) learning by identification with model personalities; and (3) learning the social roles (Maric et al. 2017). Each and every child and adolescent at Camp Minisink was pushed to commit to service. Yet, we did not know that then. Listening to the stories of the elders, assuming the rotating responsibilities that were given to the various units (e.g., serving meals; planning and delivering worship services; older youth helping out with younger campers), and having such noted Black dignitaries as Percy Sutton, H. Rap Brown and Lorraine Hansberry visit us at camp were constant reminders that we were called to “give back”. We internalized the mantra, “equal opportunity means equal responsibility” (The African Gourmet n.d.). This was not to benefit us as individuals, but to share largess bestowed upon us with others. Presently, we find Minisinkers engaged in a range of community activities: as sports coaches, church pastors, choir leaders; as social workers, politicians and in community soup kitchens. Minisinkers are often in leadership positions, both paid and volunteer, in a host of organizations benefiting African American people, as well as other communities. For every Minisinker involved in a form of community building, we can trace our steps back to what was learned at the feet of Minisink elders.

Faith

“Leadership comes from God” (Mustapha 2020, p. 15)

(Kenyan Proverb)

“We went to church a lot at Camp Minisink, and didn’t even know it” (Theresa Williams Stoudamire, personal communication, 1 June 2020). God was everywhere at Minisink, not solely in traditional worship services, but in the awe of the view from Skyview Hill, the singing that could be heard throughout the day all over the camp, the respect which was held for the healing elements of liturgical dance. Whether it was the safe travel prayers said as we boarded the busses to and from camp or the graces we sang before each meal, or the poems we learned or the prayers we prayed, we grew to understand the power of the spoken word as yet another strategy for stress relief and problem-solving that we could call on (Neighbors, Jackson, Bowman & Gurin as cited in Parks 2007). Herskovits (as cited in Tuleja 1997) found that within African American culture, spiritual fulfillment is an essential part of life and can be found daily in many social contexts. In an ethnographic study, Haight (as cited in Edwards and Wilkerson 2018) found that “African American children learned about their heritage from other African Americans who valued and nurtured them” (p. 51). Furthermore, African American children’s resilience was found to be more of an outgrowth of their learned spirituality from others, than as something gained in their relationships with immediate family members (Theron et al. 2012). Regardless of the religious practices in their own homes, the youth of Minisink were in the most subtle of ways imbued with a sense of connectedness to a larger source; we were shown how to rely on this source regardless of the nature of our circumstances.

Our individual findings highlighted memories of the rustic chapel on the lake and the views from Skyview mountain. Although we cannot recall all of the bible verses we

learned at camp, we each described the overwhelming, yet humbling feelings we felt in those spaces, even as young children. We can remember-word for word- the lyrics of so many songs learned long ago, and how the collective voices of the campers, counselors and elders echoing off the lake and throughout the hills constantly reminded us of a larger force in our lives. Likewise we recall the joy-filled dancing that took place during many of the worship services. It was a revelation as we shared that for two of us our most spiritual moments are when we are hiking or walking in the woods, and how we actively seek opportunities to do that in our daily lives. The third person wrote of her passion for dance, and how that art form is how she connects to a higher source.

On 29 April 2020, Minisinkers from all over the world received an invitation to join a Zoom Vespers gathering. The invitation arrived approximately two days before the scheduled event. At exactly 7:30 on the appointed day, over 80 Minisink alumni joined the session. Immediately, we began singing the songs and practicing the rituals that we had all learned so many decades ago. We were all older and heavier and grayer around the temples, but within moments we were once again youngsters, sitting in a rustic chapel on the lake filled with hope and awe, excitement and love.

The significance of the date is that it was a few weeks after the country, especially New York, had been placed on lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like others, we were scared. Given our ages, many of us were now in the high-risk category for contracting the virus. We were uncertain about our jobs, our families' well-being, and the direction of the country, as a whole. We were in uncharted territory, and instinctively we returned to the only source of healing we were absolutely sure of—the mainstay of our Minisink experience—vespers. Another significant point is that it was the younger Minisink alumni, those who camped during the 1980s and 1990s, who organized this gathering. The legacies of collective work and responsibility, unity and respecting elders remained intact.

4.1. Vespers

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Vespers is an evening prayer through which the church fulfills Jesus' command to pray always. "Through this prayer, the people of God sanctify the day by continual praise of God and prayers of intercession for the needs of the world" ([United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2020](#), para. 1). While Minisink's roots were undeniably Christian, its adaptation of Vespers was non-denominational. It also incorporated many rituals that were drawn from African American culture.

Camp Minisink had many enclosed structures or buildings in which daily Vespers services could have been held. Occasionally, due to inclement weather, it was held in the dining hall or in our individual units. However, mainly we gathered in the "chapel", which was located on the main campus, a few steps away from the large dining hall. It was a rugged construction, which we quietly entered each evening after supper via a rock-strewn path. It was a secluded area beneath tall pine trees with wooden benches for seating campers and staff. We had a glorious view of the lovingly named Root Beer Lake, and the outline of the Shawangunk Mountains. In this serene setting we meditated and sang of the beauty of nature around us. The deck in the front of the chapel, which was also wooden was the focal point for African American rhythmic dancing, scripture and poetry reading, and the sharing of reflections of the day. "The hand carved sign above the deck, made from birch tree bark read, "In the Beginning God", something that none of us would ever forget" (Theodora Mason, personal communication, 29 April 2020).

The aforementioned traditions of God, unity, family, respect for elders could all be found in the Vespers ritual.

Each of camper units, even the youngest ones, had responsibility for designing and implementing an evening Vespers service. The friendly sibling rivalry ensured that each offering was as unique and as creative as possible, yet we all knew the songs and committed them to memory. We were mesmerized by the dancing, long before liturgical or praise

dancing became popular in Black church services. Young children who often get restless during traditional church services, eagerly awaited Vespers each evening.

4.2. Sunday Morning Sings

Closely related to Vespers was the Sunday morning sings which took place after breakfast. The songs were led by Thornie, the Camp Director, with enthusiasm and passion. We can still hear the collective harmonious voices of 400 campers singing “What Band Sunday Morning?” or “Somebody Bigger Than You and I” to name just two. Thornie’s command of the music along with the jingle of the many bangles on her arms as she moved them in time with the songs are fond memories that many of us imitate when gathered together. No hymnals, no song sheets—just pure imitation and identification (Maric et al. 2017) with Thornie, taught us the lyrics to those songs. Again, without knowing it, the call and response communication styles of our African and African American ancestors were being passed onto yet another generation (Floyd 1996). Four hundred children from Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens, who according to Wilkerson (2020) had been assigned to the lowest American caste possible by virtue of their skin color were unwittingly learning through these spiritual renditions how to express their sadness, anguish and despair, but also how to cope, endure, liberate and celebrate (Robinson 2015). Ani (as cited in Robinson 2015) wrote, “Spirituals provided that normalcy, an expression of their culture while allowing the enslaved Africans to heal” (p. 9). It is to these very songs that so many of us have returned decades later in the now monthly Vespers services that have been resurrected during the anguish and despair of the current pandemic.

4.3. Sunday Worship

One might think that daily Vespers services and Sunday morning sings after breakfast were enough to ground us spiritually. Yet, consistent with the truism that spirituality is ever present in the lived experiences of African Americans, Sunday worship services not only exemplified this fact, but highlighted additional rituals that may not appear overtly sacred or divine in nature.

After the robust hour-long, post-breakfast Sunday morning sing, campers returned to their units to get dressed for Sunday worship. We wore our Sunday “whites”—white shorts or pants, white tee shirts, and white blazers for those in Tapawingo. Sellers (2020), describing his experience at the historically Black male Morehouse College wrote “We dress like one unit, which says it matters to me, your brother that you are successful, because you represent me, and I represent you” (p. 54). Sellers suggests that such ceremonial nature of dress immerses you into the collective; that regardless of where you actually came from, the transmitted message of the uniformity in dress was that you were part of a group, a people that was destined to lead.

While the service itself was more like an extended Vespers, it set the tone for the remainder of the day. Sunday activities were less structured and more relaxed. Lunch was in the African American tradition of after service *soul food*, but supper was always light—usually sandwiches (which was not the typical meal fare at Minisink!). If memory serves us well, admission to Sunday suppers was always a letter home, a way of reminding us that we had familial connections to maintain during our stay at camp. The flow—from breakfast, to Sunday morning sing, to Sunday worship in dress whites, through lunch and supper kept us in touch with the importance of holding God sacred, of honoring a day of rest and of our interconnectedness with each other. These healing traditions, these safety and protective factors continue to be cornerstones in the lives of many of us who proudly call ourselves Minisinkers.

Purpose

“We desire to bequeath two things to our children; the first one is roots, the other one is wings”. (Mustapha 2020, p. 23)

(Sudanese Proverb)

Karenga (2007) stated that the Kwanzaa principle of purpose (Nia) “reinforces the central ethical teachings of our ancestors that humans are chosen to bring good in the world and that we should and shall never rest until the goodness and well-being of the world and all in it are secured. It cultivates in us an active consciousness of this sacred assignment given by heaven and compelled by history and reminds us to be rightfully attentive to the awesome duty our identity demands of us in our personal and social relationships and lives” (p. 2).

Deeply rooted within the African ethos since prior to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, *rites of passage* training have been a sacrosanct entree into adulthood. With that knowledge is the understanding that adolescents engaged in rites of passage and other Africentric cultural adaptations will emerge as responsible adults who add to their families, communities and the world. Additionally, armed with such newly learned life skills these young people will be less likely to engage in risky behaviors especially those associated with violence or that are detrimental to their health. A recent Harlem-based Amsterdam News article quoted Dr. Brian Agard, of the Minority Achievement Office in Orlando, Florida. He stated that mentees are 46 per cent less likely than their peers to start using drugs and 27 per cent less likely to use alcohol (Caldwell 2019).

Rites of passage training are considered essential parts of the social and spiritual passage into adulthood. (Okwumabua et al. 2014; Washington et al. 2017). African American culture in the United States is a hybrid of African and American cultures. Thus, Africans in the diaspora often borrow Africentric principles and apply them to United States based rites of passage programs (Orisa Lifestyle Academy 2015).

The term rites of passage was not part of the Minisink lexicon. However, the intent of such traditions and the accompanying processes were and continue to be the foundations of all Minisink inspired programs for boys, girls, adolescents and young adults. Van Genep (as cited in Pinckney et al. 2020) describes rites of passage as a ritual event that marks a person’s progress from one status to another. Unfortunately, the literature on African American rites of passage programs remains scarce, but what is known is that the healing and safety factors contained within these efforts include the cultivation of a positive racial identity, and positive behavioral outcomes that enhance the experiences of both the individual and their racial community (Pinckney et al. 2020). This has been found to be especially true for Black males, who are mentored by Black male elders (Washington et al. 2017). Young people who experience such programs emerge with a sense of purpose and belonging. They gain a sense of possibility and a vision of what their contribution might be to a greater good.

4.4. Crossroads Africa

Crossroads Africa was a program in which selected Minisinkers who showed promise for leadership, spent several weeks in a chosen African nation to learn the culture, and history of that country. Upon their return, these young people, many of whom were counselors or counselors-in-training would in turn, share information, stories, dress, and information from the Motherland with campers:

My first view of an African American in African dress not on television was as a 10-year-old camper. To this day I can recite a Somali children’s song I learned over 50 years ago. Unbeknownst to us as children, we were re-learning a history that was stolen 400 years previous. We learned to look upon our African heritage with pride, thus countering the onslaught of negative images of people of color portrayed in the media. Minisink administrators connecting young adults with the Crossroads Africa program invested wisely. (Avon T. Morgan, Jr., personal communication, 15 August 2020)

Today, travel to and from African countries is commonplace for many African Americans. It cannot be emphasized enough how novel this idea was prior to the 1970s, when Camp Minisink was in its heyday. Exposing African American youth to a counter-narrative about their roots and their ancestry was indeed an esteem-building intervention that un-

doubtedly contributed to the strong sense of racial and cultural identity that many alumni have. Again the concept of service was reinforced through the notion of “each one, teach one”. There was a sense of purpose for those who participated in Crossroads Africa who upon their return were expected to share what they had learned with other campers.

4.5. Counselor Exchange Program

Closely related to Crossroads Africa was the Counselor Exchange Program. Every summer people from throughout the globe came to Camp Minisink to serve as counselors for the summer. Living, eating, playing with and disciplining us were young men and women from Sweden, Germany, the Ivory Coast, Finland, England and Russia, to name a few. We also had African American counselors from other parts of the United States—Virginia, the Carolinas, Tennessee. Youngsters who were normally limited to “the block” on which they lived in the city, suddenly became aware of a much larger world beyond what they knew. We learned new languages, new clothing styles (many of the older female campers hunted down Swedish clogs when we returned home!) and new customs. Specifically, building relationships with European Whites was a very different experience for many of the campers and quite different from what many of us were accustomed to in our day-to-day experiences. Conversely, the negative stereotypes about African Americans that are often promulgated around the world, were quickly dispelled as Ulla, Wolfgang, Yao, Ursula, Eric and many others got to know us. Furthermore, lifelong relationships were often formed between counselors who shared cabins and work responsibilities for the summer:

Ulla was six years older than me. She was from Stockholm Sweden. We shared a cabin for the entire summer, supervising revolving groups of little girl campers who were five and six years-old. Ulla could not understand how during Sunday morning sings the girls and I (as well as the other campers) could so easily clap in rhythm to the songs. We couldn't understand how she so easily ate everything on her plate—even liver, which we all hated!...Ulla visited me and my family in the housing projects in the Bronx, during the camp break between the July and August sessions. Many years later, my partner, my son and I spent ten days with her and her family in Sweden. Her son and his fiancé, and on another occasion her niece spent time with me at my home in Westchester County, New York. We were family . . . we maintained a 45-year, long distance relationship, until her transition in 2013. I miss her. (Robyn Brown-Manning, personal communication, 10 September 2020)

Farah (2001) wrote, “These days, a college semester abroad is de rigueur. But there’s something to be said for exposing children to other cultures during more formative years” (p. 16). Through a Minisink lens, such exposure was an extension of our belief in unity. It taught us that we were not only members of our biological family or even the Minisink family; that we were members of the global family and that we were not limited by geographic boundaries. We learned that racial and cultural differences did not have to be adversarial in nature, and that everyone had something of value to offer the world—including us. The experience gave us a sense of purpose. Undergirding all of this is the Kwanzaa principle of *Nia* or purpose, reinforcing the notion that as global citizens we are called upon to leave the world in better condition than we found it.

4.6. Order of the Feather

The Order of the Feather (“The Feather”) joined the cadre of Minisink programs in 1946. Although the program currently refers to itself as a junior fraternity, it remains a risk prevention volunteer program. African American men and elders guide teenagers and young men into manhood. The rigorous initiation into the Feather challenges the mind, body and spirit. The reason for this intense training is deliberate. As many of the program participants come from particularly traumatic situations, by taking a balanced approach, it is designed to deter unhealthy behaviors; instill a sense of personal and fiscal responsibility;

develop overall social skills; and better prepare participants for leadership, for college and other long-term life goals.

In keeping with Africentric principles, young men are taught to have a strong self-esteem, to care for their “brothers”, their family and their community and celebrate their Blackness. During the initiation, each “pledgee” is required to engage in athletic activities, memorize personal aspirations, read at least one book, usually with an Africentric theme and become critical thinkers. “Even after 54 years, I recall our assigned book, *Before the Mayflower* by Lerone Bennett which traced almost 500 years of African and African American history and contributions” (Avon T. Morgan, Jr., personal communication, 20 August 2020).

The ceremonial Tap Out is the culminating event of the program when the pledges formally cross over into full-fledged Feathermen. At camp, it was always a much-anticipated activity which all campers attended. The ceremony was modeled after Indigenous Pow-Wows, complete with Indigenous dress, dance and song. Unlike many other camps which appropriated Native traditions for their summer experiences, Burgie, one of the elder fathers of Minisink had actually spent time on reservations out West. Not only was he trained in their traditions, but he was given permission to incorporate them into Minisink’s programs and practices. In addition, an elder of the Cherokee nation oversaw all of the Feather rituals to insure authenticity and appropriate meaning-making. Furthermore, with a keen understanding that this specific portion of programming may be interpreted as appropriative, we shared our manuscript with said enrolled elder of the Cherokee Nation who reviewed it and verified the accuracy of our descriptions as well as the process of relational exchange. We want to reinforce the notion that any programming of this nature should be done in mutually beneficial exchange, partnership, and relationship with Indigenous peoples. The bond between Indigenous and African American cultures is palpable throughout all aspects of the Minisink experience.

Recalling Sellers’ (2020) earlier referenced comment about the significance of uniformity in dress, the signature maroon and white sweater, with the large letter M on the chest, lets the community and the world know that this young man is now a Featherman, with a sense of purpose and a commitment to his fellow Feathermen, his community and to the world.

4.7. *Minisink Cadet Corp (aka City Mission Cadet Corp)*

New York City Mission’s Harlem Unit and Minisink’s youngsters’ camping experience proved so successful, that by 1945, City Mission saw the opportunity to provide inner city boys with year-round activities. The program expanded and collaborated with other community organizations and churches throughout the city. One of the larger newly incorporated programs was the Minisink Cadet Corp (Miller and Miller 1962), under the leadership of recently discharged veteran, Wilbert E. Burgie. Targeting boys who might otherwise be recruited into gangs, the Cadet Corp grew to include several hundred program participants. In addition to mastering marching and drills, the program trained its members in leadership skills through a variety of workshops. It produced legions of individuals who would later serve in the armed forces as noncommissioned and commissioned officers.

4.8. *Tapawingo*

Of all the Minisink programs, Tapawingo or Tap as it is commonly called is probably the most touted, the most recognized and probably perceived by many as being the most elite. The Order of the Feather is probably second in line. Unlike the Feather and many of the other Minisink programs that are too numerous to name, Tapawingo membership is not organized around gender. Young men and young women are eligible to be part of the program. Tap was and continues to be a year-long initiation process. Campers are selected to be in Tap, thus the illusion of it being somewhat elite. Not every camper gets to participate in this organization, which somewhat reflects Greek sororities and fraternities that are common on Black college campuses (In fact, for many Minisinkers who were not

able to attend a Black college, the overall Minisink experience is often described as a close alternative).

Every year, a different class is formed, and they become known as Tapawingo of that year. Co-authors (Sharon Lockhart Carter) and (Robyn Brown-Manning) became Tap sisters in 1967. There was a total of 67 campers in our Tap, although the matching number is coincidental. Co-author (Avon T. Morgan, Jr.) is our “older” Tap brother, as he was in Tap ‘66. While we were considered the counselor-in-training component of the camp, we were very much a leadership development program. Through a very intentional design we learned all of the healing processes which Somé (1993) and Karenga (2007) outlined as deriving from the African cosmos. In addition to those characteristics already illustrated through other Minisink activities, the qualities of trust, openness, and love and care came in the forms of both overt and subliminal lessons:

“I still have the notebook we were required to maintain. It has detailed descriptions of 27 sessions that I attended in July, when I was at camp. My notes describe everything from studying the many types of trees throughout the grounds; what to expect from college life; talking with a social worker about sex; and talking with counselors from different countries. The notebook includes a music appreciation section, a poetry section, and a full outline on the meaning of camp. There is even a handwritten vocabulary list of 48 words!” (Robyn Brown-Manning, personal communication, 5 September 2020)

The notebook captures how much we were required to work in collaboration, not only with our Tap sisters and brothers, but with many others in the camp community. It recalls the times when there was discord to the detriment of the entire group, as well as the times when the love that was fostered in us outweighed the petty disagreements that are so common among adolescents.

Each Tap year also had a unique theme, song, poem and book on African American history that we were required to read. While this provided each class with its distinct signature or culture, when woven together a pattern across Tap years definitely emerges. Consistently we see the African traditions of unity, faith, respect for elders, collective work and responsibility embedded in everything that we say and do. It is organic; it is who we are.

5. Our Discoveries

The first discovery was how remarkably similar our stories were. While this may have been a feature of us having been campers during the same time periods, the informal exchanges that we heard during the recently resurrected Vespers services (which is discussed later in this article) suggest that campers who are both older and younger than us had very similar experiences. This furthered our understanding that there was indeed a model that transcended the decades. Our memories were all positive, with very limited recollections of negative or troubling incidents. Without exception, words such as *family, safety, elders, spirituality and singing* appeared in each of our remembrances. These terms mirrored what we learned through our literature review on African cosmology, ideology and rituals.

Our next realization was how the Minisink experience had not only shaped our visions for our chosen profession but was directly related to our decisions to work within Black communities and with Black youth. Beyond paid employment, embedded in our psyches was the importance of service to the global community. We are all well-traveled; the desire and the possibility for world travel was gifted to us through the exposure to counselors from other countries and the Crossroads Africa program. Through our dialoguing we identified a critical curiosity about the workings of other governments. Our travels are never strictly for entertainment or relaxation, but to also learn about other cultures, practices and policies, especially regarding diasporic Africans. We believe that the readings we were required to do in several Minisink programs planted the seeds for these tendencies.

Our deference to elders, even as we approach 70 years of age, ourselves, is palpable. Each of us is intimately involved with a minimum of one elder, be it a parent, a neighbor

or a community group. We intuitively address them with a title, never by their first names. Our involvement ranges from running errands, to assisting with health care issues, to cooking or just being a social companion. Each of us is employed, either full or part time. Each of us has family obligations and each of us does volunteer work. Yet, we are clear, that serving an elder is not a choice or an option. We sat at the feet of Ma Kline and Thornie and Burgie who gave us the roadmap that we are each following today. We are still young enough to continue to learn from our elders, but we find ourselves grooming our own children and the youth with whom we work to do the same with us and others of older generations.

Our involvement in formal religious practices differ. We are of different faiths, with very different levels of commitment to religious dogma and doctrine. Regardless, there is a deep recognition that there is something larger than us in the Universe. Of interest, is the fact that none of us is able to separate this understanding from the strong connection we feel with the earth and nature. Again, although unnamed, the African rootedness to the land, the honoring of song and dance as gifts from the Creator to be returned to the Creator was ever present at camp and continues to be so.

6. Discussion

As these findings are not the outcome of an extensive, traditional research study, we recognize that there are limitations to these discoveries. They are primarily the stories of three people, who attended camp during the same period and who were influenced by the experience to become social workers. Our contribution focuses on the Africentric foundation of the Minisink Model, which heretofore has not been identified as such. Our findings illustrate the lifelong impact of such programming and holds potential for contemporary youth serving agencies in Black communities. We are acutely mindful of the challenges that so many Black and Brown children are facing today. In almost every institution, they are situated at the wrong end of the statistical equation. Black and Brown youth are overrepresented in the foster care system. The school-to-prison pipeline seems to have been customized for them. They are routinely dehumanized, if not actually murdered by law enforcement, and too often experience these same outcomes from their peers. Obesity, diabetes, and high cholesterol are becoming commonplace. Suicide among Black children between the ages of 5–12 is twice that of their White counterparts (Nutt 2018).

Frameworks for safety and protective factors abound. They are most visible in the very services that disproportionately work with African American children and families: the child welfare system; under-resourced public schools; juvenile detention centers, etc. The [Center for the Study of Social Policy \(2018\)](#) in its research informed protective factors framework, *Strengthening Families*, highlights the importance of engaging programs, families and communities in building five key protective factors: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in the times of need, and social/emotional competence of children. The Child Welfare Gateway (n.d) adds to this list the importance of mutual aid and cultural practices.

While the frameworks are designed to support all families, based on the previously mentioned trajectories and experiences, we know that they are largely applied to African American children and their networks. Given its success with thousands of children across multiple decades and myriad challenges faced in their communities, it behooves organizations to employ many of the strategies included in the Minisink Model. Familiarizing themselves with the frameworks offered by [Somé \(1993\)](#) and [Karenga \(2007\)](#) would insure that all programming, interventions and other services are culturally responsive and grounded in an Africentric cosmology. Recruiting and embracing community elders—grandmothers, grandfathers, othermothers/fathers, religious leaders, barbers and beauticians, etc. to work in collaboration with existing staff is critical to the success of this model.

Of utmost importance is allowing these collaborators to bring their intuitive wisdom to the work. The language and strategies they use with young people may not be found in the evidence-based research, we as professionals have come to rely on. The Minisink

Model offers a different type of knowing; a different type of protection; a different type of healing. When the *mauma* or a “Ma” Kline figure lays her hand on a youngster’s head and says “I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you and not harm you to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:1), it may momentarily feel like a violation of church and state boundaries. Yet, it is this expression of faith, that may remind youth of their own *maumas* or grandmothers. When group singing is introduced as a routine part of practice, it is more than just fun, it creates an atmosphere of “psychological liberation” (Robinson 2015, p. 13). It enables young people, like those of us at Minisink to cope, endure and celebrate. Intentionally using concepts such as brother and sister, aunt and uncle taps into the common familial terms that exist within African American culture and foster the Africentric notion of unity and kinship beyond blood. Lifelong associations and the ability to network with others organically emerge from young people’s recognition of themselves as valued members of a larger entity. Lastly, as Karenga (2007) points out when defining the Kwanzaa principle of purpose (Nia), youth exposed to the Minisink Model have the increased likelihood of bringing this spirit to other communities, social service organizations, businesses, etc. Endowed with the ancient teachings of their ancestors is the understanding that they are global citizens with a responsibility to the world. Such responsibility also entails being mindful and in integrity with practices that are borrowed from other cultures, such as Indigenous populations. While previously stated, it bears repeating that every effort must be made to engage with those who have first-hand knowledge and proprietorship over these activities. Doing so minimizes the actual or perceived appropriation of another’s cultural traditions.

Going forward, additional exploration of the Minisink Model would be helpful. Interviewing a larger sample of Minisinkers from all decades, professions and life trajectories could add depth to the current findings and highlight any limitations that we may have overlooked. As mentioned earlier, to our knowledge nothing formal and comprehensive has ever been written about Camp Minisink. It is our hope that this contribution is merely the first entry to what we are referring to as ‘the greatest story never told’.

7. Conclusions: The Minisink Gift

During one of our recent Zoom Vespers gatherings, we were Zoom bombed. In the midst of a song that was being sung by three young women from one of Minisink’s programs, we overheard someone use the word “nigger”. Suddenly the word was being written in big dark letters on the screen and before any of us really knew what was occurring, several naked White men were on the screen masturbating and calling out all types of obscenities. This all happened within about 90 seconds, but it felt like a lifetime. The host quickly shut the meeting down and emailed everyone (close to 100 of us) the new password to re-enter.

As we gradually made our way back to the gathering, we could hear those who had arrived before us calmly singing one of our favorite Minisink songs. How easily we tapped into those unnamed African-centered healing and protective factors we had unwittingly learned so long ago. Our unity, our love and care for each other, our faith, our collective calling on the ancestors armored us against what could have been a devastating and traumatic experience. Ma Kline, Thornie, Daniel Taylor and Burgie knew they would be unable to shield us from the pain and the horror of racism, terrorism and hate. However, they knew they could reach back to the wisdom of the ancestors to provide us with the tools that allowed us to get through that Zoom Vespers and through so many other of life’s challenges.

In the spirit of one of our favorite camp songs, we offer the gift of the Minisink Model to the larger community of those serving African American children and youth:

There lies a world beyond these mountains
There lies a world for us to see
And we must go beyond these mountains
Dear Lord, help us to walk with thee.

Oh, Tapawingo, we'll serve gladly
 On life's roads be they high or low
 Oh, Tapawingo, we'll serve gladly
 And take thy fame wher'er we go.
 Yes, we will follow all thy teachings
 As Tapawingos, we will lead
 We'll try to serve all others nobly
 And to the world our best we'll give. (author unknown)

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