

Who Wants Wilderness?

**ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATIONAL PARKS:
A STUDY INTEGRATING CULTURAL HISTORY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH**

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IN MEMORY OF MY GRANDFATHER,

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this project has been to explore whether Wilderness appreciation is a culturally relative phenomenon. A meta-analysis of National Park history reveals that the evolution of National Parks can be linked to singularly Euro-American and Western traditions. Judeo-Christianity, Modernist philosophy, the American Pioneer Myth, landscape painting, and 19th century urban discontentment collectively contributed to the emergence of America's Parks as *Wilderness*: "uninhabited" nature. Outdoor recreation research has demonstrated lower visitation rates among ethnic minorities to such "Wilderness" areas. This thesis presents an integrated methodology of cultural history and social research. I administered written questionnaires and conducted focus groups at two Rhode Island high schools, in order to assess the degree to which ethnicity and/or socioeconomic status contribute to variations in high school students' perceptions of the National Parks.

Students at the Met school in Providence, RI and Barrington High School in Barrington, RI (an affluent suburb) are represented in this research. The Met school sample is comprised of 57% students who self-identified as ethnic minority, compared with 11% of the Barrington students. My findings reveal that the Met students are less informed about Park history and contemporary Park issues. They listed with significantly greater frequency TV and movies as a primary source of information on the Parks, and generally maintain a more romantic and idealized perception of the Parks. They are less aware of the activities available in National Parks, and displayed significantly lower interest in outdoor recreation than their Barrington counterparts. Despite the culturally relative history of the National Parks and the suggestion by outdoor recreation research that ethnic minorities underutilize wilderness areas, the Met school students expressed with salience and ardor an appreciation for the National Parks. Moreover, they seem to have a stronger conviction that Park protection should be a high government priority. Their attachment to undeveloped wilderness appears to stem primarily from their perception that National Parks wilderness provides a refuge from and contrast to a degraded and polluted urban landscape.

When photographic images of National Parks were discussed in the Met school focus groups, students primarily framed their reaction to Wilderness in terms of the potability of the water, the cleanliness of the snow, and the absence of liquor stores, needles, and trash. These sentiments were absent from the reactions of the Barrington students to Park imagery. And, in contrast to the Barrington students, Met school respondents were predominantly opposed to the concept of user fees. They believe that the federal government, rather than individual visitors, should bear the responsibility of wilderness preservation.

The findings of my thesis suggest that the cultural relativity of Park history is negated both by the pervasiveness of romanticized Wilderness imagery in the popular media, and by the unanticipated strong desire among students for an aesthetic contrast to the city environment. As the National Park Service strives to adjust itself to the cultural values and ideals of an increasingly diverse population, it should attempt to garner the support of an urban, ethnically diverse adolescent population that already holds a high affinity for Wilderness. I suggest that this outreach should take the form both of in-school education and perhaps more importantly, through enhanced efforts by the Park Service to bring ethnic minorities and underprivileged youth to the National Parks.

INTRODUCTION

High School Students: Harbingers of the Parks' future

Since their origin in the latter half of the 19th century, the National Parks have sought to embody the most cherished American ideals: democracy and equality. The establishment of Yellowstone in 1872 as the pioneer National Park in the world encompassed these lofty values; the enabling legislation dedicated it as “a Park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the People.”¹ The portrayal of Parks as American institutions of egalitarian access and enjoyment can be traced through the Park System legislation and publicity of the past 127 years.

The National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, which joined the Parks under one administrative body, proposed to conserve the “scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein...as will leave them unimpaired for the *enjoyment of future generations.*”² The General Authorities Act of 1970 was even more explicit in asserting that the Parks provide for “the benefit and inspiration of *all people* of the United States.”³ In 1999, the National Park Service remains as steadfastly committed to assuring democratic access to and enjoyment of its resources: “The National Park Service is determined to make the National Parks engaging and meaningful for all Americans.”⁴

¹ <http://www.nps.gov/legacy/legacy.html>, posted November 1999.

² Ibid. Emphasis added.

³ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁴ <http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/diversity/visitors.ht> Posted November 1999.m

But are the Parks meaningful and engaging for all Americans? Has the Park Service's oft-repeated commitment to existing "for the People" been historically realized, or has the agency's rhetoric fallen short of achieving its desired results? Karl Jacoby, professor of history at Brown University, suggests that Wilderness is a distinctly EuroAmerican ideal. Outdoor recreation research has repeatedly documented lower use of wilderness in general, and the National Parks in particular, by ethnic minorities. Are these observations an indication that only an affluent Euro-American elite appreciates and/or makes use of America's preserved Nature?

The intent of my thesis is to explore how socioeconomic status and ethnic identity influence people's perceptions of the National Parks. My study will focus primarily on the views expressed by high school students from the cities of Providence and Barrington, Rhode Island. I chose to work with adolescents because they are an accessible population; they are candid with their viewpoints; and they are future users of National Parks. The views high school students express may indicate how the nation as a whole will perceive, utilize, and value the Parks in the coming decades.

My central question is as follows:

- Do ethnicity and/or socioeconomic status contribute to variations in high school students' perceptions of the National Parks?

This question is important for several reasons. As stated above, high school students will be future Park visitors, policy-makers, and voters. Understanding how they perceive the Parks can inform future management efforts. The National Park Service has made commendable efforts to educate the public about the Parks. Educational initiatives

have included interpretive exhibits and visitor centers within Park boundaries, as well as instructional outreaches in communities across the country. By exploring what students currently think and know about the Parks, my findings may inform future outreach efforts towards the appropriate topics and populations.

Exploring the meaning National Parks have for a diverse adolescent population is also important because the preservation of wilderness in the National Parks has come at considerable costs to ethnic minorities. The National Parks are a legacy of the Native American displacement that resulted from United States expansion during the 19th century. As Figure 1 illustrates, Native Americans were allowed to remain on Park grounds only when deemed to significantly contribute to the tourist experience. More often, the government went to great lengths to eradicate any vestige of indigenous residence or use from National Park lands. Treaties assuring Native usufruct rights to local game were revoked and tribes were barred or physically removed from Park boundaries. These actions were motivated by the prevailing 19th century American conviction that Wilderness in its pure state was an *uninhabited* Eden. As historian Mark Spence notes, “[National Parks] presented a fantasy realm where individual Americans could play out their little frontier dramas, and like their European forebears, reinvigorate their lives through contact with the essential elements of the American wilderness...[Native Americans] remained wholly absent from the tourist’s experience of the real wilderness.”⁵

⁵ Spence, Mark. 1999. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 87. Spence was referring specifically to Glacier National Park in this quote, but his preceding and ensuing analysis suggest that the quote can apply to several National Parks. For a comprehensive analysis of Indian Removal from the Parks, consult Spence’s text.



Fig. 1. Spence refers to the Native American caddies as “ ‘primitive’ accouterments to the ‘civilized’ splendors of Great Northern Railroad’s luxurious hotels” in Glacier National Park.

The preservation and glorification of wilderness has also had deleterious effects on contemporary society. William Cronon criticizes Wilderness as a social and cultural construct that promotes a dichotomous view of the natural world. Wilderness is exalted while the urban environment is decried and largely ignored. As Cronon argues, by escaping to “pristine” and “pure” nature, affluent Americans have shirked responsibility for sustaining and ameliorating their everyday environment. Urban settings (in which the majority of minorities reside⁶) have historically suffered the greatest brunt of this neglect,

⁶ Helpful census data on the percentage of minorities residing in urban locations was provided by Tanya Rakpraja. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race.html>, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html>, <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/race/api98/table01.txt>, Posted November 1999. For further information on the number of minorities residing in urban areas, Chris Zarcadoolas supplies the following sources: Kasarda, John. "Cities as Places Where People Live and Work: Urban Change and Neighborhood

in the form of pollution, overcrowding, and environmental health concerns. “The flight from history that is very nearly at the core of wilderness represents the false hope of an escape from responsibility, the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave our marks on the world.”⁷

By establishing its National Parks as embodiments of Wilderness, the United States has greatly influenced the preservation efforts of nations worldwide. Canada, Belgium, New Zealand, and Japan are among those countries that have modeled their Parks on the American paradigm. As a publication of the National Parks Association of Japan states, “Needless to say, the urge [to establish Parks] was directly stimulated by the creation of Yellowstone National Park.”⁸ In addition, developing nations of the world, such as India and Kenya, had National Parks created by former colonial powers. Some of the ramifications of imparting the American Wilderness concept on the global landscape include indigenous dispossession; the enactment of oppressive game protection laws; and monetary loss associated with uncontrolled wildlife predation of livestock and crops.⁹

In addition to these considerations, if the National Parks are not appreciated and valued by a growing segment of the population, how can we condone their continuation as a government-funded American institution?

Distress: Interwoven Destinies," in Cisneros, Henry G., ed. 1993. *Cities and the Nation*. New York: Norton, p. 81-124; Jargowsky, Paul. "Ghetto Poverty among black in the 1980s. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 13 (1994), p. 288-310; Rosler, Martha. "Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint," in Wallis, Brian, ed. 1991. *If you Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism*. Seattle: Bay Press

⁷ Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Goldfarb, Theodore D., ed. 2000. *Sources: Notable Selections in Environmental Studies*, 2nd ed. Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill, p. 149.

⁸ National Parks Association of Japan, *National Parks of Japan* (n.p., 1966), p. 1. As reprinted in Nash, Roderick. 1970. "The American Invention of National Parks." *American Quarterly* 22:3(Autumn, 1970), p. 735).

Finally, the National Park Service as a public agency has an obligation to meet the needs and desires of the greatest possible portion of the American population. In part, the mission of The Park Service is to represent the natural world in a manner commensurate with the aesthetic, spiritual, and recreational values of the populace. Given the rapid increase in the nation's diversity, my examination of students' perceptions of the Parks will hopefully illustrate the relative success with which the Park Service is achieving this goal.

⁹ My analysis of the detrimental impacts of imposing a wilderness model on the developing world stems primarily from my personal experience with and observations of the National Park system in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

Integrating cultural history and social research

Outdoor recreation research over the past thirty years has demonstrated the existence of substantial variations in ethnic utilization and perception of wildlands resources. In 1978, Randal Washburne illustrated that African Americans were less likely to participate in activities associated with wildlands environments or to visit remote wildlands areas. Since then, a substantial body of researchers have solidified and expanded on Washburne's findings. Researchers have gone on to examine the style with which ethnic groups recreate in the out of doors, the psychological reasons for lower levels of wildlands utilization among certain ethnic groups, and the intra-ethnic group variation in wildlands perception and use.

At the same time, historians have made considerable advances in investigating the role of National Parks and Wilderness in the American cultural experience. The seminal study in the field was conducted by Roderick Nash; UUWilderness and the American Mind presented in 1967 what was to date the most comprehensive and extensive analysis of the evolution of Wilderness in American cultural perception. Since Nash, a number of historians (Max Oelschlaeger and William Cronon foremost amongst them) have expanded our understanding of the role of Wilderness in American society. National Park histories have ranged from an analysis of the cultural, political, and economic

factors underpinning their establishment (Alfred Runte) to elucidations of Indian removal and mistreatment that characterized the formation of several National Parks (Mark Spence).

Rarely, though, have the two fields intersected. The majority of outdoor recreation research, while making invaluable contributions to our understanding of differences in ethnic utilization and perception of wildlands resources, offers only the most cursory historical contextualization. Though a portion of studies framed around the National Parks often feature a brief summary of Park development, few if any studies in the field have sufficiently acknowledged the potential of the Parks' cultural history to influence minority perception and use. Wilderness and National Park histories, on the other hand, succinctly illustrate the historical ideologies and events that have been integral to the evolution of National Parks and wilderness preservation in the United States. Yet, few authors devote much more than a small portion of their prologue or conclusion to exploring the implications of Park history on contemporary use and perception.

My intention has been to integrate cultural history and social research into my examination of adolescents' perceptions of the National Parks. By analyzing the history of National Parks development and wilderness preservation, I hope to discover whether Park history can be linked to singularly EuroAmerican ideals. In so doing, I believe I will better inform and contextualize my study of how ethnicity and socioeconomic status influence high school students' perceptions of the National Parks. I would contend that the degree to which an individual can relate to and find familiarity with the religious,

philosophical, and cultural foundations of the National Parks will fundamentally influence the perceptions and attitudes s/he asserts in regards to them.

I examined the history of the National Parks through a cultural lens. My intention was to explore the cultural factors that differentiate one society from another—religion, philosophy, art—as they influenced the development of the National Parks system. My cultural history of the Parks is best seen as a meta-analysis. Rather than conduct my own examination of archival and documentary information, I relied on the combined works of a variety of scholars to formulate a better understanding of Park history.

Much of my citations and references are drawn from the laborious and dedicated research of previous works. The history of the Parks I present, therefore, should not be viewed as new research in the field, but rather an amalgamation of existing research to forward an original perspective on Park history. The sources I have drawn on include philosophical and historical analyses of the Wilderness concept, histories of the National Parks, interpretations of landscape art in the 19th century, and studies of anti-modernism and urbanization in the 19th century.

The social research component of my research consisted of written questionnaires and focus groups with my target population of adolescents. I administered 65 questionnaires at the Met School in Providence, and 70 questionnaires at Barrington High School in Barrington, RI. I also conducted three focus groups with students at each school. The two schools were chosen because the communities in which they are located represent different points on a demographic spectrum. In order to analyze my central question, it was necessary to work with an urban and suburban community, as well as a community that featured a significant proportion of ethnic minority students.

Barrington High School is the public high school of Barrington, a nearby suburb of Providence. The median income in Barrington was \$53,058 in 1989.¹⁰ Of the 15,936 people who lived in Barrington in 1989, approximately 98% reported their race as white.* .3% identified themselves as black; .09% identified themselves as American Indian; .8% identified themselves as Asian; .1% identified themselves as Other. .7% claimed to be of Hispanic origin. The overwhelming ethnic homogeneity of the town's population is reflected in the school system.

The sample of the Barrington High School population represented in my survey reflects—to a degree—the ethnic homogeneity of the town. 69% of the respondents identified themselves as EuroAmerican; 7% identified themselves as Hispanic American; 3% identified themselves as American Indian; 1% identified him/herself as Other.⁺ 21% students did not respond to the question of ethnicity. I felt that it would be invasive to ask students to provide the household income of their family; therefore, I will assume that the median income of Barrington is reflected in the school population.

The Met school is located in downtown Providence. The median income in Providence was \$22,147 in 1989.¹¹ Of the 160,700 people who lived in Providence in 1989, approximately 70% reported their race as white. 15% identified themselves as black; 1% identified themselves as American Indian; 6% identified themselves as Asian; 8% identified themselves as Other.

¹⁰ All the following demographic figures were gathered from the 1990 census.

* The census data mixes race and ethnic classifications together. That is, “white” and “black” are used alongside of Asian/Pacific Islander. For my analysis, I have chosen to focus on ethnic, rather than racial classifications. Thus, I have replaced “white” with EuroAmerican, and “black” with African American.

⁺ While the Census report indicates there are no American Indians in the school system, because the report is almost 10 years old, I have to allow for the possibility that two students of American Indian descent have since enrolled.

¹¹ All the following demographic figures were gathered from the 1990 census.

As with the Barrington sample, the proportion of White students is underrepresented in my Met school sample. 26% of respondents identified themselves as EuroAmerican; 14% identified themselves as African American; 6% identified themselves as Asian American/Pacific Islander; 35% identified themselves as Hispanic American; 1% identified themselves as American Indian; 3% identified themselves as Other. 14% students did not respond to the question of ethnicity. Given the intent of my thesis to explore, in part, how ethnicity influences students' perceptions of the Parks, the overabundance of ethnic minority students in the Met school sample is acceptable.

As in Barrington, I felt that it would be invasive to ask students to provide the household income of their family; moreover, the Met school population is not exclusively from Providence. The school is classified as a statewide district, and therefore draws on students from across the state. However, its charter mandates that the school has at least 75% residents of Providence. The geographic diversity of the school must be regarded as a limitation in any conclusions I draw about how socioeconomic status influences high school students perceptions of the National Parks. And yet, the majority of Met school students are from Providence; all of the students spend a good portion of each day in an urban environment during the academic year. Taken collectively, these realities lend credence to the supposition that variations in questionnaire and focus group responses between the two schools may be in part attributable to the socioeconomic, ethnic, and environmental differences of the two communities.

The written survey was administered at the Met school during the month of June 1999, and at Barrington High School during the month of October 1999. Before this time I had piloted the survey with students at the Met school. Based on their comments, and

the revisions suggested by my principal advisor, the survey went through two drafts before its final form. The written survey packet included two questionnaires and a cover sheet explaining the project. The students were instructed to fill out one of the two questionnaires, depending on whether they had been to a National Park or not.

Aside from wording to accommodate actual or future visits, the surveys are nearly identical in the content and progression of the questions. There were a total of 24 questions; several questions featured multiple parts, making for 31 total parts that students were asked to answer. At the end of the survey were two optional questions, addressing the students' ethnicity and generational status. The survey questions were framed around analyzing what students knew about the National Parks, what they felt were the important reasons to have a National Park system, why they might want to go to a National Park, and how invested they were in National Park protection. A copy of the survey instrument is included as an appendix to this thesis.

I administered 65 questionnaires at the Met school. Beforehand I made arrangements with individual teachers to come into their classroom to present the surveys. At the Met school, each teacher works with 13 students, so I had to go to a number of classrooms to administer the total number of surveys. Students had been informed I was coming, and the teacher planned in the survey as part of the day's activity. Student attention and focus was accordingly very high; nor did I have to recruit students to participate.

I administered 70 surveys at Barrington High School. Rather than make arrangements with individual teachers, I worked with the superintendent of schools, principal, and vice-principal of Barrington high school. The principals made

arrangements for me to administer surveys during the study hall period. In contrast to the Met school, I had to recruit students to participate in the survey. Since many of the students viewed the study hall as a time to get work done for later classes, I had a more difficult time getting the necessary number of surveys completed. Once the students began the survey, they seemed engaged and interested in the questions. However, the students were initially more resistant to take part in the survey process than were the Met students.

I also conducted focus groups at the Met school and at Barrington High School. I decided to incorporate focus groups into my analysis because they allow for more in-depth and qualitative examination of the attitudes, cultural values, and beliefs that underlie perceptions and use patterns indicated in a survey. While the survey instrument allowed me to infer what students' views were towards the National Parks, what knowledge they possessed, and how important preservation was to them, it did not allow me to sufficiently examine the question of "why." The focus group experience, on the other hand, offers a better context for gaining an elaborated understanding of the nature of students' views and what factors contribute to the formation of their perspectives. And, as an alternative source of data collection, focus groups allowed me to triangulate the responses and trends I observed in the written survey results.¹²

During the focus groups, I served as the moderator and facilitator. I compiled a moderator's guide to direct the focus group process, assuring a base level of consistency between groups. By touching on very similar questions with different populations, I was

¹² For an elaborated discussion on the value and effectiveness of focus groups, see Krueger, Richard. 1988. *Focus groups : a practical guide for applied research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, and Zarcadoolas, Christina. "Popcorn, Politics, and Public Health: Conducting Successful Focus Group Research." *The American Journal of Health Communications*. Summer 1996, p. 5-10.

able to extract differences in students' opinions of and values towards the National Parks. I recorded the focus groups on audio tape, and later went back to expand on notes I took during the discussion itself. Each focus group featured a visual component, in which students were asked to react to images displayed of National Park environments. I coded student responses according to common themes that emerged across the focus groups. Students' quotes that represented a given theme were recorded verbatim, and presented in the thematic analysis. A copy of the moderator's guide is included as an appendix to this thesis.

The focus groups varied in size and length by school. At the Met school, I had made arrangements with teachers to conduct a focus group in their classroom. Accordingly, the focus groups were able to last for a full class period (approximately 45 minutes); there were 8, 9, and 13 students at each of the Met school focus groups.

At Barrington high school, I was again restricted to drawing on the study hall population to conduct the focus group. Students exhibited a similar resistance to taking part in the focus group as they had with the survey. And, since I had to spend time recruiting students to participate, focus groups were shorter by 10-15 minutes than they were at the Met School. There were 6, 8, and 9 students in the Barrington focus groups.

CHAPTER I

Old World Influences on America's National Parks

An analysis of my central question must be predicated on the recognition that the history of Park development in the United States can be linked to singularly Euro-American ideals, traditions, and cultural trends. In particular, National Parks emerged from a 19th century American culture fundamentally shaped by a Judeo/Christian heritage, the influence of modernist philosophy, increasing urbanization and an associated nostalgia for the declining frontier, and the desire for cultural recognition from Old World Nations.

National Parks are essentially segments of a landscape that a society protects as emblematic representations of the natural world. Cultural values of the environment are reflected in Park design, the selection of geographic, topographic, and biotic features to be protected, and the permissibility of visitors within Park boundaries. Since the middle of the 19th century, the American ideal has been that National Parks should be static snapshots of scenic wonder, untainted by the encroachment of development or residential interests.*

This commitment to establishing the Parks apart from the influence of Civilization has its deepest roots in the emergence of the Judeo-Christian heritage. The

most oft-quoted passages to support this contention are from the first chapter of Genesis. Verses 26 and 28 establish Man alone—apart from the rest of creation—as made in G-d’s image. The passages proceed to describe the natural world as existing for the use and advancement of human society. “Let us make man in our Image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.”¹³ Clearly, the Bible portrays human beings as the chosen species and Nature as their subservient resource.¹⁴

By extolling belief in a supreme G-d apart from and above nature, the Hebrews removed from natural objects any animistic or religious value found in pagan cultures. By objectifying and devitalizing the “creatures of the earth,” Hebrew peoples could exploit nature, unfettered by previous religious and social inhibitions.¹⁵ As Max Oelschlaeger elaborates, “Judeo-Christianity negates the ideas that humans are simply one among the many children of the Magna Mater and that the natural order is sacred, and affirms the ideas that *man* is the son of G-d, and therefore a privileged creation superior to wild nature, created by G-d to dominate creation.”¹⁶

* I refer here specifically to the 54 National Parks maintained by the National Park system. Other units of within the system—national monuments, national historic sites, etc—have varied criteria for their establishment and maintenance.

¹³ <http://library.brown.edu/search/t+king+james+bible/1,2,2,B/1856&tKing+James+Bible&1,1,,1,0>

¹⁴ But, as Max Oelschlaeger observes, too often historians have magnified and isolated the influence of Judeo-Christian ideology on contemporary Western worldview, without adequately considering its development in a greater historical context. “Judeo-Christianity is better understood...as bound with a long complicated process of cultural evolution, not the least part of which is the agricultural revolution...Judeo-Christianity is no one thing that serves a primal explanatory substance but is bound up with the mutable human world—*influencing and influenced*.” (p. 43) See Oelschlaeger, Max. 1991. *The Idea of Wilderness*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

¹⁵ White, Lynn Jr. 1967. The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis. *Science*. March 10. p. 1203-07.

¹⁶ Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 61.

The modern Western ideal of Wilderness also originated in Judeo-Christian ideology. The notion of Wilderness stems from the creation narrative, in which Adam and Eve are cast from Eden into a desolate world. As Roderick Nash notes, “The world Adam and Eve now faced was a wilderness, a ‘cursed’ land full of ‘thorns and thistles.’” From this point onwards (until the 19th century), wilderness was viewed as the antithesis of paradise. Subsequent passages in the Bible contrast Eden and Wilderness. In Joel, “The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, but after them a desolate wilderness.” And in Isaiah, “G-d will comfort Zion and make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the Garden of the Lord.” Later discussions will illustrate that nostalgia for the pre-lapsarian⁺ condition encouraged human efforts in later centuries to subdue and conquer the wilderness in order to establish a neo-Edenic civilization.

The Judeo-Christian dualistic view of Nature was buttressed by revolutionary philosophy emerging from Athens in the 4th and 5th centuries B.C.E. In his homocentric view, Socrates split from previous philosophers that had cast human identity within the context of an all-encompassing Nature.¹⁷ “For man,” contended Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living.”¹⁸ He removed the focus of inquiry from the outside world to the human soul. Oelschlaeger describes the effect as “[turning] attention inward, from nature as a connected order of being with which humankind is intrinsically bound toward human beingness as distinct from the non-human other.”¹⁹ Like Judeo-

⁺ As utilized by Oelschlaeger, Nash, and Carolyn Merchant, I understand this term to mean the state of human society before the Original Expulsion from Eden.

¹⁷ For Socrates’ place in Western Civilization see A.E. Taylor, *Socrates* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1953); Karl Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus: The Paradigmatic Individuals*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1962); and Leonard Nelson, *Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy*, trans. Thomas K. Brown III (New York: Dover, 1965). As suggested by Oelschlaeger in *Idea of Wilderness*.

¹⁸ As reprinted in Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 56-57

Christian ideology, Socrates' homocentrism removed the human species from the rest of the natural world.

Socrates' student, Plato, enhanced the homocentric view in his theory of a Divine Artificer. Plato applied universal qualities of the human soul to the concept of G-d as an "all-powerful soul."²⁰ Clarence Glacken links this philosophy to the Greek admiration for the ability of the artisan and skilled worker to transform base matter into a superior functional product. "The respect for artisanship could lead to two general ideas: (1) the creator as artisan, and (2) man as a being who can create order and beauty out of brute material, or more broadly, who can control natural phenomena with a combination of intelligence and skill."²¹ Platonic ideology thus mirrored Judeo-Christianity in attributing semi-deistic powers to human kind. Humans were viewed as replicators of G-d's original work. As G-d created the heavens and the earth in the Judeo-Christian tradition, He is in the Athenian heritage the Divine Artificer of the universe. Correspondingly, humans in both cultures were advanced as the sole species capable of mimicking G-d by imparting their design on the natural world.

Aristotle built upon both Socratic and Platonic philosophies. Pre-dating European modernists by several centuries, Aristotle furthered the scientific examination of nature to enable the control of natural resources and functions. During the Paleolithic era, people classified the world based on their everyday interactions and oral traditions. In contrast, Aristotelian taxonomy promoted understanding for the sake of use and exploitation. In Paleolithic times, people sought knowledge for survival and a continued harmony;

²⁰ Ibid, p. 58

²¹ Glacken, Clarence. 1967. *Traces on the Rhodesian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 46. As reprinted in Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*.

Aristotle's quest for understanding nature was intended to enhance rationalist, scientific, and philosophical discourse.

Judeo-Christianity, reinforced by Athenian philosophy, thus laid the conceptual framework for a dualistic vision of nature. Characterized by the paradigms of Nature as Other and Nature as Resource, the Judeo-Christian worldview still permeates Western culture. A corollary of Judeo-Christianity, however, tempered the influence of this dualistic view of Nature until the rise of Modernist thinking in the 16th century. Christian doctrine advanced the concept of life on Earth as a transitory preparation for Heavenly salvation. As stated in John 3:16, " For G-d so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that everyone who believes on him may not perish, but have eternal life."²²

Peasants could gain solace in the knowledge that they would be rewarded for their impoverished lives through everlasting salvation. That is not to say that Middle Age people felt no motivation to improve mortal life. Glacken contends that "If a dominant idea existed, it was that man, blessed with the faculty of work, assisted G-d and himself in the improvement of an earthly home even if the earth were, in Christian theology, only a sojourners' way station."²³ That said, overall acceptance of poverty may have limited peasants' exploitation of natural resources and systems.

The introduction of the Renaissance in the 14th century, and particularly the rise of Modernism in the 16th century, dramatically altered popular concepts about lifestyle and salvation. No longer did the assurance that "Blessed are the Meek, for they shall inherit the Earth" (Matthew 5:5) persuade the population to accept a life of poverty.²⁴ This change can be attributed principally to both the advancement of political philosophy

²² <http://www.churchesofchrist.net/bibles/bibles.mv>

²³ Glacken, p. 175. As reprinted in Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*.

during the Renaissance and the religious fragmentation of the Reformation. These movements presented a staunch challenge to the unqualified hegemony of the Church and feudal state.

Marsilius of Padua instigated societal upheaval by advancing the interests of the people over the dictates of the executive authority. Cemented later by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and other philosophers, Marsilius' declarations and discourse affirmed the sovereign will of the people.²⁵ Oelschlaeger comments on the implications of this sweeping perspective on the environment. "With the rise of the secular state, the emergence of an entrepreneurial class, and the revolutionary ideology that the state's end was to promote the citizenry's well-being, the claims made on the physical and biological capacities of wild nature escalated dramatically."²⁶

The onset of the Reformation only accelerated human exploitation of the natural world. Protestantism challenged Church doctrine that poverty was the surest path to salvation. The Calvinists rejected Christian maxims which taught that entry into Heaven could be achieved by leading a life of piety and penitence. These reform sects argued for the predestination of the soul, that "G-d gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected."²⁷ Religious zeal henceforth became an indication of, rather than a vehicle towards acquiring, eternal salvation. Wealth and prosperity came to be viewed as a sign of divine favor.

²⁴ <http://www.churchesofchrist.net/bibles/bibles.mv>

²⁵ Although not mentioned in the discussion of Athenian philosophy, Aristotle's treatises on the State largely influenced Marsilius and subsequent philosophers. In addition to contributing to the notion of Nature as Resource, Aristotelian belief that the end of the state was the prosperity of the people eventually brought about the decline of Ecclesiastical authority. Correspondingly, as Oelschlaeger observes, humans in Europe began to exploit natural resources with increasing rapidity and intensity.

²⁶ Oelschlaeger, p. 74.

²⁷ <http://www-student.furman.edu/users/g/gallowa/FivePoints.html>

In the 16th century, Francis Bacon built on this cultural transformation by touching off a flurry of philosophical discourse which solidified the permanence of the secular state and the rise of a capitalist, nature-exploiting society.* Bacon's views are perhaps most appropriately seen as an amalgam of three distinct cultural influences. First, he embodied the contemporary glorification of Civilization's ability to advance the well being of humanity. "Let a man only consider what a difference there is between the life of men in the most civilized province of Europe, and in the wildest and most barbaric districts of New India...And this difference comes not from soil, not from climate, not from race, but from the arts."²⁸ Second, Bacon adapted Greek philosophy in his homocentric emphasis and his belief in humans as "artificers" who extract value from an otherwise worthless natural world.

Finally, Bacon was also rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Much of his philosophy was guided by a determination to return humanity to a pre-lapsarian condition. Oelschlaeger refers to Genesis 2:19 as Bacon's "favorite biblical allusion:" "And out of ye ground the Lord G-d formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam, to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof."²⁹ Bacon viewed this precept as an indication of human privilege over the natural world. He viewed modern

* Deliberately excluded from the ensuing discussion of the Modernist perpetuation and magnification of the Nature as Resource ideology is an analysis of the scientific, technological, and industrial advancements that inspired, and often confirmed, Baconian-Cartesian theory.

²⁸ Francis Bacon in Anderson, F.H., ed. 1960. *The New Organon and Related Writings*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. P. 118. As reprinted in Oelschlaeger.

²⁹ Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*, p. 389

<http://library.brown.edu/search/t+king+james+bible/1,2,2,B/1856&tKing+James+Bible&1,1,,1,0>

science as a means of reclaiming this license: “[Science is a way to] exercise over the nature of things the authority which properly belongs to it.”³⁰

Bacon’s desire to reclaim dominion over the natural world is identified by Carolyn Merchant as indicative of a larger Recovery Narrative in Western culture. In her view, “The story of Western civilization since the seventeenth century and its advent on the American continent can be conceptualized as a grand narrative of fall and recovery.”³¹ Through her lens, the emphasis on regaining human control of nature is integrally linked to Bacon’s Western heritage. Indeed, his intent to re-establish an Edenic existence is the rationale for his scientific undertakings. “Man by the fall, fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses can in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and the latter by arts and science.”³² Merchant’s association of Western actions towards nature with an impulse to Reinvent Eden can be applied to later modernist thinkers and most tangibly to the pioneer experience in the New World.³³

The result of Bacon’s combination of contemporary, Greek, and Judeo-Christian cultural influences was his belief that all components of the natural world exist to further human prosperity. The Judeo-Christian definition of nature as a bounty to sustain humanity through its search for salvation no longer sufficed. Influenced by the context of secularism, Bacon elevated humanity beyond benefactor to master of all things. At its

³⁰ Anderson, p. 7

³¹ Merchant, Carolyn. “Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative.” In Cronon, William, ed. 1996. *Uncommon Ground*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

³² Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, in *Works*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Devon Heath, 14 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1870), p. 4. As reprinted in Merchant, “Reinventing Eden.”

³³ For an elaboration of Merchant’s arguments, see “Reinventing Eden” in Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, p. 132-159.

most fundamental, Baconian discourse promoted the use of science to refashion wilderness for human profit.

While Bacon reasserted humanity as the master of nature, Rene Descartes advocated comprehensive examination of nature as the means to achieve dominion. In other words, Bacon provided justification and motivation for exploiting Nature; Descartes described how this exploitation was to be accomplished. “Knowing the force and the action of fire, water, air, the stars...we can in the same way employ them in all those uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature.”³⁴ Like Bacon, Descartes can largely be seen as a continuation of Athenian philosophy. Cartesian thought evokes particularly strong parallels with the Aristotelian emphasis on classifying and investigating nature to achieve human benefit. Oelschlaeger describes the distinct similarity between another Greek principle—G-d as divine artificer—and Descartes’ mechanistic view towards the biotic world.

Animals ‘have no reason at all, and...it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs, just as a clock which is only composed of wheels and weights is able to tell the hours and measure the time more correctly than we can do with all our wisdom.’³⁵

The ramifications of this view toward nature are manifold. By viewing animals as machines, Descartes removed any intrinsic or innate value from even the highest order of species. Animals were incapable of experiencing pain, sensation, or emotion. This removed any vestige of restraint on human exploitation and plundering of natural resources, which were seen to have only utilitarian value.

³⁴ Rene Descartes, “Rules for the Direction of the Mind, Discourse on the Method, Meditations on First Philosophy, Objections against the Meditations and Replies, The Geometry,” in Hutchins, Robert Maynard. 1952. *Great Books of the Western World*. 31:61. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. As reprinted in Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness*.

Two revolutionary thinkers emerged from the British Enlightenment of the 17th century whose contributions further reinforced the Judeo-Christian, and now Baconian-Cartesian, ideology of Nature as Resource. Adam Smith is widely regarded as the originator of modern capitalism; he is also responsible for escalating the exploitation of the natural world to meet human needs.³⁶ Smith strongly believed in the redemptive powers of civilization and industrialization to achieve prosperity.

Smith's particular contribution to the Baconian-Cartesian framework was his insistence that consumption was fundamentally linked to human well being; therefore the production of wealth should be the goal of society. Smith was staunchly optimistic about the ability of an industrial society to achieve this objective. According to Smith, the industrial society's ability to produce abundant wealth and accumulation was predicated on the consumption of extensive natural resources. Smith shares Descartes' utilitarian view of nature--society at large became a "processing machine," which converted raw (and otherwise valueless) natural material into tangible wealth for its citizenry. "The *Wealth of Nations* represents the realization of Merlin's dream [of alchemy]: the base and valueless could now, with the facility of natural science and industrial technology, be transformed into a Heaven on earth."³⁷

John Locke's treatises had a direct impact on the American pioneer experience unfolding across the Sea. A contemporary of Adam Smith in 17th century Britain, Locke further established nature as a utilitarian resource for human kind by advancing a novel interpretation of how humans were to achieve such dominion. He maintained that land

³⁵ Oelschlaeger, p. 87.

³⁶ For an elaborate, innovative discussion of the link between capitalism and natural resource exploitation, see Murray Bookchin. 1990. *Remaking Society : Pathways to a Green Future*. Boston: South End Press.

³⁷ Oelschlaeger, *Idea of Wilderness* p. 94.

could only be claimed by improving it through the addition of human labor. An extension of this perspective proved to be of great importance in the American context: land *not* fixed with human labor was considered worthless and without value. “I think it will be but a very modest computation to say that of the products of the earth useful to the life of man...ninety-nine hundredths are wholly to be put on the account of labor.”³⁸

John Locke explicitly paved the way for what became the American interpretation of nature in the New World. According to Locke, early pioneers had to clear and cultivate the land in order to prosper. This view elevates humans to the role of quasi-saviors, capable of attaching value through the addition of their efforts to an otherwise useless landscape. Lockeian thought should thus be read as a further chapter in Merchant’s Recovery narrative. As she observes, “The recovery plot is the long, slow process of returning humans to the Garden of Eden through *labor* in the earth.”³⁹ Lockeian philosophy stressed that an Edenic equivalent could only be obtained by converting the New World wilderness into a cultivated, gardenesque landscape.

The combined philosophies of Bacon, Descartes, Smith, and Locke extended and substantiated earlier Judeo-Christian and Greek concepts about Nature as Resource. Their perspectives asserted human dominion over the natural world; the absence of intrinsic value in biotic life; and the potential for abundant wealth to be derived from otherwise worthless resources.

The experiences of settlers in the New World reinforced the second element of the dualistic view: Nature as Other. Attributable to Judeo-Christianity is the Western perception of wilderness as the antithesis of Eden. In 16th and 17th century America, this

³⁸ John Locke. “An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government.” Chap 5: 38. In Ashcraft, Richard. 1987. *Locke's Two Treatises of Government*. London: Allen & Unwin.

vision of Wilderness as Antithesis was translated into Wilderness as Adversary. For two centuries, the pioneer ethic that a neo-Edenic existence could be achieved from a conquered natural world dominated American history. As Merchant notes, "New World colonists [undertook] a massive effort to reinvent the whole earth in the image of the Garden of Eden."⁴⁰

In their initial encounters with the American continent, Pilgrim settlers continually emphasized the contrast between Old World and New. Cotton Mather bemoaned the ship "Lady Arabella" leaving an "earthly *paradise*" in England to come to America and "encounter the sorrows of a wilderness."⁴¹ Puritan struggles with the American environment often conjured up Biblical images of the bleak land into which Adam and Eve were originally expelled.

Francis Higginson in 1630 recounted that "this Countrey being verie full of Woods and Wildernesses, doth also much abound with Snakes and Serpents of strange colours and huge greatnesse." The creatures with "Rattles in their Tayles that will not flye from a Man" were horribly foreign to the Pilgrims, and could only confirm a foreboding sense of evil pervading the continent.⁴² In contrast to civilized Europe, in which pagan symbols had been eliminated and G-d's favor had graced the people with increasing wealth and modernity, the New World was rife with satanic creatures. In the view of Michael Wigglesworth, the newly "discovered" territory was "a waste and howling wilderness, /Where none inhabited/ But hellish fiends and brutish men/ That

³⁹ Merchant, "Reinventing Eden," p. 133. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Merchant, "Reinventing Eden," p. 134.

⁴¹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (2 vols. Hartford, Conn., 1853) I, 77. As reprinted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 26.

⁴² Francis Higginson, *New England Plantation (1630)* in Force, I, No.12, 11-12. As reprinted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 29.

Devils worshiped."⁴³ One can only wonder whether the Puritans felt that they had, by some unfortunate circumstance, been cast back to the era of Original Expulsion.

In the face of "a hideous and desolate Wilderness," many Puritans were full of despair and downtrodden.⁴⁴ However, they remained resolute in their "mission" to subdue the earth and have dominion over every living creature. The Puritans were determined to forge a pre-lapsarian society from the desolate surroundings in early America. As Nash observes, "The driving impulse was always to carve a garden from the wilds; to make an island of spiritual light in the surrounding darkness."⁴⁵ Edward Johnson wrote in 1654 that "The Lord made this poore barren Wildernesse become a fruitfull Land...[and] hath...been pleased to turn one of the most Hideous, boundless, and unknown Wildernesses in the world...to a well-ordered Commonwealth."⁴⁶ Puritan fervor to conquer the Wilderness took on an almost frenetic proportion. According to Nash, settlers began to view themselves as "Christ's Army" or "Soldiers of Christ" in a war against the natural world.⁴⁷⁺

The early colonial experience in America may also be analyzed as an application of Modernist/Capitalist thinking to the "laboratory" of the New World environment. The

⁴³ Wigglesworth, *G-d's Controversy with New Eengland (1662)* in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 12 *1871) p. 83. As reprinted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 36.

⁴⁴ William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), p. 62. As reprinted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*.

⁴⁶ Edward Johnson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, 1628-1651 (1654)*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson, *Original Narratives of Early American History*, 7 (New York, 1910) p. 71. As reprinted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 37

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, pp. 60, 75. As reprinted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 37; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 37.

⁺ Identifying American antagonism towards wilderness as solely a product of Western cultural traditions is over reductive, however. Battling wilderness must also be viewed as a matter of simple of expedience. The likelihood of colonial survival was greatly hampered by the realities of New World soil, climate, and geology. Early colonial efforts to conquer and subdue the environment are more appropriately viewed as both an environmental necessity *and* a cultural directive.

impact of Lockean thought on colonial expansion cannot be downplayed. His injunction that value could be exacted from the land only through human labor was nowhere more realizable than on the American continent. Nash refers to an early account of New England history, which mentioned how a “howling wilderness” had through settlers’ toil become a “pleasant land.” Christopher Gist, commenting on the Ohio territory in 1751, noted that “it wants Nothing but Cultivation to make it most delightful Country.” Later in the 18th century, William Cooper noted that his “great primary object” was “to cause the Wilderness to bloom and fructify.”⁴⁸

Locke himself doubted the ability of American pioneers to translate their labor into any significant achievement of prosperity or cultural advancement. “[The Americans] are rich in land and poor in all the comforts of life; whom nature, having furnished as liberally as any other people with the materials of plenty...yet for want of improving it by labor, have not one hundredth part of the conveniences we enjoy.”⁴⁹ Too soon did Locke pass judgment on his former countrymen.

Hector St. John de Crevecoeur commented on the advance of civilization by 1782. “Here [the European] beholds fair cities, substantial villages, extensive fields, an immense country filled with decent houses, good roads, orchards, meadows, and bridges, where an hundred years ago all was wild, woody, and uncultivated!”⁵⁰ Certainly, the modern network of metropolises, cultivated farmlands, and endless residential expanses further confirm the success with which American pioneers adhered to Locke’s directive.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, *A Brief Relation of the State of New England (1689)* in Force, *Tracts*, 4, No. 11, 4-5; *Christopher Gist’s Journals*, ed. William M. Darlington (Pittsburgh 1893), p. 47; Cooper, *A Guide in the Wilderness or the History of The First Settlements in the Western Counties of New York with Useful Instructions to Future Settlers* (Dublin, 1810), p. 6. As reprinted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Locke, *Two Treatises*. Chap. 5:41.

⁵⁰ St. John de Crevecoeur, Hector. 1782. *Letters from an American Farmer*. New York : Dolphin books,

Of more significance to this analysis, though, is the cultural imprint of the Pioneer Era on American identity. Within a century, American pioneers were lionized domestically and renowned internationally for the success and speed with which they subdued the land. Lending credence to the American conqueror mentality, Ralph Waldo Emerson championed the importance of subduing the wild. "This great savage country should be furrowed by the plough, and combed by the harrow; these rough Alleghenies should know their master...these wild prairies should be loaded with wheat; the swamps with rice...How much better when the whole land is a garden, and the people have grown up in the bowers of paradise."⁵¹

In the poem appropriately titled "O Pioneers!," published in 1855, Walt Whitman offered a glowing remembrance of the pioneer way of life:

O you youths, Western youths,
So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and friendship,
Plain I see you Western youths, see you tramping with forceness,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
Have the elder races halted?
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the sea?
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a new mightier world, varied world,
Fresh and Strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
We detachments steady throwing,
Down the edges, through the passes, up the mountains steep,
Conquering, holding, dying, venturing as we go the unknown ways,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
We primeval forests felling,
We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the mines within,
We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!⁵²

Doubleday, [1961], p. 35.

⁵¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Young American," *The Dial* 4 (1844) p. 489, 491. As reprinted in Merchant, "Reinventing Eden," p. 142.

⁵² <http://www.bartleby.com/142/153.html>, Posted November 1999.

Romanticizing and lauding the pioneer way of life was not confined to the poetry of Emerson and Whitman. During the latter half of the 19th century, several painters depicted the pioneer march across the continent. In John Gast's *American Progress* (Fig. 2), buffaloes, Indians, and forested wilderness retreat from the frame as pioneers expand into their territory. The picture shows an army of people, wagons, and stagecoaches being led onwards by a soaring female figure clutching telegraph wires in her left hand and a book in her right—symbols of progress and logic. In Emanuel Leutze's *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way* (Fig. 3), “a madonna-like group of a pioneer with his wife and child” points westwards towards still-virgin territory. Behind them a mass of settlers and wagons press onwards; in the near distance a party of men prepares the way by cutting down the forest with axes.”⁵³



Fig. 2. John Gast, *American Progress*

⁵³ For an elaborated and insightful analysis of these paintings, see Merchant, “Reinventing Eden,” p. 148-149. Quote from p. 148.



Fig 3. Emanuel Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*.

Foreigners also acknowledged the unique exploits of the American pioneer movement. Alexis de Toqueville, upon visiting the American continent in the 1830's, commented on the single-minded attention of American pioneers to the conquest of nature. "The Americans...are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet. Their eyes are fixed upon another sight, the...march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature."⁵⁴

The above excerpts all speak to a common phenomenon. The American pioneer experience was alternatively lionized, validated, eulogized, and commemorated. These perspectives on the American conquest and subjugation of the nation's wilderness in the

17th and 18th centuries contributed to the creation of a Pioneer myth that integrally shaped American identity. Particularly in the 19th century, American intellectuals regarded the Pioneer era with a nostalgia similar to the sentimentality with which the Modernists regarded the pre-lapsarian state. The image of hardy pioneers beating back the encroaching wilderness came to be viewed as the core of the American spirit, the source of the vitality and virility characteristic of the nation's people.

The frontier was the root of America's egalitarian society, composed of respectable, humble, rugged yeomen. Through taming and working the land, the Pioneers instilled in the nation a tradition of freedom. They were praised for the exceptional alacrity with which they forged a neo-Edenic civilization out of what Locke and others had described as an impenetrable and indefatigable wilderness. I would suggest that the American dream—the notion of the United States as the Land of Opportunity—emanated from the romanticization and glorification of the Pioneer myth. Furthermore, the evolution of an American identity seems indelibly linked with the subjugation and conquest of wilderness upon which the Pioneer myth is based.

American intellectual consciousness, as it materialized in the 19th century, proudly associated the ascendance of the United States as a world power with these Frontier origins, in which adversarial Wilderness was pushed back and vanquished by rugged, perseverant pioneers. The Pioneer society laid the foundation for a rapidly accelerating exploitation of the natural world. The conquest of nature through cultivation in the 17th and 18th centuries was transformed into subjugation through industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century. The corresponding social conditions contributed to

⁵⁴ Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Philip Bradley (2 vols. New York 1945), 2, 74. As reprinted in Runte, *National Parks*.

a desire for preserved open space, free of development. Moreover, the still pervasive Western value of Nature as Resource was modified in the 19th century: American intellectuals found that scenic nature could be utilized as a vehicle by which American cultural prowess could be held up to the standard of European antiquity. Finally, when the 1890 census proclaimed the frontier officially closed, American nostalgia for the Pioneer myth precipitated a movement to preserve what vestiges remained of early America.

CHAPTER II

Laying the Groundwork for the National Parks: Landscape Art, Cultural Insecurity, and Urban Discontent in the 19th century

The escalated transformation of the American landscape in the 19th century indicates the extent to which American pioneers embraced Judeo-Christian and Modernist edicts to subdue and conquer the natural world. What began as a relatively minor incursion into the New World had by the 1800's evolved into a pervasive extension of modernization across the continent. A series of territorial purchases and annexations in the first half of the century greatly expanded the acreage of the nation. Propelled by manifest destiny and a Homestead Act which awarded 160 acres of free land to any pioneer willing to cultivate them, Americans raced westward. Gold rushes and fantasies of instant wealth only encouraged new settlements. An exceedingly interwoven and complex network of railways crisscrossed the country, linking even the most wayward towns with the industrial centers of the East. As Frederick Jackson Turner noted, "The slender paths of aboriginal intercourse had been broadened and interwoven into the complex mazes of modern commercial lines; the wilderness had been interpenetrated by lines of civilization growing ever more numerous."⁵⁵

In the seventeenth century, old growth forests covered half of the American continent. Nearing the end of the 19th century, this was reduced to twenty percent, as

⁵⁵ Turner, Frederick Jackson. 1961. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Frontier and Section*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., p. 46.

lands were cleared for cultivation, grazing, and the construction of homes.⁵⁶ The greatest evidence of modernization across the continent was the dizzying growth of urban centers. From 1790-1900, the population of the United States increased sixteen-fold; the proportion of people living in cities escalated 139 times.⁵⁷ While only one out of four Americans lived in cities by the mid-1800's, half of the population had migrated to urban areas by 1910.⁵⁸

Rapid modernization and urbanization across the continent precipitated a radical change in Americans' perceptions of the natural world. As the century progressed, American intellectuals gradually came to replace perceptions of Wilderness as Adversary with notions of Wilderness as Victim. Later modifications soon followed this cultural shift: Wilderness as Vanishing; Wilderness as National Pride; and Wilderness as Refuge. These changing perceptions of nature are most appropriately viewed as gradual steps along a continuum rather than discrete occurrences. By the 1890's, hostile and antagonistic views towards Wilderness characteristic of the 17th century had evolved into appreciation of and reverence for Nature. This attitudinal shift culminated in the formation of National Parks as preserves of pristine Wilderness.

Soon apparent to many people in the early 19th century was the denuded and altered landscape which emerged as a by-product of social progress. In the eyes of

⁵⁶ Mitchell, Lee Clark. 1981. *Witness to a Vanishing America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Schlesinger, Arthur M. 1949. "The City in American Civilization," *Paths to the Present* New York, p. 225, in White, Morton and Lucia. 1962. *The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press and The M.I.T. Press, p. 54

⁵⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1975. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*. U.S. Department of Commerce. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.

* As will become evident throughout the remainder of this chapter, historical record only affords us a sense of how a limited portion of the intellectual population of 19th America perceived the natural world. As artists and writers, their works can to some degree be seen as reflective of popular cultural views. In later discussion, I will comment on the development of the National Parks movement and the rise of wilderness

Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, “And change with hurried hand has swept these scenes:/ The woods have fallen across the meadow-lot/ The hunter’s trail and trap-path is forgot,/ And fire has drunk the swamps of evergreen.”⁵⁹ Explorer Barnard Taylor voiced his regret over the costs associated with civilization. “Nature here reminds one of a princess fallen into the hands of robbers, who cut off her fingers for the sake of the jewels she wears.”⁶⁰ Rising scientists such as James Audubon and George Perkins Marsh offered empirical studies of the impact of Progress on the natural world. Audubon warned of the rapidly diminishing herds of buffalo, which “before many years...will have disappeared.” Marsh, offering an ecological perspective far ahead of his time, cautioned that continued exhaustion of natural resources would render the earth “an unfit home for its noblest inhabitant.”⁶¹

Before the mid-1800’s, the generations-old perception of Wilderness as a hostile adversary was coming under criticism and revision. Less than two hundred years earlier, William Bradford had bemoaned the American environment as a “hideous and desolate Wilderness” which encroached upon pioneer efforts to survive.⁶² In the 1800’s, antagonistic views towards Nature began to wane.

What propelled the dramatic shift towards a more sympathetic consideration of Wilderness? Largely, this change reflected a regard for Nature as a *vestige* of the

preservation as emerging from the observations, efforts, and nostalgia of a limited proportion of the population.

⁵⁹ Frederick Goddard Tuckerman. Quoted in Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Taylor, *At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery, and Men*, 2nd ser. (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1862), p. 155. Reprinted in Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 31.

⁶¹ Audubon, James, Cited in Francis Hobart Herrick, *Audubon the Naturalist: A History of His Life and Time*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), 2:255-256; Marsh, George Perkins. *Man and Nature (1864)*, ed. David Lowenthal (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 36. Reprinted in Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 55; Mitchell *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 60.

romanticized Frontier era. In the 19th century Americans were forced to recognize that modernization, while fundamentally initiated by the Pioneer conquest of the natural world, was nonetheless erasing from the landscape all remnants of Pioneer life. In American folklore, early settlers were celebrated for having achieved prosperity, freedom, and an independence from Europe through contest with an imposing Wilderness. As Turner was to explain,

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips him of the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin...Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe...The fact is, that here is a new product that is American.⁶³

The advance of civilization, which derived from the creation of a unique American existence, threatened to expunge from the continent any connection with the cherished Frontier Era.

Concern for the disappearance of the Frontier way of life led to a new trend in American art and literature: documentation of the vanishing wilderness. As Lee Clark Mitchell elaborates, “[The land] alone could testify to the natural delights that had first attracted the pioneer. Few challenged the tenets of their progressive faith...Yet more than a few attempted to capture a permanent view that would form the sole content of another generation’s knowledge of its heritage.”⁶⁴ Analysis of how these artists represented Wilderness is crucial to understanding the creation of National Parks. By preserving Wilderness in prose and on canvas, the artists generated national interest in and

⁶² William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), p. 62. As reprinted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 24.

⁶³ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier,” p. 39.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 29.

awareness of the vanishing landscape. What began as solely artistic preservation of wilderness in the 1830's and 1840's produced by the latter half of the 19th century a determination to preserve the physical remains of American Nature.

In the literary world, Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper were among the more noteworthy artists to call attention to the disappearing wilderness. Explaining his desire to join a westward expedition, Washington Irving stated that "I should see those fine countries of the 'far west,' while still in a state of pristine wilderness, and behold herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies, before they are driven beyond the reach of a civilized tourist."⁶⁵ A series of popular accounts of the West emerged from this interest in Westward travel. *A Tour of the Prairies, Astoria, and The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U.S.A.* shared the common theme of capturing impressions of western Nature before it was overcome by civilization. "It is the object of our task to present scenes of the rough life of the wilderness, and we are tempted to fix these few memorials of a transient state of things fast passing into oblivion."⁶⁶

Like Irving, James Fenimore Cooper's work lamented the disappearing landscape. "Though the scenes of this book are believed to have once been as nearly accurate as required by the laws which govern fiction, they are so no longer."⁶⁷ The tension between civilization and wilderness marks one of the central themes of Cooper's renowned Leatherstocking tales.

⁶⁵ *The Western Journals of Washington Irving, ed.* John Francis McDermott (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 1944), p. 10; Reprinted in Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 26

⁶⁶ *Astoria, or, Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains*, ed. Edgely W. Todd (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 14; Reprinted in Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pathfinder, or The Inland Seas* (New York: W.A. Townsend and Co., 1859), p. viii; Reprinted in Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 43.

Throughout the series, Cooper comments on the degradation of Nature generated by the advance of civilization. He parodies the mindset of expansionists in *The Pioneers* when a character argues that, “We must run our streets by the compass, coz, and disregard trees, hills, ponds, stumps, or, in fact, anything but posterity.”⁶⁸ Cooper’s awareness of this attitude among his contemporaries corresponded with his mounting malaise about the effects of modernization on the land.⁶⁹ These realizations prompted Cooper to attempt to preserve the vanishing American wilderness within prose fiction. As Mitchell observes, “Cooper’s disquietude about men’s ravaging of nature gave him sufficient reason to document the landscape.”⁷⁰

The writings of Irving and Cooper had important influences on 19th century American society. By calling attention to the vanishing wilderness, they popularized a lament for the disappearance of the American frontier. They substantiated an intrinsic valuation of Wilderness in the consciousness of east coast readers. Cooper in particular furthered and legitimized misgivings about progress. Finally, Irving and Cooper’s lament revolutionized the Edenic ideal. The Recovery Narrative of Baconian-Cartesian thought asserted that a pre-lapsarian condition could be regained through human dominion over the natural world—by cultivating a garden out of the surrounding wilderness. In the 19th century this conceptual model was turned on its head. Rather than bringing paradise closer, Irving and Cooper suggested that modernization and urbanization carried society further *away* from Eden.

⁶⁸ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers* (New York: W.A. Townsend and Co., 1859), p. 199; Reprinted in Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 46.

⁶⁹ Cooper comments on observing pine trees pine trees “[waving] in melancholy grandeur its naked limbs to the blast, a skeleton of its former glory.”

⁷⁰ Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 47.

The new 19th century Edenic paradigm had a stronghold in American landscape painting of subsequent decades. This genre suggested that the apex of American Civilization had been eclipsed: Reinventing Eden now required a return to Nature, a rejection of extreme civilization and modernization. Paradoxically, as civilization and settlement spread across the American continent, the Edenic paradigm progressively portrayed Original Paradise as "pure" Wilderness.

American painters' detailed depictions of the landscape and vivid imagery of pristine Nature fundamentally reshaped how Americans viewed the natural world. This effect was especially profound for eastern residents, who were not exposed to the western landscape. The popularity of these paintings, taken to be authentic replicas of wilderness, triggered a public desire to preserve the actual scenery from which the artists had drawn their inspiration.

As with their literary contemporaries, the landscape artists created accurate renditions of nature in order to capture images of a vanishing world. James Audubon expressed apprehension that little record of the landscape existed among American archives.

I feel with regret that there are on record no satisfactory accounts of the state of the country from the time when our people first settled on it...However, it is not too late yet; and I sincerely hope that either or both [Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper] will ere long furnish the generations to come with those delightful descriptions which they are so well qualified to give, of the original state of a country that has been so rapidly forced to change her form and attire under the influence of increasing population.⁷¹

⁷¹ Audubon, James. *Delineations of American Scenery and Character* (New York: G.A. Baker and Co., 1926), pp. 4-5. As reprinted in Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 36.

Written in 1843, Audubon's lament both reflected an awareness that the landscape was irrevocably changing and rallied literary figures to continue to document the frontier. Audubon heeded his own call to preserve images of the natural world. During the 1840's he produced the encyclopedic *Birds of America* series, which featured a detailed taxonomic depiction of America's feathered species. One painting, the *Wild Turkey* (Fig. 4), presented a life-size rendition of the animal. His selection of the turkey was deliberate; the wild turkey, like the American bison endemic to America, was a widely recognized and revered national icon.



Fig. 4: James Audubon. *Wild Turkey*.

George Catlin shared Audubon's dismay over the disappearance of the western frontier. Whereas Audubon focused on the decline of wildlife, Catlin lamented the eventual decimation of Native Americans. "I have, for many years past, contemplated

the noble races of red men who are now...melting away at the approach of civilization...yet, phoenix-like, they may rise from 'the stain of the painter's palette,' and live again upon canvass."⁷² Native Americans were the subjects of Catlin's artwork. In *Pipestone Quarry, Coteau Des Prairies* (Fig. 5) Catlin displays a group of Indians dressed in traditional garb, at work on the plains. William Cronon notes that the painting remains within the confines of depicting a transient culture affecting minimal influence on a vast landscape. "Here Indians really are altering the environment around them, leaving a permanent imprint on the landscape, but the effect is so small and so local that nothing in this image undermines our general sense of a nomadic people with no permanent commitment to a particular place."⁷³

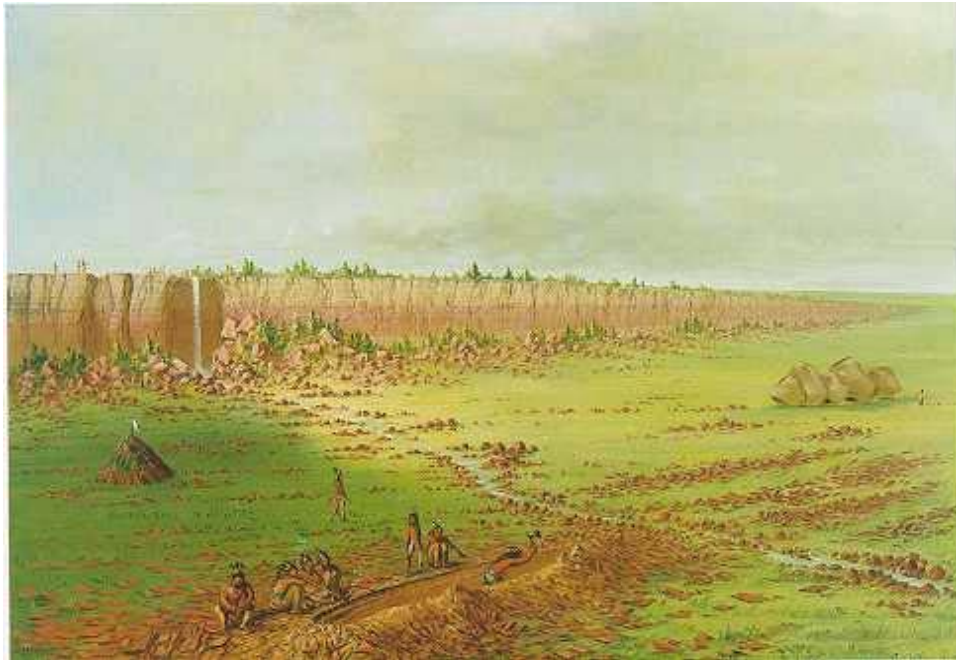


Fig. 5: George Catlin, *Pipestone Quarry, Coteau Des Prairie*.

⁷² Catlin, George. *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, 2 vols. (London, 1841; reprint: New York: Dover, 1975), 1:16. As Reprinted in William Cronon, *Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscapes of Frontier Change*, in Prown, Jules, ed. 1992. *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 50.

⁷³ Cronon, *Telling Tales*, p. 25

James Audubon and George Catlin must be acknowledged for their commitment to and role in the documentation of the western landscape.⁷⁴ Yet, the images presented in the paintings of Audubon and Catlin had little influence on later calls for the creation of National Parks. Cultural values had changed to such a degree by the 1870's and 1880's that Park officials actually *removed* Native tribes from Park grounds, because they were felt to compromise the Parks' wilderness atmosphere.⁷⁵

The paintings of Thomas Cole, a contemporary of Audubon and Catlin, had a more pronounced influence on the formulation of National Parks. Rather than focus on the waning biotic or human elements of the frontier, Cole portrayed the scenic landscapes of the West. His paintings, which depicted Wilderness as a spectacle and glorified the Pioneer existence, had a profound impact on American conceptions of Nature. Cole's works perpetuated Western perceptions of humans existing apart from Wilderness; however, they shifted the relation to nature from conqueror/subjugator to visitor/spectator. Further, by depicting American scenery in a picturesque and inviting fashion, Cole furthered a perception of Wilderness as benign and appealing, rather than hostile and frightening.

“The ‘meagre utilitarianism’ of contemporaries who seemed willing to sacrifice the landscape to the ‘ravages of the axe’ enraged Cole.”⁷⁶ *The Course of Empire*, an

⁷⁴ Indeed, Catlin is often credited with originating the concept of a National Park: “What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! A *nation's Park*, containing man and beast, in all the wild[ness] and freshness of nature's beauty!” As reprinted in Nash, p. 101.

⁷⁵ The removal of Native Americans from National Parks, and the shifting cultural values that resulted in Americans viewing Indians as foreign, rather than integral to, the American frontier, are aptly detailed in Mark Spence. 1999. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of National Parks*. New York: Oxford University Press. The removal of Native Americans from National Parks, and Spence's analysis in particular, will be address later in this chapter.

⁷⁶ Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, p. 37.

acclaimed five-panel series produced in 1836, portrays society emerging out of wilderness toward a state of high civilization, only to decline again into ruin and desolation. The series was produced shortly after Cole's return from Europe and illustrates concern over the detrimental impact of civilization on a nation. Perhaps the series served as a warning against the direction towards which America was proceeding.⁷⁷

The subjects of many of Cole's paintings are the most telling indications of his preference for an un-civilized American landscape. His paintings pioneered the presentation of the American landscape as worth visiting and valuable due to its wilderness. The *Falls of Kaaterskill* (Fig. 6), for instance, depicts a pristine scene of a waterfall cascading over a steep cliff. Within the frame, there is no evidence of human influence or presence. *Kaaterskill* is best understood as the beginning of American portrayal of wilderness as scenic and appealing. Both *Kaaterskill* and *The Oxbow* (discussed later) are tempered in their portrayal of wilderness as picturesque. While the paintings certainly reveal much more embracing perceptions of Wilderness than existed in previous generations, wholesale celebration of American wilderness as dazzling and attractive did not emerge until the latter half of the nineteenth century.

⁷⁷ For a further analysis of *The Course of Empire*, see Mitchell, p. 37; Cronon, *Telling Tales*, p. 43; Herndl, Carl G., ed. 1996. *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p. 271-272.



Fig 6. Thomas Cole. *Falls of Kaaterskill*

The viewer's perspective is one of the more intriguing elements of Cole's painting. As Clark, Holloran, and Woodford state, "The vantage point is a consciously contrived one; there is at the actual site of Kaaterskill Falls no opposing slope on which to stand." In *Kaaterskill*, the ruggedness of the landscape and the viewer are dually emphasized. The land, untainted by modernization, exists in a free state; the viewer "proves equal to the challenge of the landscape" by attaining a perspective on the Falls where none seemed possible.⁷⁸ While Cole refutes the Modernist utilitarian view of the natural world, he maintains the Judeo-Christian identification of humans existing outside the realm of nature. Though the unfeared viewer is no longer exploiting nature, he nonetheless remains external to Nature's sphere of influence—indeed, he is not even included in the frame of Cole's representation of the Kaaterskill wilderness.

⁷⁸ Clark, Gregory, S Michael Halloran, and Allison Woodward, "Thomas Cole's Vision of 'Nature' and the Conquest Theme in American Culture, in Herndl, *Green Culture*, p. 266.

Thomas Cole is perhaps more acclaimed for his portrayal of an idyllic yet dynamic balance between the advancing frontier and existing wilderness. This theme is most evident in *The Oxbow* (Fig. 7). While the pastoral landscape is sharply separated from the lush wilderness by the Connecticut River, the two spheres appear to be peacefully coexisting. Human presence in the landscape is minimized. The artist and his umbrella, the only hints of civilization, are barely discernible between two rocks in the foreground. The harmonic poise between Wilderness and Civilization was to Cole the epitome of American beauty. “Whether we see it at Haverhill, Northampton, or Hartford, it still possesses that gentle aspect; and the imagination can scarcely conceive Arcadian vales more lovely or more peaceful than the valley of the Connecticut.”⁷⁹



Fig. 7: Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow*

⁷⁹ Cole, Thomas, “Essay on American Scenery” (1836) in Thomas Cole, *The Collected Essays and Prose Sketches*, ed. Marshall Tynn, John Colet Archive of American Literature, no. 7 (Minneapolis:

At the same time that *The Oxbow* contributed to the romantic Frontier narrative, it also revealed Cole's foreboding that Civilization might transform the landscape from its bucolic pastoral state. Cronon observes that Cole's uncertainty is written into the canvas. "In the lazy turn of the great oxbow—echoed by the circling birds at the edge of the storm—we can make out the shape of a question mark: where is all this headed?" Similarly, scattered smokestacks rising out of the cultivated plains foretell a resting potential for development of the land.⁸⁰ While Cole celebrated the advances of the frontier into the wilderness, he lamented the changes advancing modernization might have on the landscape.

I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes is quickly passing away—the ravages of the axe are daily increasing—the most noble scenes are made destitute, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation...another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called improvement.⁸¹

Thomas Cole's contributions to American landscape painting popularized emerging efforts to preserve the vanishing American landscape on canvas. While his paintings glorified the American frontier existence, they also presented wilderness as a place worthy of visit and repose. Cole portrays himself lounging in the wilderness of *The Oxbow*, gazing down upon the farmlands. He follows the Judeo-Christian/Modernist tradition by depicting humans as distinct from the natural world, but portrays humans in a novel way, as willing spectators and visitors rather than as exploiters. Additionally, his paintings attached visual imagery to the laments jointly expressed by Irving, Cooper, Audubon, and Catlin. Through his canvas, Cole conveyed to the viewer a recognition

John Colet Press, 1980), p. 15. As reprinted in Cronon, *Telling Tales*, p. 40.
⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 42

that advancing Civilization threatened to upset the peaceful harmony between wild Nature and the pastoral landscape.

As the century progressed, the trend in American landscape art shifted increasingly towards portraying Nature as pristine and alluring. Gradually, romanticization of the Frontier narrative faded from mainstream painting efforts.⁺ In *Kindred Spirits* (Fig. 8), Asher Durand amplifies Cole's depiction of wilderness as picturesque and inviting. Featured in the painting is a eulogized Cole himself, strolling with his friend William Cullen Bryant. Dressed in topcoats, carrying canes, and sporting top hats, the two spectators are enjoying a leisurely walk amidst pristine nature. Produced a decade after the majority of Cole's paintings, *Kindred Spirits* illustrates the shifting American perceptions of wilderness. Increasingly, artists like Durand chose to depict the attractive scenic qualities of Wilderness, apart from any association with the Frontier narrative.

⁸¹ Cole, Essay on American Scenery, p. 17. As reprinted in Cronon, *Telling Tales*, p. 42.

⁺ Glorifications of the Pioneer landscape were still present and oft-expressed in the decades following Cole's death. Frederic Edwin Church's *Mount Katahdin* (1855) is one such painting that idealized, and according to Cronon fantasized the harmony between the frontier and surrounding wilderness. Increasingly, though, landscape painting shifted towards representations of picturesque, sublime, and pristine Nature.



Fig. 8: Asher B. Durand, *Kindred Spirits*.

This trend culminated in the “post-frontier” landscape paintings of Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt. In contrast to Cole and Durand, who focused on eastern examples of the natural world as their subjects, Moran and Bierstadt represented landscapes of the west. The westward migration of landscape painting is indicative of two trends. By the 1860’s and 1870’s, when Moran and Bierstadt were active, the frontier had advanced far beyond the Mississippi. The vast majority of the eastern landscape showed evidence of modernization and urbanization; only further west were there still large pristine tracts of the natural world.

More significantly, their selection of western landscapes revealed a growing preference and demand for images of Wilderness devoid of any signs of Civilization. As Cronon observes, “The apparently pre-human wilderness of these paintings is in fact a *post-frontier* landscape, a product of the very frontier process it seeks to erase, set at a

narrative moment when at least some Americans had begun to wonder whether all parts of the nation should be destined for development.”⁸²

While some of Moran and Bierstadt’s paintings still include human visitors, they appear insignificant and dwarfed by the vast, untouched Wilderness that surrounds them. In *The Grand Canyon of Yellowstone* (Fig. 9) Wilderness is portrayed as beautiful, breath-taking, and awe-inspiring. Produced in 1872, (not coincidentally the year Yellowstone was established as the first National Park) Moran’s painting represents a completion of the Edenic narrative reversal. No longer is the Recovery Narrative defined by carving a garden out of the surrounding Wilderness. According to the Edenic narrative of the 19th century, which culminated in the formation of the National Parks, a return to Paradise could only be achieved by returning to *untainted, uncivilized* Nature. The reversal of American attitudes towards Wilderness that precipitated the appreciation and celebration of pristine Nature was both reflected in and influenced by the frontier literature and landscape art of the 1830’s-1870’s. American landscape painting and literature of the 19th century is appropriately recognized as a fundamental precursor to the preservation of Nature in the National Parks.



Fig. 9. Thomas Moran: *The Grand Canyon of Yellowstone*

⁸² Cronon, *Telling Tales*, p. 81.

Artistic popularization and celebration of the western landscape coincided with an era in American history in which intellectuals experienced a sense of cultural inferiority to the Old World. Despite achievements in frontier literature and landscape painting, American art was thought to pale in comparison with the products of European civilization. America had no Shakespeare, Michelangelo, or Mozart to hold up as symbols of national pride and accomplishment. What, intellectuals despaired, did the nation possess that could compete with the cultural traditions of Europe?

As Alfred Runte observes, “By the 1860’s many thoughtful Americans had embraced the wonderlands of the west as replacements for man-made marks of achievement. The agelessness of monumental scenery instead of the past accomplishments of Western Civilization was to become the visible symbol of continuity and stability in the new nation.”⁸³ The development of National Parks can in part be understood as an attempt by eastern intellectuals to legitimize American cultural identity through celebration of its unique Wilderness scenery. *

In the decades leading up to the establishment of Yellowstone on March 1, 1872, prominent Americans championed the superiority of western natural wonders over European scenery. Particularly targeted for comparison were the Alps of Switzerland. While the rest of European Nature had long ago been denuded by untold centuries of cultivation, grazing, and recent industrial development, the Alps remained a pristine landscape into the 19th century. To the American eye, however, the Frontier landscape was unparalleled for its beauty and effect. Lieutenant Colonel A. V. Kautz proudly boasted in 1857 that the Cascade Mountain Range possessed “mountain scenery in quantity and quality sufficient to make half a dozen Switzerlands.” William H. Brewer

stated, “When we come to the Yosemite Falls proper, we behold an object that has no parallel anywhere in the Alps...[It] comes over the wall on the far side of the valley and drops 1,542 feet for the first leap, then falls 1,100 more in two or three more cascades...I question if the world furnishes a parallel; certainly there is none known.”⁸⁴

Promoters of American Wilderness scenery made comparisons not only with the natural wonders of Europe, but also with cultural legacies of the Old World. Wilderness was compared with architecture, mountains with castles. Clarence King, an explorer from Connecticut, maintained that no “fragment of human work, broken pillar or sand-worn image half lifted over pathetic desert—none of these link the past and to-day with anything like the power of these monuments of living antiquity.” Early expeditions to the Yellowstone wilderness described formations “that constantly suggested some mighty effort at human architecture.” A stream was observed to flow “between a procession of sharp pinnacles, looking like some noble old castle, dismantled and shivered with years, but still erect and defiant.”⁸⁵

Eastern intellectuals believed that America’s natural wonders could serve as sources of national pride only as long as they remained *preserved* and protected. This backlash against the deleterious effects of civilization stemmed largely from the despoliation of Niagara Falls, and European derision at America’s inability to protect its scenic wonders. Runte elaborates on this contention: “The impulse to bridge the gap between appreciation and protection needed catalysts of unquestionable drama and

⁸³ Runte, *National Parks*, p. 11-12.

⁸⁴ A.V. Kautz, “Ascent of Mount Rainier,” *Overland Monthly* 14 (May 1874): 394; James M. Hutchings, *Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1865), p. 134; William H. Brewer, *Up and Down California in 1860-1864*, ed. Francis P. Farquhar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), pp. 404-405. As reprinted in Runte, *National Parks*, p. 271.

visibility. In the fate of Niagara Falls Americans found a compelling reason to give preservation more than a passing thought.”⁸⁶

In the first half of the nineteenth century, before many EuroAmericans had viewed the natural wonders of the west, Niagara was widely regarded as the nation’s most impressive sight. It attracted hordes of domestic and foreign tourists eager to see the legendary cascade. The completion of the Erie Canal and railroad connections greatly facilitated access to Niagara from eastern cities. In the capitalist tradition of the United States, however, the Falls also attracted a host of entrepreneurs eager to profit from the tourism boon. “Private developers quickly acquired the best overlooks, then forced travelers to pay handsomely for the privilege of using them. By 1860 gatehouses and fences rimmed the falls from every angle.”⁸⁷ Coupled with the hydroelectric companies which diverted the Falls for generating electricity, the “sharper and hucksters” converted a magnificence of Wilderness into a blazon illustration of America’s desecration of the landscape.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Clarence King, *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1872), pp. 41-43; Nathaniel Pitt Langford, *The Discovery of Yellowstone National Park*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), pp. vii-xvii. As reprinted in Runte, *National Parks*, p. 21; 38.

⁸⁶ Runte, *National Parks*, p. 5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁸ For an elaboration of the defacement of Niagara Falls, see Runte, p. 5-9, 57-59. Runte also suggests Alfred Runte, “How Niagara Falls Was Saved: The Beginning of Esthetic Conservation in the United States,” *The Conservationist* 26 (April-May 1972): 32-35, 43; idem, “Beyond the Spectacular: The Niagara Falls Preservation Campaign,” *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 57 (January 1973): 30-50.

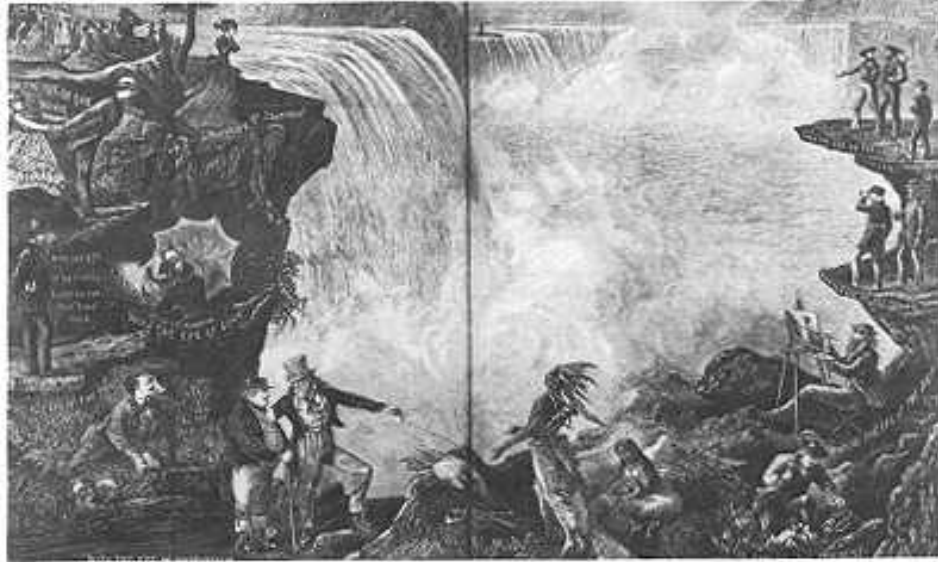


Fig. 10: Arthur Lumley, *Niagara Seen with Different Eyes*, 1873

European visitors to the Falls were quick to criticize the inability of Americans to preserve such a valuable natural wonder. Alexis de Toqueville, during his 1831 visit to the United States, commented on Niagara's rapid transformation. Fearful of what might befall Niagara in the years to come, he implored a friend to see it as soon as possible. "If you delay, your Niagara will have been spoiled for you. Already the forest round about is being cleared...I don't give the Americans ten years to establish a saw or flour mill at the base of the cataract." Andrew Reed and James Matheson, English Congregational Ministers, expressed even greater contempt for America's neglect: "One has hardly the patience to record these things. [A] universal voice ought to interfere and prevent the money-seekers."⁸⁹

⁸⁹ As quoted in George Wilson Pierson, *Toqueville in America* (New York: Doubleday and Co. Anchor Books, 1959), p. 210; As quoted in Charles M. Dow, *Anthology and Bibliography of Niagara Falls*, 2 vols. (Albany, N.Y.: J. B. Lyon Company, 1921). 2:1070-1071. Respectively reprinted in Runte, *National Parks*, p. 6

The criticism of Sir Richard Henry Bonnycastle, an English traveler, must have registered particularly poignantly with intellectuals insecure about America's cultural standing.

The Yankees [have] put an ugly shot tower on the brink of the Horseshoe and are about to consummate the barbarism by throwing a wire bridge...over the river just below the American Falls...What they will not do next in their freaks it is difficult to surmise, but it requires very little more to show that patriotism, taste, and self-esteem, are not the leading features in the character of the inhabitants of this part of the world.⁹⁰

Bonnycastle's indictment of Americans for their despoliation of Niagara sent a clear and forthright message to eastern intellectuals. Scenic wonders of the western landscape could only provide the United States with a national and international cultural identity if preserved. Concurrently, new accounts from travelers and government-financed expeditions, augmented by the paintings of Bierstadt and Moran, filled the American imagination with dazzling images of newly discovered natural scenery. To assure that these natural wonders did not suffer the same fate as Niagara, intellectuals began to fervently advocate for the preservation of the nation's scenic beauty.

Complimented by an urban elite cognizant of wilderness as a refuge from urban life, the preservation movement made the establishment of National Parks a manifest occurrence.

In 1800, the urban population in America numbered 322,000. By 1890, the year the U.S. census bureau officially closed the western frontier, the urban population had skyrocketed to over 22 million people.⁹¹ While urbanization and industrialization heightened the material wealth and comfort of the nation, it produced great opulence for a

⁹⁰ As quoted in Charles M. Dow, *Anthology and Bibliography of Niagara Falls*, 2 vols. (Albany, N.Y.: J. B. Lyon Company, 1921). 2:1075. As Reprinted in Runte, *National Parks*, p. 7

⁹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1975. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*. U.S. Department of Commerce. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.

small minority of its citizens and atrocious living conditions for the city's working class. This precipitated acute disillusionment with Civilized life among the urban elite.

America's cities could not provide sanitary and decent living conditions for the influx of immigrants and rural migrants. Struggling to provide housing for burgeoning populations, municipal governments hastily assembled tenement and apartment buildings—most of which were horribly overcrowded and filthy. Historians Christopher Tunnard and Henry Hope Reed describe the paltry living conditions found in New York at the end of the 19th century: "Toilet facilities, if they can be so named, were in the cellar or under the sidewalk; they soon became cesspools. Windows looked out on black airshafts, and the corridors were...so narrow that two people could just squeeze past one another. In one of these blocks 577 persons were confined in 96 rooms."⁹²

The effect of such abysmal living conditions on the urban working poor was ably captured by James McCabe, Jr., who in 1868 published a book on the condition of America's cities. "In the day time half-clad, filthy, emaciated creatures pass you on the gloomy streets, and startle you with the air of misery which they carry about them. At night these poor creatures huddle into cellars, so damp, foul, and pestilential that it seems impossible for human beings to exist in them."⁹³ The upper and middle class residents of the City never endured such depraved living conditions. However, as McCabe noted, most residents could not help but confront the often shocking sight of the City's working classes.

Moreover, the depravity of these living conditions was rarely confined to the walls of the tenement houses. Filth regularly accumulated in the city streets, and violence

⁹² Tunnard, Christopher, and Henry Hope Reed. 1956. *American Skyline: The Growth and Form of Our Cities and Towns*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company, p. 100.

often erupted in the overcrowded neighborhoods of the city's poor. James W. Gerard commented on the pervasiveness of violence in urban environments. "Look any and every day in the week, at your morning paper, and see what a black record of crime has been committed in your public streets the day and the night before, what *stabblings*, what shootings, what knockings down...insults to women and other disgusting details of violence."⁹⁴

While the urban intellectual class was largely protected from the worst aspects of city living, they were nonetheless the most vociferous antagonists towards urban America. The intellectuals bemoaned the moral depravity, effeminization, and debilitating nervousness associated with city living. They were steeped in the Pioneer Myth and Jeffersonian agrarian ideal, which jointly celebrated the origin of American identity through labor and toil with the land. In comparison to this ideal, the expansion of urbanism represented a precipitous fall from grace.

The rise of the urban lifestyle detached man⁺ from the land and made him dependent on the intangible processes of industrialization and commerce. The shift from rural to urban was viewed as a sharp departure from the Pioneer existence. Critics feared that detachment from the land would result in the loss of American ruggedness, strength, and resilience. As a pathologist observed in 1888, "Once let the human race be cut off from personal contact with the soil, once let the conventionalities and artificial

⁹³ McCabe, James Jr. 1868. *The Secrets of the Great City*, in Still, *Urban America*, p. 163.

⁹⁴ Gerard, James W. 1853. *London and New York: their Crime and Police*, in Still, *Urban America*, p. 179.

⁺ I consciously use the term "man" here instead of humans because most intellectuals expressed their fears of urbanization in terms of the deleterious effects it would have on men. The Pioneer Myth, after all, featured most prominently an idealization of the Rugged *Frontiersman*. It was the degeneracy and weakening of *his* character that city critics were most worried about.

restrictions of so-called civilization interfere with the healthful simplicity of nature, and *decay is certain.*”⁹⁵

The belief that urban middle class men had become meaningless cogs in an increasingly complex industrial machine was oft-repeated in late 19th century society. Charles Eliot Norton complained that “the man of to-day is less independent than the Greek; he cannot get along alone, he is more helpless by himself with every advance of our complicated civilization.”⁹⁶ Dependence on the intangible economic network was not simply a perception. Gail Bederman reports that between 1870 and 1910, the proportion of self-employed middle class men dropped from 67 percent to 37 percent. Compounding this trend was a series of economic depressions from the 1870’s through the end of the century that triggered several thousands bankruptcies. Bederman notes that these changing socioeconomic trends “drove home the reality that even a successful, self-denying small businessman might lose everything, unexpectedly and through no fault of his own.”⁹⁷

In addition to feeling incapable of forging their own existence (as their Pioneer forbears had), middle class men felt that urban living was rendering them weak and impotent. As Henry James observed through Basil Ransom in *The Bostonians*, “The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it’s a feminine, nervous, hysterical, chattering canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false

⁹⁵ Woods Hutchinson, “The Physical Basis of Brain-Work,” *North American Review* 146 (May 1888): 522-531. As reprinted in Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 28. Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ Letter, Charles Eliot Norton to S.G. Ward, 19 September, 1900, in *Letters of Norton*, 2:300; As reprinted in Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 34.

⁹⁷ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 218; As reprinted in Bederman, Gail. 1995. *Manliness and Civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Bederman, p. 12.

delicacy and exaggerated solitudes and coddled sensibilities.”⁹⁸ William Blaikie, a former rowing star, lamented that, “about all our play is mental or emotional, adding hardly anything to bodily vigor.”

Intellectual apprehension was aggravated by the fear that middle class indolence could lead to social uprising; events in the last quarter of the 19th century seemed to confirm these fears. T.J. Jackson Lears elaborates on the social conditions of America’s cities. “Periodic social upheavals kept bourgeois hysteria at white heat: the Haymarket Affair and the giant Knights of Labor strike in 1886, the violent class confrontations at Homestead in 1892 and Pullman in 1894, the assassination of President McKinley by a self-proclaimed anarchist in 1901—these were only the best-publicized incidents.”⁹⁹ Dr. James Weir’s observations in 1894 are indicative of a widespread concern that the weakening of the elite would pave the road for upheaval. “The rich become effeminate, weak, and immoral, and the lower classes, taking advantage of this moral lassitude, and led on by their savage inclinations, undertake strikes, mobs, boycotts, and riots.”¹⁰⁰

Intellectual disillusionment with the City existence also stemmed from fear that America’s identity would be lost if decay continued. In 1887, George Frederic Parsons of the *New York Tribune* wrote, “Poverty, thrift, prosperity, wealth, luxury, corruptness, degradation: in these seven words the fate of many great empires is told. No nation following in that track has escaped the common destiny. Shall we?”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Henry James, *The Bostonians* (New York: Modern Library, 1965), p. 343, quoted in Kimmel, “Contemporary ‘Crisis,’” p. 146; As reprinted in Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, p. 16.

⁹⁹ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ James Weir, Jr., M.D., “The Methods of the Rioting Striker as Evidence of Degeneration,” *Century* 48 (October 1894): 952-953. As reprinted in Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 29.

¹⁰¹ George Frederic Parsons, “The Growth of Materialism,” *Atlantic Monthly* 60 (August 1887): 157-172. As reprinted in Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 27-28.

Many of the same literary figures who earlier had championed the Pioneer Era were now among the more outspoken critics of urbanization. Walt Whitman, whose eloquent poetry commemorated the Frontier era, gave a far less glowing evaluation of late 19th century America. “[There exist only] numerous congeries of conventional, over-corpulent societies, already become stifled and rotten with flatulent, infidelistic literature, and polite conformity and art.”¹⁰² Ralph Waldo Emerson, who ardently defended the Pioneer conquest of the American wilderness, expressed great trepidation about urbanization. “I always seem to suffer some loss of faith on entering cities. They are great conspiracies; the parties are all maskers, who have taken mutual oaths of silence not to betray each other’s secret and each to keep the other’s madness in countenance. You can scarce drive any craft here that does not seem a subornation of the treason.”¹⁰³ Edgar Allen Poe expressed his dissatisfaction with urban America with even more heartfelt sentiment: “I am heartily sick of this life and of the nineteenth century in general. I am convinced that everything is going wrong.”¹⁰⁴

It is no wonder that the urban American man in the late 19th century felt overwrought with anxiety. His increasingly dependent, industrial existence represented a far cry from the agrarian life of his Pioneer ancestry. He was panged by feelings of physical decrepitude and perpetually afraid of a workers’ revolt. He was cognizant that he was witnessing the decay of American culture. Rather than attribute this apprehension

¹⁰² Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (New York, 1871), p. 43; As reprinted in Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 27.

¹⁰³ *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston, 1883), I, 269-270. As reprinted in White, Morton and Lucia. 1962. *The Intellectual Versus the City: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press and The M.I.T. Press, p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ *The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe*, edited by James A. Harrison (New York, 1902), VI, 208-209. As reprinted in White, p. 52. For a more in-depth analysis of intellectual response to urbanization, consult Lears, *No Place of Grace*, Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America*, and White, *The Intellectual Versus the City*

to obvious socio-cultural roots, doctors diagnosed a physical malady as the cause of this stress among men. George M. Beard in 1881 first described neurasthenia as “nervelessness—a lack of nerve force.”¹⁰⁵ He believed that humans possessed a finite supply of “nerve force;” ironically, men were thought to exhaust their supply by exercising “labor of the brain over that of the muscles.”

Beard was explicit in his linkage of neurasthenia with the modern urban condition. “The chief and primary cause of this development and very rapid increase of nervousness is *modern civilization*...Civilization is the one constant factor without which there can be little or no nervousness, and under which in its modern form nervousness in its many varieties must inevitably arise.”¹⁰⁶ Beard was by no means alone in identifying neurasthenia as a debilitating disease. According to Bederman,

Although physicians today do not recognize neurasthenia as a disease, between 1870 and about 1915, physicians took it very seriously indeed. By the early 1880s, neurasthenia had become a near epidemic, in large part because it so clearly expressed and explained this cultural problem.¹⁰⁷

As it relates to the development of the National Parks, Wilderness was increasingly identified as a source of reinvigoration and vitality for urban residents seeking to rid themselves of neurasthenia and escape from the drudgery and stress of urban life. By the end of the century, intellectuals and other prominent Americans were championing excursions to the natural world as a means of rejuvenating a beleaguered urban population. Before these adulations of Nature escalated, however, G. Stanley Hall,

¹⁰⁵ George M. Beard, *American nervousness: Its causes and Consequences* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1881), p. 3. Emphasis in original; As reprinted in Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. vi; As reprinted in Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁷ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, p. 85.

founder and president of Clark University, offered his own controversial solution to the problems of a society plagued by neurasthenia.



Fig. 11: Hall's theory advertised in the *Boston Sunday American*, August 15, 1915.

Hall contended that allowing boys to express their primitive urges could prevent the onset of neurasthenia later in life. He sharply criticized the existing education curriculum, in favor of a program more attentive to savage tendencies. “All that rot they teach to children about the little rain-drop fairies with their buckets washing down the windows must go. We shall go back to reading the old, bloody stories to children, and children will like to hear them because they are healthy little savages.”¹⁰⁸ In so doing, Hall maintained that boys would establish a sound reserve of nervous energy early in life—sufficient to prepare them for the physical and social difficulties of modern urban life.

¹⁰⁸ G. Stanley Hall, “Corporal Punishments,” *New York Education* 3(November 1899): 165; As reprinted in Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, p. 99.

As Bederman describes, Hall's theory was wholly based on the conviction that "boys could avoid neurasthenic breakdown and become powerful civilized men by taking full advantage of their boyhood access to the primitive."¹⁰⁹ Hall was largely vilified in the Chicago Press following the public presentation of his thesis. Several prominent figures were persuaded by his arguments, however; Teddy Roosevelt concurred with Hall that "the barbarian virtues" could prevent the decline of civilized boys into effeminate "milksofs."¹¹⁰

The promotion of wilderness preservation seems a logical outcome in the light of Beard's diagnosis of neurasthenia and Hall's pedagogical preventative for physical deterioration. As journalist Emerson Hough put it, America "found her sickness within doors, through looking at images of a man with a cigarette and a ticker tape, instead of the old figure of a man with a rifle and a hunting shirt."¹¹¹ Writers, social critics, and historians popularized the belief that contact with and immersion in wild Nature had transformed the soft, feeble European settler into a robust and resilient American Pioneer. Urban men felt with confidence that a return to Wilderness would produce a similar transformation of their enfeebled bodies and beleaguered souls.

American impulse to relive the frontier experience should not be confused with a desire to return to an agrarian way of life. Americans sought a brief recreational encounter with Nature, as popularized in the paintings of Durand, Bierstadt, and Moran. They did not wish to work the land. In fact, the American farmer was largely scorned by

¹⁰⁹ Bederman, p. 92. Bederman provides a much more thorough analysis of Hall's theory itself, as well as its moral and racial implications. See Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, p. 77-120.

¹¹⁰ Theodore Roosevelt to G. Stanley Hall, 29 November 1899, reprinted in Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: The Psychologist as Prophet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 318. Emphasis in original; As reprinted in Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, p. 100.

his urban contemporaries. Harper's editor Donald G. Mitchell said, "[it must be] the grossest kind of untruth to say that the farmer's life is specially favored—the horny hands, the tired body, the haydust and the scent of the stables."¹¹² The paradoxical City resident cherished the material comfort of urban living, but bemoaned its influence on his physical and social development. What intellectuals endorsed was an occasional *escape* to rugged nature, where their virility and strength could be recharged. As Peter J. Schmitt elaborates, "An increasing number of city dwellers turned 'back to nature,' rather than 'back to the farm,' mainly to escape the minor irritants of urban life."¹¹³

How persuasive and relieving it must have been to the disillusioned middle class man to learn that his vitality could be regained through a short sojourn into Nature! The revivifying potential of Wilderness was celebrated across the eastern seaboard. Social luminaries—Teddy Roosevelt amongst them—frequently championed the "strenuous life." "...Expeditions represent just about the kind of things I do. Instead of rowing it may be riding, or chopping, or walking, or playing tennis, or shooting at a target. But it is always a pastime which any healthy middle-aged man fond of outdoors life...can indulge in if he chooses."¹¹⁴ Robert Bradford Marshall, chief topographer for the United States Geological Survey (USGS), argued that wilderness encounters could help prepare the nation's soldiers.

While "city soldiers in the past have made good," as urban areas became "more and more congested" the "physical status" of boys and men "deteriorated" and would "continue to deteriorate."

¹¹¹ Emerson Hough, "Deathless Heathen," *Reader*, VII (April, 1906), p. 532. As reprinted in Schmitt, Peter J. 1969. *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 13.

¹¹² Donald G. Mitchell, *My farm of Edgewood* (New York: Scribner's, 1894, 1st ed. 1863), pp. 258, 256; As reprinted in Schmitt, *Back to Nature*, p. 7.

¹¹³ Schmitt, *Back to Nature*, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Theodore Roosevelt to "Needham," July 19, 1905, in Theodore Roosevelt Papers, box 150, Library of Congress. As reprinted in Schmitt, *Back to Nature*, p. 13.

Hanging “from the straps of crowded [street] cars” working men “forgot they have legs.”

“Give them national parks,” places “where they can go every year or so and forget something of the rush and jam and scramble of the modern life...and build up their bodies by being next to nature. Then, should there be a call to arms, the dwellers of the city canyons will be able to meet the physical needs of a strenuous field service.”¹¹⁵

The director of the USGS, George Otis Smith, shared Marshall's position. “The nation that leads the world in feverish business activity requires playgrounds as well as workshops...the playgrounds of the nation are essential to its very life...For no greater value can be won from mountain slopes and rushing rivers than through *utilization* of natural scenery in the development of [our] citizens.”¹¹⁶ The most eloquent claim for the rejuvenating effects of Wilderness came from one of its staunchest advocates: John Muir. “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as *fountains of life*.”¹¹⁷

Ironically, the vast expanse of urbanization and modernization in the 19th century, which dramatically heightened *conquest* and *subjugation* of the natural world, precipitated the *preservation* of non-developed Nature in America’s National Parks. Recognition of disappearing Wilderness first prompted artists and painters in the 1830’s and 1840’s to document the vanishing landscape in literature and on canvas. These artistic efforts to preserve nature were bolstered by urban intellectuals who saw

¹¹⁵ Typed transcript, R.B. Marshall, “Our National Parks,” March 6, 1911, McFarland Papers, Box 22. Library of Congress. As reprinted in Runte, *National Parks* p. 95-96. Non-quoted, joining text provided by Alfred Runte.

¹¹⁶ George Otis Smith, “The Nation’s Playgrounds,” *American Review of Reviews* 40(July 1909): 44; As reprinted in Runte, *National Parks*, p. 96. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁷ John Muir, “The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West,” *Atlantic Monthly* 81 (January 1898): 15. As reprinted in Runte, *National Parks*, p. 82. Emphasis added.

Wilderness both as vital to America's cultural legitimacy and as a refuge for a beleaguered urban middle class. America's dearth of artistic accomplishments could be sufficiently compensated for by its scenic beauty and natural wonders; America's nervousness and decrepitude could be ameliorated in the out of doors. The realization that Civilization unchecked could lead to the ruin of the western landscape stimulated concerned individuals to call for the preservation of Nature. The establishment of Yellowstone National Park on March 1, 1872 marked the actualization of these preservationists' aspirations.¹¹⁸

The demographic profile of the United States has drifted considerably from the ethnic homogeneity that surrounded the birth of the National Park System.* In the 1990 census, one out of every four residents self-identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific-Islander, or Native American. By 2050, the transition to a more culturally diverse society will be even more dramatic—47% of the population is predicted to self-identify as non-EuroAmerican in descent.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ This belief in the need for total preservation was carried into and amplified in the 20th century. Advocacy on behalf of wilderness culminated in the Wilderness Act of 1964, which legally set aside 9.1 million acres of wilderness in National Forests, and directed the National Park service to evaluate the preservation of wilderness within its boundaries. The Wilderness Act of 1964 institutionalized an idea of wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

* The U.S. population in 1870 numbered 38.5 million people. Of that total, 4.7 million were classified as "Negro," 25.6 thousand were classified as "Indian," 63.1 were classified as Chinese, and the Census Bureau reported 55 Japanese residents. While the African-American population in 1872 represented a significant portion of the American people, the Fifteenth Amendment granting voting rights to African-Americans had only been ratified two years earlier. Of 234 Representatives in Congress, 3 were African-American; of 69 Senators, 1 was African-American. Thus, the opinions and positions of the minority population in 1872 likely went wholly underrepresented in the decision to establish Yellowstone as a National Park. (Figures collected from U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1975. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*. U.S. Department of Commerce. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office; Smith, Jessie Carney. *Black Firsts: 2000 Years of Extraordinary Achievement*. Detroit: Visible Ink Press.

¹¹⁹ Murdock 1995. *An America Challenged: Population Change and the Future of the United States*. Boulder: Westview Press. As reprinted in Floyd, Myron. 1999. "Race Ethnicity, and Use of the National

To reiterate my initial premise, the history of National Parks development and the rise of wilderness preservation can be linked to Euro-American ideals, traditions, and cultural trends. For the rising minority of U.S. residents born in foreign nations, divergent cultural experiences and traditions could promote considerable variation in Americans' comprehension of, appreciation for, and attitudes towards the National Parks. When we consider the racial bias imminent throughout National Park history, the possibility that minorities may not be attracted to the Parks becomes only more probable. After all, the formation of several National Parks depended on the forced removal of indigenous Native tribes and the renouncement of hunting treaties guaranteed by the United States government in perpetuity.¹²⁰ We must also remember that the imagery of landscape painters from John Gast to Thomas Moran invariably portrayed settlers/spectators as white men. Though urban intellectuals in the 19th century found appeal in this representation of the Wilderness visitor, can we expect the same to be true of an increasingly non-white population?¹²¹

The remainder of this project is focused on analyzing how the American population, largely influenced by non-EuroAmerican religious backgrounds, philosophical traditions, and development histories, perceives and values the National Parks of the United States.

Park System," in *Social Science Research Review*, 1(Spring/Summer), U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service.

¹²⁰ See Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*. I am grateful to Karl Jacoby for his encouragement to make the racial bias of National Park formation more explicit in my cultural history.

¹²¹ Of course, this question asks nothing of how women perceive National Parks and wilderness, despite their development as refuges for urban *men*. The results of my study found no significant variation between men and women, however, in terms of adolescents' perceptions of the National Parks. Hence, I have conducted my history through a cultural/racial lens rather than a gender analysis.

CHAPTER III

Differing Visitation, Distinct Styles, Divergent Perceptions:

A review of the current literature

Over the past 30 years, the fields of outdoor recreation and leisure research have presented a wealth of studies accounting for ethnic variations in wilderness use, perception, and valuation. Relatively few of these studies have focused particularly on ethnic minority use and perception of National Park lands. As Professor Myron Floyd observes, “Park-specific studies having a race or ethnicity component are rare in the published and unpublished literature...”¹²² Instead, most reports have been based on data collected at National Forest sites, urban Parks, and state/regional recreation areas. Alternatively, some studies have analyzed nationwide telephone survey data of American recreational habits. While not directly related to Park environments, these findings provide a valuable indication of how members of different minority communities utilize and perceive natural landscapes. Coupled with studies directly focused on the National Parks, the existing body of literature provides a strong foundation for my exploration of variations in adolescents’ perceptions of the National Parks.

¹²² Floyd, Myron. 1999. “Race Ethnicity, and Use,” p. 12.

Variations in visitation to Wilderness areas

Randal Washburne (1978) was one of the first researchers to call attention to differences in ethnic groups' use of wildlands resources. Based on an analysis of 1969 telephone survey data, he observed lower visitation rates to wilderness areas and participation in wilderness activities among African American respondents. Washburne proposed two theories to explain the observed differences. The Marginality Hypothesis contended that ethnic minorities underutilized wilderness areas because of insufficient access to socioeconomic resources. The Ethnicity Hypothesis argued that even with socioeconomic factors being held equal, ethnic groups' possession of different cultural values and attitudes towards the natural world would lead to underutilization of wilderness areas. When Washburne controlled for socioeconomic factors between African American and EuroAmerican participants, he found that significant differences persisted in recreation participation. Based on these findings, Washburne concluded that ethnicity was the most significant factor determining minority groups' utilization of wildlands resources.¹²³

Subsequent analysis of Park/wildlands utilization data has further illustrated differences between ethnic groups.¹²⁴ Washburne and Wall (1980) found lower participation rates for African Americans than EuroAmericans in several wildlands activities. For instance, 35% of EuroAmerican respondents participated in developed

¹²³ Washburne, R.F. 1978. "Black Under-Participation in Wildland Recreation: Alternative Explanations." *Leisure Sciences*. 1:175-189.

¹²⁴ The most comprehensive summary of studies on National Park visitation, style of use, and perception is Floyd, "Race, Ethnicity, and Use of the National Park system." Also of considerable assistance is Gramann, James. 1996. "Ethnicity, Race, and Outdoor Recreation: A Review of Trends, Policy, and Research." U.S. Army Engineer Waterways Experiment Station, Vicksburg, Mississippi.

camping activities compared to 15% of African Americans.¹²⁵ Hartman and Overdeest (1990) found that 37% of EuroAmerican respondents had gone camping at a developed site at least once in the past year, compared with 12% of African Americans. Houtz (1995) found that 68% of EuroAmerican schoolchildren surveyed listed hiking as one of their top ten favorite activities, compared with 20% of Hispanic Americans.

National data has illustrated significant variations in ethnic groups' visitation of the National Parks. Gramann's (1996) analysis of the 1982-1983 National Recreation Survey found that 42% of EuroAmericans reported never having visited a National Park, compared with 83% of African Americans. Dwyer (1994) found that 45% of EuroAmericans surveyed had visited a National Park, compared with 38% of Hispanic Americans and 24% of African Americans. Hartman and Overdeest's (1990) analysis of the 1982-1983 National Recreation Survey revealed that on average EuroAmericans had visited three National Parks during their lifetime, compared with .33 Parks visited for non-EuroAmerican respondents. Floyd's (1999) analysis of the same survey found that EuroAmericans averaged 40 days per year in outdoor recreation activities compared with 21 days for non-Euro Americans.

Floyd (1999) reports findings by the National Park Service's Visitor Services Project (VSP) that illustrate further differences in ethnic group utilization of National Park units:

- In the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, 95% of the visitor groups included [EuroAmericans], 8% included Hispanic Americans, 4%

¹²⁵ Similar trends emerged in primitive camping and hiking. 26% of EuroAmericans participated in primitive camping compared with 11% of African Americans; 31% of EuroAmericans claimed hiking as an activity, compared with 21% of African Americans.

included African Americans, and 10% included “other” minority groups (Littlejohn 1993a).

- At Bandelier National Monument, 90% of the visitor groups included [EuroAmericans], 8% included Hispanic Americans, 2% included American Indian/Native Alaskan, 1% included African Americans, and 5% included “other” minority groups (Patterson 1996b).¹²⁶

A Market Opinion Research survey (1986) reported frequency of use of federal parks, forests, and recreation areas for different ethnic groups. 19% of EuroAmericans reported using such areas “very often” or “often.” 8% of Hispanic Americans and 13% of African Americans reported use of these areas “very often” or “often.” Adams and Thomas (1989) found that 70% of participants in “appreciative” outdoor recreation activities were EuroAmerican, compared with 18% Hispanic Americans and 10% African Americans.¹²⁷

Variations in style of outdoor recreation

A growing body of outdoor recreation literature has also demonstrated that considerable variation exists in the *style* with which ethnic groups recreate in outdoor recreation settings. According to Gramann (1996), different styles in outdoor recreation, rather than underutilization of wildlands resources, characterize the greatest difference between ethnic groups. Gobster (NAS 1992)¹²⁸ conducted a study in Lincoln Park,

¹²⁶ VSP findings as reprinted in Floyd (1999).

¹²⁷ Also see West’s (1989) analysis of ethnic group use of urban vs. regional parks.

¹²⁸ This and all subsequent citations featuring (NAS 1993) refer to papers included in the following publication: North American Symposium on Society and Resource Management (4th: 1992: Madison, Wis.), 1993. *Managing urban and high-use recreation settings: selected papers from the Urban Forestry and Ethnic Minorities and the Environment Paper Sessions: 4th North American Symposium on Society and Resource Management : May 17-20, 1992, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. St. Paul, Minn: North Central Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture,*

Chicago, in which he found that 66% of Hispanic American respondents, compared with 64% of African American respondents and 45% of EuroAmerican respondents, voiced a preference for “passive,” social activities, such as picnicking. Hutchison (NAS 1992), in a study of Hmong recreation preference, concluded that different ethnic groups have a range of outdoor recreation preferences--the Hmong sample group in Hutchison’s study exhibited a strong partiality towards fishing during outdoor recreation excursions. Gramann, Floyd, and Saenz (CCC 1993)¹²⁹ found Hispanic American preference for family related activities to remain constant even as acculturation rates increased.¹³⁰

Many studies that focused on ethnic variations in style of outdoor recreation included an exploration of preferred group size and structure. Hospodarsky (1993) found that 34% of Hispanic American visitors to a recreation area were part of a family group, compared with 25% of EuroAmerican visitors. In his analysis of Lincoln Park, Gobster (NAS 1992) found that EuroAmericans were likely to visit the Park in groups of 1.6 people on average, compared with 3.7 people for African Americans, 4.4 people for Hispanic Americans, and 5.0 people for Asian Americans on average. 88% of EuroAmerican respondents reported coming to the Park alone. Irwin (1990) found that Hispanic American recreational groups were nearly twice as large as their EuroAmerican recreational groups—12.8 people compared with 6.9 people.¹³¹ Carr and Williams (1993) found that 51% of Hispanic Americans had come to a National Forest site as part

¹²⁹ This and all subsequent citations featuring (CCC 1993) refer to papers included in Ewert, Alan W., Deborah J. Chavez, and Arthur W. Magill, eds. 1993. *Culture, Conflict, and Communication in the Wildland-Urban Interface*. Boulder: Westview Press.

¹³⁰ Also see Hutchison (1988) and Simcox and Pfister (1990).

¹³¹ As reprinted in Floyd (1999).

of an extended family group, compared with 30% of EuroAmericans who had come as part of an extend family group.

Variations in perception of the natural world

A significant body of outdoor recreation and leisure research has attributed differences in ethnic groups' visitation patterns and style of use to varying cultural values for and perceptions of the natural world. Marin and Marin (1991) described the strong presence of allocentrism in Hispanic American cultures, which emphasize the interdependence between individuals of a larger community. Marin and Marin suggested that the principle of allocentrism influenced Hispanic American belief in an interdependent relationship between humans and nature.

Simcox (CCC 1993) detailed the differences between EuroAmerican and Hispanic cultural attitudes towards nature. While a utilitarian perspective arising from historical domination of the natural world characterizes EuroAmerican cultural attitudes, Simcox described the Hispanic American cultural view of humans as subjugated by Nature. Simcox maintained that the absence of scientific and technological control of Nature has created an attitude among Hispanic Americans of environmental management as ineffectual. "The belief that humans are incapable of controlling the future in terms of land and nature turns the process of planning into an exercise in futility." (p. 270)

Talbot and Kaplan (NAS 1992) conducted a study of landscape preferences among 69 African American and 71 EuroAmerican youth. Talbot and Kaplan displayed a series of photographs which ranged in their presentation of the natural world. Neither people nor spectacular nature was displayed in any of the photographs. Rather, pictures were displayed of environments that the youth might encounter in close proximity to their

homes. Undeveloped or unmanicured sites were “non-preferred” by African Americans, but were “moderately to highly preferred” by the majority of EuroAmerican youth. The opposite was true for ethnic preference of photographs featuring built elements. African Americans, in contrast to EuroAmericans, expressed a strong appreciation for scenes with a well-kept appearance. According to the authors, “[African Americans] have higher preferences for settings that are carefully manicured and relatively open, while [EuroAmericans] prefer settings that are more heavily wooded and show less evidence of human influence.” (p. 95)

Several studies have argued that lower visitation to wildlands environments by ethnic minorities can be attributed to fear of racial intimidation and/or historical discrimination associated with rural settings. Taylor (NAS 1992) found that 59% of African Americans, compared with 27% of EuroAmericans, do not use the park closest to them because it is perceived as dangerous. Blahna and Black (NAS 1992) found that 20% of African Americans interviewed experienced interracial racism in outdoor recreation settings. The authors related the experience of a Hispanic American who encountered racism in a park environment. “A student was told to leave a park by a park guard who said, ‘You know you guys don’t belong in this Park; they kill Hispanic people here.’” (p. 113) West (1989) also concluded that fear of interracial intimidation contributed to ethnic minorities’ underparticipation in wildlands activities. West reports the murder of a minority user in a Seattle park, and the presence of a sign defaming “niggers” in Chicago’s Lincoln Park as incidences contributing to ethnic minorities’ dislike of wildlands areas.¹³²

¹³² Also see Wallace and Winter (1992).

As part of their study, Blahna and Black conducted a series of focus groups that revealed historical predispositions against wildlands experiences. African Americans expressed a fear of bodily harm coming to them in forest preserves. “That’s the reason I fear for high trees, high grass, and a lot of trees...you never know what’s in there and you’re afraid to venture in to see what’s in there.” (p. 115) The authors also relate a negative association of wildlands activities among Hispanic American parents, who were upset with the idea of their children using tents for camping. Parents did not want their children to return to the experience of tenting, which brought to mind their living conditions as migrant workers. (p. 115)

Medzer (1974) observed that historical associations with the land may turn African American and Native American populations against wildlands activities. He argued that the land for African Americans symbolizes a place of punishment and imprisonment, where people were forced to reside in servitude. For Native Americans, Medzer suggested that National Parks were centers of Indian humiliation; while their cultures were on glorified display, the forced removal of indigenous populations from Park environments was deliberately obscured by Park officials.

Outdoor recreation and leisure research literature over the past thirty years has established considerable variation among ethnic groups’ utilization and perception of natural landscapes. EuroAmericans have been shown to have higher usage rates of wildlands environments, including the National Parks, and also participate more frequently in wildlands activities. Substantial differences have also emerged concerning the style with which ethnic groups recreate in the outdoors. Attitudinal research has suggested that ethnic minority populations may underutilize wildlands environments

because they fear racial intimidation/discrimination or because of historical negative associations with the American environment as oppressive, humiliating, or dangerous.¹³³

These studies provided an invaluable context for my analysis of how ethnicity and/or socioeconomic status contribute to variations in high school students' perceptions of the National Parks.

¹³³ A number of researchers (Carr and Williams (1993), Allison (CCC 1993), Allison (PRO 1992), Floyd (1999)) have cautioned that attributing under-participation exclusively to ethnicity may blur additional influential factors. They have found that generational status, ancestral group, and degree of acculturation significantly influence the formation of minority perceptions towards and use of the natural world. According to the researchers, there exists no ethnic group "monolith."

CHAPTER IV

Social Research Findings: Survey Results Comparing Barrington High School and the Met School

I designed the written questionnaire to gather information on high school students' perception of, interest in visiting, and knowledge about the National Parks, as well as the relative importance students associated with Park protection. 65 students at the Met School and 70 students at Barrington High school completed the 31-part survey. No significant differences were observed when responses were compared by gender. Variations between ethnic groups did present themselves when ethnic minorities and EuroAmericans were compared within the Met school. Because of the small number of EuroAmericans represented at the Met school, however, these differences could not be judged as statistically meaningful.

Nonetheless, while consulting the results that follow, the reader should keep in mind that the Met school sample is much more ethnically diverse—57% of the Met students self-identified as ethnic minority, compared with 11% of the Barrington students. It is therefore reasonable to speculate that some of the variations that emerge between the two schools may be attributable to the significant difference in ethnic composition.

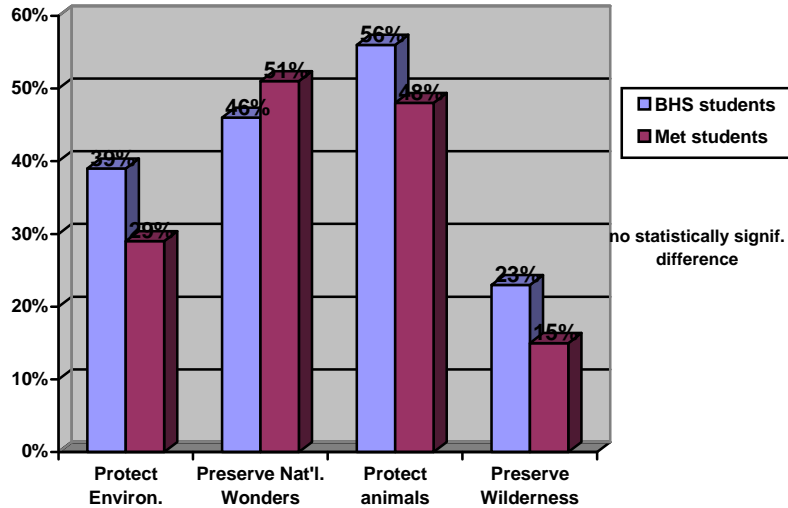
Student Perception of the National Parks

What are the main benefits of National Parks?

Barrington students were fairly evenly distributed in their identification of the main benefits of having a National Park system. A considerable portion of the sample (39%) listed "protecting the environment" as a main benefit. An even greater number (46%) listed "preserving natural wonders" as one of the main benefits. Over half of the sample (56%) answered that "protecting animals" was one of the main benefits of having a National Park system. "Preserving wilderness lands" was the only response that a markedly lower proportion of Barrington sample (23%) indicated as a main benefit of the National Park system. Few students (7%) listed an "other" benefit.

Met student identification of the benefits of having a National Park system were slightly more varied than those of the Barrington students. Though a considerable segment of the Met school sample (29%) listed "protecting the environment" as one of the main benefits of having a National Park system, more than half of the Met students (51%) answered that "preserving natural wonders" was one of the main benefits. An equally large portion of the Met sample (48%) listed "protecting animals" as one of the main benefits of having a Park system. As was the case in Barrington, a considerably smaller portion of the sample (15%) answered that "preserving wilderness lands" was one of the main benefits of having a National Park system. Few students at the Met school (6%) listed an "other" benefit of having a National Park system.

Graph 1. The two most important benefits of National Parks

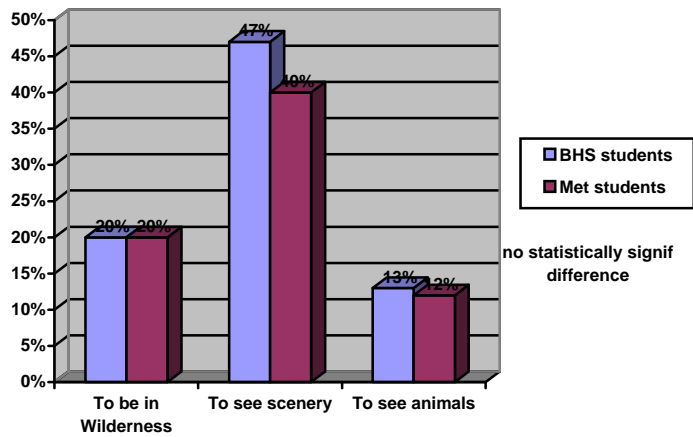


Why do people in general go to the National Parks?

Barrington students’ reasons for why people in general visit the National Parks were quite varied. Though a number of the respondents (20%) answered that people visit the Parks “to be in wilderness,” the most frequently listed answer (47%) was that people visit the National Parks “to see the scenery.” A small portion of the sample (13%) listed “to see wild animals” as the primary reason why people visit the Parks; an even smaller fraction (11%) of the Barrington students listed an “other” response for why people visit the National Parks.

Responding to why people in general visit the National Parks, a number of respondents at the Met school (20%) answered that people go to Parks “to be in wilderness.” Twice as many students (40%) responded that most people go to the National Parks “to see the scenery.” A smaller portion of the Met students (12%) listed that people go to the Parks “to see wild animals.”

Graph 2. Why people in general go to National Parks



Words associated with the National Parks

When asked to list several words that they associated with the National Parks, Barrington students most frequently listed a word (33%) that described the physical environment of the Park—trees, rivers, mountains, etc. A significant portion of the sample (21%) provided words that described the aesthetic appearance of the Parks—beautiful, lovely, pretty, etc. Roughly the same fraction of the Barrington students (23%) mentioned an animal or animals that came to mind when they thought of the Parks—bears, deer, etc. A considerably smaller portion (8%) listed a word that described the serenity of the Park atmosphere; an even smaller fraction (6%) provided a word that described the size/magnitude of the Parks. Additionally, a few students (10%) listed a word that described the camping activities available in a Park environment. Only one student (.5%) answered that s/he did not know what words to associate with the National Parks.

In their word association with the National Parks, Met students displayed a similar propensity (43%) to list words that described the physical environment of the

Parks. A significantly smaller portion of the Met respondents (13%) listed a word that described the aesthetic appearance of the Parks, though a number of Met students (21%) did list a word relating to an animal or animals in the Parks. Few Met students (8%) described the serenity of the Park environment, but compared with the Barrington sample, a larger number of the Met respondents (12%) listed a word that described the size/magnitude of the National Parks. Very few Met students (3%) listed a word describing the camping activities available in Parks; only 1% of the Met sample did not know any words to associate with the Parks.

Student Knowledge about the National Parks

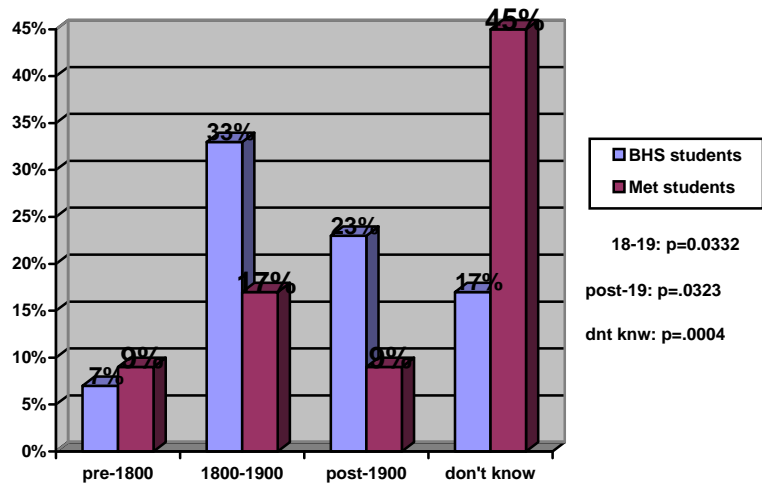
When were the National Parks created?

Student knowledge about the National Parks was partially assessed by asking respondents to answer when the National Parks were created. A third of the Barrington sample (33%) correctly indicated that the Parks were established sometime in the 19th century. A significant number of students (23%) speculated that the Parks were established some time after 1900; a markedly smaller portion of the sample (7%) believed that the Parks were established prior to 1800. A notable segment (17%) of the Barrington sample answered that they did not know when the Parks were created.

Met student knowledge about when the Parks were established was considerably lower than in the Barrington sample. Not even a fifth (17%) of the respondents at the Met school correctly identified that the National Parks were established in the 19th century. A few students (9%) speculated that the Parks were established in the 20th century; an identical segment of the Met school sample (9%) believed the Parks were

created prior to 1800. The bulk of Met school respondents (45%), however, indicated that they did not know when the National Parks were created.

Graph 3. When the National Parks were created

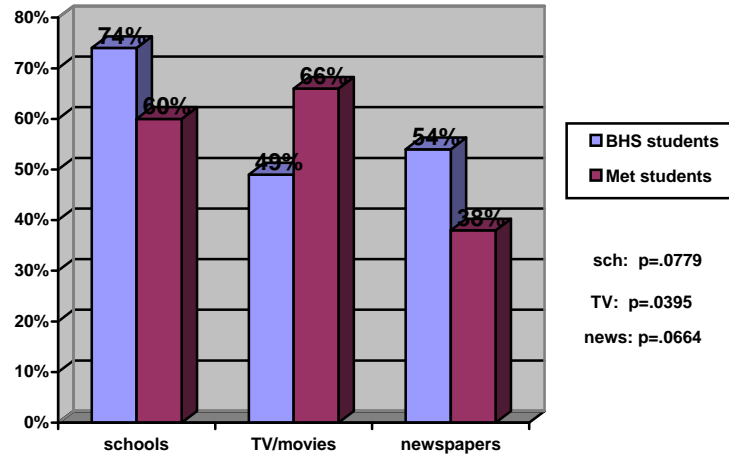


Where have you learned about the National Parks?

Most of the Barrington students (74%) responded that they had learned about the National Parks "in school." Almost half of the respondents (49%) indicated that they had learned about the Parks through "TV/in movies." A slight majority (54%) of the students also answered that they had learned about the National Parks "from newspapers or magazines."

As was the case in Barrington, the majority of Met school respondents (60%) answered that they had learned about the National Parks "in school." An even greater number of the respondents (66%) claimed to have learned about the National Parks through the "TV/in movies." Considerably fewer students (38%) answered that they had learned about the National Parks "from newspapers or magazines."

Graph 4. Students' source of knowledge about the Parks



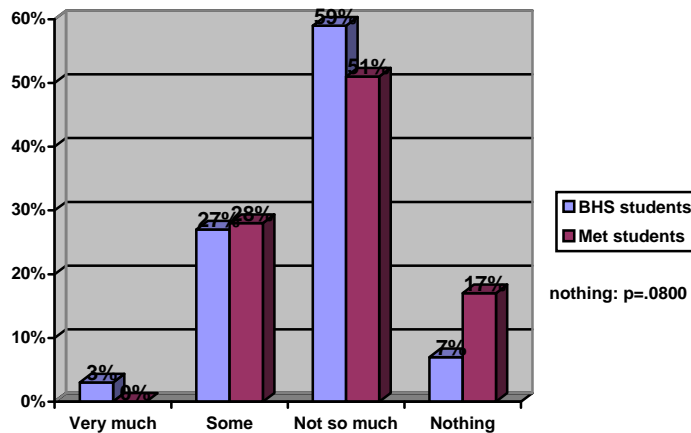
How much do you know about the National Parks?

Barrington student confidence about their knowledge of the National Parks was quite low. When asked how much they felt they knew about the National Parks, an almost negligible portion of the Barrington sample (3%) indicated that they knew “very much.” While a fairly notable segment of the respondents (27%) answered that they knew “some” about the Parks, students most frequently indicated (59%) that they knew “not so much” about the National Parks. Few students (7%) felt they knew “nothing” about the National Parks.

Met students displayed a similarly low level of confidence in their knowledge about the National Parks. Not one Met student (0%) answered that s/he knew “very much” about the National Parks. Though a considerable number of students at the Met school (29%) indicated that they knew “some” about the National Parks, as in Barrington, most students (51%) answered that they knew “not so much” about the Parks. A notable

portion of the Met students (17%) answered that they knew “nothing” about the National Parks.

Graph 5. Students’ self-identification of knowledge about the Parks



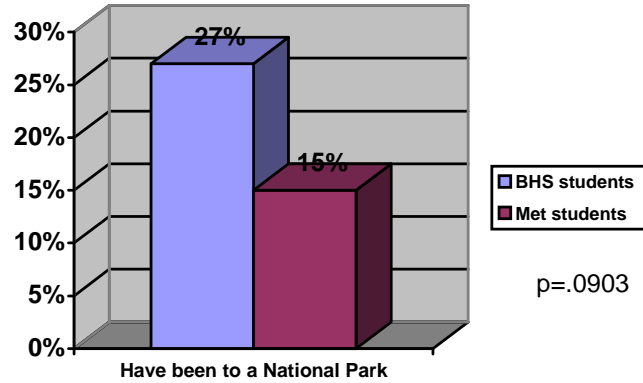
Student Interest in Visiting the National Parks

Why would you want to go to a National Park?

When asked whether they would like to go to a National Park, a substantial majority of the Barrington respondents (70%) said they would indeed like to visit a Park. Roughly a quarter of Barrington students (27%) had previously been to a National Park. Very few students (3%) said they would not like to go to a National Park, and a sizeable segment of the sample (21%) said they were not sure. Respondents’ reasons for wanting to go varied considerably. The most frequently given answer (43%) was that students thought going to the Parks would be an interesting or novel experience. A considerable number of students (19%) responded that they wanted to go to a National Park to see Nature or Wilderness. A handful of respondents (9%) said they would like to go to a Park to see natural beauty. Very rarely cited as reasons to go were the serenity of the

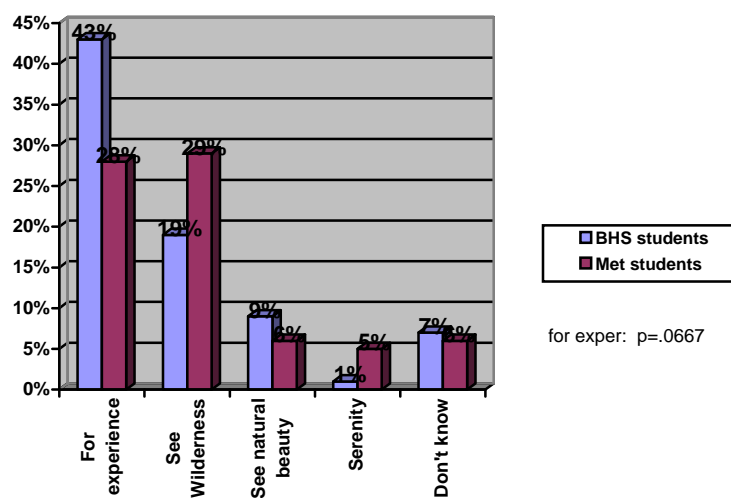
experience (1%) or as a form of escapism (1%). Several respondents (7%) indicated that they did not know why they would want to go to a National Park.

Graph 6. The percentage of students who had previously visited a National Park



Similar to the Barrington respondents, the large majority of students at the Met school (75%) indicated that they would choose to go to a National Park. A minor segment (15%) of the Met students had previously been to a National park. Only a small fraction (3%) answered that they would not want to go to a National Park, while a sizable portion of the sample (17%) was not sure. Mirroring the results in Barrington, Met students cited a wide range of reasons for why they would like to visit a National Park. The most frequently given response (29%) was to see Nature or Wilderness. A considerable number of Met students (28%) also responded that they would want to go to a National Park because it would afford an interesting or novel experience. Only a small handful of students (6%) listed a desire to see natural beauty as an impetus to visit the National Parks; similarly, only a few respondents at the Met school listed serenity (5%) or escapism (6%) as reasons to visit the National Parks. A fraction of the Met sample (6%) indicated that they did not know why they would want to visit a National Park.

Graph 7. The reasons why students would go to a National Park

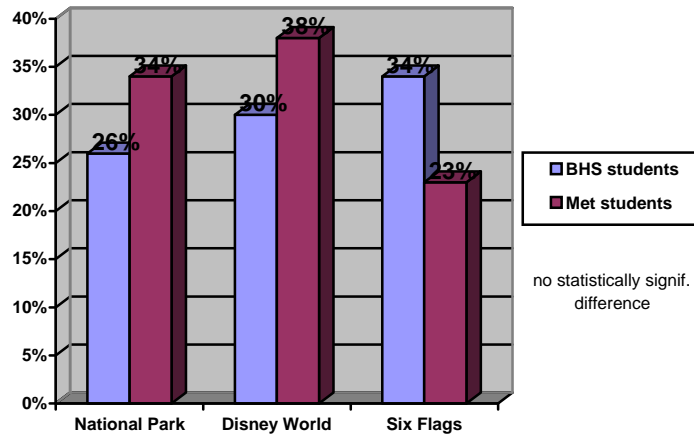


Where would you rather go: National Parks, Disney, or Six Flags?

Students were asked whether they would choose to go to a National Park, Disney World, or Six Flags if given the choice. Barrington students’ responses were fairly evenly split between the three options. Roughly a quarter of the sample (26%) indicated that they would choose to go to a National Park over Disney or Six Flags. A larger portion of the Barrington respondents (30%) said they would choose to go to Disney World. The most frequently given choice among the Barrington respondents (34%) was to go to Six Flags Amusement Park over a National Park or Disney World.

Met students were less evenly distributed than the Barrington respondents in their choice between visiting a National Park, Disney World, or Six Flags. Roughly a third of the Met students (34%) answered that they would choose to go to a National Park over Disney World or Six Flags. An even larger number of students (38%) listed Disney World as their top choice. By comparison, a considerably smaller segment of the Met sample (23%) responded that they would choose to go to Six Flags as their first choice.

Graph 8. If given the choice, where students would choose to go

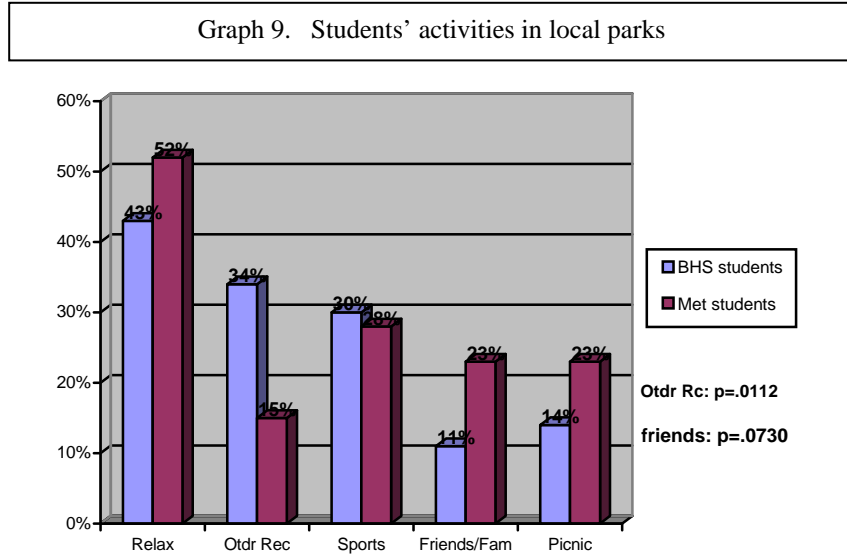


What would your activities be?

Students were asked what activities they participated in when they went to local parks. Barrington students most frequently answered (43%) that they relaxed or hung out when they went to local parks. Over a third of the respondents (34%) indicated that they participated in outdoor recreation activities when they went to local Parks; a considerable number of students (30%) also responded that they played sports when they went to a local park. Although with considerably lower frequency, a number of respondents answered spending time with friends/family (11%) and having picnics (14%) as activities they participated in at local Parks.

The Met students had different preferences than their Barrington counterparts for activities they participated in at local parks. While relaxing and hanging out was listed with similarly high frequency (52%), outdoor recreation activities were participated in much less often by Met students (15%). A significant portion of the Met school respondents (28%) indicated that they played sports when they visited a local park.

Almost a quarter of the Met students also listed spending time with friends or family (23%) and/or having picnics (23%) as activities they participated in at local parks.

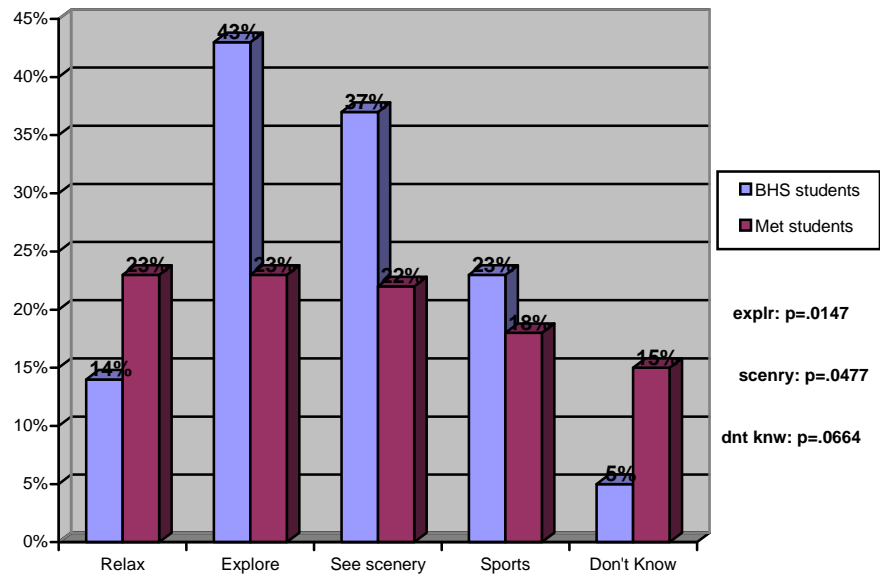


Though relaxing or hanging out was a highly preferred activity in local parks, a substantially smaller segment of the Barrington sample (14%) indicated this as an activity they would want to participate in at a National Park. Nearly half of the Barrington survey respondents (43%) indicated that they would want to explore or hike if they visited a National Park. Seeing the scenery was also a frequently listed answer (37%). A considerable segment of the Barrington respondents (20%) answered that they would want to play a sport or take part in a camping activity if they were to visit a Park. Only a few respondents (5%) answered that they did not know what they would do if they visited a National Park. No students (0%) listed spending time with friends and family as an activity they would participate in at a National Park.

Students at the Met school were fairly evenly distributed in listing the activities they would want to participate in if they visited a National Park. Of nearly equal

popularity to the Met respondents were relaxing or hanging out (23%), exploring or hiking (23%), and seeing the scenery (22%). A number of students (18%) also indicated they would take part in sports or camping activities if they visited a National Park. Very few students (3%) specifically indicated spending time with friends as a likely activity. In contrast to the Barrington respondents, a sizeable segment of the Met school sample (15%) said they did not know what activities they would participate in if they visited a National Park.

Graph 10. What students would do at a National Park.



Student Commitment to National Park Protection

Why should the Parks be protected?

The large majority of Barrington students (71%) felt that taxpayers' money should be used to protect the National Parks. Though a substantial portion of the Barrington respondents (20%) were unsure whether taxpayers' money should be used to

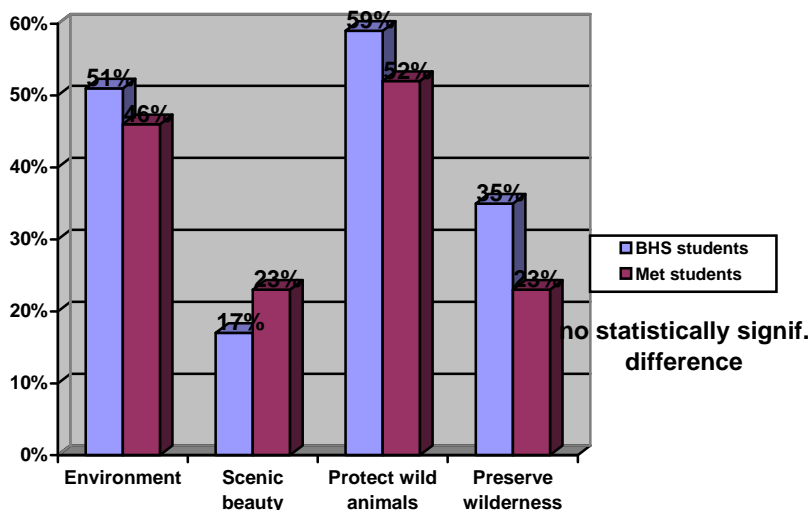
protect the Parks, only a couple of students (1%) claimed that taxpayers' money should not be used to protect the National Parks.

Barrington students were fairly divided in identifying the most important reasons to protect the National Parks. More than half of the respondents (51%) listed "to protect the environment" as one of the most important reasons to protect the Parks. With even greater frequency (59%) students answered that "to protect wild animals" was an important reason to protect the Parks. A substantially smaller segment of the Barrington sample (35%) listed "to preserve wilderness lands" as an important reason for Park protection; fewer still (17%) identified "to protect scenic beauty" as an important reason to Protect the Parks. A few students (6%) chose to list "other" reasons.

A considerable majority of Met students (74%) also felt that taxpayers' money should be used to protect the National Parks. A notable segment of the sample (20%) was unsure whether taxpayers' money should go to the Parks; very few students (2%) answered that taxpayers' money should not go to the National Parks.

When asked to identify the most important reasons to protect the National Parks, students at the Met school were also fairly divided in which options these chose. Nearly half of the Met students (46%) listed "to protect the environment" as one of the most important reasons to protect the National Parks. With even greater frequency (52%) respondents selected "to protect wild animals" as one of the most important reasons to protect the National Parks. Students identified "to preserve scenic beauty" and "to preserve wilderness lands" with equal frequency (23%). Only a few students (3%) listed an "other" response.

Graph 11. The two most important reasons to protect National Parks



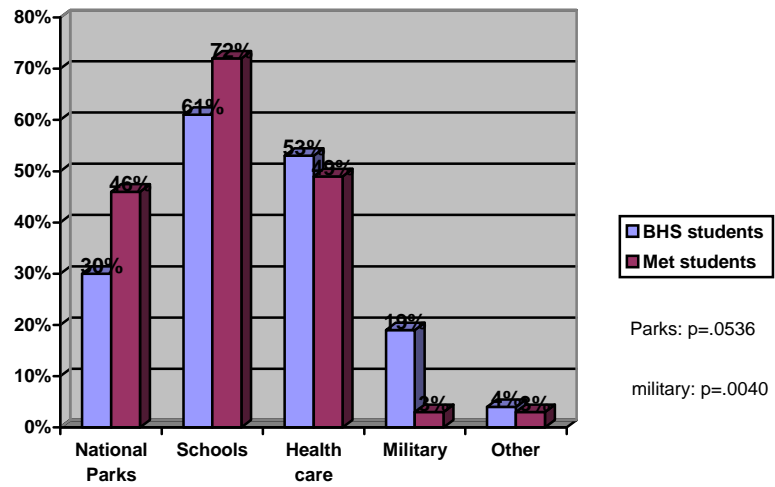
Which public institutions most deserve government funding?

Barrington respondents did not strongly identify National Park protection as one of the two public institutions most deserving government funding. Though a considerable number of Barrington students (30%) did identify “National Park protection” as one of the two most important areas for government funding, respondents chose “schools” (61%) or “health care” (53%) with substantially greater frequency. A sizeable portion of the Barrington sample (19%) selected “the military” as one of the areas most deserving of government funding. A handful of students (6%) chose to provide an “other” response.

In response to the question, “Which areas most deserve government funding?” Met students displayed a different set of priorities than the Barrington respondents. Nearly half of the students (46%) selected “National Park protection” as one of the areas most deserving government funding. A clear majority of the students (72%) indicated

that “schools” were one of the areas most deserving government funding. Students at the Met school awarded less importance to health care and the military than did students at Barrington High School. Less than half of the students at the Met school (49%) indicated that “health care” was one of the two areas most deserving government funding. An almost insignificant segment of the Met sample (3%) listed “the military” as one of the areas most deserving government funding. Additionally, a few students (3%) chose to write in an “other” response.

Graph 12. The two public institutions most deserving government funding



In summary, students from Barrington and the Met school exhibit strikingly similar perceptions of the main benefits of the National Parks and why people in general go to the National Parks. Students from both schools identified particularly strongly with the preservation of natural wonders and the protection of wild animals. Conversely, considerable differences emerged between the two school samples in terms of their knowledge about the Parks and their interest in Park activities. Students from Barrington

had a greater awareness of Park history, were more likely to learn about the Parks from school and newspapers, and were more interested in and aware of outdoor recreation activities at National Parks. Although students from Barrington and the Met jointly identified the protection of the environment and wild animals as the main reasons to protect the National Parks, Met students were significantly more likely to list National Park protection as one of the two public institutions most deserving government funding.

CHAPTER V

Who wants wilderness?

A presentation of the Focus Group Findings

I have attempted to demonstrate that Wilderness appreciation is a culturally relative phenomenon. The evolution of National Parks and the protection of pristine nature in the United States have a centuries-long and Western heritage. For recent immigrants to the United States, hailing from diverse religious, cultural, and philosophical traditions, how would Wilderness (as emblemized in the National Parks) register as a depiction of the natural world?

My conversations with a diverse group of Barrington and Met school students produced a wide range of themes. For some topics, students from both schools voiced strikingly similar and equally intense opinions and perceptions. Most students think of the National Parks as pristine wilderness, and value them greatly for that character. Other topics of conversation produced dramatically different results between the focus groups in Barrington and the focus groups at the Met school. Barrington students were aware of Park user fees and felt that the user fees were acceptable and necessary. The majority of Met students were confident that visiting the Parks was free for anyone, and were disappointed and angry that people were forced to pay to see nature.

Throughout my analysis of the focus groups, I have attempted to recreate the voice, tone, and inflection of the students. Each new quotation represents the opinion of a separate speaker. The students' words comprise the bulk of my analysis. Interspersed are my paraphrasing or synthesis of their comments, along with my reflections on the salience, intensity, and consensus of their viewpoints. I again encourage the reader to consider the focus group findings in light of the socioeconomic and ethnic differences (57% minority at the Met vs. 11% minority at Barrington) between the school populations.

The National Parks as pristine Nature
“The Parks are what the world used to be like.”

The National Parks in the eyes of the high school students are collections of “untouched” nature. The great majority of the students in the focus groups felt that the Parks encompass “all-natural” wilderness, the way it was before human kind imparted its influence on the landscape. They are the homes of trees and animals, “big areas...where it’s all free.” The Parks are “what the world used to be like before we started to multiply and have lots of persons...It’s like untouchable.” They are places that are “deserted,” places that are quiet, places to “relax and be peaceful.” They preserve a setting, a place, an atmosphere. “They’re nothing like parks.” “There’s trees and forests, not like a normal park where you walk around.” They remind students of Yogi Bear and Smoky Bear. They are the safe haven for endangered species, put there by the government because they might not survive otherwise. They are land undeveloped, uninhabited by people, “A large area of land kept the way it is with natural trees and landscapes.” They are pretty big—“Connecticut and Rhode Island together?!” “I didn’t know it was that

big!”—places protected for their natural beauty, for the geysers and animals, nature and trees.

The National Parks as organic creation
“No one got out a hammer and chisel and made that.”

To the high school students in my focus groups, the Parks are organic and archaic. “This is what the Earth really looks like.” “National Parks create themselves; it’s not man-made.” They are natural and naturally made, “so when you see it and it’s beautiful, you’re like, wow, this is amazing.” They are original and unique and unreplicable. They have been built over a long time, by Nature, not man. They are appreciated for “growing themselves.” They are liked for being natural, “Just the fact that it’s natural and man has no bearing on how it is.” They are fresh and clean, areas that should be left alone by people. “It’s something that no one can really touch. It’s all natural, not something that’s man-made. Instead of sitting in the city and smelling pollution you can go somewhere and smell fresh air.” “We should leave the Parks alone. Leave it alone.”

Student opposition to development in the Parks
“I wouldn’t want people to mess it up—that’s too precious.”

Students were adamant that the Parks should stay pristine; they should have no sign of development. “I don’t think there should be any sign of human life in these Parks.” “Just keep all the trees, keep all the animals; get rid of the fences, get rid of everything there; get rid of the parking. Just keep the trees and animals, and make it back to the way it’s supposed to be.” The Parks represent America as it used to look, “before we built our buildings and roads and everything else.” “That’s put there by nature, its not put there by us. Nobody can create that.” “Usually National Parks are set up because it’s

part of land that hasn't been touched for many, many years, and they want to keep it that way."

They are the real, the opposite of artificial. "This is better. All the other stuff is fake and synthetic." "It looks natural. It doesn't look like it was made." They are peaceful, quiet, real, and relaxed. "The best part of them is that it's not manmade, it's not artificial." They are old and should stay that way. "It's something that's been there a long time; you don't touch it." "I wouldn't want people to mess it up—that's too precious." They are "beautiful," wonderful, "still and quiet." They are "sacred places for natives;" beliefs are tied up in those woods. "I think it's important because we don't have any places left that are sacred to us; everywhere you go is a city." They stand the test of time, even as cities and people change; they are history. "Over the course of decades and generations, cities change but National Parks always stay the same, because it's not interfered with by people."

To a student at the Met school, an asteroid formed the pristine wilderness of the Grand Canyon. "Some huge rock hit it, and made a crater." "No," said another student, "Paul Bunyon and his ox wrestled, creating the Grand Canyon." "No," you're wrong too interjected a third, "the Grand Canyon was made because Paul Bunyon dragged his axe across the land." "Wasn't it made by a glacier?" inquired a fourth. The preceding conversation was carried out with seriousness and sincerity on the part of the Met students. Mythic and legendary explanations of the Grand Canyon's formation were debated alongside hydrological and astronomical accounts. Other group members received fictive descriptions of the Parks' formation with the same speculation and consideration as the more historical renditions.

While most are represented by the above statements, some students feel differently about the Parks. Several students from Barrington do not buy into the notion that the Parks are pristine and untouched, even if that's how they're supposed to be. "There's so much tourism now; the lines of cars lined up to get through the gates of the Grand Canyon or something. It isn't really that pristine." Some think that the land has only become more inundated with impact since they were established as a National Park. "There's almost more impact on the land as they've become tourists sites than it would if it was just land." Some think that commodification of the National Parks has compromised their wilderness character. "They made it a National Park to possibly keep it preserved, but instead it became this place to go, like Disneyland." In the same focus group in Barrington, some students didn't believe that popular images of the Park wilderness were realistic. "That picture's kind of deceiving; there are roads there."

Development impeding on the National Parks

"In another 10 years it's going to be like Providence. Believe it or not Providence looked like that at one time."

In the eyes of almost all Barrington and Met school students in my focus groups, the National Parks are threatened. Students are exasperated about the potential of development to despoil the Park landscape; they fear that any development would lead to complete ruination. In their eyes, development is perpetually impeding, perpetually encroaching on Park boundaries. Outside the parks "will get worse," but "If they keep it preserved there's still a place people can go to see what it's like in a natural area." "Everything else is just falling to businesses and buildings." The Parks need to be there; "Otherwise, it would get developed by houses." Students believe in preservation,

because, “If we don’t start keeping things preserved, everything is going to be developed.” National Parks are different, set apart from the civilized world. “You don’t see a town with stores or a mall anywhere near this type of thing—which is good. The two don’t mix.”

Humans as destructive forces in natural environments
“Everywhere that man finds to hang out, he’ll trash it.”

In their eyes, people hurt the Parks, bring desecration to the landscape. “People are the ones who ruin everything. Like the rainforests, because people had to tear it down to build their farms.” With people come trash; where people don’t go remains pristine. “Everywhere that man finds to hang out, he’ll trash it, he’ll trash it eventually.” “They should just leave the Parks the way they are; if people don’t go in there than it won’t be trashed; there’d be no need to clean it up.” The presence of too many people threatens the Park environment. “If they had millions of people running through that each year, in like ten years, it would just like, I don’t know, be eroded.”

The slippery slope of internal Park development
“You’d just ruin it. You’d ruin everything. You’d notice a change—in the air, the environment, the atmosphere, everything.”

On November 2, 1999, *The New York Times* featured an article about the imminent possibility of commercial development on privately-owned tracts in the National Parks. “The Park Service list alone has a backlog of 10,184 private tracts in 145 parks -- more than 1 million acres in all.”¹³⁴ Had I asked the students in my focus groups to read this, they would have reacted with anger—and concern. In their eyes, any development in the Parks would lead the way to wholesale degradation of the landscape.

“Building would destroy the natural habitat; they would have to chop down trees. Sooner or later more people are gonna be moving in.” “If some people start a business, then more people will start a business and after that it will turn into another city.” To the students, buildings and development mean garbage and pollution. “If you do a building, the people who work in the building need places to put the garbage, which means you either need trucks to come in or there’s gonna be a whole bunch of garbage.” “It’s gonna become like a sewer.”

In the minds of several students, development would compromise the Park ecology. “A lot of National Parks are putting roads in and signs and lodges and a whole bunch of stuff, and it messes up the environment, messes up the ecology.” “Kill the animals, kill the plants, and then you’ve got nothing.” Students are exasperated about the possibility of development in the Parks—it’s recognizable in their words, even more so in their tone and inflection. Said one student with dismay, “You put in a basketball hoop, tennis net; that’s something negative you’re putting in the Park when the Park is all natural, everything is natural. Why do you got to change it, make it modern, like our regular small Parks?” Students don’t want “all-natural” Parks turned into “regular, small” parks. “Basketball courts mean litter, that means dirty, that means they won’t be clean anymore, it will just be a regular old park.”

Student attachment to untainted Nature

No!! Cause it would destroy the whole scenery. You’re gonna kill it. If you do it everyone else will.

I asked students what they would think about building condominiums in a National Park. They were, to say the least, opposed to the idea. “You’d be an eyesore.”

¹³⁴ Janofsky, Michael. “Private Acres in Public Parks Fuels Battles on Development. *The New York Times*. November 2, 1999. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/yr/mo/day/news/national/park-resorts.html>

“You’d be right in the middle of this beautiful landscape with your condos.” “In another 10 years its going to be like Providence. Believe it or not Providence looked like that at one time.” In their eyes, development was starkly equated with ruin. “You’d just ruin it. You’d ruin everything. You’d notice a change—in the air, the environment, the atmosphere, everything.” Development would take away what the students appreciate most about the National Park—their pristine character. “I wouldn’t want to go visit that if there were houses all over the place. It just wouldn’t be the same.”

They want a place untainted, a place kept natural. “We’ve basically ruined the city, so why not have something we keep natural; this world is messed up,” said a student with mild disgust. Visitation was acceptable, but only with strict parameters: “People should be allowed to visit, but can’t do anything to it: no littering, no yelling; don’t scare the wildlife; don’t smoke there.” Said one Barrington student with an appeal to reason prominent in her plea, “We have to have *some* areas that aren’t full of people and pollution.”

Student views on the demographics of Park users.

Met student: I think it’s all ages and like all races; it doesn’t matter.

There is no clear consensus about who visits the Parks. Most students at each school agree that “families” and “tourists” comprise the majority of Park visitors. “Families, all around; everybody,” one student offered. “Families and old people,” said another. A few students at the Met school felt that “foreigners” made up a significant proportion of Park visitors. As one student put it, “People who live here know about it and they see enough pictures on National Geographic. You see those shows on TV and when you see them you see what they’re showing and you don’t really want to go there.”

While she was the only student to express this viewpoint, several students nodded in agreement that foreigners were more likely to visit the Parks.

When I posed the question, “What can you tell me about the ethnic backgrounds of Park visitors?” students from both schools were divided in opinion. In the eyes of some students, all people go to the National Parks. “I think every type of person would probably go.” “Maybe there’s not a big percent of each, but I think each race goes.” “A little bit of each.” “Not more of a certain background.” One Barrington student offered that, “No one has rules in their religion that’s against going to a National Park.”

To other students in Barrington and at the Met, Park visitors are mostly “Caucasians.” “I would say a lot more whites go than any other race.” “There’s more white people going to the National Parks than minorities.” In their eyes, ethnic minorities are not found in National Parks. “A lot of people who live in urban areas are more likely not to go to National Parks than people who live in the boonies.” “Americans be going to see things, but you don’t see Spanish people camping all the time.” “When I went to the Grand Canyon I didn’t see diversity.” In the minds of others, ethnic minorities lack the opportunity to visit the Parks. “I think a lot of the other races don’t really have a chance to go to them if they grew up in the inner city.” “Minorities, I don’t think, really pay attention to that. They pay more attention to work and stuff like that. We struggle on financial problems.”

Students’ views on Park user fees

Barrington Perspectives: ***It’s not asking too much, Nah!***

Students at Barrington High School recognize that visitors have to pay user fees before entering the National Parks. “I’d guess \$10-\$15.” “Maybe \$5.” “I know they

have season's passes that are a lot cheaper." "National Parks must have some kind of fee." A couple of students weren't completely sure. "Maybe it's free." "National Parks get tax money. That's why I don't know if you have to pay to go, but I know they get funded, the National Parks." "They probably charge for Parking, not walking around on the land." "\$5." \$15." "Maybe \$25."

In the Barrington students' minds, the Park user fees were entirely sensible. "They have to pay everyone that takes care of it." "It costs more because of exhaust in the Park." "I think that's pretty reasonable." Higher prices wouldn't turn people away. "It is reasonable, and I'm sure if they raised it people would still go." "I'd pay more than \$10." "I'd pay \$25-\$50." One student even favored higher prices. "I think they should raise it. A car should cost more money." In their eyes, no one would be turned away because of the user fees. "I think that's a pretty good figure for anyone." "It's not asking too much, Nah!"

Met Perspectives:

Say people who don't really have a lot of money are curious to go see. I mean, why are we going to cut them off? That's unfair! Everyone has a right to see them.

Some Met students also recognize the reality and necessity of user fees. "\$5 or \$10." "\$3." "If you come in a group they'll most likely charge you." These students acknowledge that Park fees allow the Parks to stay in existence, or go towards protecting the Park environment. Most Met students, however, believed that Park entry was free. "You don't have to pay. Just sign some papers." "It's not required." "They ask for it, but no one is there to get it." "It's like a donation." One student quipped, "I think it has to be free. What, are they going to have a little person in a booth?" The chortling and

snickering in response to his comment prompted one student to joke, “Oh sorry, you can’t see the woods.”

“There’s only one entrance to a Park?” asked one student incredulously. In the most Met students’ eyes, Park access *should* be free. “I wouldn’t go if they were going to charge me \$10 to see some of my own country. That’s ridiculous!” “Why should they charge me to go to a bigger Park?” “So it’s a zoo,” remarked one student sarcastically. In their eyes, the government is to blame, the government is corrupt. “That’s terrible—I think if the government was really concerned with preserving things they wouldn’t make us pay to get in.” “The government is so greedy.” “If they were really concerned about preserving it, they wouldn’t let people in the first place. I think it’s a crock of shit. They’re making money off of it.”

Said one student with disgust, “They want the city to look good and that’s about it. They’ll let the animals die; they don’t give a damn about that.” Individual people shouldn’t have to pay to “see a bunch of trees and animals;” the government should pay for Park protection. “If the government was really concerned they would be funding it and they wouldn’t have to charge like \$10 a carload.” User fees prevent equal access to the Park, keep certain people out. “Say people who don’t really have a lot of money are curious to go see. I mean, why are we going to cut them off? That’s unfair! Everyone has a right to see them.”

Students’ impressions of local/neighborhood Parks

Barrington Perspectives:
“State Parks are there to go visit and stuff.”

As students in my Barrington focus groups see them, local and neighborhood parks are “a lot smaller” and serve different purposes than National Parks. They are “not

as big.” They are less natural, more civilized. They aren’t “actually wilderness,” there’s “less wildlife.” They exist for recreation, relaxation, and short vacation. They are “places for people to just go—some open land.” State Parks are run by smaller organizations, and are “more recreation.” There’s a lot of Frisbee throwing at State Parks. “There’s a big green; they have a little beach you go to play Frisbee on.” “State Parks are there to go visit and stuff.” “You go there on a day to play Frisbee.”

By comparison, National Parks in the eyes of Barrington students are “more well-kept,” “more beautiful,” and “bigger.” While they are well-kept, they are also more wild, less maintained by people. “State Parks aren’t as much into the preservation of nature; National Parks preserve it more; they don’t mow the lawns and mow the fields down.” National Parks are better funded, and more valued for their aesthetic appearance. “I think they’re a lot more well-kept because they’re funded more; they’re used for their natural beauty.” National Parks have more purpose, an intended existence, a motivation for creation. “National Parks seem like there’s a reason why they were founded, because of the Grand Canyon or some big national monument.”

Met Perspectives:

There’s mutant fish. I think I’ve seen fish there with three eyes.

In the eyes of the Met students, their local/neighborhood park is “dirty” and “smelly.” The water in particular is repulsive and disgusting. “Those waters are real dirty. I don’t know how fish live in them.” “It’s real nasty. It smells bad.” “Someone told me the water in there is boiling in slime.” Roger Williams Park is man-made, artificial, controlled by people. “We made this Park over here.” “Roger Williams was made for people.” “That Park is controlled by the people; most National Parks are but they’re so huge, they’re not controlled as much.” In their eyes, Roger Williams can only

offer so much. “If you plant the trees and make streets, you get some fresh air from the trees, but you still have cars going around and pollution and everything.” “It’s really close to Broad St; I don’t think there’s a Broad St in a National Park.” When asked what he thought of Roger Williams Park, one student responded, “I try to avoid it.”

For the Met students, National Parks stand out as stark contrasts to their local/neighborhood park. They are less polluted and more pure. “Trees are greener in National Parks; it’s probably nicer, cleaner.” “It’s probably in a mountain so it’s not so much pollution; there’s clean air and stuff, clean water.” Clean water is important to the Met school students. “You can probably drink that water.” In Providence, “The only clean water is in the sink, and that’s still dirty.” National Parks pre-date humans, are “preserved” landscapes. “It’s got all natural stuff.” “It’s not in the City.” They provide homes for animals, places where animals can run around and be free. “In National Parks they don’t hold animals captivated, like they do in Roger Williams.” In the eyes of the Met students, the National Parks are sparsely visited and protected from people. “There’s not as many people there; they can’t mess it up.” “They limit the people that can be admitted so there won’t be as many people and there won’t be so much littering.”

Why students appreciate the National Parks

Barrington Perspectives:

“It’s a beautiful site. You take a picture of your family in front of that—it’s a memorable moment.”

In the eyes of Barrington students, the National Parks are important for reasons beyond their pristine, aesthetic character. To some students, the Parks benefit the environment; people see it “as part of the history of the country.” “Them being there affects the whole country. All the trees and the water, the pureness of the oxygen. If it wasn’t there, the whole nation would be affected.” “It gives us a sense of history. Over

the course of decades and generations cities change but National Parks always stay the same.”

For others, they are where people go on vacation, to teach their children and see unusual nature. “You can go there on vacation and see different things, if you wanted to show their kids more about life, what nature’s like, show their kids they can have fun without rides, be amazed at seeing things the don’t see everyday.” “Sequoia’s are attractions. A lot of people would just like to go see just to say I saw the biggest sequoia.” They are where we drive our station wagons, they provide future memories. “I think of tourism; if you go on vacation, you’re going to visit a National Park in a station wagon with all your gear.” “It’s a beautiful site. You take a picture of your family in front of that—it’s a memorable moment.”

A number of Barrington students value the challenges offered by Park wilderness. “Not only can you enjoy the beauty but you can climb it if you want.” During the focus groups, we looked at images of different National Parks. One of the pictures featured El Capitan in Yosemite, a sheer rock wall. One student inquired, “Can you hike that? It goes straight down.” “No,” another student told him, but “You can climb it.” When I think of a National Park, one student offered, “I think of Yogi Bear—and then there’s the camping scene.”

Many students in the Barrington focus groups offered reasons why they thought city residents would appreciate the Parks. “I think a lot of people go because if they grow up in the city or something they could never have been to a place like this, with natural wildlife; they’re used to skyscrapers and factories—it’s a lot different.” In the eyes of Barrington students, National Parks would be a relief to the artificial environs of urban

centers. “It’s natural. New York City is not real. It’s all concrete and metal; there’s no earth there.” “People who live in the city want to go see parts of Nature.” National Parks allow people to get away from “ugly stuff.” “A lot of people most their life look at ugly stuff. If you live in a city or even a suburb, you see houses and telephone poles.”

Met Perspectives:

I ain’t never seen nothing that clean before. All I’ve seen is dirty pictures, never anything beautiful like that.

The National Parks in the eyes of some Met students are esteemed because they protect wildlife. They “allow us to watch wild animals, see how they live.” In National Parks, there are different animals, not just “squirrels” and “rats.” “There’s animals that someone like us probably hasn’t seen, and that gives people the chance to see all the kinds of creatures.” “We go to different parks and see different things—all the different creations that there are.” The animals in National Parks are in their homes, not where we put them in zoos. “They show people animals in their natural habitats.” Other students value the freedom of Parks. “National Parks are big areas...where it’s all free.” In Parks, said one student, “You don’t have to worry about the government coming after you for taxes, bills you didn’t pay.” Another remarked that, “When you’re out there, you feel like you’re a bird, you’re free.”

In the eyes of the vast majority of Met students, the National Parks are an appreciated relief from and contrast to the City. By going to the Parks, students can “escape city life.” “I’d go anywhere, to get out of Rhode Island, out of New England.” “As long as it’s not Providence, it’s alright with me.” They’re “natural,” and different, and a refreshing change of pace. “It gives people a chance to get away from the city and stuff.” “It’s the pollution and noise and everything like that; it makes people want to go

where it's quiet and peaceful and reflect on it." They are valued, and needed, for their cleanliness. They're "somewhere to get away, to be away from the City; it's clean."

"We need the Parks to protect wildlife; we need places that are clean. All in the city we have a whole bunch of pollution; we need a place where we can go and not see the same things we see on the streets."

In the eyes of the Met students, images of the National Parks illuminate the dreariness of Providence. National Parks make us feel good, "Because we look at that all day," said one student as she gestured out the window. They are "peaceful," and "real." They are decidedly not Providence. "Whatever that thing is, we don't have that." "If that was Providence, you'd see at least 30 liquor stores on top of that mountain." "It's nice and Providence might be trashy." A photograph of Providence would show something entirely different. "You'd see all the crap floating in the water, needles and stuff." "If it was here the snow would be dirty already." Providence is "the ghetto," "dirty," "drugs." Because they are so different, Met students voice a deeply felt, resolute valuation for the National Parks. They are "beautiful," "wonderful," "nice and cool." Students like the Parks because, "It's not like geysers come popping out in downtown Providence." "It's pretty and the water looks clean. Nobody's messing with it." Clean water is very important to the Met students. "You can probably drink that water."

The cleanliness of the Parks is something students were unfamiliar with, surprised by. "I ain't never seen nothing that clean before. All I've seen is dirty pictures, never anything beautiful like that." They are "clean," and "natural." Providence doesn't have such nature. "There's no rocks, there's hardly any trees, it's never that clean." The Parks

provide solitude. “It’s probably so quiet right there; in that exact spot right now it’s probably silent.” They are “still and quiet,” “lovely” and “beautiful.”

CHAPTER VI

Putting It All Together: An Interpretation/Discussion of the BHS vs. Met Results

Limitations

Before delving into an interpretation of my results, I believe it is important to address the limitations that I encountered during the collection and analysis of my data. As I mentioned in the methodology section, I administered questionnaires and conducted focus groups during a study hall in Barrington. The focus group atmosphere was predictably far less suitable or ideal than at the Met school. Whereas I was able to conduct the focus groups in enclosed classrooms at the Met school, I conducted the focus groups in Barrington in a corner of the cafeteria (where the study hall was held). The environment was predictably more distracting for the students, and restricted the level of concentration and attention of the group as a whole.

One of the major limits of my study is that it does not take into consideration the generational status of the respondents. A number of researchers (e.g. Carr and Williams 1993) have argued that generational status significantly influences ethnic minorities' relation to American representations of Nature. That is, researchers speculate that the longer ethnic minority families have resided in this country, the more they become acculturated to Western cultural values and traditions. These researchers also criticize the employment of an ethnic "monolith" label—subsuming all members of an ethnic group under one label. Given the small sample size at the Met school, I was forced to group all ethnic minority students into a group. My results thus blur the variations that potentially

exist between members of different ethnicities and sub-cultural groups, as well as between minorities of the same cultural heritage who may have lived in the United States for varying lengths of time.

Several limitations also arose in the format of my questions, both on the written questionnaire and during the focus groups. I was able to assess students' knowledge of Park history only through the most tenuous question—"When do you think the Parks were created?" My assessment of their knowledge thus depended on piecing together a range of responses from different sections of the data collection. Similarly, I had difficulty assessing students' commitment to National Park protection in the focus groups. I was unable to hash out in discussion a realistic trade-off that would force the students to question their commitment to Park protection. Notions of "taxpayers' money" and "voting priorities" seemed too ambiguous and too hypothetical to draw any meaningful conclusions about students' level of commitment to preserving the Parks. Finally, an inherent limitation of working with an east coast population is that most respondents framed their answers hypothetically. The substantial majority of each school sample had never been to a National Park. It seems quite plausible that their views would be quite different if they were drawing on an actual experience in the Parks.

Data Interpretation

Where the survey allows the researcher to identify trends, patterns, and consistencies in students' values and perceptions, the focus group experience allows the researcher to go beyond the checked box or circled option. Focus groups draw out an elaborated understanding of students' attitudes, as well as the reasons and impulses that

underlie their responses.¹³⁵ Accordingly, I will discuss first the survey findings for each school, followed by an exploration of how the focus group results confirm, contradict, enlighten, and/or enhance the trends observed in the survey data.

Students' Perception of the National Parks

The survey results reveal that Barrington and Met students perceive the National Parks chiefly as a collection of scenic vistas and attractions. Almost absent from the survey results is an assertion of the sublime qualities of a Park experience; nor do students display a strong identification with the outdoor recreation opportunities available in National Parks. Instead, the visual offerings of Park landscapes appear to stand at the forefront of students' minds. That respondents listed protecting wild animals as a main benefit of the Parks seemed to stem less from a commitment to biodiversity and more from an attachment to animals' "cute and fuzzy" qualities. Similarly, the considerable frequency with which students listed preserving natural wonders as an important benefit, as well as a primary reason why people visit the Parks, seems to indicate a high regard for the Park landscape.

Why do students present such a consistent appreciation of the Parks for their scenic character? I contend that the answer to this question can in part be found in the cultural and historical context of the National Parks. After all, the landscape paintings of Thomas Cole, Thomas Moran, and Alfred Bierstadt indelibly etched into the American consciousness a concept of the western landscape as glorified, artistic, and *scenic*. Moreover, it was the visual appeal of western landscapes that original Park promoters lauded—not their ecological or wilderness character—as a vehicle for asserting American

¹³⁵ See Krueger, *Focus Groups*, Zarcadoolas, "Popcorn, Politics, and Public Health."

cultural identity. This trend of illuminating the scenic and aesthetic value of National Parks continues today, pervading popular media and culture—in Sierra Club address books, Wilderness Society calendars, films, advertisements, and theme Park exhibits.¹³⁶

Focus groups further revealed that students' appreciation of the Park aesthetic stems primarily from an identification of the Parks as pristine and uninhabited. Corresponding to students' preference for untouched Nature was their revulsion towards the prospect of internal Park development. This aversion to development in the Parks is strikingly similar to the original insistence of 19th century intellectuals that the Parks be established as Wilderness.

According to the original park proponents, the degradation of Niagara Falls was emblematic of what would happen to western natural scenery if it were subject to development interests. Over the past 150 years, the belief that commercial activity threatens the integrity of Park environments seems to have only escalated in popularity. Students in both focus groups were quite steadfast in the opinion that allowing one person to build a house in a National Park would virtually guarantee the presence of a city "within ten years."

I would argue that Met students' expression of a strong appreciation for the pristine quality of National Parks confounds the notion that Park valuation is culturally relative. Though the development of National Parks and the rise of wilderness preservation emerged from Western ideals and cultural traditions, students of diverse ethnic backgrounds seem to identify fervently with a dichotomous conceptual model of

¹³⁶ For a luminous discussion of how Nature is commodified in American society in general and the popular media in particular, see Parker, Jonas. 1999. *The Commodification of Nature in Film*. Senior Thesis. Brown University. For a specific discussion of how theme parks such as Disney popularize images

wild Nature vs. tamed Civilization. This seems predominantly attributable to Met students' view that the Park landscape stands in marked contrast both to their residential neighborhood and local parks.

Students' Knowledge about the National Parks

Students' knowledge about the National Parks proved to be a difficult category to measure. The students themselves did not appear to correlate knowledge of when the Parks were created with a self-identified knowledge of Park history. Met students and Barrington students displayed very similar levels of low confidence in assessing their personal knowledge about the Parks. Barrington students did cite school and newspapers as sources of information about the National Parks with notably greater frequency than the Met students, while Met students listed TV/movies with greater frequency. One could speculate that more informative, substantial, and realistic portrayals of the Parks are provided in school and in print when compared to the popular media of television and films.

Qualitative comments from the surveys themselves and the focus groups do suggest, however, that Barrington students' knowledge about the Parks is indeed more advanced than that of the Met students. Barrington students' have a more informed, more realistic grasp of Park history and contemporary Park issues. Met students overwhelmingly relied on ambiguous or non-specific phrases when describing the Parks. A substantial number of BHS respondents listed specific features of the Parks or Park history: geysers or other geologic features; the forest fires of Yellowstone. Several

of wilderness, see Cypher, Jennifer Anee. 1995. *The Real and the Fake: Imagineering Nature and Wilderness at Disney's Wilderness Lodge*. University of Alberta: Masters of Arts.

students answered that they had studied the wolves of Yellowstone as part of their school curriculum.

During the focus groups, a number of students again made reference to learning about the Yellowstone wolves as part of their school curriculum. Whereas the Met focus groups as a whole maintained that the Parks represented “untouched” Nature, one group in Barrington pointed out that the Parks are not quite so pristine. Several Barrington students displayed a keen awareness the degree to which tourists are overrunning Parks. They went so far as to compare the Park experience with a Disney vacation. The recognition that millions of visitors enter the Parks each year was seemingly absent from the Met school groups, who continually identified the Parks as “quiet,” “still,” “deserted,” and “untouched.”

Students' Interest in Visiting the National Parks

On the surface, it would appear that most students from each school do wish to visit the Parks. When presented with a trade-off, though, students' interest in visiting the National Parks waned considerably. Apparently, the novelty of a Park experience or the desire to see Nature fell short of a greater interest in going somewhere to have fun—Disney or Six Flags.

Considerable differences emerge between the two school populations in terms of what they think a Park visit would entail. Barrington students responded with consistently greater frequency than Met students that they would participate in outdoor recreation opportunities at a National Park.¹³⁷ Met students, on the other hand, were somewhat more likely to claim relaxing or hanging out as a way they would spend their time in

¹³⁷ In part this may be understood as a confirmation of previous studies, which noted a preference among ethnic minorities for low-involvement activities, which allow for greater relaxation and time with family.

National Parks. Of additional importance is the greater abundance of responses on the part of Barrington students to this open-ended question. Barrington respondents provided 50% more activities they would participate in at a National Park.

Coupled with a lower number of overall responses, the Met students had a significantly greater frequency of answering that they did not know what activities they would participate in were they to visit a National Park. One possible explanation is that Met students have a more difficult time envisioning what a visit to a National Park would be like. Perhaps for the Met students, visiting the National Parks registers as a more foreign or unprecedented experience than it does for the Barrington respondents.

Just as student interest in going to the Parks waned when compared with Disney and Six Flags, the focus groups revealed transience in participants' desire to visit a National Park. That is, only certain Park landscapes were appealing to the Barrington and Met students—the forests of Yellowstone, Yosemite's mountains, even the canyons of the Grand Canyon. More barren landscapes—the volcanoes of Hawaii, for instance—were regarded with more ambivalence, if not downright apathy. Students saw these seemingly uninhabitable Parks as “scary” and “dangerous,” and could not comprehend why someone would want to visit them.

Parks' appeal to the Barrington and Met students, then, seems dependent on the presence of aesthetically pleasing and comforting vistas. If students were shown views of Yellowstone shortly after the forest fires, or perhaps Yosemite in the middle of a thunderstorm, I question how many of them would want to visit the Parks. This finding further confirms that student appreciation of the National Parks stems not from their offerings of a sublime experience, outdoor recreation opportunities, or the chance to

immerse oneself in wilderness. Rather, students who have been influenced by 150 years of romanticized natural wonders in art and the popular media value the Parks because of their picturesque façade.

Students' Commitment to National Park Protection

The ardor of students' commitment to Park protection diminished considerably when students were presented with trade-offs. Particularly in Barrington, protecting the National Parks was of considerably lesser importance than funding schools, health care, or the military. Though National Park protection was of substantially greater importance to the Met students, it was still outshadowed by a desire to fund schools, and slightly less favored than health care. It is worth noting that while students appreciate the Parks for their aesthetic value, they believe the Parks should be protected because of their perceived ecological importance to the nation.

Respondents' reactions to user fees in focus groups may suggest who (if anyone) they think should bear the responsibility of Park protection. Barrington students were quite comfortable and familiar with the notion of Park user fees. They demonstrated a willingness to pay significant amounts of money (\$50) if doing so would preserve the Parks. In contrast to the Met students, they appear to accept the idea that Park users, perhaps more so than the federal government, should bear the responsibility of funding Park upkeep. This perspective cannot be separated from the greater overall affluence of the Barrington sample. Their views indicate that receptivity to Park user fees depends on the visitors' possession of monetary flexibility—perhaps more so than a cultural inclination to Wilderness.

Met students resistance to user fees also seems to stem from a lack of understanding why Parks required large budgets. While Barrington students were possibly willing to pass this question off without consideration, Met students appeared frustrated that National Parks would require a user fee on top of money from the federal budget. Their suspicion of the government possibly suggests a broader suspicion that their tax dollars are not being put to efficient uses—or those public sectors most in need of funding. A number of Met students felt that the Parks should simply be left alone—no roads, no maintenance, no concessions, and only scattered rangers. They appeared to be less concerned that people be able to visit and stauncher in their conviction that Parks should remain pristine and clean. Met participants' belief that the Parks represent appreciated contrasts to the degraded and polluted city environment seems to inspire their prioritization of Park preservation over greater visitor accessibility.

CHAPTER VII

Carrying Forward: Implications for further research

My study has demonstrated notable differences between Barrington and Met students' knowledge of the National Parks; investment in Park protection; and reasons for Park valuation. However, the findings from all the data collectively do not indicate whether these differences can be more attributable to socioeconomic differences or ethnic differences. To a large degree, it seems that socioeconomic factors seem to have primary influence on the direction of students' perception; students of various ethnicities at the Met school voiced a strong appreciation for the Parks as a contrast to the City. And yet, the entire cultural history of the National Parks, coupled with the findings of outdoor recreation research, suggest that ethnic minority students would manifest different perceptions of the Parks than EuroAmerican students.

The importance of controlling for socioeconomic factors meant that I would have had to compare ethnic minorities with EuroAmericans within the same school. Given the small size of my samples, I was unable to do this. Future studies should strive to have sample sizes sufficiently large to allow for intra-school comparisons. Additionally, there might be value in conducting focus groups composed of different ethnic groups—EuroAmerican, Hispanic American, etc.—to see if any discernible differences arose. In so doing, further research will hopefully be able to assess the salience of my findings.

Students from Barrington and the Met school exhibited considerable differences in their historical and contemporary knowledge about the National Parks. Towards the end of my study, I have begun to speculate with increasing regularity whether the differences in students' knowledge of the Parks can be largely attributable to the source of information from which they have gathered information on the Parks. Met students demonstrated a lower awareness of Park origins, of actual details of Park landscapes, and of recent events that have influenced the National Parks. They appear to maintain a much more romanticized view of the National Parks as uninhabited, pure, and pristine. I have gone to considerable lengths to associate this perception of the Parks with Met students' attitudes towards their residential environment.

I also wonder whether their romanticized view of the Parks might in large part stem from their having acquired knowledge about the National Parks largely from TV or movies. My colleague Jonas Parker is currently writing his thesis, titled *The Trouble with Nature Films; or, Going towards Hyper-Real Nature*, on the representation of Nature in the mass media; Gregg Mitman published a text entitled *Reel Nature*, which discusses the portrayal of wildlife in popular film of the past half-century. Susan Davis and Jennifer Price have respectively commented on the romanticization of Nature in theme parks and shopping malls.¹³⁸ I would suggest that further research should attempt to analyze how Wilderness and the National Parks are depicted in popular culture and media, compared with how they are portrayed in school or more traditional media—newspapers and

¹³⁸ See Parker, *The Commodification of Nature*; Mitman, Gregg. 1999. *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Films*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Davis, Susan. 1997. *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Davis, Susan. "Touch the Magic," in Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*; Price, Jennifer. "Looking for Nature at the Mall. A field guide to the Nature Company," in Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*.

magazines. In that Barrington students and Met students reported statistically significant differences in their sources of information, research in this area could illuminate whether they are receiving markedly different imagery and history about the Parks.

I have attempted to illustrate that despite the singularly EuroAmerican cultural history of Wilderness and the National Parks, students from various ethnic groups voice an appreciation for and identification with pristine nature. That does not suggest, however, that cultures around the world will react with similar affinity to the establishment of Wilderness parks in their nations. In many developing nations—Kenya foremost among them—the indigenous displacement that characterized the formation of America’s National Parks is being repeated. To protect wildlife populations that attract tourist revenue, the Kenyan national government has forbidden hunting. However, native tribes have not been compensated for the loss of livestock and agricultural lands from wildlife intrusion. Traditional grazing lands have been declared off-limits; some tribes have been forced to abandon their historical residences to make way for National Parks and reserves.

I do not maintain that the United States should dictate how other nations construct and manage their National Parks. However, through Western conservation organizations and Western tourist dollars the United States and other countries exert a significant influence on wildlife preservation policies in other nations. Future research should attempt to analyze use patterns and perceptions among residents of foreign nations in regards to *their* National Parks. The extent to which indigenous populations value and appreciate the existence of Wilderness Parks should influence whether United States

wildlife organizations continue to force the Wilderness model of nature preservation upon the nations of the world.

And finally, I think future research should strive to analyze students' perceptions of and attitudes towards the National Parks in the physical context *of* the National Parks. How fascinating and informative it would be, if students' reaction to Wilderness could be measured by how they reacted to actual landscapes, instead of color photographs. Further, students would have the opportunity to comment on the realities of the National Parks that they observed—levels of overcrowding, pollution, the presence of “man-made” structures. Perhaps most enlightening would be to do a series of “before,” “during,” and “after” focus groups, whereby the researcher would have the opportunity to analyze how students' opinions changed when they were exposed to an actual Park environment.

I also forward this suggestion for future research because I think the Park Service has a political and social duty to continually improve the equity and distribution of Park use. By bringing students into the National Parks, I think they, or other researchers, would be setting a precedent for Wilderness management organizations to be more proactively inclusive of ethnic minorities and/or underprivileged citizens.

CHAPTER VIII

Towards a future for the National Parks:

Conclusions from my study

Given the cultural history of the National Parks, and the findings of thirty years of outdoor recreation research, one would think that ethnic minority groups would manifest dramatically different perceptions of the Parks than EuroAmerican citizens.

When students from Barrington high school and the Met school in Providence voiced their views of and attitudes towards the National Parks, however, the differences were not so extreme. Even with the marked differences in ethnic composition between the two schools (11% of the Barrington respondents self-identified as ethnic minority, compared with 57% of the Met school respondents), students' general perceptions of the National Parks were quite similar. To students of both schools, the National Parks are bastions of primitive, pure, pristine, and unadulterated Wilderness. The Parks are valued, appreciated, and thought of primarily in terms of their scenic offerings. The values and ideals of the original Park proponents—that National Parks should exist as pure *Wilderness*—prevail to this day.

Students voice no awareness of the Indian removal undertaken in the formation of the first National Parks; they are convinced that Park boundaries encapsulate primordial Wilderness. They would be surprised, I think, to learn that early Park officials constructed artificial wildlife populations for animal-seeking tourists by practicing

predator reduction, winter feeding, and animal importation.¹³⁹ The degree to which ethnic minority students have incorporated a desire for and appreciation of National Parks landscapes into their worldview speaks to the pervasiveness of wilderness imagery in the popular media and society at large.

Of course, smaller but still significant variations do emerge when we compare how Barrington students and Met students perceive the National Parks. Barrington and Met students express widely different reasons for their valuation of the Parks. Barrington students are motivated by largely utilitarian interests. They value the Parks as places to recreate, to climb mountains and hike trails, to take families on vacation, to see the scenery. The Met students' greatest appreciation of the Parks stems from their impression that the Parks offer a clean and pristine contrast to the degraded urban landscape. They are noticeably more escapist in their appraisal of the Parks. Some want to go to the Parks to get away from the pollution of the City; most are content simply to know that it exists, a pure and untainted alternative to the scarred, denuded urban environment.

Perhaps most surprisingly, while the Met students evidence a somewhat naive, uninformed impression of the National Parks, they are arguably the Parks' greatest supporters. They exhibit a significantly higher conviction that the National Parks merit government funding than the Barrington respondents. They believe and adhere to the maxims of democratic and egalitarian access that have characterized Park legislation for almost 130 years. For the most part they are against user fees; in their view, the government has an obligation to preserve the National Parks so that *all* Americans can benefit from and appreciate their existence. And, when it comes down to it, the Met students were considerably more ardent and staunch in their advocacy of Park protection.

¹³⁹ Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, p. 88-89.

Pristine Wilderness means more to them, it arouses greater passion, because it stands in such poignant contrast to the environment in which they live.

As public institutions, the continued existence of National Parks in the 21st century will hinge on the support of an increasingly ethnically diverse constituency. The ethnic composition of the Met school represents what the ethnic composition of the United States will be at large, fifty years into the future. The Met students support and believe in the National Parks—but chiefly because of their pristine character. The National Parks *are* immeasurably more natural, pristine, clean, and *uninhabited* than the environment in which these students reside. Striving to convince them that the Parks are otherwise will only erode the base of their support.

That is not to say that I promote keeping high school students in ignorance about the factors that limit the “primitive” and organic character of Wilderness. As I said before, I think the Park Service should acknowledge through ceded land and re-instated hunting rights the prior claim of Native Americans to the land. Moreover, students should know about the overcrowding in National Parks, the effect of acid rain and carbon emissions on reducing visibility in the Parks, the extensive efforts undertaken by the Park Service to maintain the integrity of the Park ecosystems. However, these realities do not compromise the solitude, natural beauty, and pause for quiet reflection that can still be had 200 feet off of any road in any National Park.

No, the Parks are not pure, unadulterated Wilderness. But they do protect large tracts of the natural world free from buildings, human litter, automobiles, noise, and asphalt. As long as the current values and ideals of the American people regarding pristine Wilderness are reflected by and remain incorporated into Park legislation, this

facet of the National Parks will remain unchanged. Ethnically diverse students at the Met school embrace these values; in fact, they are stauncher advocates than their Barrington counterparts that the National Parks be protected in perpetuity.

With the high school students of America rests a prophecy of how the United States will perceive and value its National Parks in the coming decades of the 21st century. Despite their evolution from singularly Euro-American ideals, histories, and traditions, and three decades of research that would suggest otherwise, the National Parks are strongly appreciated and valued by a diverse body of Met and Barrington students. To further solidify students' support and investment in the Parks, the National Park Service should undertake heightened efforts to increase their awareness and understanding of Park history and current issues affecting the National Parks. This educational enhancement should happen both by bringing the Parks to the classroom, and by bringing classroom to the Parks. National Parks should not exist solely in the imaginations, or on the TV screens, of our nation's urban youth.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Hi! My name is Ben Bruder, and I'm a senior at Brown University. This survey is part of a project I'm doing on how high school students view the National Parks of the United States. Please answer as honestly as possible, but don't worry; there are no right or wrong answers. You will find a yellow and a blue survey attached to this sheet. If you have **not been to a National Park before**, please fill out the **"yellow" survey**. If you **have been to a National Park before**, please fill out the **"blue" survey**. All results will be completely confidential and anonymous when presented. For now, though, please put your name, in case I need to contact you for further parts of my study. My study may also include group discussions, individual interviews, and hopefully a week-end trip to a National Park in the fall. The survey should take 15 minutes to complete. Thank you very much for your help! Please let me know if any of the questions don't make sense to you.

Yellow Survey

Name_____

(turn over)

I'm going to begin by asking you some questions about your use of local/state parks.

1) During the summer, do you go to local or state Parks, for example Roger Williams Park or a public beach?

Yes_____

No_____

2) If yes, how often? **Please check one**

Weekly____

Monthly____

A few times a year____

3) a. What do you do most often do when you go to a local Park?

b. Who do you most often go to local Parks with? **Please check one**

My family____

My friends____

By myself____

Other_____

4) The National Park System currently operates and takes care of 54 National Parks, such as Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks. Have you ever heard of these or any other National Parks?

If you answered "yes" to question #4, please continue with #5. If you answered "no," please hand in your survey now. Thank you for your time!

5) What do you feel are the main benefits of having a National Park System? **Please check the two most important benefits**

Because they protect the environment_____

Because they preserve natural wonders (waterfalls, mountains, etc)_____

Because they protect wild animals_____

Because they keep wilderness lands undeveloped_____

Other_____

6) When do you think the first National Park was created?

7) What do you think is the main reason people go to the National Parks in general?

Please check one

To be in the wilderness_____

To see the scenery_____

To see wild animals_____

Other_____

8) Where have you heard about the National Parks?

In school_____

On TV/in movies_____ (Please list which TV programs or movies if you can remember)

From newspapers or magazines_____

9) How much do you feel you know about the history and purpose of the National Parks?

Very Much_____

Some_____

Not so much_____

Nothing_____

10) a. When you think of the National Parks, what is the first Park that comes to mind?

b. What do you know about the Park you listed in part a (in terms of its history, what it looks like, or anything else that you can think of)?

c. What are some words that come to mind when you think of the Park you listed in part a?

(turn over)

11) If you had the opportunity, would you choose to go to a National Park?

Yes_____

No_____

Not Sure_____

If you answered "Yes" or "Not Sure," why?

If you answered "No," why not?

12) If you went to a National Park, who would you go with? **Please check one**

By myself_____

Family_____

Friends_____

Other_____

13) What would your main activities be?

14) If you had to choose between going to a National Park, going to Disney World, or going to Six Flags Amusement Park, which would you most want to visit?

15) Do you believe that government funds/taxpayer's money should be used to protect and preserve the National Parks?

Yes_____

No_____

I'm not sure/I need more info_____

16) In your opinion, what are the most important reasons to protect the National Parks?
Please check what you feel are the two most important reasons.

To protect the environment____
Because of their scenic beauty____
Preservation of wild animals____
To keep wilderness lands undeveloped____
Other_____

17) Please rank the importance of protecting the National Parks in relation to these other areas that receive government funding: **Please check the two areas you think are most important**

National Park protection____
Schools and Education____
Health care____
Military spending____
Other_____

Background Questions:

These questions are intended to gather some basic background information, that will help me analyze everyone's responses. Thanks for taking the time to fill it out!

18) a. Have you ever been on an overnight camping trip?

Yes____
No____

If you answered "yes" please continue with part b. If you answered "no" please go on to #19.

b. What was the longest trip you have gone on?

c. Where did you go on this camping trip?

19) Do you go on vacations with your family?

Several times a year____
Once a year____
Every few years____
Never_____

(turn over)

20) Have you ever been to a theme park like Disney World, Sea World, or Busch Gardens?

Yes _____

No _____

If yes, Which ones?

21) How old are you?

22) Are you male or female?

The following two questions are optional

23) In terms of race or ethnicity, what do you consider yourself?

African American _____

Anglo American _____

Asian/Pacific Islander _____

Hispanic/Latino _____

Native American _____

Other _____

24) Please describe how long your family has lived in this country

I'm first generation (I was born in this country but my family was born in a different country) _____

I'm second generation (My parents and I were born in this country but my grandparents were born somewhere else) _____

I'm third generation (My grandparents, parents, and I were all born in this country) _____

Other _____

Blue Survey

Name _____

(turn over)

I'm going to begin by asking you some questions about your use of local/state parks.

1) During the summer, do you go to local or state Parks, for example Roger Williams Park or a public beach?

Yes____

No____

2) If yes, how often?

Weekly____

Monthly____

A few times a year____

3) a. What do you do most often do when you go to this Park?

b. Who do you most often go to this Park with? **Please check one**

My family____

My friends____

By myself____

Other_____

4) The National Park System currently operates and takes care of 54 National Parks, such as Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks. Have you ever heard of these or any other National Parks?

If you answered "yes" to question #4, please continue with #5. If you answered "no," please hand in your survey now. Thank you for your time!

5) What do you feel are the main benefits of having a National Park System? **Please check the two most important benefits**

Because they protect the environment____

Because they preserve natural wonders (waterfalls, mountains, etc)____

Because they protect wild animals____

Because they keep wilderness lands undeveloped____

Other_____

6) When do you think the first National Park was created?

7) What do you think is the main reason people go to the National Parks in general?

Please check one

To be in the wilderness_____

To see the scenery_____

To see wild animals_____

Other_____

8) Where have you heard about the National Parks?

In school_____

On TV/in movies_____ (Please list which TV programs or movies if you can remember)

From newspapers or magazines_____

9) How much do you feel you know about the history and purpose of the National Parks?

Very Much_____

Some_____

Not so much_____

Nothing_____

10) a. How many National Parks have you visited?

0-5_____

6-10_____

10+_____

b. Of the Parks you have visited, which was your favorite Park?

c. What did you enjoy most about your visit to that Park?

(turn over)

d. What are some words that come to mind when you think of your favorite Park?

11) If you had the opportunity, would you choose to go back to a National Park?

Yes_____

No_____

Not Sure_____

If you answered "Yes" or "Not Sure," why?

If you answered "No," why not?

12) When you went to your favorite Park, who did you go with? **Please check one**

By myself_____

Family_____

Friends_____

Other group_____

13) What were your main activities?

14) If you had to choose between going to a National Park, going to Disney World, or going to Six Flags Amusement Park, which would you most want to visit?

15) Do you believe that government funds/taxpayer's money should be used to protect and preserve the National Parks?

Yes_____

No_____

I'm not sure/I need more info_____

16) In your opinion, what are the most important reasons to protect the National Parks?
Please check what you feel are the two most important reasons.

- To protect the environment_____
- Because of their scenic beauty_____
- Preservation of wild animals_____
- To keep wilderness lands undeveloped_____
- Other_____

17) Please rank the importance of protecting the National Parks in relation to these other areas that receive government funding: **Please check the two areas you think are most important**

- National Park protection_____
- Schools and Education_____
- Health care_____
- Military spending_____
- Other_____

Background Questions:

These questions are intended to gather some basic background information, that will help me analyze everyone's responses. Thanks for taking the time to fill it out!

18) a. Have you ever been on an overnight camping trip?

Yes_____

No_____

If you answered "yes" please continue with part b. If you answered "no" please go on to #19.

c. What was the longest trip you have gone on?

d. Where did you go on this camping trip?

19) Do you go on vacations with your family?

Several times a year_____

Once a year_____

Every few years_____

Never_____

(turn over)

20) Have you ever been to a theme park like Disney World, Sea World, or Busch Gardens?

Yes_____

No_____

If yes, Which ones?

21) How old are you?

22) Are you male or female?

The following two questions are optional

23) In terms of race or ethnicity, what do you consider yourself?

African American_____

Anglo American_____

Asian/Pacific Islander_____

Hispanic/Latino_____

Native American_____

Other_____

24) Please describe how long your family has lived in this country

I'm first generation (I was born in this country but my parents were born in a different country)_____

I'm second generation (My parents and I were born in this country but my grandparents were born somewhere else)_____

I'm third generation (My grandparents, parents, and I were all born in this country)_____

Other_____

APPENDIX B
FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE

National Parks Focus Groups

A Moderator's Guide

Hello again! Thank you for being willing to work with me again on my study of the National Parks. This discussion is a follow-up to the surveys you completed at the end of the last school year. The questions I will be asking are in large part drawn from the answers you gave on the questionnaires. My goal for the discussion is to get a more in-depth sense of your views and attitudes towards the National Parks—what you think the Parks are like, how much you feel you know about them, and how important they are to you. During the discussion we'll be looking at and talking about some images of National Parks—that's why we have the projector hooked up. And you've probably noticed the tape recorders on the table. I'll be taking notes, but mostly I'll be talking with you, so the tape recorders are to make sure that I can accurately recall your comments and observations. However, your responses will be heard only by researchers involved in the project. No names will be associated with the final report or presentation.

Here's how a focus group works: I'm the moderator. I'll be asking you a series of questions that are intended to gather your opinions, not to test your knowledge of facts related to the Parks. There are a few ground rules for focus group discussions. First, a focus group can only be successful if everyone contributes, but you don't have to agree—with me or with each other. All that I ask is that you let each other speak uninterrupted. Please give everyone a chance to express their views and opinions, even if they're not in agreement with your own. Again, feel free to disagree with each other, but do so in a respectful manner. And, as I said before, all your responses are completely confidential, so you should feel comfortable to say whatever you'd like in response to the questions. Are there any other rules that people would like to make before we start our discussion?

OK. This is the only question that I'm going to ask that we go around and each answer. Before you answer the question, please say your name so I can get to know each person in the discussion:

QUESTION: Let's start by defining our topic: When you hear the term National Park, what comes to mind? What is a National Park?

Probe: • What does a National Park look like to you?

QUESTION: Now we all have an image in our heads of what "National Park" means to our group. Why do you think they're called "National Parks?"

Probe:

• Are local Parks, like Roger Williams, the same as National Parks? How are they different?

QUESTION: Given our definition of a National Park, why do you think the Parks were started in the first place?

Probe:

- Who started the National Parks? What kinds of people started the NPs?

How many of you have been to a National Park?

QUESTION: Now I'm going to tell you a few facts about National Park history and current Park use, and then I'll ask your opinions on a couple questions of Park trivia.

- Parks were created in 1872. The first Park was Yellowstone
- There are 54 National Parks, on almost 52 million acres of land. Yellowstone National Park alone is over 2.2 million acres, compared with Roger Williams Park, which is 437 acres
- From Providence, it would take about 8 hours to drive to Acadia National Park in Maine, 36 hours to drive to Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, and about 45 hours to drive to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.

Now I have a couple of trivia questions for you:

- 1) How much, if anything, do you think it costs for a carload of people to visit a National Park? **\$10**
- 2) How many people do you think will visit National Parks in 1999?
Approximately 60 million

Probe:

- What are your reactions to these numbers?
- Would you expect more or less people to visit National Parks?
- When you think of people who generally visit National Parks, who comes to mind? What age group? Where are they from? What else would you guess about them?
- What do you think of the \$10 fee to visit a National Park? Should it be more or less? Why?

QUESTION: Now I'd like to you to look at some pictures I have of different natural areas. The first time through, I want you to just look at them, holding on to your comments and observations for a minute. Then we'll go back to the slides and talk about them.

This time through, let's go slide by slide, and you tell me by a show of hands whether the image is something you'd like to include in a National Park, and why.

Probe:

- What do you think of this image? Would you want this scene in a National Park? Why?

- Is this a place that you would want to visit? What do you like about it? If you don't want to visit, what don't you like about it?

After images Probe:

- Which image would you be most likely to go to?
- Why are these Park scenes important to people? If you asked a visitor, what might they say? Is the solitude in a Park the same as solitude in a garden or maybe in a religious space? How is it different? Why are the Park animals special?
- Who do you think are the people who choose to go to places like these? What kinds of people? Where do they come from?
- * How does this image compare with where you go to school?
- Are people who visit the National Parks the same as people who visit Disney World or Busch Gardens? If not, what's different about them?
- Are there any images left out from the group that you would want to include in a National Park?

Missing People Probe:

- One thing is missing from all these pictures. Can anyone guess what it is? **People!**
- How do we feel about people in these spaces? Should people be allowed to visit? To live in the Parks? What kind of rules should there be about people visiting the Parks?
- If I took the scene and put people into it, would it make you feel differently about any of the images?

QUESTION: How important is it to keep the National Parks?

Probe:

- Are there government programs you would be willing to take money out of to support the National Parks?

Ending Question:

Now that we've heard everyone's opinions about the National Parks, I'm going to ask you one final question: Is there anything you think we should change to our original definition of What is a National Park?