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The Nature State:

Tourism and Ecological Citizen Construct, Representation and Cultural Access

in Yellowstone National Park

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Introduction

The National Park Service commemorated its 100th year anniversary in 2016. The fabled beginnings of wilderness conservation materialized under the 1916 Organic Act, legislation that created the iconic National Park System (NPS) and added landscape protection to the cannon of American heritage. The cathartic social activism and political reform that characterized the Progressive Era answered harsh criticisms by carving out, quite literally, a space to clarify American ideals; sites first selected for heritage manufacturing appeared in Western expanses.

This demonstration, however, was not the first-time review of American identity relied on a government endorsed proxy to build public consensus and neutralize politically centered cultural threats to national longevity. The original model for the system appeared forty-four years before with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park. The continuity of this model to present day offers the opportunity to examine historical representations of American identity displayed in a wilderness setting and tourist implications for cultural accessibility. The historic renewal of

nationhood in these curated landscapes reoccurred for an elite, white audience and perpetuated exclusionary tourist practices, a legacy that still impacts the ability for many Americans to access multicultural heritage resources.

This research attempts to invalidate the notion of the National Parks as America's Best Idea. Common starting points in the historiography of the NPS is its birth in 1916. The case study of Yellowstone, America's first national park, emphasizes the late 19th century infancy of the park system and how tourist practices significantly shaped American understandings of belonging in wilderness. The intersection of representation, landscape, and tourism theory provide an appropriate framework to ask questions of group membership representation, support structures for meaning and power, as well as evaluate how these cultural expressions promote exclusionary dynamics.

Historiography

Scholarship in the historical discipline charted a new course after the civil rights movements in the 1960. This cultural turn between 1970 and 1990 pushed out of the social history box to include subjective concepts such as indigenusness, agency, race, gender, neocolonialism, power, perception, and memory study to the forefront of scholarship.¹ Evolutions in human logic and cultural phenomena now acknowledged previously excluded groups and topics. Suddenly historians concerned themselves with questions of experience, representation, and agency. How did system thinking approaches allow new historical contexts to incorporate more diverse

¹ Volker dekat. "The Cultural Turn in German and American Historiography," *Amerikastudien*. Vol 54, no 3. Assessments, transformations, perspectives, 2009. 427

experiences and broaden the parameters of historical inquiry? This cultural turn is critical to the research in this paper to match policy benchmarks with historical review.

Environmental concerns and rise of scientific standards caused the National Parks to reform their institutional purposes. The first concrete, national cultural policy frameworks as evidenced in the Wilderness Protection Act, National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act are favored landmarks for environmental and National Park Historians alike. These pieces of legislation are often called upon by historians as evidence of purpose evolution of the National Parks; to really immortalize such spaces as both a national identity and as a sign of progress in American policy for achieving democratic aims. The National Parks gained reverence as exceptional models for conservation and land management for the world. These narratives were popularized by historian Roderick Nash, active in the 1970s, and declared that Americans differentiated in landscape models and understandings of nature from Europe. Environmental historian and consultant to Ken Burns, Alfred Runte echoed the thoughts of Nash by arguing that the park system, with its flaws, was still the most impressive form of national unity Americans.²

In 1993, Bill Clinton assumed the United States Presidency after a decade of a conservative politics. Around this time major scholarship covering the National Park System followed the policy engagements of the Clinton Administration in long term environmental planning, protected spaces and Indian Self Determination.³ Scholarship at this time rejected previous narratives of democratic progression seen in tourist relationships in American wilderness and took issue with the omission of minority histories, particularly that of dispossessed Native Americans. Sensitive

² Sutter, Paul. "The Trouble with 'America's National Parks'" *Journal of American Studies*. Vol. 46, no 1. Cambridge University Press, 2012. 29

³ Sutter, 7

subjects such as tribes annihilated and exiled from their ancestral lands and historic segregation in National Parks prompted the National Park System to emphasize multicultural representations of American Identity.

Newer scholarship framed by multicultural focuses often assumes an international or global perspective. Historian Ian Tyrell contributed to a new body of scholarship that disputes the United State's hegemonic ownership of the National Park System narrative in favor of a non-linear, transnational perspective stemming from the Progressive Era.⁴ This type of analysis is inappropriate to discuss how the infancy of the National Parks broadly impacts contemporary tourist practices.

Ken Burns' notoriety stems from his patriotic film making. Burns released *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* in 2009 and in doing so, established his work as the most publicly accepted (and celebrated) history to date. His film syndicated democratic values, love of land and precedent of exceptional American leadership in the natural world to the American people: "a story of people: people from every conceivable background – rich and poor; famous and unknown; soldiers and scientists; natives and newcomers; idealists, artists and entrepreneurs; people who were willing to devote themselves to saving some precious portion of the land they loved, and in doing so reminded their fellow citizens of the full meaning of democracy."⁵ This focus popularized the idea of everyday, working Americans as the quintessential steward, developer and companion of the National Parks. Burns, however, ends the history of the parks in the 1970s. Burns elected to not discuss the contemporary issues facing the NPS such as accessibility and multicultural representation-puzzle pieces rooted in the institutional history. Additionally, Burn takes on the

⁴ Sutter, 29

⁵ Burns, Ken. *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. DVD. Directed by Ken Burns, Florentine Films Washington D.C. 2009

class conflict theme in his film. The dismissal of an elite presence in favor of “all Americans” is oversimplified; elite presence directly relates to issues of power and representation related to the American ideology of wilderness, treatment of indigenous residents, and the realities of poor minority attendance and participation in relation to cultural accessibility.

Theoretical Premise

Practitioners of cultural analyses employ representation methods. From a semiotic approach, representation is the production and propagation of meaning.⁶ Representation theory demonstrates how people interpret and create meaning from representations (language, images, objects); meaning exists in cognitive structures and functions to inform the content and evolution of belief systems by communicating in etymological substance to a group, where membership is shared or and defined by consensus within circulated ideas.⁷ Structure, nodes, space and shape organize ideas and attach both ownership and membership status to ideas. Representation is also a process of interactions; factors are produced, are received by interpreters (and influence the interpreter) and communicate or reference a scenario. The production of meaning (representation) undergoes reproduction or naturalizing procedures—a process often contested with competing meaning, values, and identifiers—leads to identity or position in relation to society, allows cultural phenomena to operate, and then is actively consumed or reflected. Representation works through deliberate relationships and defined semiotics.

Representation theory bleeds into the logistics of identity theory. Identity is defined by sets of behavioral and personal characteristic whereby individual membership can be determined. This

⁶ Berry, Kate. *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America: Race, Space and Place*. University of Nevada Press, 2002. 156

⁷ Dowling, Susan. “Constructing Identity Identity Construction,” Master’s Thesis, School of Art and Design. Georgia State University, 2011. 4

construction is complex; “self” is produced by interrelated exchanges with others, cultural artifacts, a summary of historical influences, and reflections of symbolic meaning.⁸ Essentially, processes defining location and shape of an individual relative to a group characterize identity. Symbolism and metaphors are conventions through which identity is constructed, understood, and collapses alternative possibilities of representation. Individuals sharing more similarities to one another constitute a group just as dissimilarities constitute group distinctions. Dialect characterizes the reciprocal relationship between social identity, social representation and culturally contextualized representation.

The analytics of representation map historical elements and allow scholars to analyze value systems, identity, perspective, presence, orientation, practices, and ideology. Culturally constructed frameworks of meaning define identity, shape perspective, systematically deliver orientation, and condition the possibility for all human action in both social behaviors and cultural practices. A cultural approach requires systems of meaning to be interrogated for consistency, stability, effectiveness in controlling messages and the extent of its infiltration, and adaptation to new historical contexts. Historians consult various cultural artifacts to map out relationships, behavior, expression, etc. Fictional and non-fictional texts, paintings, photographs, films, visuals, architecture, music, and practices all constitute cultural evidence.⁹ This research builds from a social history to a cultural history. As such, the study of cultural artifacts in Yellowstone National Park, its relationship to building or reinforcing identity, and that impact on cultural systems (and accessibility) require fundamental understandings of how these factors perform, particularly in a government institution responsible for managing cognitive and physical spaces.

⁸ Dowling, 4

⁹ McDonald, Bryan. "Considering the Nature of Wilderness: Reflections on Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind." *Organization & Environment* 14, no. 2 (06, 2001)

Setting the Stage for an Ecological Citizen

Western understandings of wilderness date back to early Judeo-Christian interpretations. Wilderness is a cultural construct; the Old Testament depicted wastelands or vast expanses away from established communities as devil occupied spaces. From an anthropological view, it makes sense that unknown “other” places where limited protection exist would have been treated with hostility. These early conceptual elements of wilderness introduced themselves through many biblical stories.

While “wilderness” often existed as a peripheral space, it did so purposely as an external arena for spiritual interaction. This can be understood in a simple contrast of Edenic, god protected spaces and satanic, wilderness spaces. The collapse of a perfect Eden created a precedent for living spaces to become ‘new Edens’. The murder of Abel at the hand of his brother Cain occurred in the wilderness and developed the idea of banishment. In the Old Testament, the forty-year estrangement of the Jewish exodus from Egypt transformed wilderness from a hellacious place of abandonment and desecration into a spiritual refuge where freedom of worship existed. Direct contact with God occurred through tests of faith. Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke in the New Testament depict the temptation of Christ: Jesus gallivanting around the mountainous Judean Desert, defying the enticements and challenges of Satan. The emphasis on wilderness as an evil reinforced notions of creating New Edens. This premise followed European civilization in many ways-creating a historical moment of departure in the discovery of the New World.

The discovery of the New World reenacted the desire to control space and insert Christian ideology. The general logistics of religious quest and colonization came to the wilderness as a productive space where exploitation of resources could fuel economic activities. Europe was introduced to accessible spices, potatoes, sugar, cocoa, gold, silver, and tobacco in the Columbian

exchange.¹⁰ The act of establishing a presence in the wilderness embedded ideas of wealth, power, glory, ownership, and within the concept of wilderness.

Towards the era of Enlightenment settlement in North America reenacted the release of religious persecution. The early settlement of New England by Puritans in 1620 corresponded with the catholic settlement of Maryland in 1634.¹¹ Western civilization came to interpret unoccupied land as blank canvas-a space of freedom. This attractiveness fundamentally influenced the ways in which socially understood wilderness shaped democratic thinking the future United States of America. Place and physicality of the North American continent represented a new, American identity. Nature represented a different governing authority and introduced “love of land” concepts into political ideology.

The beliefs, customs, learned behaviors reflected cultural changes in the North American landscape. These “imprints” or human activities on the environment not only created a visual effect from the landscape but cognitively placed meaning on those characteristics to differentiate place. An American cultural landscape, generally, began to take form. The American Frontier drew upon European ideas of the “sublime” in the early 20th century. Enlightenment idealization and romanticism of nature tied ideas of solitude, mystery and territorial authority under God to the people living there.

The Yellowstone area was first discovered by John Colter, member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, in 1809-later expeditions in the 1860s would garner more publicity.¹² Western landscapes became the subject of Americanized intellectuals, painters and writers during this time.

¹⁰ Columbian exchange

¹¹ Religious settlement north America

¹² Barlett, Richard. *Yellowstone: A Wilderness Besieged*. University of Arizona Press, 1988. 4

Painters Thomas Cole, Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt and philosopher and writer Henry David Thoreau presented wilderness in grandiose, naturalistic rhetoric. George Catlin employed comparisons to Eden when visiting Yellowstone—a space conceived as spiritual and political refuge.



“The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone”, Thomas Moran, 1872.

Artistic and Artistic and literary commentary directly framed wilderness as an advantageous moral resource over Europe, disposing of the legacies of “old”, stagnant Western Civilization and America as the new, Edenic Western Civilization. In part this competition over cultural expression manifested in major tourist exhibitions and emphasized national sceneries; the development of American politics and society focused on differentiating itself from Europe as well as the creation of the individual through emotional experiences.¹³ “Higher nature” reflected abundance, quality, morality, reason, freedom, and salvation. The mythic American idealism represented in wilderness pursued iconicism, reinvention, prosperity and independence. A general eastern upper class group absorbed concerns about the ideological relevancy of “intact” and “pristine” wilderness in America—concerns that also reflected political tension and deliberation

¹³ Baranowski, Shelley and Furlough, Ellen. *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer culture and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor. 2001. 40

over meanings of freedom and citizenship with the dawn of the American Civil War. The evolution of wilderness meanings is very important to American history, particularly that of the National Parks. It is equally important to note that these understandings of nature began in cultural swells. ‘Wilderness’ acted as a bank to deposit the collective history of Western civilization while constructing a powerful cognitive American allegory.

The American Civil War and Reconstruction Period

In somewhat casual terms, the United States experienced an identity crisis-evidenced by the American Civil War. This blatant intermission from the continuity, effectiveness and stability of American identity largely occurred in the political debates of the time-limitations on freedom, citizenship, and questions of legality attached themselves to the complex fabric of American society. Many historians theorize sectional differences between northerners and southerners revealed contradictory value systems in political discourse-slavery, industrialization, and applications of constitutional law.

During this four-year estrangement, rapid changes in technology and medicine elevated understandings of the human costs of war. Civil War technology raised the bar; hot air balloons, submarines, iron clads, torpedoes photography, commissioned rifle and minie ball weaponry, expanded railroad networks, amputation, anesthesia inhalants, plastic surgery and ambulance operations modernized the war landscape.¹⁴ These developments, however, did not spare the significant social trauma of the nation’s bloodiest war. Casualties and fatalities profoundly affected the psychological state of the American public and soldiers. Battle fatalities, disease, infection, mental collapse and suicide brought the death toll to nearly 750,00 Americans.¹⁵ An estimated

¹⁴ Horwitz, Tony. “Did Civil War Soldiers Have PTSD?” Smithsonian Magazine. 2015.

¹⁵ Gugliotta, Guy. “New Estimate Raises Civil War Death Toll,” The New York Times, 2 April 2012.

37,000 women widowers and 90,000 orphans faced uncertain futures.¹⁶ The less populated South keenly felt the demographic and economic decline disproportionately more than the North.

The challenge of Restoration felt clear political weights but also required reconciliation in cultural forms. In 1872, President Grant promised the American people Yellowstone National Park for the “benefit and enjoyment of the people.”¹⁷ Explorers such as Ferdinand Hayden boldly mapped and reported the “wonderland” waiting Americans.¹⁸ Troops traded the ravaged agricultural lands and thick forests for the open frontier. Railroad demagogues laid new tracks, connecting previously isolated locations to centers of trade. These western enterprises found a new enemy-Native Americans. Ceremonial and medicinal practices, hunting, plant horticulture, mineral collection and trade networks tied Blackfoot, Crow, Cayuse, Coeur D’Alene, Bannock, Nez Perce, Shoshone and Umatilla tribes to the Yellowstone.¹⁹ Patterns of Western expansion allowed new comers to assume rights of the land and its resources with little consideration for the endemic cultures that lived there. Violently dispossessed of their home, Native Americans perished or reluctantly transferred to undignified reservations. General Phil Sheridan stated, “The only good Indian is a dead Indian,”²⁰ The U.S. army assumed protectorate duties of Yellowstone National Park in 1886. In clearing out indigenous residents, the US military manicured a misleading, pristine wilderness for American consumption.

¹⁶ Gugliotta

¹⁷Mitchell, Kerry. *Spirituality and the State: Managing Nature and Experience in America’s National Parks*. New York University Press, New York. 2016. 21

¹⁸ Hayden expedition

¹⁹ National Park Service. “Historic Tribes,” Park History. [//www.nps.gov/yell/learn/historyculture/historic-tribes.htm](http://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/historyculture/historic-tribes.htm)

²⁰ Mieder, Wolfgang. “‘The Only Good Indian is a Dead Indian’: History and Meaning of a Proverbial Stereotype.” *The Journal of American Folklore*. Vol. 106, no. 419, 1993. 38

While reconstruction politically ended in 1877, territorial negotiations took a longer path towards cultural reconstruction. Tourism acted as a retreat from reconstruction-healing national wounds well into the 1920s; the rhetoric and ideology that organized new patronalism readily adopted wilderness concepts.²¹ American identity is very much reliant on place and physical place; as so, Yellowstone became representative of state authority and citizen's "love of land". Sanctity or ideals of nature addressed the larger political issues of the time. By reaching out to the American West-national reconstruction cognitively disengaged many from the epistemological validity of remnant political and social discourses and attempted to replace cultural conversations with monumentalizing national heritage projects. Fantastically curious and spatially as well as cognitively separated from the national scars of the Civil War, the wilderness locale offered the opportunity to renew the affections of countrymen and find mental release in its spaces. While wilderness preparation became the occupation of white trappers, explorers and military chaperones a younger generation, rising from the ashes of the Civil War, became the first class of ecological citizens to bring a permanent American tenancy to Yellowstone National Park. Once again, Americans engaged themselves in the increasingly complicated, multidimensional invention of ideology and tradition.

Post-Industrial Capitalism and Tourism

American tourism accompanied the railroad expansion. Commercialized train travel served the purposes of funding its expensive expansion while also strategically developing an American tourist sector. Tourism filled the economic void left by industrial capitalism before the Civil War

²¹ Pearson, Susan. "A new Birth of Regulation: The State of the State after the Civil War." *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Volume 5, Number 3. 2015. 433

while acting as an agent in creating culture.²² The advent of comfortable train travel into the western precincts opened alternative avenues of engaging in the march of Western civilization, wilderness tourism became an American cultural practice. Instead of a grand European tour, railroad agents reinvigorated travel routes domestically. In 1882, the Northern Pacific Railroad finished its route to Livingston, Montana and in 1883 the Union Pacific finished its Utah addition to Wyoming.²³ New national transportation systems, national landscapes and national market of tourist services began to produce an authorized nationalism ready to entertain the next generation of Americans.

While infrastructure made travel to Yellowstone possible, the poetics of nature tourism and democratic education that made mass holiday experiences required elements of persuasion. Railroads launched sophisticated advertising campaigns at the turn of the 20th century. In the three decades that had passed since the Civil War, a new generation was ready to quite literally go into the wilderness to know thy country. Impressed with transformed ideas of recreation and the new class of educated, cultured young adults began visiting Yellowstone in mass. These advertising schemes paired the symbolic visuals of Yellowstone with glamorous images of financially secure vacationers to sponsor a class endorsed new nationalism.

²² The Center of the American West, University of Colorado at Boulder. *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism and the American West*. University Press of Kansas. 2001. P 235

²³ Runte, Alfred. "Images of the West: Trains of Discovery," *Big Sky Journal*, online. 2011.
<https://bigskyjournal.com/Article/trains-of-discovery>



Figure 2. "The Wonderland Route to the Pacific Coast." 1885

Initial advertisements framed Yellowstone as a wonderland in accordance with its sublime descriptions. Marketing techniques made exploration activities fashionable for young white women, as seen in the advertisement above. Advertisements emphasized individuality, an emotional experience of being alone in nature while also being elegantly clothed and accommodated comfortably. This experience, administered by the state, promoted reflective and adventurous private experiences. These qualities affirmed the nationalized cultural landscape.

The commodification of tourist experiences in Yellowstone relied on similar images to reference national messages as well as attract the same kind of tourist-elite whites. Previously honeymooners went to Niagara Falls-vogue honeymooners elected to travel to Yellowstone. In Figure 3, the young white woman depicted wears expensive clothing, is well groomed and wears

her hair stylishly. While the woman is the focal point of the image, a white male-presumably a groom- also peers out the window at the new infrastructure and unique natural scenery. The woman appears comfortable and stimulated. Figure 4 uses wildlife images, Old Faithful geyser, and fashionable young white couples to market Yellowstone as a tourist site.

These experiences allowed young, affluent Americans to reaffirm their identity as model, ecological citizens.²⁴ This activity occurred outside of political arenas and allowed consumption of nature to legitimize citizenship. World War I closed off many traditional European vacation destinations; as a result, America built a scenic tourist industry that romantically intertwined political conversations, myth, tradition, location into national merchandise.

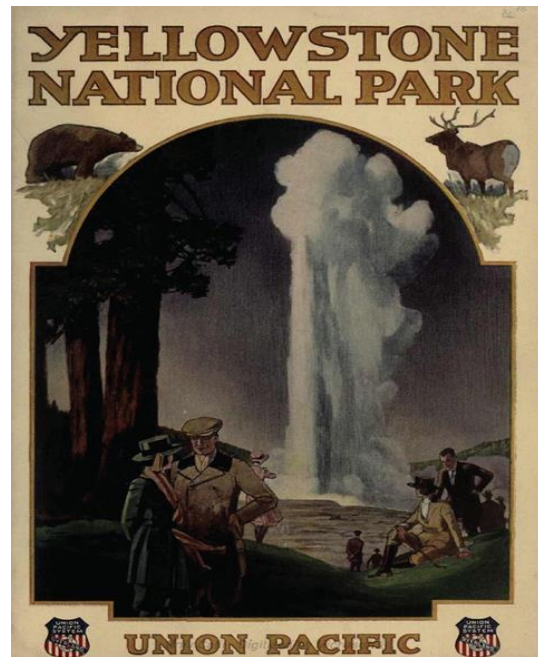


Figure 3. *The Honey Moon Trip*, Union Pacific Railroad, 1909

Figure 4. *Yellowstone National Park*, Union Pacific Railroad, 1916

²⁴ Baranowski and Furlough, editors. *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*. The University of Michigan Press. 2001. 157

Old Faithful and wildlife in particular are convincing, enduring images of truly authentic American landscapes. Advances in medicine created a public awareness of anatomical functions. Old Faithful's eruptions were commonly related to heartbeats or pulses-quite literally casting Yellowstone the heart of America.²⁵Old Faithful's name refers to its consistent eruptions, casting it as an act of loyalty and personified as familiar. Old Faithful embodied, quite literally, the nation.

The visceral experience of traveling to and seeing Yellowstone National Park reinforced class distinction. At the end of the 19th century and into the first several decades of the 20th century class distinction became understood through the ecological citizen-one that valued nature, visited wonderful natural landforms, and interpreted them to identify as an individual and American. While aristocratic Americans focused on defining their social characteristics in this cultural practice, other groups looked to other practices to apply meaning and interpret identity. The middle class "championed 100 percent Americanism, supported the Red Scar and embraced the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan."²⁶

Working class Americans embraced the emblematic American wilderness-just not as tourists. The Reconstruction Period in America saw a renaissance of alcohol production with thousands of distilleries popping up, especially in the South. Bourbon in particular had become known as an "Americanized" drink: whiskey served as a representation of resistance, becoming the preferred drink of choice in many circles after the boycott of English tea nearly a century earlier.²⁷ Bourbon whiskey production thrived in the unique ecological systems of Kentucky and Tennessee where many distillers then sold it down the Mississippi River to upper class customers

²⁵Tichi, Cecilia. *Embodiment of a Nation: Human Form in American Places*. Harvard University Press, 2009. P 109

²⁶ Baranowski, 157

²⁷ Minnick, Fred. *Bourbon: The rise, Fall and Rebirth of an American Whiskey*. Voyager Press, Minneapolis. 2016. P

in New Orleans.²⁸ Whiskey during the Civil War was used both as an antiseptic and numbing agent-a use that endeared it to many Americans but also as a source of tax revenue.²⁹ American whiskey became a drink of the people. While the same cultural practice as to scenic tourism, the conditions that produced and distributed American whiskey bound working class Americans together.

In 1872, immediately after the establishment of Yellowstone National Park, a distiller rebranded its product to be named ‘Yellowstone’.³⁰ This marketing ploy attached great connotations as well as reinforced the product as an American product. In branding its product, the whiskey adopted the image of Old Faithful. Additionally, a cultural exchange between rustic appeals and quality consumer goods sold in more expensive, glass bottles allowed the working class to access the new cultural ideas seen in Western wilderness without participating in expensive tours to national parks. Whiskey distilling did not gain the state sponsorship that national parks did. As a result, the working class did not gain access to the ecological citizen experience but did gain cultural participation in being able to use the body of national ideas manifesting in wilderness concepts. This entire process reinforced the significance of wilderness in defining the American nation and classifying its people according to their absorption of the messages.

During this entire cultural construction process-key elements of other groups were left out. This was due to the material and discursive production of whiteness in American wilderness. Today, the bison serves as one of the most recognized animals attached to the Yellowstone ecosystem. In early advertisements, bears were commonly used to represent wildlife. This was both intentional and realistic: to break apart the economy and society of the Plains Indians, many

²⁸ Minnick, 33

²⁹ Minnick, 44

³⁰ Taylor and Williams, Inc. Yellowstone Advertisement. The Kentucky Irish American. 21 July 1917.

of whom visited the Yellowstone area, the U.S. army nearly drove bison extinct.³¹ The American buffalo was representative of native cultures and had no room in the Americanized, white Christian wilderness. An estimated 50 million bison were slaughtered as part of an ethnic cleansing project.³² The living, working wilderness known by Native Americans was a threat to the pristine image of white wilderness.

Additionally, blacks were not readily integrated into or embraced in American society following the Civil War. Many blacks moved north while many remained trapped in sharecropping situations. Exposure to wilderness for this group, historically, was geographically centered in the Great Smoky Mountains, the Everglades, or Shenandoah Valley and appeared as swamps, forests, not wonderlands of mountains and geysers.³³ Blacks and whites occupied physically and cognitively fundamentally different spaces in nature in the American south. Their relationship to wilderness differed and developed connotations of refuge and shelter from a ruling white class. Unoccupied spaces cognitively resonated with Blacks-they wanted to transform and own their own land. While the unknown Western spaces also held connotations of freedom, Blacks did not share the same Western tradition of understanding nature. Additionally, National Parks were nationalized spaces curated for elite white citizens. In this respect, Blacks had competing, parallel understandings of wilderness and likely were less interest in national parks.

Today, the National Park Service is concerned with promoting multicultural messages and addressing its low minority visitation counts. In 2011, the National Park Service completed a comprehensive statistical survey of visitation. The survey reported less than 1% of American

³¹ Smits, David. "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3. 1994. P 321

³² Smits, 336

³³ Starkey, Michael. "Wilderness, Race, and African Americans: An Environmental History from Slavery to Jim Crow." Master's Thesis, Energy and Resources, University of California Berkeley. 2005. P 23

Indians and only 11% of African Americans visited a national park in their lifetime; nearly 83% of all white Americans reported visiting a national park at some point.³⁴ While economic costs were found to be the primary obstacle for all races and ethnicities to visit national parks, the most significant factors for American Indians included a lack of knowledge about national park units, not enough information to direct tourist activities, and that they are unpleasant places to be.³⁵ For African-Americans, their highest detractors also include a lack of knowledge about national park units, a lack of information about what to do in national parks, meanwhile whites felt strongly that it took too long to get to parks.³⁶ These responses indicate that still, parks remain more accessible to whites. These data indicate that the same tourist practices from the early 20th century remain intact and do not appeal to a multicultural audience.

I argue that historical understandings of wilderness and interactions (or lack thereof) with parks impact the relevancy and attractiveness of park visitation. This assessment is made based off the examination of representation and codified understandings of wilderness that led to tourist practices in Yellowstone National Park. Minority groups still experience exclusion in being represented in tourist practices. This impacts the accessibility of many to an American identity through cultural understandings of wilderness. As to whether or not the National Parks are indeed America's Best Idea, citizens may need to consider the role parks played in creating a national identity and cultural values around wilderness and use discernment on alternative understandings of democracy, freedom, individuality, and role played when entering these spaces. Western

³⁴ U.S. Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. "National Park Service Comprehensive Study of the American Public: Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors," Table 2, Natural Resource Report. 2011.

³⁵ U.S. Park Service, Table 4

³⁶ U.S. Park Service, Table 4

tourism may better be understood as a cultural practice that throughout history reinforces racialized social constraints-a practice that adds layers of meaning to ideological wilderness.

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