

For the Benefit and Enjoyment of *Which* People?
African Americans and America's National Parks



The Roosevelt Arch outside the northern entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

Leni Hirsch
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Introduction

For the past twenty-eight years, Shelton Johnson has worked as a ranger for the National Park Service. One time, when a family drove up to Johnson's station at Yellowstone National Park's western entrance, Johnson recalls being startled; the driver had to regain his composure before saying, "You're the last thing I expected to see at this gate."¹ Why was this seemingly ordinary event so extraordinary? Because both men were African American.^{2, 3}

Yellowstone, where Johnson was stationed, was the first of the United States' fifty-eight national parks,⁴ sometimes called "America's best idea."⁵ President Ulysses S. Grant established it as such on March 1, 1872. During the next four decades, his successors recognized some of America's most stunning outdoor spaces, including Yosemite, Mount Rainier and Crater Lake, as national parks. Until 1916, these parks were managed by the Department of Interior, while the War Department and the Forest Service administered other monuments, natural lands and historical areas. In 1916, however, Congress passed the Organic Act of 1916, thereby creating the National Park Service (NPS), which serves as a single agency providing "unified management of the varied federal parklands."⁶ In the act, Congress codified the NPS' dual

¹ Glenn Nelson, "How Shelton Johnson Became the Buffalo Soldiers' Champion," *High Country News*, July 28, 2016, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.hcn.org/articles/from-detroit-to-yosemite-the-journey-of-shelton-johnson-champion-of-the-buffalo-soldiers>.

² This encounter is not unique; many similar situations have been highlighted in the popular media. In 2010, when Oprah and Gayle King went to visit Johnson at Yosemite for an episode of *The Oprah Show*, they joked that they would be able to recognize Shelton "for sure" because he would be the only African American ranger present. Later in the episode, when they run into another African American visitor, Oprah and Gayle take a picture with him, commemorating their encounter with "the one other black person we saw." In 2009, African American actor Blair Underwood was depicted going hiking as a part of a *Funny or Die* sketch. At one point, a park ranger approaches Underwood and says, "We just want proof that you were here. This is really amazing for us." Other visitors' jaws drop when they encounter him on the path. And in a 2013 *New Republic* article, Ryan Kearney notes that the top hits for the Google search "hikers" do not include a picture of an African American person. The same goes for when a person Google searches "national park visitors."

³ In this paper, I will refer to "black" Americans as African Americans. The NPS uses this terminology, and, for the sake of consistency, I have chosen to reflect its language.

⁴ In this paper, "national parks" will refer specifically to the "wilderness" national parks (as opposed to the NPS' historical or cultural units).

⁵ Wallace Stegner, 1983 as quoted in "Famous Quotes Concerning the National Parks," NPS, Last modified January 16, 2003, accessed November 23, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/hisnps/NPSThinking/famousquotes.htm>

⁶ "History," NPS, accessed November 23, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/history.htm>.

mission: "...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such a means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."⁷

One hundred years after the NPS was charged to protect these national jewels for future generations, the national parks welcome more visitors than ever before. In 2015, they received 75,290,221 visitors.⁸ This number is so large in part because there are now fifty-eight national parks,⁹ covering over 52 million acres.¹⁰ But even within Yellowstone, the first of such parks, the number of visitors has skyrocketed from 5,414 in 1906 to 4,150,217 in 2015.¹¹

And yet, the demographics of these visitors are not representative of the country's. Indeed, if one were to expect that the percentage of African Americans within the general United States' population would constitute the same percentage of visitors to NPS units, then, in 2008-09, African Americans were "under-represented" by five percentage points.¹² While 13% of the United States' population is African American, only 8% of visitors were.¹³ "NPS units" include not only national parks, but also historic sites, battlefields and parkways. The NPS does not publish specific figures about the racial distribution of visitors to national parks versus

⁷ *Organic Act. Title 16*, sec. 1, 1916. <https://www.nps.gov/mora/learn/management/upload/ORGANIC-ACT.pdf>.

⁸ The NPS does not track the number of individual visitors; they use the number of total visits as a proxy for this data. Therefore, if a person visits Yellowstone in June and July of the same year, he will be counted twice.

⁹ "Annual Park Ranking Report for Recreation Visits in 2010 (Park Type: National Park)," NPS, Accessed October 24, 2016, [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/National%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Ranking%20Report%20\(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/National%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Ranking%20Report%20(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)).

¹⁰ "Summary of Acreage," National Park Service, December 31, 2015. <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/FileDownload/1226>.

¹¹ "Yosemite NP Annual Park Recreation Visitation," NPS, Accessed October 23, 2016, [https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)?Park=YOSE](https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=YOSE).

¹² Patricia A. Taylor, Burke D. Grandjean, and James H. Gramann, "National Park Service comprehensive survey of the American public 2008–2009: Racial and ethnic diversity of national park system visitors and non-visitors," The NPS, July 2011. Accessed November 23, 2016, https://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/CompSurvey2008_2009RaceEthnicity.pdf, 10.

¹³ "Quick Facts," US Census Bureau, accessed October 24, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>.

monuments or battlefield parks. All other data indicate, however, that African Americans would be at least as under-represented in the national parks specifically, if not more so, than in other NPS units. In 2011, 92% of visitors to Shenandoah National Park were white¹⁴, indicating that African American visitors were underrepresented by five percentage points, if not more.¹⁵ In 2009, a survey including a random sampling of visitors to Yosemite showed that only 1% of visitors were African American.¹⁶ Additionally, the Forest Service, which has purview over national forests and wilderness areas where people go to pursue many of the same activities they might in national parks, found that, between fiscal years 2008 and 2012, 95% of visitors were white.¹⁷ Essentially, while the NPS, as an entire system and service, has a “diversity problem,” the national parks have an even more acute one.

The first African American NPS director, Robert Stanton, who was appointed by President Clinton in 1997, stated after his retirement that it is “*philosophically*” and “*practically*” important to act on the observation that the American outdoors in general, and its national parks specifically, have historically excluded African Americans and, today, attract a disproportionately small number of African American visitors.¹⁸ Philosophically, it is wrong that public lands, especially ones imbued with cultural significance, appear to serve only a segment of society. Practically, the members of Congress who vote on whether or not to protect the outdoors represent an increasingly non-white population. By 2050, less than half of the United

¹⁴ For the purposes of this paper “white” is to mean “non-Hispanic white.”

¹⁵ Marc F. Manni, Wayne Morse, Yen Le, and Steven J. Hollenhorst. “Shenandoah National Park Visitor Study Summer and Fall 2011.” NPS, October, 2012, accessed November 24, 2016, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/461667>, vii.

¹⁶ Blotkamp, A., B. Meldrum, W. Morse, and S. J. Hollenhorst, “Yosemite National Park visitor Study Summer 2009,” *Park Studies Unit, Visitor Services Project Report 215* (2010), accessed November 23, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/nature/upload/Visitor-Use-Summer-2009-Study.pdf>, 14.

¹⁷ “National Visitor Use Monitoring Results (FY 2008-10),” USDA Forest Service, accessed October 24, 2016, http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/2012%20National_Summary_Report_061413.pdf, 8.

¹⁸ Robert Stanton, interview by Janet A. McDonnell, Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park System, 2005, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/director/stanton.pdf, 73.

States' population will be white.¹⁹ Stanton pointed out that if this new public does not have positive experiences with the governmental organization that protects the national parks, in addition to other federal lands designated as "wilderness," they will not elect representatives who prioritize preserving these lands.²⁰ Stanton perhaps simplified the equation too much by assuming one-issue voters for instance, but his sentiment stands: these lands require protection and this protection must come from a generation that looks increasingly different from its predecessors.

NPS administrators have recognized this dilemma since the 1960s and have ostensibly taken steps to address it. They have created new NPS units closer to African American populations; made efforts to change the makeup of the NPS workforce; and, introduced innovative programs in an effort to improve relations with African American citizens. What NPS officials and people who have written about this topic have missed, though, is that while these approaches hypothetically address the NPS' practical concern for solidifying a base of supportive voters, they do not properly address the philosophical problem that the NPS is not serving all populations equally and that the American outdoors remains a "white space."²¹ Furthermore, as a result of the NPS' course of action, the national narrative has been muddled; the NPS, as well as the people who write about its efforts, fail to distinguish between the National Park System in its entirety and the national parks; therefore, they do not distinguish between the lack of African American representation in the larger American outdoors from the African American population's exclusion from governmental agency activities. And, even if the NPS were to

¹⁹ "Minorities Expected to Be Majority in 2050," CNN, August 13, 2008, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/08/13/census.minorities/>.

²⁰ Robert Stanton, interview by Janet A. McDonnell, Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park System, 2005, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/director/stanton.pdf, 73.

²¹ In a 2014 article entitled "The White Space," Elijah Anderson, a sociology professor at Yale University, defines "white spaces" as "settings in which black people are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present."

succeed in garnering African Americans' support for the service through these methods, they would not necessarily have helped to fully integrate the American outdoors.

Methodology/Historiography

In order to show how the NPS reinforced the American outdoors and the national parks as white spaces in the second half of the 20th century, I first elucidate how the United States and the NPS' history established the American outdoors as a white space. I then detail how the national parks remained exclusionary during the country's segregationist period, despite efforts from NPS administrators to introduce equality into the parks. I go on to explicate how, under the premise of increasing the NPS' engagement with the African American community during the 1960s and 1970s, the NPS, under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, actually reinforced the American outdoors and the national parks as white spaces. Finally, I examine how the policies from the Kennedy and Johnson era have influenced the NPS today. I argue that its current strategies to attract African American visitors continue to address the practical implications of an increasingly diverse American population, but fail to address philosophical qualms about the American outdoors being a white space.

I am not the first to show that the American outdoors were conceived as white spaces. Most of the literature, however, either look at the general outdoors (as is the case with *Carolyn Finney's Black Faces; White Spaces*²²) or the entire National Park System and/or Services' relationship with ethnic minorities (as is the case with Ken Burns' documentary, *America's Best*

²² Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces : Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, (2014).

*Idea: This is America*²³), rather than the relationship between race, the American outdoors, and the park system meant to protect it.

While others have written about people of color in the national parks, I am intentionally departing from this literature by writing exclusively about the African American experience. Myron F. Floyd points out that, in the 1970s, most of the relevant literature focused on lack of access for African Americans; in the following decades, however, as the Hispanic and Asian American populations grew rapidly, research turned towards studying more diverse racial ethnic sub-populations.²⁴ He hypothesizes that a “pervasive egalitarian sentiment obviated the need to devote significant attention to race.”²⁵ In 2016, following events of police brutality against African Americans and presidential campaigns that sparked a renewed focus on governmental relations with African Americans, it seems appropriate to refocus the conversation on race. Furthermore, African Americans represent the largest minority racial group in the United States and have held that place in society since before the NPS was created.²⁶

I will direct a great deal of attention towards the exclusion of African Americans that took place in southern parks in particular. I made this choice in part because segregation and racial discrimination were most pronounced in this region. Additionally, the South has been home to the majority of African Americans since the time the NPS was founded. In 1900, 90.1%

²³ Ken Burns, *The National Parks America's Best Idea: This Is America*, 2009, <http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/about/this-is-america/>.

²⁴ Note that Floyd defines race “as a social group distinguished... by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of real or perceived *physical* characteristics” while an ethnic group is “set apart on the basis of *cultural* or *nationality* characteristics. Thus, there is not necessarily a relationship between race and ethnicity.”

²⁵ Myron F. Floyd, "Research on race and ethnicity in leisure: Anticipating the fourth wave," *Leisure/loisir* 31, no. 1 (2007), 249.

²⁶ Sandra L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman, "Projections of the Size and Composition of the US Population: 2014 to 2060," *US Census Bureau, Ed*(2015), 6.

of African Americans lived in the South;²⁷ in 2010, 55% of African Americans lived in the South.²⁸

Conceptions of Wilderness

American conceptions of the environment, and of the wilderness in particular, have been developing since the moment the Pilgrims left Europe to establish colonies in the “New World.” In his influential text, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Frazier Nash, a professor emeritus of History and Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, writes that American colonists did not arrive from Europe with an appreciation of the wilderness. The wilderness, and specifically the frontier, presented a formidable challenge to the colonists’ survival; thus, from their perspective, it was not something to be appreciated. In fact, as late as the 18th century, wilderness’ connotations were anything but positive; its synonyms included “deserted,” “savage” and “waste.”²⁹

In just a few generations, however, American views of wilderness changed drastically. Both William Cronin, a professor of History, Geography, and Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and Nash note that the European Romantic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries had a major influence on American conceptions of wilderness. Romantics, especially urban writers, made a strong case for the appreciation of nature.³⁰ They had “an enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary and mysterious... in regard to nature [they] preferred

²⁷ Thomas N. Maloney, “African Americans in the Twentieth Century,” *Economic History*, EH.net, January 14, 2002, accessed November 23, 2016, <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/african-americans-in-the-twentieth-century/>.

²⁸ Sonya Rastogi et al., *The black population: 2010*. US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, US Census Bureau, 2011, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>, 7.

²⁹ William Cronin, “The trouble with wilderness: or, getting back to the wrong nature,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 8.

³⁰ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind: Fifth Edition*, (Yale University Press). 44.

the wild.”³¹ Romantics also valued primitivism. They believed that man’s happiness “decreased in direct proportion to his degree of civilization.”³² Influential European writers, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, encouraged civilized men to engage with primitiveness and praised the sublimity of wilderness.³³ Ultimately, the romantics helped the wild shed its “repulsiveness.”³⁴ Indeed, the wilderness became something to return to rather than something to be avoided.

Ironically, despite the clear influence of European intellectualism on the definition of American wilderness, a major motivation for Americans to embrace the country’s wild spaces was the need to create a “distinctive culture” that was “uniquely American.”³⁵ The American people were self-conscious about their nascent country’s “lack of...cultural sophistication.”³⁶ The country needed something “valuable enough to transform embarrassed provincials into proud and confident citizens.”³⁷ In part because European thought leaders imbued wilderness with such value, the United States’ wilderness, unparalleled in the “Old World,” became an asset and source of pride for Americans and their leaders. President Thomas Jefferson, for instance, insisted that the United States was the world’s leader where nature was concerned and was therefore worthy of the world’s respect.³⁸

By most accounts, the American wilderness’ defining feature was the western frontier. In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner presented his paradigm-shifting “frontier thesis” which stated that “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of

³¹ Ibid., 47.

³² Ibid., 47.

³³ Ibid., 49.

³⁴ Ibid., 44.

³⁵ Ibid., 67.

³⁶ Deni Cosgrove, “Habitable earth: Wilderness, empire, and race in America,” *Wild ideas* (1995): 35, as quoted in Jason Byrne and Jennifer Wolch, “Nature, race, and parks: past research and future directions for geographic research,” *Progress in Human Geography* (2009), 11.

³⁷ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 67.

³⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York, 1964), 17 as quoted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American mind*, 68.

American settlement westward” defined America’s history and culture.³⁹ Cronon argues that, because of how Turner and his contemporaries framed the “frontier myth,” wilderness became “the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American.”⁴⁰ He writes that, “to protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation’s most sacred myth of origin.”⁴¹ Engaging in and conserving the outdoors was to engage in a patriotic act.⁴² For many African Americans, however, the fact that the frontier myth serves as a foundation for the American wilderness is problematic. The slave narrative does not comport with this “myth of origin.”⁴³

Not only is the frontier narrative problematic, American conceptions of wilderness were largely developed by a group of ethnically homogenous, white males who were under the impression that the outdoors was a space exclusively available to them. For example, an examination of the words and actions of President Theodore Roosevelt, the “conservationist president,” reveals that he fostered a conception of wilderness that existed exclusively for certain segments of American society: white, educated males.⁴⁴ Roosevelt developed his passion for the outdoors through his own experiences in nature. He was a feeble young man plagued by neurasthenia, an ailment characterized by “depression, insomnia, anxiety, and migraines, among other complaints.”⁴⁵ Roosevelt’s doctor, Silas Weir Mitchell, treated him with the “West cure,”

³⁹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. Western Americana, Frontier History of the Trans-Mississippi West, 1550-1900 Reel 543, No. 5458. 1894, 2.

⁴⁰ Cronon, “The trouble with wilderness: or getting back to the wrong nature,” 13.

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

⁴² In “The Trouble with Wilderness: A Response” published in volume 1 of *Environmental History* (1996), Cronon admitted that his article “struck a nerve” with many readers and had garnered some sharp critiques from those inside the environmentalist movement. Nevertheless, it has shaped dialogue on this subject for decades.

⁴³ Cronon, “The trouble with wilderness: or getting back to the wrong nature,” 18.

⁴⁴ “Theodore Roosevelt and Conservation,” NPS, accessed October 24, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/theodore-roosevelt-and-conservation.htm>.

⁴⁵ Anne Stiles, “Go Rest, Young Man,” *American Psychological Association* 43, no. No. 1 (January 2012): 32.

which involved engaging in “vigorous physical activity out West, and [writing] about the experience.”⁴⁶

But the “West cure” was not intended for every American because not every American was considered capable of developing neurasthenia. Only a “brain-worker” and his “highly evolved wife and children,” could experience the nervous breakdowns characteristic of the ailment. And even women diagnosed with neurasthenia were not sent to the West; they were sent to rest and reacquaint themselves with the domestic sphere.⁴⁷ Early in the 19th century, African Americans were not even considered to have the “highly evolved brain and nervous system[s]” necessary to develop the illness.⁴⁸ However, the 1840 census found that “insanity” was eleven times more likely for a free African American than an enslaved one.⁴⁹ In fact, this statistic was fabricated in order to provide evidence that enslavement was good for African Americans. Inadvertently though, the statistic also contradicted the long-held assumption that African Americans were not sophisticated enough to have mental illnesses.⁵⁰ Even so, African Americans did not qualify for the “West cure.” While increased freedom and forays into nature were the remedies for white men and domestic life was the cure for white women, the census, with its fictitious statistic, suggested that enslavement was both a preventative measure and treatment for African Americans.

In effect, Roosevelt and many of his early environmentalist contemporaries (including Walt Whitman, for example) discovered the outdoors as a result of a cure, available only to

⁴⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁹ Brad Campbell, “The making of American’: race and nation in neurasthenic discourse,” *History of Psychiatry* 18, no. 2 (2007): 170.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 170.

males, for an illness that was considered a “mark of American cultural superiority.”⁵¹ Furthermore, because part of the West cure included writing about one’s experiences, the narratives of this particular demographic “had a major impact on the nation’s culture” and helped to construct notions of wilderness that exclusively reflected the experiences of white, professional men.⁵² For example, in 1899, as governor of New York, Roosevelt delivered a speech before the Hamilton Club in Chicago entitled “The Strenuous Life.” Douglas Brinkley, who wrote a well-regarded biography of Roosevelt,⁵³ interprets this famous speech as saying that “exertion and physical education [were] national imperatives”⁵⁴ and that “the hardy American character” could be “replenished by the outdoors life.”⁵⁵

Roosevelt’s “strenuous life doctrine” also applied “the basic tenets of Darwinism to a program for Homo sapiens, in the spirit of Horatio Alger’s fictional stories about self-made men.”⁵⁶ For Roosevelt, the outdoors was a place for white, educated males to assert the dominance of the white, American race. Roosevelt was not alone; many of the early conservationists had motivations for preserving aspects of the western frontier that were implicitly, if not explicitly, racist and/or nationalistic. As Jedidiah Purdy aptly stated in a *New Yorker* article, “it was an unsettling short step from managing forests to managing the human gene pool.”⁵⁷ The early conservationists did not want to preserve the frontier just for the sake of it; they wanted to preserve the environment in which earlier—and racially purer—immigrants

⁵¹ Stiles, “Go Rest, Young Man,” 32.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵³ Jonathan Rosen, “Natural Man,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 2009, sec. Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/09/books/review/Rosen-t.html>.

⁵⁴ Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America*, 1st Harper Perennial ed. New York: Harper Perennial, 2010, 350.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁵⁷ Jedidiah Purdy, “Environmentalism’s Racist History,” *New Yorker*, August 13, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalisms-racist-history>.

were believed to have forged American identity.⁵⁸ One such conservationist, Madison Grant, a wildlife zoologist and devout conservationist during the Roosevelt Era, wrote *The Passing of the Great Race, or The Racial Basis of European History*.⁵⁹ The book warns of the decline of the “Nordic” peoples and would later be referred to as “my Bible” by Adolf Hitler. Additionally, Robert Fisher, who served on Roosevelt’s National Conservation Commission (NCC), warned of “race suicide” if America did not experience an influx of Northern European people. Equally troubling is the fact that Gifford Pinchot, who served as head of the NCC, also served as a member of the advisory council to the American Eugenics society.⁶⁰ Finally, though John Muir, a close confidant of Roosevelt’s, did not attend eugenics conferences, he, like Roosevelt, did come to the environmentalist movement very much as a result of his position in society as a white male. During the Civil War, Muir was a draft dodger “apparently having no interest in the fight to save the Union or free the slaves.”⁶¹ Instead, he sought solitude in the Canadian wilderness where his passion for the outdoors was born. While he may never have said anything explicitly derogatory about African Americans, he was not particularly kind to other people of color, calling some of the Native Americans, a group that had resided in the lands that would ultimately become national parks for centuries before the Pilgrims came to America, “dark” and “dirty.”⁶²

Despite the concerning aspects of Roosevelt and his peers’ narratives, Bruce Braun, a professor of geography at the University of Minnesota, points out that they continue to be

⁵⁸ Cosgrove as quoted in Byrne and Wolch. "Nature, race, and parks," 11.

⁵⁹ Purdy, “Environmentalism’s Racist History.”

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Nash as quoted in Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of darkness: Race and environmental history," *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (2003): 386.

⁶² Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 382.

invoked and revered in modern literature.^{63,64} The Progressives made an indelible imprint on perceptions of the American wilderness; the idea of exerting oneself in the outdoors as a defining American experience survived those who originally conceptualized it. For example, in the late 19th century, railroad companies, eager to capitalize on transporting tourists to places like Yellowstone, branded their promotional materials with the phrase “See America First” and images of the national parks.⁶⁵ The messaging is clear: do not vacation in Europe; instead, be patriotic and explore America. Themes from this marketing campaign reemerged in the 1930s and 1940s when the Works Project Administration produced some 2,000 posters of the nation’s landmarks with the words “See America” printed on them.⁶⁶ The idea that the frontier was for only white Americans also persisted. A map of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, published in 1941, proclaims that the park “presents a unique opportunity to preserve frontier conditions of a century ago” and that “the white population of the region still exhibits the pristine ruggedness and self-sufficiency of the pioneer period shortly after the American Revolution.”⁶⁷ Finally, Johnson noted that the popular media has perpetuated the idea that the frontier is and has always been a space for white Americans. He pointed out that it is not the case that African Americans were historically uninterested in the outdoors or did not assign similar cultural significance to it; rather, this perception has developed over time. In western films from the mid-20th century, for example, white actors were cast to play people such as Jim Beckwourth, an

⁶³ Bruce Braun, "On the raggedy edge of risk: Articulations of race and nature after biology." *Race, nature, and the politics of difference* (2003): 197.

⁶⁴ The seminal texts on environmental history, including Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* and Cronin’s “The trouble with Wilderness: or, getting Back to the Wrong Nature” are just two of many texts that cement their place in environmental history and do not recognize non-white perspectives of the outdoors.

⁶⁵ “The Railways, the National Parks and the ‘See America First’ Campaign,” Public Broadcasting Company, *The National Parks America’s Best Idea*, 2009. <http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/history/ep3/3/>.

⁶⁶ “Posters: WPA Posters,” *Library of Congress*, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/wpapos/>.

⁶⁷ “Great Smoky Mountains National Park,” United States Department of the Interior, 1941, “Mountaineer Culture in the Great Smokies.”

African American western explorer, effectively “whitewashing” the western wilderness.⁶⁸ These words and images recall and preserve the American outdoors as a significant space that was created by and for white men of a certain class. They do not necessarily “reflect us at our best rather than our worst,” as Wallace Stegner suggested when he first called the national parks “America’s best idea.”

*Segregation in the Southern National Parks*⁶⁹

The frontier, the defining feature of the American wilderness as conceived in the early 20th century, existed only in the West. As a result, for many years, national parks existed exclusively in the West, as well. In 1919, Acadia National Park was founded in Maine,⁷⁰ but it would take nearly another two decades before Shenandoah National Park, the first park to be authorized in the southern region, to formally open to the public.⁷¹ The eastern natural landscape simply did not fit the criteria for wilderness that needed to be protected. In 1918, the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane, wrote a letter to the first NPS director, Stephen T. Mather, instructing him that new national parks should contain “scenery of supreme and distinctive quality or some national feature so extraordinary or unique as to be of national interest and importance;” Mather was not to allow the national park system to be “lowered in standard, dignity and prestige” by the inclusion of new lands.⁷² Along the same lines, the 1937 “National

⁶⁸ Shelton Johnson (NPS Ranger), in discussion with the author, November 16, 2016.

⁶⁹ In this section, and the one that follows, I cite extensively from materials from Howard University’s archive on W.J. Trent. I would not have been able to locate these papers if it were not for Professor Young’s paper “A Contradiction in Democratic Government”: WJ Trent, Jr., and the Struggle to Desegregate National Park Campgrounds.” *Environmental History* 14, no. 4 (2009): 651-682. It provided a jumping off point for these sections, providing me with much of my background information.

⁷⁰ “Acadia National Park,” National Geographic, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/national-parks/acadia-national-park/>.

⁷¹ “Shenandoah National Park,” National Geographic, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/national-parks/shenandoah-national-park/>.

⁷² Franklin Lane, “Secretary Lane’s Letter on National Park Management,” May 13, 1918,

Park Supplement to Planning and Civic Comment” notes that “while it may be desirable to establish playgrounds according to centers of population and the recreational needs of the communities, it is not possible to select national parks and monuments on that basis.”⁷³

Even once the Shenandoah and Smoky Mountains were identified as natural lands that met the NPS’ standards for national parks, another problem came to the fore: these new areas were not public. Originally, Congress had been able to establish new parks by transferring land from one federal agency to another. But if no such public land existed, that method no longer worked. Congress determined that states or private donors would need to assume the financial and legal costs associated with a new project. In 1926, President Calvin Coolidge signed a bill putting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Shenandoah National Park under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior (and the NPS) as soon as the lands were purchased. As the daily newspaper, the *Boston Evening Transcript*, put it, “...Uncle Sam will not Buy Them, So the Promoters Pass the Hat.”⁷⁴ Ultimately, with the help of philanthropists such as John D. Rockefeller Jr., the states were able to purchase the lands.⁷⁵ Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina opened in 1935 and 1940, respectively.⁷⁶

For the first time, there were national parks and public outdoor spaces within reach of large swaths of the African American population. The logistics of the two southern parks’ creation, however, caused some additional problems for potential African American visitors. Because the federal government had distanced itself during their establishment by not providing

https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/anps/anps_1j.htm.

⁷³ *National Park Supplement to Planning and Civic Comment*. 1936, 8.

⁷⁴ Allen Chamberlain, “Twenty Million Dollars for Two National Parks,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 19, 1925.

⁷⁵ George B. Hartzog Jr., *Battling for the national parks*, Moyer Bell Limited, 1993, 197.

⁷⁶ “Great Smoky Mountains,” NPS, accessed October 30, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/historyculture/stories.htm>.

the funds to purchase the land, in the words of then Virginia Senator Harry Byrd, “it was agreed that all laws governing the [states] would be in effect within the Park area[s].”⁷⁷ This agreement meant that Shenandoah National Park would be segregated, as was the practice in public spaces in Virginia at the time.⁷⁸ From 1932 to 1940, there was an entirely separate facility known as Lewis Mountain intended for African American visitors; it was not fully integrated until 1947.⁷⁹ A similar arrangement was made in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Its master plan, drawn up in the late 1930s, indicated that the park would have three “colored” campgrounds. In fact, by the time the campgrounds were built, they were no longer referenced to as “colored,” but they effectively served that purpose.⁸⁰ As is usually the case, separate excluded the possibility of equal. Lewis Mountain held only a “tenting area,” not a full camping ground.⁸¹ Additionally, according to the civil rights lawyer Phineas Indritz, Lewis Mountain’s location was “inferior in scenic qualities” to the sites reserved for white visitors in Shenandoah National Park.⁸² When considered within the broader context of 20th century American history, it is not surprising that the sites selected for African American usage were not prime locations. While African Americans could now technically reach national parks, once inside the parks, they were withheld the opportunity to experience them in the same way as white visitors.

Segregated facilities were not the only aspect of the national parks’ operating systems that negatively impacted their African American visitors. From the inception of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, it had been the policy of the Department of the Interior and the NPS to

⁷⁷ Byrd as quoted in Robinson as quoted in Susan Shumaker, “Untold stories from America’s national parks Segregation in the National Parks” 1 (2009): 31.

⁷⁸ Shumaker, “Untold Stories,” 29.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁸¹ Anthony French Merrill, *Our Eastern Playgrounds; a Guide to the National and State Parks and Forests of Our Eastern Seaboard* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1950), 224.

⁸² “Memorandum to Solicitor Nathan Margold from Phineas Indritz,” January 12, 1939, William J. Trent Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

rely on private capital to provide and operate facilities such as hotels, lodges and stores within and around the parks.⁸³ While the NPS could dictate certain provisions in its contracts, it was dependent on local companies to provide services for a park. Without them, a park could be out of commission for an entire season.⁸⁴ In the South, the local companies that operated within Shenandoah National Park, such as the Virginia Sky-Line Company, were accustomed to local practices, including strict segregation.⁸⁵ Therefore, in addition to the campsites being segregated, the other facilities within the two parks, such as lunchrooms and gasoline stations, were also segregated.⁸⁶

Despite the hostile conditions and the troubling origins of the national parks, there was sustained interest in them from many within the African American community. In a memorandum to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, his Negro Affairs officer,⁸⁷ W.J. Trent, drew the secretary's attention to the fact that a school teacher in Washington D.C., as well as the Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, had written to the NPS "protesting against the segregation of and discrimination against Negroes in the use of facilities along the Skyline Drive in the Shenandoah National Park."⁸⁸ Furthermore, Indritz pointed out to Nathan Margold, the NPS' solicitor, that "requests by Negro tourists for [lunchrooms, gasoline stations, etc.] [had] frequently been refused."⁸⁹ This often overlooked interest on the part of the African American community reaffirms that this

⁸³ United States. National Park Service. *Employee Handbook : Basic Information for All Employees*. National Park Service In-service Training Series. Washington, D. C.]: Service, 1955, 12.

⁸⁴ Shumaker, "Untold Stories," 32.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁶ "Memorandum to Solicitor Nathan Margold from Phineas Indritz," January 12, 1939.

⁸⁷ A position created during FDR's time in office.

⁸⁸ "Memorandum to Secretary Ickes from W.J. Trent," February 24, 1940, William J. Trent Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁸⁹ "Memorandum to Solicitor Nathan Margold from Phineas Indritz," January 12, 1939.

period of history was marked by active, rather than passive, exclusion of African American from the national parks.

Integration in the Southern Parks

Despite the fact that NPS policy stipulated that racial segregation be maintained, some within the NPS expressed discomfort with these practices. In fact, a group of progressive New Dealers, including Ickes and Trent, made it their mission to integrate the national parks. Not only did they think doing so was a moral imperative, but Margold had also informed Ickes in 1939 that segregation, as it was being practiced within the parks, constituted “an infringement of constitutional principles.”⁹⁰ In 1939, Margold had also informed Ickes and Trent that, contrary to what the Virginian senator might have articulated, the federal government and its agencies, including the NPS, were “not bound by either law or customs” of the states in which parks were located.⁹¹

Despite Margold’s blessing to integrate the parks, Ickes and Trent took a more cautious approach, attempting to integrate them while simultaneously “straddling” southern segregationist policies.⁹² As a “step toward” providing “for all citizens,” Ickes made Shenandoah National Park into a test case. He ordered that one large picnic area, “The Pinnacles,” be integrated and that signs that had previously indicated segregation be removed.⁹³ By adopting this approach, Ickes circumvented the need to introduce new regulations or engage in legal battles, while still taking steps toward integration.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ “Memorandum to Secretary Harold Ickes from Solicitor Nathan Margold,” January 17, 1939, William J. Trent Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC, 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹² Shumaker, “Untold Stories,” 29.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

Skeptics of this plan, including Shenandoah's superintendent, Ralph Lassiter, worried that these changes would put off white visitors and that they would no longer patronize the parks.⁹⁵ Trent wrote to Ickes in 1940, after the policy had been in place for one year, to explain that, "to date, I have heard of no untoward incidents resulting from the opening of the Pinnacles Picnic Ground to all groups. On the contrary, a number of Negroes who visited the area during the past season stated that no question of their use of the area was ever raised by other picnickers."⁹⁶ Oliver G. Taylor, NPS' Chief Engineer, on the other hand, observed that, "whites kept their distance from African Americans at Pinnacles, while others – when they realized that the picnic area was integrated – simply left."⁹⁷ Despite these conflicting reviews, the NPS director at the time, Newton B. Drury, integrated all the picnic areas in Shenandoah National Park for the 1941 season.⁹⁸ During the same year, it was decided that Great Smoky Mountains would operate under similar premises; areas would not be publicly or officially designated for either race, "thereby encouraging – but not legislating – desegregation in the park."⁹⁹

By the end of 1942, though, just a year after these policies were put in place, they became moot. Shenandoah's facilities had been shuttered due to the country's entry into World War II and visitation to the national parks that remained open, including Great Smoky Mountains, dropped drastically.¹⁰⁰ During the war, many federal government organizations were temporarily integrated, including some of the country's combat units.¹⁰¹ When the closed parks re-opened in 1945, Interior officials seized the opportunity to desegregate all of the parks. The Department

⁹⁵ Ibid., 30

⁹⁶ "Memorandum to Secretary Harold Ickes from W.J. Trent," February 24, 1940 as quoted in Young, "W.J. Trent, Jr.," 670.

⁹⁷ Robinson as quoted in Shumaker, "Untold Stories," 31

⁹⁸ Shumaker, "Untold Stories," 31.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰¹ "NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom," Library of Congress, accessed October 30, 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/world-war-ii-and-the-post-war-years.html>.

also issued a general bulletin to all concessioners requiring them to desegregate their facilities.¹⁰² Desegregation in the parks was, in theory, both practically and philosophically beneficial to potential African American visitors. Indeed, it had the potential to end unfair practices within the system, thereby allowing African American visitors to fully experience the parks for the first time and, ideally, become advocates for the NPS for generations to come.

Looking at legislation or official NPS policy, however, is not sufficient to understand the African American experience in the national parks during the 20th century; in fact, integration, and the philosophical and practical benefits it presented, did not immediately follow the order. Firstly, concessioners posed a major problem for park officials. For example, Virginia Sky-Line Company threatened to pull out of its contract if it could not follow Virginia's Jim Crow laws within Shenandoah National Park. Without the means to provide the services for which the concessioner was responsible, the NPS was forced to cave to its demands; it ultimately took until 1950 for the NPS and the concessioner to work together to desegregate Shenandoah.¹⁰³ Secondly, the ranger force undermined desegregation efforts. Though nothing as overt has been documented since the 1945 change in policy, an incident after the 1941 order illustrates how the rangers could thwart administrators' efforts: rangers continued to mark park maps with red pencil to indicate the areas intended for African American visitors, effectively keeping the grounds segregated for months after integration had become park policy.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, in light of the fact that there was not a single African American ranger and that popular opinion of African Americans was quite poor in the South, it can be reasonably deduced that the rangers did

¹⁰² Shumaker, "Untold Stories," 31.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 30.

not suddenly become a welcoming force after the 1950 order.¹⁰⁵ Rangers' importance to the national park experience should not be understated. In his report to the Secretary of the Interior, the first NPS superintendent notes that, "the ranger force in reality makes the success or failure in administering the parks."¹⁰⁶ Guidebooks, published by people independent from the parks, revere the civil servants. For example, in *Our Eastern Playgrounds*, Anthony Merrill notes that, "If you run into difficulties you can count on a Park Service vehicle coming along presently."¹⁰⁷ And, at multiple points in *America's National Parks*, Nelson Beecher Keyes features pictures of visitors discussing their travel plans with rangers. One such picture's caption reads, "United Air Lines stewardess plans an exciting park drive with the help of a ranger." Rangers' aid in planning a visit was especially important in pre-Internet times, as potential visitors could not easily scope out the best camp site or trail prior to their arrival at a park. Rangers had also gained influence directly following integration. During "Mission 66," a postwar effort to improve park infrastructure, the NPS placed "visitor centers" which housed visitor services, interpretive programs and administrative offices on major entry roads so that nearly every visitor to a national park had to come into contact with a park employee.

While the ranger force was within the purview of the NPS, other factors that influenced African American experiences with the outdoors and the national parks shortly after their official desegregation were not within the NPS' control. One of the primary examples of this phenomenon were the conditions that a person had to navigate in order to reach the national parks. While cars had originally been restricted in many of the national parks, by the time Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains were opened, automobiles were the most common way

¹⁰⁵ Robert Stanton, interview by Janet A. McDonnell, Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park System, 2005, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/director/stanton.pdf, 5.

¹⁰⁶ United States. Superintendent of National Parks. *Annual Report of the Superintendent of National Parks to the Secretary of the Interior, for the Fiscal Year Ended ...* 1916, 13.

¹⁰⁷ Merrill, *Our Eastern Playgrounds*, 221.

to get to and travel around the parks. This fact was especially true in the southern parks because Blue Ridge Parkway, a national parkway that was considered an attraction in and of itself, connected them.¹⁰⁸ Yet, a white motorist and an African American motorist might have had quite different experiences while driving to the two parks. In 1920, WEB Dubois wrote that, “The thought of a journey seemed to depress [colored people].”¹⁰⁹ Evidence of the additional stressors African American travelers experienced can be found in travel guides known as “Green Books,” which Victor Hugo Green published between 1936 and 1966. The 20th anniversary edition of one such book notes that while “The white traveler has had no difficulty getting accommodations... [the Negro has] had to depend on word of mouth, and many times accommodations were not available.”¹¹⁰ The 1956 edition notes that the books were meant to help African Americans avoid the “embarrassment” that was too often associated with travel.¹¹¹ The Green Book’s discontinuation in 1966 did not, of course, indicate the end of discrimination in the United States. As D. Parke Gibson, president of a market research firm specializing in the “negro market,” told the New York Times in 1966, “Whether the discrimination is real or imagined, it is there.”¹¹² Even if the NPS had full support from its concessioners and employees, it could not have fully overcome the entrenched values and customs in the areas that surrounded the parks despite the fact that they unquestionably influenced African American visitors’ experiences.

In addition to providing insight into African American travel in the 20th century, the Green Book and similar publications also offer insight into the demand for national park experiences within the African American community. Interestingly, national parks are very

¹⁰⁸ “Blue Ridge Parkway,” Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/attractions-destinations/blue-ridge-parkway>

¹⁰⁹ William Dubois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (Courier Corporation: 1920), 228.

¹¹⁰ “The Negro Travelers’ Green Book: Fall 1956,” The New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9c454830-83b9-0132-d56a-58d385a7b928>, 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹² “Discrimination and Negro Tourists.” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 23, 1966. <http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/docview/116942548?accountid=11311>.

present in some editions of the Green Book, but not in others. For example, the 1950 edition has a feature on Mt. Rainier National Park;¹¹³ the 1952 edition contains a list of the national parks and the contact information for their superintendents. Readers, however, are instructed to contact the chambers of commerce in nearby towns to find out more about “places to stay” near the national parks.¹¹⁴ Curiously, the Green Book does not serve as an authority on hotels near national parks as they do for hotels in major cities. Furthermore, in some editions, the national parks are left out entirely. In the 1956 edition, for example, not a single national park is mentioned.¹¹⁵ Similarly, a map of the eastern seaboard,¹¹⁶ published in 1942 by a consortium of African American Newspapers in a similar spirit of the Green Book, does not include Shenandoah or Blue Ridge Mountains national parks, despite the fact that they were considered big attractions in the southern states to the broader population.¹¹⁷ Ultimately, while not every publication featured the national parks, they were presented as options for African American travelers within African American publications, signifying that lack of interest alone could not possibly explain the dearth of African American faces in the national parks. Rather, other factors were serving as deterrents to African American visitation.

Post-Segregation Era in the Parks: The 1960s-80s

¹¹³ "The Negro Motorist Green Book: 1950," New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/283a7180-87c6-0132-13e6-58d385a7b928#/?uuid=288f9b40-87c6-0132-0441-58d385a7b928>, 7.

¹¹⁴ "The Negro Motorist Green Book: 1952," New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed October 31, 2016. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/42c15a10-92c7-0132-cf89-58d385a7b928#/?uuid=4347c210-92c7-0132-6d7f-58d385a7b928>, 2-4.

¹¹⁵ "The Negro Motorist Green Book: 1956," New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed October 31, 2016. <http://digital.tcl.sc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/greenbook/id/88>.

¹¹⁶ See appendix A.

¹¹⁷ Afro-American Newspapers. *Afro American Travel Map*. Baltimore: Afro-American Newspapers, 1942.

Despite hindrances, FDR's administration, and specifically Ickes and Trent, is credited with *officially* desegregating the national parks. Nevertheless, FDR's appointees left a system with a great deal of possibility for improvement with regard to equal opportunity within and access to the national parks. Arguably, the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies were the first administrations to try to promote better access to the NPS and its units for African Americans. Many of their efforts, however, had long-lasting, unintended consequences that damaged the NPS' relations with African American citizens and reinforced the American outdoors as a white space.

President Kennedy laid the groundwork for and President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The act formally ended segregation in public places and has been called the "crowning legislative achievements of the civil rights movement."¹¹⁸ While not directly related to the NPS, the act did address some factors outside the NPS' purview that influenced African American vacationers, including travel conditions in the South.

The same year that President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, however, he also signed The Wilderness Act. In her book, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, Finney, a professor of Geography at the University of Kentucky, argues that when considered together, the Civil Rights and Wilderness Acts had unintended implications for the definition of the American outdoors. Finney claims that the two pieces of legislation "have influenced how we frame, name and claim issues relating to environment and race... [and] provides some insight into the "disconnect" between the construction of race and the environment in the United States."¹¹⁹ At a time when African Americans were making huge progress in their struggle for equality, Congress was simultaneously codifying values put forth by the likes of John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt and

¹¹⁸ "Civil Rights Act," The History Channel, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-act>.

¹¹⁹ Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, 44.

their more modern peers, including Howard Zahniser and Colin Fletcher. Furthermore, Finney aptly points out that the Wilderness Act focuses on preserving wilderness areas for “public purposes,” but does not appear to take into consideration the entire American public.¹²⁰ For example, the act includes words such as “primitive,” latent with sensitive, negative meanings for African Americans.¹²¹ Additionally, the legislators did not acknowledge “the underlying structural and systematic inequalities that prohibited ‘all men’ from participating in and actively enjoying the American Wilderness.”¹²² The proponents of the act made sure to emphasize that they were not dismissing the values of civilization in the process of advocating for the preservation of wilderness. Rather, they argued that people could benefit “from a temporary return to the primitive.”¹²³ However, inherent in this “temporary” argument is sentimentality about an earlier time when and place where white Americans were the conquerors, the chosen race.

The Civil Rights Act and the Wilderness Act of 1964 are not the only policies related to the national parks during the Kennedy/Johnson Era that appeared to be a step forward for the national parks’ relationship with African Americans, but which actually had complicated implications. Behind almost all of these policies was George Hartzog, who served as director of the NPS between 1964 and 1972. Having joined the Service in 1946 as an attorney,¹²⁴ Hartzog is remembered for having steered the NPS during a “period of transition,”¹²⁵ as well as being “one of the most influential and effective directors that the National Park Service ever had.”¹²⁶ He defined his “main mission” as taking a “pretty much western oriented organization pretty general

¹²⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹²¹ Ibid., 47.

¹²² Ibid., 47.

¹²³ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 247.

¹²⁴ George B. Hartzog, interview by Janet A. McDonnell, McLean, VA: Department of the Interior, NPS, 2005, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/director/hartzog.pdf, ix.

¹²⁵ Ibid., vii.

¹²⁶ Ibid., x.

white male organization” and “[making] it more relevant to a changing urban population.”¹²⁷

Though Hartzog did not frame his initiatives in terms of reaching the “African American” population, “urban” has been “linked with blackness” ever since the 20th century Great Migration during which six million African Americans moved from the rural south into cities in the northern, midwestern, and western United States.¹²⁸

According to Hartzog, he took up the issue of diversifying the national parks by his own accord, not because of pressure from superiors.¹²⁹ Having been raised in a poor family in the South, he felt “empathy for the downtrodden” and was “[sensitive to] the goodness of black people.”¹³⁰ Kathy Mengak, who conducted hours of interviews with Hartzog, concluded that, to Hartzog, “treating all people like human beings was just the right thing to do.”¹³¹ He believed for philosophical and moral reasons that the NPS should touch more diverse segments of society. Practically, he also believed that the NPS would be “[saved] not so much through wilderness or rural orientated constituencies,” but rather through “urban constituencies...that are going to continue to accrete political power over [the] long haul.”¹³² He understood that courting a growing urban population was key to creating a long-term base of support for the NPS.

One of the ways Hartzog attempted to reach such urban populations was to expand the NPS, both in terms of the number and, more importantly, types of parks units¹³³ For example, he increased the prevalence and number of the NPS’ historical parks. The historical parks did not originally have a major place in the System. In 1933, however, at the urging of then NPS

¹²⁷ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, interview by Kathy Mengak, February 2, 2007, transcript, 600.

¹²⁸ Irine Chien, “Urban for Black,” *Global Urban Humanities at UC Berkeley*, September 24, 2013, <http://globalurbanhumanities.berkeley.edu/blog/blog-irene-chien-urban-for-black>.

¹²⁹ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, interview by Kathy Mengak, June 8, 1999, transcript, 368.

¹³⁰ Hartzog as quoted in Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 147.

¹³¹ Kathy Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks and Their Guardians: The Legacy of George B. Hartzog Jr.* (UNM Press, 2012), 147.

¹³² William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, phone interview by Kathy Mengak, July 8, 1997, transcript, 246.

¹³³ Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 91.

director, Horace Albright, FDR issued Executive Order 6166, which reorganized the NPS' responsibilities. The order dictated that the NPS would gain control over military parks as well as all national monuments within the continental United States, thereby significantly increasing the number of historical parks under the NPS' purview.¹³⁴ Hartzog sought to further solidify the NPS' role in historic preservation by shepherding the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 through Congress, which gave the NPS control over the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, he sought to incorporate a "wider range of historical sights other than battle-grounds and birthplaces."¹³⁵ He endeavored to highlight what "the creative genius of the people who came to [the United States] contributed..."¹³⁶ In doing so, Hartzog oversaw the addition of thirty-four new historical parks.

Hartzog not only added to already existing park categories; he also created an entirely new category: "urban parks" which were meant to bring "the parks to the people." Spurred by a national report on the lack of accessible outdoor recreation resources, as well as his own observation that "millions of young people [were] being reared in asphalt and concrete jungles completely isolated from their natural and cultural inheritance," Hartzog pushed for the establishment of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco and the Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City.¹³⁷ Conservationists "lined up behind the bill,"¹³⁸ but it was met with a great deal of resistance from President Nixon who "opposed urban national

¹³⁴ Harlan D. Unrau and George F. Williss, *Administrative history: expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s*. Denver Service Center, National Park Service, 1983, Chapter 2C.

¹³⁵ Robert Cahn, "Park Unit Awaits 'Invasion'," *The Christian Science Monitor* (1908-Current File), Feb 19, 1966.

¹³⁶ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, phone interview by Kathy Mengak, August 10, 1996, transcript, 162.

¹³⁷ "House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, To Provide for the Establishment of the Gateway National Seashore in the States of New York and New Jersey, and for Other Purposes" as quoted in Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 205.

¹³⁸ William C. Everhart, *The National Park Service* (Westview Press, 1983), 70.

recreation areas” because their expensive development ran counter to his “New Federalism”¹³⁹ approach.¹⁴⁰ In 1972, with a tight election looming though, Nixon reluctantly allowed the two urban parks to be established in the hopes that they would help him win two crucial states on the electoral map.¹⁴¹

Additionally, in his efforts to reach “underrepresented and undeserved groups, particularly urban populations, minorities [including African Americans], and young people,”¹⁴² Hartzog introduced innovative programming. For example, he introduced the “Summer in the Parks” program in Washington, DC, which provided entertainment and recreational opportunities for disadvantaged people in the city. As a part of this program, rangers took underprivileged children to fish, ride horses, visit farms and do arts and crafts around the nation’s capital.¹⁴³ Long known as the “Chocolate City,” Washington’s residents were 70% African American in 1970.¹⁴⁴ The pictures included within a feature on the program in the April 1969 edition of *Trends in Parks and Recreations* reflect this fact; all of the children shown in all but two of the photos are African American.¹⁴⁵ These images stand in stark contrast to mid-20th century guidebooks for the national parks in which a picture of a single African American is difficult to find. By the fall of 1968, “practically everyone” in Washington had heard of the Summer in the Parks program.¹⁴⁶ The pilot program was so successful that Hartzog expanded it to other areas outside of DC, and, in milder climates, introduced it as a year-round program.¹⁴⁷ In addition to Summer in the Parks,

¹³⁹ In 1969, Nixon called for a ‘New Federalism’ in which money and power would be directed away from the federal bureaucracy and towards states and local governments.

¹⁴⁰ Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 227.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 227.

¹⁴² George B. Hartzog, interview by Janet A. McDonnell, McLean, VA: Department of the Interior, NPS, 2005, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/director/stanton.pdf, xii.

¹⁴³ Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 223.

¹⁴⁴ Alex Kellog, “D.C., Long ‘Chocolate City,’ Becoming More Vanilla,” Morning Edition, NPR. February 15, 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Russel Wright, “Summer in the Parks,” *Trends in Parks & Recreation*, April 1969.

¹⁴⁶ NPS as quoted in Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 233.

¹⁴⁷ Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 183.

Hartzog initiated new environmental education and “living history” programs meant to provide yet another means for the NPS to connect with urban populations.¹⁴⁸

For Hartzog, the new historical and urban parks also provided an opportunity to increase diversity within the NPS workforce. The NPS was more inclined to take on African American employees who could serve in the historical and urban parks, where Hartzog and others thought they would be more welcomed by the community.¹⁴⁹ In order to attract African Americans to a career in the Service, Hartzog set up different professional pipelines through which African Americans could enter the NPS. He also recruited employees directly from historically black colleges.¹⁵⁰ Finally, Hartzog sought ways to make rangers better equipped to engage with urban populations; he wanted to “turn out a flexible person who can comfortably and effectively work with people of all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds in an urban setting.”¹⁵¹ Therefore, though the new recruits “hated it at the time,” Hartzog required that all new park rangers go through an urban training program.¹⁵²

While there is little doubt about what the programs and policies he initiated during his tenure were, it is difficult to distinguish between Hartzog’s thoughts on diversity during his time as director and when he was an elderly man, many decades and social movements later. Mengak had difficulty locating materials related to Hartzog’s push for increased diversity in the NPS workforce in his archive at Clemson University. When asked about the lack of documentation, Hartzog responded, “see, you don’t put it into policy. You put it into action.”¹⁵³ Without written materials from the time explaining the impetus behind his efforts, historians are forced to rely on

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 236.

¹⁴⁹ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, interview by Kathy Mengak, June 8, 1999, transcript, 371, 279.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 371, 350.

¹⁵¹ James Hansen to Hartzog as quoted in Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 242.

¹⁵² Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 242.

¹⁵³ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, phone interview by Kathy Mengak, August 10, 1996, transcript, 153.

his word about the motivations behind his policies and his commitment to them. However, Hartzog was not always willing to give it and appeared to have been very conscientious of his legacy. At various points in his interviews with Mengak, he asked to turn the tape recorder off or said “no comment;” at one point, he said to Mengak that she was “personally responsible for cleaning this up and protecting my honor.”¹⁵⁴ It appears his colleagues at the NPS, an organization once referred to being closer to a “tribal clan than a governmental agency,” were similarly aware that the historians they spoke to would define Hartzog’s legacy; they did not levy many criticisms.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, it is possible that, with time, Hartzog adjusted some of his emphases; as affirmative action and diversity in workplaces became bedrocks of the Democratic Party, Hartzog’s commitment to the cause may have retroactively become stronger. Mengak concludes after her time with him that, though he most definitely instituted diversity initiatives and took a great deal of pride in them later in life, they were “probably not” one of his top priorities and that he did not approach them “with the same zeal as other interests.”¹⁵⁶

Even assuming Hartzog’s intentions, as well as his work, should be taken at face value, his actions were not without troubling, unintended consequences. While it is true that Hartzog instituted policies meant to make the NPS a more diverse organization and gain support for it from urban, African American voters, in fact, his directorate reinforced the outdoors as a white space. In a sense, Hartzog’s efforts echoed the disconnect between the Wilderness and Civil Rights Acts of 1964, thereby reinforcing the outdoors as a white space while simultaneously making the NPS as a whole more inclusive. Rather than attempt to bring new people, including African Americans, to the old parks, Hartzog brought “parks to the people,” creating new units targeted at certain segments of society. In fact, some of the conservationists who gave their

¹⁵⁴ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, interview by Kathy Mengak, June 8, 1999, transcript, 373.

¹⁵⁵ Everhart, *The National Park Service*, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 203.

support for the initiative did so because they saw it as “a way to provide urbanites with a national park experience that did not threaten the wilderness.”¹⁵⁷ Similarly to how Mather was not to allow the park system to be diluted by second-class scenery, Hartzog was not to allow the park system to be marred by urbanites. Hartzog’s practice of sending African American rangers to the non-wilderness parks had similar effects. Though NPS employees may have been more diverse on the whole, the wilderness parks remained homogenous. Furthermore, the practice angered a number of African Americans who *wanted* to be in the national parks. When Johnson requested a transfer from Yellowstone Park early in his career he assumed a man like himself, infatuated with the wilderness, would be sent to the likes of Alaska. Instead, as a result of the legacy of Hartzog’s policy, the NPS determined that Johnson, a young African American man from Detroit, Michigan, would be a “perfect fit” for Oxon Hill Manor and Farm, conveniently located outside urban Washington, DC. Johnson reported that he almost left the Service because of his placement.¹⁵⁸

Though Hartzog vehemently insisted that the historical and urban parks that African Americans were funneled to were on par with the national parks, many people saw them as “second tier.”¹⁵⁹ In fact, this hierarchy (with the wilderness national parks at the top) began as early as 1933 when FDR restructured the parks with Executive Order 6166.¹⁶⁰ Johnson believes that the “reorganization made the national park experience much more complicated,” citing the fact that trekking in the Alaskan mountains and visiting a historical home now fell under a singular institutional umbrella.¹⁶¹ The new parks confused many people. After stating that he had “nothing against the urban parks”, one NPS executive, not understanding what type of land now

¹⁵⁷ Everhart, *The National Park Service*, 70.

¹⁵⁸ Shelton Johnson (NPS Ranger), in discussion with the author, November 16, 2016.

¹⁵⁹ Reginald (Flip) Hagood, phone interview by Kathy Mengak, August 31, 2000, transcript, 12.

¹⁶⁰ Terence Young (Professor of Geography, Cal Poly – Pomona), in discussion with the author, November 9, 2016.

¹⁶¹ Shelton Johnson (NPS Ranger), in discussion with the author, November 16, 2016.

qualified for a park, asked, “but what the hell is our policy?”¹⁶² And though perhaps unaware of it, Hartzog may have implicitly harbored a view that the urban parks were of lesser value. When asked what his favorite park unit was, Hartzog said you can “only have a favorite at the moment you’re there.” However, he went on to say that:

“You stand in that valley and you look there and you shiver because you’ll never see anything like that again. And then you get on the airplane and go to the North Cascades and you look there and you say ‘My Lord, this has got to be the last place the Lord put his hand on the earth.’ And then you turn around and fly into Jackson Hole and you go up to Yellowstone and you stand there and look at that geyser basin and that vast plateau and you think “Oh Lord, there’s nothing else like this in the whole world.”¹⁶³

Hartzog’s bias toward the wilderness national parks is evident, but not entirely surprising.

Terence Young, a professor of Geography at Cal Poly – Pomona commented that an ambitious NPS employee would be gunning to be superintendent of one of the older, wilderness national parks; no one is appointed director after being in charge of the Gateway National Recreational Area.¹⁶⁴ Interestingly, Hartzog did advocate for NPS’ emblem, an arrowhead outline with a large sequoia tree, bison, distant lake and mountains depicted within it,¹⁶⁵ to be changed. He thought the symbol was “outdated” and advocated for three interlocking triangles symbolizing the historical, natural and recreational to replace it.^{166,167} However, he received a great deal of pushback from within the Service, as well as prominent conservationists.¹⁶⁸ To this day, the original emblem, which provides further evidence of the agency’s implicit bias towards wilderness, sublimity and, ultimately, the national parks, remains. Thus, under Hartzog’s tenure,

¹⁶² As quoted in Everhart, *The National Park Service*, 71.

¹⁶³ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, interview by Kathy Mengak, March 23, 1996, transcript, 58.

¹⁶⁴ Terence Young (Professor of Geography, Cal Poly – Pomona), in discussion with the author, November 9, 2016.

¹⁶⁵ See appendix figure B.

¹⁶⁶ See appendix figure C.

¹⁶⁷ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, interview by Kathy Mengak, September 1, 2006, transcript, 575-6.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 575-6.

African Americans had increased access to NPS units both as visitors and employees, but not the best ones; not the ones that many believe define American culture.

Importantly, Hartzog also failed to address, let alone acknowledge, factors outside of the NPS' direct purview that prevented African Americans from working in or visiting the national parks. Stanton noted that many African American recruits could not follow him out West because the NPS did not provide assistance in transporting them to a park and expected them to purchase uniforms before their first pay check came.¹⁶⁹ By not addressing factors such as cost and transportation, Hartzog's programs failed to meaningfully promote African American involvement at all levels and across all opportunities within the NPS.

Instead of actualizing his stated hope that the urban parks would serve as "windows"¹⁷⁰ or "bridges"¹⁷¹ to the national parks, Hartzog's efforts ultimately helped to maintain the division between the wilderness and urban parks. Hartzog and his service failed to extend a genuine invitation to the African American population, thereby preventing the window or bridge metaphors from becoming a reality. In fact, at the time Hartzog was pushing for new urban parks, it seemed as though the national parks could not welcome any new visitors. In 1972, Secretary of Interior Rogers C.B. Morton complained to Congress that the parks were being "loved" to death by the growing number of visitors.¹⁷² Hartzog echoed his superior and told the press that the NPS needed to "ration the visitors" to the wilderness areas by instituting "carrying

¹⁶⁹ Robert Stanton, interview by Janet A. McDonnell, Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park System, 2005, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/director/stanton.pdf, 7.

¹⁷⁰ Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 256.

¹⁷¹ Reginald (Flip) Hagood, phone interview by Kathy Mengak, August 31, 2000, transcript, 11.

¹⁷² Elmer Lammi, "The Price of 'Loving our Parks to Death,'" *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, Jun 04, 1972. <http://search.proquest.com.ezpprod1.hul.harvard.edu/docview/148388690?accountid=11311>.

capacities.”¹⁷³ If the national parks could barely handle all the white visitors, how could they possibly welcome a whole new cohort of African American visitors?

Ultimately, under Hartzog’s leadership, the NPS attempted to become more inclusive of and responsive to African Americans as a governmental organization. In the process, however, the American outdoors contained within the national parks remained exclusive and elusive to many Americans. One argument in defense of Hartzog’s administration is that, had he had more time in office, he could have made more meaningful progress towards bridging the various types of NPS units. Hartzog’s time in office, however, was unexpectedly cut short in December 1972 when Nixon indicated he would no longer support his appointment due to a personal conflict.¹⁷⁴ Nixon appointed Ronald Walker, a political appointee, rather than an NPS careerist, as Hartzog’s successor. Walker went on to dismantle much of what Hartzog had constructed.¹⁷⁵ Hartzog recalled that before he had even “cleared the building” Walker began scrapping his programs.¹⁷⁶ He recounted that the environmental education and Summer in the Park programs, for example, “were totally abandoned the year after I left.”¹⁷⁷ One former NPS employee noted that the NPS’ focus on diversity went “swisshhhh... out the door” during the following administrations.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, Hartzog’s dream of a “whole system of urban parks” also did not come to fruition.¹⁷⁹ Hartzog’s charismatic leadership had managed to push the Service so far, but, without him, it could not continue to advance. As a result, many of Hartzog’s policies not only reinforced

¹⁷³ Robert Cahn, “Hartzog Leaves Legacy of Goals for Parks,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (1908-Current File), Dec 23, 1972.

¹⁷⁴ George B. Hartzog, interview by Janet A. McDonnell, McLean, VA: Department of the Interior, NPS, 2005, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/director/hartzog.pdf, 63.

¹⁷⁵ “Directors of the National Park Service,” NPS, accessed November 16, 2016, <http://npshistory.com/publications/directors/index.htm>

¹⁷⁶ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, interview by Kathy Mengak, June 8, 1999, transcript, 355.

¹⁷⁷ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, phone interview by Kathy Mengak, January 20, 2005, transcript, 456.

¹⁷⁸ Reginald (Flip) Hagood, phone interview by Kathy Mengak, August 31, 2000, transcript, 5.

¹⁷⁹ Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks*, 256.

the outdoors as a white space, but also failed to institutionalize adequate alternative parks for African Americans, thereby creating yet another poor interaction between the Service and the population it was trying to court.

The 21st Century and African American Involvement in the NPS

While some of Hartzog's policies were thwarted, others had long-term effects and are currently experiencing a second wind of sorts. Though many African American rangers were sent to work in urban parks, Stanton, who had been recruited as a direct result of Hartzog's efforts, was sent to work in Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming.¹⁸⁰ In 1997, President Bill Clinton appointed him as the NPS' director, making him the first African American to hold the position. Arguably, Stanton was the first director since Hartzog to focus on the relationship between the NPS and African Americans.¹⁸¹ In the first strategic plan published under his supervision, the NPS recognized that the United States' changing demographics necessitated a change in the relationship between the NPS and minorities, including African Americans. After noting the fact that white Americans would be the minority in the next century, the report explains that "this [change] is an important cultural and social issue because parks have historically been used mainly by the white middle class segment of the population, and many parks do not attract and offer park experiences meaningful to visitors from varied ethnic backgrounds, or have not yet made their park values relevant to them."¹⁸²

Stanton, however, came into a role that had changed a great deal since Hartzog had held it. After Hartzog, the director's position experienced a steady decline in power to the point where

¹⁸⁰ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, interview by Kathy Mengak, June 8, 1999, transcript, 350.

¹⁸¹ Reginald (Flip) Hagood, phone interview by Kathy Mengak, August 31, 2000, transcript, 5.

¹⁸² Robert Stanton, "National Park Service Strategic Plan," National Park Service, 1997, <http://npshistory.com/publications/nps-strategic-plan-1997.pdf>, 55.

the Assistant Secretary to the Interior “ha[d] taken over.”¹⁸³ One colleague of Hartzog’s noted that, “Hartzog might be termed the last director of the ‘old’ Park Service.”¹⁸⁴ And, interestingly, Stanton’s individual efforts have not been discussed extensively. Johnson spoke enthusiastically about the difference that Stanton’s presence as an African American in a position in power made, but he could not cite a single program or policy he had changed or created.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Stanton started a dialogue that continued well after his term ended.

In 2003, the NPS followed up on the 1997 strategic plan with “The National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public: Ethnic and Racial Diversity of National Park System Visitor and Non-Visitors Technical Report.” This survey was conducted in order to answer the question, “Why do members of some ethnic and racial groups [including African Americans] visit the National Park System units less frequently than non-Hispanic white Americans?”¹⁸⁶ The report found that, in 2000, African American visitors were underrepresented by seven percentage points.¹⁸⁷

While the report never mentions Hartzog by name, his influence is present on the page. Despite the fact that numerous people inside, and outside of, the NPS distinguish between and rank the various types of units it manages, the survey and subsequent report do not differentiate between the types of NPS units. Importantly, they do not make a distinction between the reasons African Americans do not visit a battlefield or urban park versus the reasons they do not patronize one of America’s western national parks. Like Hartzog, they attempt to address the NPS’ diversity problem without realizing that the outdoors has its own diversity problem in need

¹⁸³ William C. Everhart and George B. Hartzog, Interview by Kathy Mengak, July 28, 1999, transcript, 397.

¹⁸⁴ Everhart, *The National Park Service*, 150.

¹⁸⁵ Shelton Johnson (NPS Ranger), in discussion with the author, November 16, 2016.

¹⁸⁶ Frederick Solop, Kristi Hagen, and David Ostergren, “Ethnic and Racial Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors Technical Report,” NPS, December 2003, <https://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/archive/EthnicAndRacialDiversity.pdf>, 4.

¹⁸⁷ Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann, “Comprehensive Survey,” 10.

of attention. Given the cultural significance that early American leaders placed on the outdoor spaces found in national parks, as well as the historical differences between the many types of units and the public's perception of them, this decision was a large oversight. Because the report fails to acknowledge the difference in NPS units, it does not address the fact that one type of NPS unit, the national parks, might actually bare the brunt of the responsibility for African American underrepresentation. Because of its methodological limitations, the report similarly lacks the capacity to provide insight as to whether and to what extent the national parks are even whiter than their historical/cultural/urban counterparts.¹⁸⁸

The imprecise methodological approach used in the survey allowed the NPS to follow Hartzog's lead and craft solutions focused on certain types of units, primarily urban and day-use parks, including historical sites. The 2003 report focuses on the fact that 71% of African American non-visitors cited the expense of hotel/food/other costs and 67% cited the distance necessary to travel as reasons as to why they did not visit NPS units.¹⁸⁹ The report concludes that, due to these barriers that are not "within the ability of the NPS to correct," outreach programs and innovative interpretive themes within day-use and parks in urban areas "would seem to hold particular promise at promoting the relevance of the National Park System and increasing visitation by under-served populations."¹⁹⁰ The report endorses a strategy first conceived by Hartzog: bringing the parks to the people through new programming. Like Hartzog's strategies though, this tactic may mend the NPS' relationship with African Americans without integrating them into the historically, culturally resonant national parks and the larger American outdoors.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸⁹ Solop, Hagen and Ostergren, "Comprehensive Survey," 7.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 9.

In fact, white non-visitors cited cost and distance almost as frequently as their African American counterparts (62% and 61% respectively).¹⁹¹ Therefore, these factors do not necessarily explain the *difference* in visiting practices between African American and white visitors. The largest disparity between white and African American non-visitors actually appeared to revolve around their treatment and experience once inside the park units. While 29%, 6% and 6% of white non-visitors agreed that there was a “lack of information once inside parks,” “employees give poor service” and “units are uncomfortable places to be” respectively, 46%, 20% and 21% African American respondents agreed with the same statements.¹⁹² This statistic suggests that one persistent issue is that potential new African American visitors face challenges in discovering their options for exploring the national parks, perhaps because they don’t perceive rangers as receptive to their needs. Although the advent of the Internet allows people to independently access information about the parks, rangers remain important liaisons between park visitors and the NPS. Another issue is that the NPS units are not perceived as comfortable places for African Americans. While these statistics are noted in the discussion of the report, they are not examined at length and the recommendations included within the report’s conclusion do not address them. Instead, the NPS draws conclusions that allowed it, knowingly or unknowingly, to focus on new programming in the newer parks, without addressing the inequality that exists in the older, outdoor spaces.

Five years into the approach outlined in the 2003 study, actual progress remained elusive. In the 2008-09 report, African American under-representation had dropped by two points, so few that “chance variation between the two samples [could not] be ruled out.”¹⁹³ Even if a third survey revealed that a trend was emerging, the results would not be definitively meaningful;

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹² Ibid., 7.

¹⁹³ Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann., “Comprehensive Survey,” 7.

because the NPS does not distinguish between the types of units in their surveys, there would remain the possibility that African American visitation had increased in only urban or historical parks. This finding would indicate that the NPS, as a governmental organization, had increased its inclusivity. However, it would leave the possibility that America's most treasured outdoor spaces would remain the domain of its white citizens. This result would show that the NPS had solved its practical problem; it would have accrued a larger base of support from potential African American voters. However, it would not have solved the philosophical issue that the American outdoors, despite being heralded by so many as an integral part of American culture, remains inaccessible to many Americans.

Despite the tepid results of the 2008-09 survey, President Barack Obama's administration has pushed ahead with an agenda largely in line with the recommendations from the 2003 study and Hartzog's efforts.¹⁹⁴ Obama will leave office having designated more public lands and waters than any other president. Many of those public lands are home to national monuments that "reflect the diverse stories of Americans." The Stonewall Inn, for example, has special significance to the LGBTQ community, while outdoor spaces like the San Miguel Mountains in Los Angeles, California have historically attracted minority populations.¹⁹⁵ Like Hartzog, Obama has tried to make the NPS more inclusive by including new units in the System, rather than focusing on changing the perception of current ones. Furthermore, many of those units are historical in nature, making them second-class additions in many people's eyes. Even the outdoor areas, including the San Miguel Mountains, are not given the "national park"

¹⁹⁴ In 2016, the conversation revolves around the Obama administration's efforts, rather than the NPS director's because the nature of the position has changed so much since Hartzog's time, as has the role of president.

¹⁹⁵ "Fact Sheet: President Obama Designates National Monument in Maine's North Woods in Honor of the Centennial of the National Park Service." Press Release. The White House Office of the Press Secretary, August 24, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/08/24/fact-sheet-president-obama-designates-national-monument-maines-north>.

designation because Obama put these lands under NPS' purview using the executive power bestowed upon him in the Antiquities Act of 1906.¹⁹⁶ In order to establish them as national parks, he would have had to get congressional approval. The result is that, yet again, additions to the NPS targeted at non-white visitors are comparatively less valuable.

Obama has also pursued some strategies that diverge from Hartzog's previous practices. For example, he introduced the "Every Kid in a Park" program, which gives any fourth grader and their family free entrance to a park managed by the NPS (as well as any other federal lands or waters managed by other agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management or the Forest Service). This program addresses, in part, the economic barriers that visiting a national park can pose and serves as an open invitation to young people and their families. Significantly, it does so without attempting to funnel certain people to certain parks.¹⁹⁷

Perhaps what distinguishes Obama's era most from that of Hartzog's, or any other NPS director to date, is the amount of attention being paid to the NPS. A great deal of this attention is the result of the fact that the NPS celebrated its centennial in August 2016. Though the 2003 and 2008-09 NPS reports garnered almost no media attention when they were originally released, dozens of articles cited them in the years immediately leading up to this momentous anniversary. The impetus for these publications, however, is not as important as their content. Though a lot of them reference the surveys, very few note that the NPS' study does not distinguish between national parks and other NPS units. And yet, the articles are evidently about the national parks specifically. For example, in a New York Times opinion editorial, which cites the 2008-09 study, Mount Rainier is the only NPS unit mentioned. The article's narrow focus on national parks

¹⁹⁶ "President Obama Designates San Gabriel Mountains National Monument." Press Release. The White House Office of the Press Secretary, October 10, 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/10/10/president-obama-designates-san-gabriel-mountains-national-monument>.

¹⁹⁷ "Every Kid in a Park General Information," US Government, September 2016, accessed November 23, 2016, <https://www.everykidinapark.gov/about/>.

specifically is also illustrated by the authors' contention that "the national parks are every American's vacation home," as well as his attention to visitors' fears of "mosquitoes... bears, cougars and wolves," all things most commonly associated with the outdoors.¹⁹⁸ Because writers do not recognize that the NPS' surveys conflate all of its units, the NPS could be credited with fixing its diversity problem without necessarily addressing the American outdoors' diversity problem, which it has contributed to over the last one hundred years. If the NPS observes an increase in African American representation in its next survey, writers could mistakenly declare its programs a success, despite the fact that the NPS' quintessential space, the great American outdoors, would still cater primarily to white Americans.

Conclusion

If current strategies, which largely focus on creating new spaces rather than altering preexisting ones, do not fix both the NPS' and the outdoors' diversity problem, what is the path forward? Are a "post-racial" park service and American outdoors possible? Recently, Johnson aptly noted that the hardest problems to fix are the "invisible ones."¹⁹⁹ Recognizing that two distinct problems exist and considering each of them and their relationship to each other is the first step towards effectively addressing both of them. The solution will no doubt be complex and involve work from those outside of and within the NPS.

Already, a number of non-governmental groups are doing admirable work to address these issues. "Outdoor Afro," a blog started by Rue Mapp in 2009, has grown into a national organization operating in twenty-eight states. It connects thousands of African Americans to outdoor experiences, in and outside of national parks, in the hopes of "changing the face of

¹⁹⁸ Glenn Nelson, "Why Are Our Parks so White?" *New York Times*, July 10, 2015, sec. Opinion. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/12/opinion/sunday/diversify-our-national-parks.html?_r=0.

¹⁹⁹ Shelton Johnson (NPS Ranger), in discussion with the author, November 16, 2016.

conservation.”²⁰⁰ After touring the national parks and observing only a “handful”²⁰¹ of non-white faces, Audrey and Frank Peterman founded Earthwise Production Inc., which “provides consulting and training services to public land managers, conservation organization and others seeking to gain market share in urban communities.”²⁰² Both of these organizations disseminate information about the national parks and issue an invitation to African Americans to visit them and participate in outdoor activities. Johnson noted that issuing invitations to under-represented populations is a critical piece of the puzzle. He stated that, “If you come from a background of exclusion rather than inclusion you don’t automatically [recognize] that this land is for me.”²⁰³ He believes that people must be told that they have an “inheritance;” that is why he worked with Oprah Winfrey to shoot two episodes in Yosemite, during which African Americans could be shown that they were wanted and welcome in the national parks.²⁰⁴

Johnson also strives to rectify the narrative that African Americans have never played a large part in the American outdoors or don’t share a cultural connection to it and the NPS. He wrote a book entitled *Gloryland* in order to tell the story of the Buffalo Soldiers, “the African American Army regiments that served as precursors to park rangers at the turn of the 20th century.”²⁰⁵ Johnson believes this story underscores the “historical, spiritual and cultural link between African Americans and the national parks” and “has the power to coax dislocated communities of color back to... national parks.”²⁰⁶ Outdoor Afro and the Petermans have also

²⁰⁰ “About us.” Outdoor Afro, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.outdoorafro.com/about/>

²⁰¹ Audrey Peterman and Frank Peterman, *Legacy on the land: A black couple discovers our national inheritance and tells why every American should care* (Earthwise Productions: 2009), 326.

²⁰² “Earthwise Productions,” Earthwise Productions, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://earthwiseproductionsinc.com/>

²⁰³ Shelton Johnson (NPS Ranger), in discussion with the author, November 16, 2016.

²⁰⁴ Johnson stated that in his interview with me that these episodes made a huge difference” and Nelson notes in his High Country News article that they were two of the highest rated of all time.

²⁰⁵ Nelson, “How Shelton Johnson became the Buffalo Soldiers’ Champion.”

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

included this story in their writing, helping to change the perception that African Americans don't have a cultural link to the American outdoors.^{207,208}

Part of Johnson's and these organizations' success, however, lies in their ability to engage with the NPS bureaucracy and the White House. In the past, they have worked *with* governmental organizations and politicians, rather than against them. Donald J. Trump's ascent to the presidency, however, could very well lead to the type of upheaval within the NPS that Nixon's administration ushered in. Its future is in limbo. Furthermore, the election results have made people question if a post-racial America is possible.²⁰⁹ The Petermans' assertion in their 2009 book that the election of an African American president meant that "limitations based upon racial identity and what African Americans... 'don't do' no longer apply" has certainly been tempered by voters.²¹⁰

Given the difficult path forward and the other important aspects of society and governmental organizations that have not been fully integrated, why devote attention to the outdoors and the NPS specifically? First, American culture is steeped in outdoor experiences. To attempt to skirt, downplay or reduce the historical importance of outdoor spaces in American history and culture could prove to be harder than opening these spaces to African Americans. Second, the outdoors is distinctive in the benefits it bestows upon its visitors. It has been proven to provide relief from stress, depression, anxiety and other behavioral disorders, such as Attention Deficit Disorder.²¹¹ Nature-based programming has also had success in "turning

²⁰⁷ Peterman, *Legacy on the Land*, 414.

²⁰⁸ "Buffalo Soldiers get Congressional Recognition," Outdoor Afro, accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.outdoorafro.com/2010/02/buffalo-soldiers-get-congressional-recognition/>.

²⁰⁹ Nikole Hannah Jones, "The End of the Postracial Myth," *The New York Times Magazine*, accessed December 1, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/20/magazine/donald-trumps-america-iowa-race.html?_r=0.

²¹⁰ Peterman, *Legacy on the Land*, 3574.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 420.

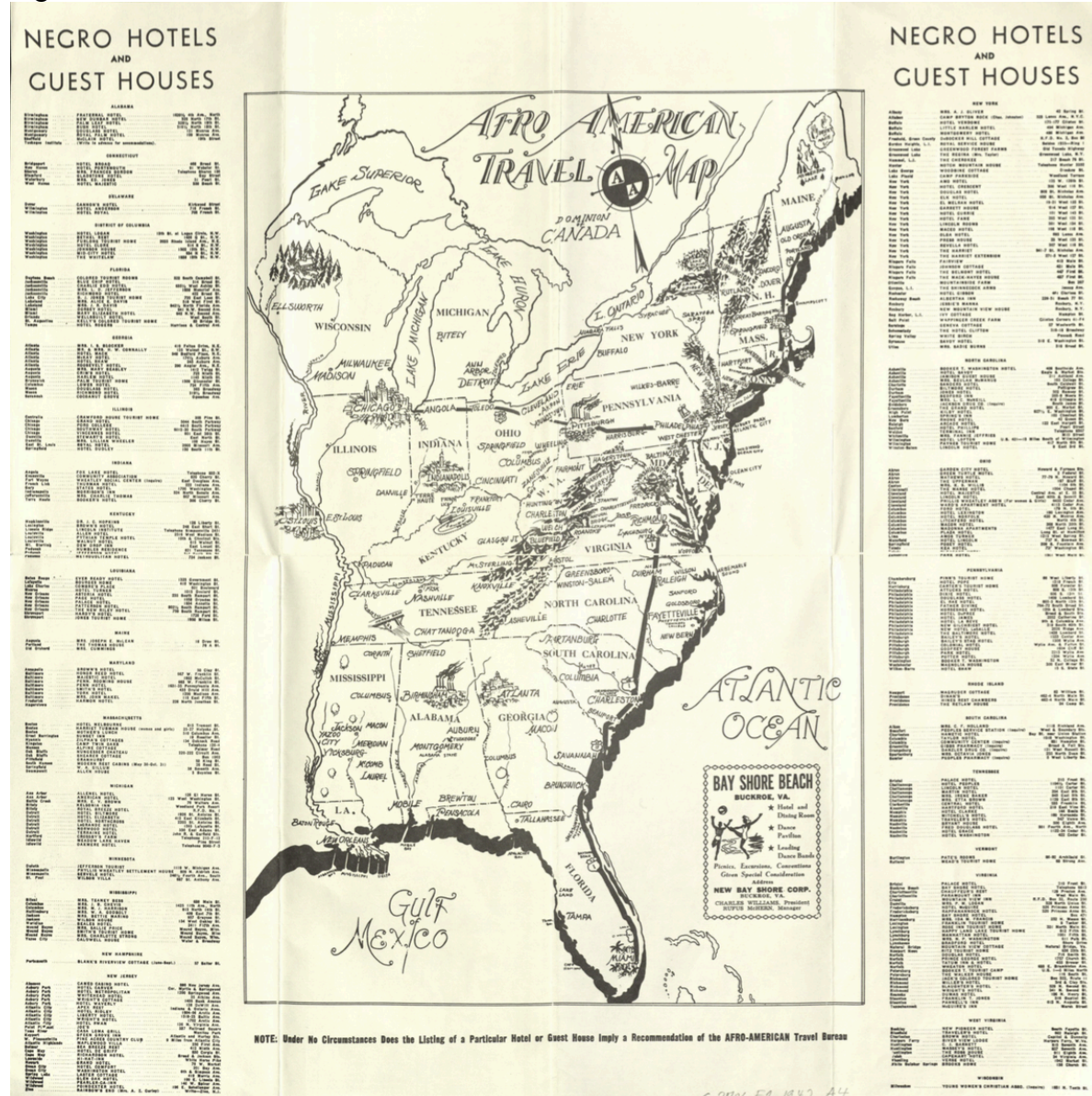
teenagers away from delinquency and towards finding their place in society.”²¹² Finally, the importance of cultivating a generation of an increasing number of non-white voters who feel connected to the American outdoors and are devoted to its protection has become an imperative for the modern conservationist movement. While historical and urban sites are important and have their place in society, the outdoors is a unique space in need of preservation.

If after genuine efforts, African Americans simply decide they do not want to recreate in the outdoors that would be one thing. However, there is evidence that demand from African Americans for participation in the national parks has not been met in the past. Furthermore, there have not been adequate efforts to address the fact that the outdoors, and the Service that protects so much of it, have excluded African Americans. It is only by considering the role of early conceptions of the outdoors in the United States, as well as that of 20th century legal segregation movements and Hartzog's directorate, that we can begin to understand and address the longstanding exclusion of African Americans from America's outdoor spaces. Furthermore, efforts will be sufficient only when they address, not only the practical implications of the NPS having a homogeneous base of support, but also the philosophical problem of having the outdoors, a space that has historically been of national importance, remain predominantly white. Ultimately, by creating a more inclusive outdoors and park service, the American people will come one step closer to more fully incorporating the interests and values of the African American community into the larger American experience.

²¹² Ibid., 420.

Appendix

Figure A



Map of Eastern Seaboard.

Afro-American Newspapers. *Afro American Travel Map*. Baltimore: Afro-American Newspapers, 1942.

Figure B



The NPS' Emblem.

"Be a Part of the World's Largest National Park Service Emblem to Celebrate 100 Years of National Parks!" NPjS.
Accessed November 30, 2016. <https://www.nps.gov/nama/learn/news/living-arrowhead.htm>

Figure C



Hartzog in front of the NPS emblem he endorsed.

Cahn, Robert. Environment editor of The Christian Science Monitor. "Park Unit Awaits 'Invasion'." *The Christian Science Monitor (1908-Current File)*, February 19, 1966.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezpprod1.hul.harvard.edu/docview/510823687?accountid=11311>.

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