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White wilderness: race, capitalism, and alternative knowledges of natural space

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WHITE WILDERNESS:

RACE, CAPITALISM, AND ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGES OF NATURAL SPACE

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ABSTRACT

This project investigates discourse about American wilderness, from the first European explorers through contemporary outdoor recreation, to reveal that wilderness is a socially constructed concept. By uncovering nine essential myths, this project argues that wilderness discourse is both influenced by and perpetuates American settler colonialism and racial capitalism. Section One traces a history of wilderness discourse to demonstrate that wilderness discourse establishes whites as citizens, as civilized, as courageous conquerors, as rightful owners to land, as protectors of space, and as beneficiaries of any potential profit. Section Two uses a content analysis of contemporary outdoor recreation websites to argue that attempts at multiculturalism in wilderness recreation fail to address underlying structures of power that justify settler colonialism and racial capitalism. Ultimately, Section Three advocates for "race radical" epistemologies of wilderness, using an analysis of visual art, as a means to challenge the structures of power embedded in wilderness discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Wilderness imagery permeates American culture from recreation and leisure activities to art, literature, and popular media. Mountains, rivers, oceans, deserts, lakes, and forests have been the symbol of the United States since the first Europeans began to settle on the continent and pride in dramatic landscapes has contributed to American exceptionalism. The American wilderness has, in many ways, served as a foundation upon which the settler colonial nation-state of America was established and continues to be justified. Despite the diversity of natural landscapes within the United States, wilderness discourse embodies distinctive attributes that are profoundly *not* diverse. Discourse on wilderness supports and perpetuates foundational myths about race, gender, and the origins of the United States. Indigenous land left, slavery, and the exploitation of non-white immigrants are hidden behind tranquil images of wilderness with no human presence. By portraying wilderness as a naturally occurring feature, absent of social and economic structures, wilderness discourse conceals histories of violence and dispossession against Indigenous groups and people of color while certifying profit and ownership for white Americans.

I argue that wilderness discourse is an important component of American settler colonialism and racial capitalism, which establishes whites as citizens, as civilized, as courageous conquerors, as rightful owners to land, as protectors of space, and as beneficiaries of any potential profit. By wilderness discourse I mean diverse texts about natural landscapes outside urban environments including, written records, laws, images, documents, and web material in written, spoken, and visual forms. The American concept of wilderness, a natural environment filled with uncontrollable animals and uncultivated plants, is not only founded on false observations recorded by European explorers but is a concept unique to Western thought.[1] The concept of wilderness does not exist in all languages and cultures because it separates certain natural areas from other natural environments and from human life.[2] Fragmenting

[1]William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," *ANNA Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3(1992):369-85.

[2]Nash, xiv.

natural landscapes both "reduce[s] the capacity of humans to know nature[…]by excluding other knowers and other ways of knowing" and reduces land in to consumable, conquerable parts.[3] Wilderness discourse enforces and conceals past and ongoing settler colonialism, white ownership of land through privatization, and it erases histories of slavery and violence against Indigenous people.

In this project, I examine the production and reproduction of wilderness discourse, focusing specifically on outdoor recreation and leisure discourse, in order to reveal the ways that wilderness upholds whiteness as superior, whiteness as profit through exploitation of people of color, women, and the natural environment. I use texts about wilderness from European explorers, Puritan settlers, Romantic writers, early conservationists, and contemporary web material from REI and the National Parks Foundation. I present a challenge to a growing discourse of multiculturalism happening in conversations about racial representation in wilderness, a discourse that posits more racially diverse hikers as a solution to racism in the outdoors. Rather, I argue that if wilderness discourse justifies and normalizes whites as original owners, citizens, and profiteers of US land, reproducing the same discourse from a multicultural lens can only perpetuate the same problematic inequalities in profit, power, and citizenship in which whites are the beneficiaries and non-whites are exploited, dispossessed, or even killed. Simply increasing representations of diversity in outdoor recreation and wilderness is actually a mechanism of racial capitalism in which whites still maintain control over land and resources and their industries profit by opening markets for new consumers.[4] Both wilderness and a newly emerging multicultural wilderness discourse are founded on whiteness as power, property, and profit. Rather than seek representation as a means to challenge the racist underpinnings of wilderness, I focus on the production of knowledges, discourses, and cultures by Indigenous and queer people, women, and people of color in order to multiply

[3]Vandana Shiva, "Reductionism and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science," in *Ecofeminism,* edited by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (Halifax: Fernwood Publications, 1993), 23.

[4]Cedric Robinson first theorized the term racial capitalism. This argument also draws extensively on the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Jodi Melamed, and Cheryl Harris who have continued theorizing this term.

and complicate our understanding of human relationships to natural spaces in ways that challenges white ownership and the erasure of violence present in the dominant wilderness narrative.

My argument is presented in three main sections. I will start by outlining the history of wilderness discourse and the way that it upholds power, profit, citizenship, and ownership for whites through nine essential tenets or myths. In the second section, I hone in on wilderness discourse in outdoor leisure to critique a multicultural approach to addressing inequalities and racism in outdoor recreation. Finally, I use the work of black, Indigenous, and feminist scholars to argue for the multiplication of wilderness knowledges that include black, Indigenous, third-world, queer, and feminist epistemologies and ontologies of wilderness.

Background

2018 has seen new, record-breaking effects of global climate change and is estimated to be the hottest year on record, followed only by 2017.[5] Natural disasters, pollution, and habitat destruction are causing detrimental health effects for humans and the natural world. Extractive industries have gained new power over land and water while lands set aside for preservation have been reopened to industry under the presidency of Donald Trump. Expansive scholarship in the field of environmental justice points to the ways in which poor, urban communities of color are most severely impacted by pollution, toxins, and other negative effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Globally, third-world women are experiencing the worst effects of climate change. [6] In response, conservation movements have been some of the loudest voices addressing climate change by advocating for increased biodiversity and wilderness conservation areas. These organizations have been, and continue to be, significant contributors to American wilderness discourse. The Sierra Club, World Wildlife Fund, the Nature Conservancy, and National Resources Defense Council, to name a few, have executed considerable global influence to create and designate conservation wilderness areas. Yet, traditional conservation successes have often

[5]NASA, "Long Term Warming Trend Continued in 2017: NASA, NOAA" NASA, January 18, 2018, https://www.nasa.gov/press-release/long-term-warming-trend-continued-in-2017-nasa-noaa.

[6]Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, & Pedagogy*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002)

come at the expense of local populations.[7] Globally, conservation NGOs like these have displaced thousands of Indigenous peoples, ruining their traditional ways of life, forcing them into capitalist economies often resulting in poverty, homelessness, and illness. While this is occurring in many rural parts of the world, in urban environments, environmental justice scholars and activists point out that "greening" attempts have yet to reach the poorest communities of color who still suffer severe health problems, dirty environments, and lack of resources.

At the same time as healthy environments collapse, outdoor recreation continues to be an expanding industry in the US, with Americans spending nearly 887 billion dollars in 2017.[8] While some people are rushing to enjoy the sublime wilderness before it vanishes, other groups are substantially underrepresented in outdoor recreation activities, at least those in wilderness. Studies by the National Parks and Forests show that the majority of visitors to these sites are white with slightly more men than women.[9] Outdoor recreation activities reveal similar statistics: people of color affiliated with climbing groups make up only about 1%, a study on Appalachian trail hikers was 96% white, and the numbers are similar in for other outdoor activities.[10] Like conservation, these activities, and especially National Parks and Forests, rely heavily on wilderness discourse and a narrow scope of what constitutes spending quality time outside.

I bring these two things, environmentalism and outdoor recreation, together to situate this paper in a larger conversation about race, capitalism and the future of the planet. Whatever you call it,

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[7]Mark Dowie. *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009).

[8]"Govt Data: Americans Love Outdoor Recreation," *Outdoor Industry Association*, February 14, 2018, https://outdoorindustry.org/article/govt-data-americans-love-outdoor-recreation/

[9]Patricia A. Taylor, Burke D. Grandjean, and James H. Gramann. *National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public 2008-2009: Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-visitors.* Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/SSD/NRR—2011432, National Park Service, Fort Collins: 2011.
USDA Forest Service, *National Visitor Use Monitoring Results USDA Forest Service National Summary Report,* 2008-2012.

[10]Mariposa, "2017 Appalachian Trail Thru-Hiker Survey," *The Trek*, November 29, 2017, https://thetrek.co/appalachian-trail/2017-appalachian-trail-thru-hiker-survey-general-hiker-stats/.
Indigo Johnson. "Diversity Climbing: A Difficult Conversation." *Climbing*, September 15, 2016, https://www.climbing.com/people/diversity-in-climbing-a-tough-conversation/.

conservation, environmentalism, or just loving nature, capitalism is incompatible with a healthy environment, that includes people and non-human life.[11] As I argue, wilderness supports advanced logics of racial capitalism and settler colonial dispossession and we cannot rely on this discourse to be a critical intervention into the practices that have created climate change and environmental destruction. For environmentalism to gain power, it must engage more ways of knowing outside of white wilderness and it must be resolutely anti-capitalist. Wilderness discourse has erased violent histories and entire peoples from the American landscape and it is influencing which lands, what environment, whose air and water is worth preserving and whose is not. If wilderness remains the dominant foundation of nature in American, it can also erase capitalism's ongoing battle against the earth and its nonwhite inhabitants.

With this context in mind, this project asks us to consider: Who profits and who suffers when wilderness discourse is at the center of conservation and recreation? How has the history of wilderness discourse shaped its usage today? How can environmental movements address the complicated relationships different ethnic, cultural, racial, and gender groups have with natural space? How can engagement in the environmental movement also address key issues of racism, settler colonialism, sexism, heterosexism, and violence?

[11]Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Versus the Climate*, is the just one contemporary example of the ways in which capitalism and environmental degradation are closely linked.

OUTLINE AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the project I describe wilderness as a discourse, which I discuss in the Foucauldian sense to mean a set of language, conversation, and images which produce a shared meaning or understanding of wilderness. Like Foucault, I am interested in not just the semiotic or rhetorical significance of discourse, but also the material power relations reflected and created through discourse. I argue that wilderness discourse is a particular social construct about a material place dominated by non-human life, what I call, natural spaces.[12] I occasionally use wilderness *narrative* or *mythology* to refer to specific tropes within wilderness discourse: the daring mountain climber, the scary dark forest, the spiritual connection, pristine landscape, or the American origin story myth. Specifically, this refers to the narrative of adventure, conquering, climbing that dominates outdoor recreation rhetoric. Discourse, rather than narrative or mythology, conveys the complex way that wilderness infiltrates many aspects of language whether or not an object of the natural landscape is being referred to. Wilderness discourse and images have come to signify the white United States from postcards to books and coins. Finally, these terms (discourse, myth, narrative) emphasize that wilderness is a *construct* rather than a naturally occurring feature able to be impartially viewed and portrayed.

I also employ the terms outdoor leisure and recreation interchangeably to refer to the activities and industry of outdoor sports, adventure, and other activities. This includes activities such as camping, hiking, mountaineering, boating, or rock climbing. I use these terms with the same assumption often made in their discourse, that these are *wilderness* activities. A distinction that I will elaborate on further in the project, is that outdoor leisure often excludes activities such as sitting in an urban park, a backyard, or a farm, but that the outdoor leisure is seen to gain its value from being in wilderness.

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[12] As I argue further in Section Three, I do not believe in a single, objective or scientific natural environment, but my argument does rely on the material existence of nonhuman life. My interest in this paper is in the politics of who and how knowledge is created about this environment, based on power and widely varying relationships between humans and natural spaces. I advocate for multiple and complex knowledges to be constructed about the natural world as a challenge to violence, exploitation, and death and as a challenge to the idea of objective science. For more on constructivism in environmental history see Cronon, 1994.

Section One "A Wilderness Timeline" is an overview of wilderness discourse throughout American history and a deconstruction of the ways in which wilderness upholds the values and interests of whites while erasing the way that whiteness has profited off of violence and exploitation of Indigenous people and people of color. I provide examples of wilderness discourse from European explorers, conservationists, artists, and writers to emphasize the core features of wilderness discourse that create a platform for justification of settler colonialism and racism. To do so, I use the text, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, by Roderick Nash which contains a multitude of primary documents about wilderness and provides an entry point for critiquing wilderness. Using Indigenous and women of color scholars I offer an intervention that reveals the underlying racism, violence, and exploitation embedded in wilderness discourse.

The central tenets of wilderness discourse that I critique are:

1. Wilderness is the opposite of civilization;
2. Any human presence is a blemish to wilderness;
3. Wilderness is the distinct pride of the United States;
4. The American landscape was untouched and unaltered before European settlers arrived;
5. Wilderness is to be conquered, contained, and controlled;
6. Wilderness is the site of the *sublime* experience- the means to connect to God or higher consciousness;
7. Wilderness is completely naturally occurring, it contains no features of social and economic life and is blemished by the presence of human interference;
8. Women, Indigenous people, and people of color are too natural and too wild to understand the value of wilderness. They must, similarly, be conquered, contained, and controlled;
9. Wilderness is best enjoyed in a leisurely context; thus, it cannot be enjoyed by the laborer, farmer, slave, or other person who works the land- it is a distinctly upper-class activity.

I use the history of wilderness as documented by Nash, the history of National Parks by Philip Burnham, and the scholarship of William Cronon in his essay, "The Trouble With Wilderness," to establish these

tenants. These scholars outline the essential components of wilderness discourse in the US from the first European settlers to transcendentalists, landscape painters, and conservationists.

Many of these core elements of wilderness discourse have been deconstructed in the work of scholars such as, Carolyn Merchant, William Denevan, and Arturo Gomez-Pompa. However, these scholars have not linked these wilderness traits to the justification and perpetuation of settler colonialism and the erasure of Indigenous people for the profit and ownership of whites. To make this point I use the works of Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Jodi Melamed to argue that wilderness discourse assures 'whiteness as property,' profit, and citizenship. Using the work of ecofeminists Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies and environmental justice scholar Mei Mei Evans, I link wilderness not only to the perpetuation of settler colonialism, but also to the erasure of slavery and anti-black violence in rural spaces and justification for violence against women.

The historical analysis of the evolution of wilderness discourse outlined in Section One, also includes the development of American wilderness spaces themselves. The history of the National Parks serves as an example of the link between wilderness discourse and a certificate of profit for wealthy white men. I use the history of the National Parks by Philip Burnham to reveal how wilderness embeds justification for exploitation, new possibilities for profiting from "unproductive" lands, and it mirrors essential capitalist philosophies of progress, science, and rationality.[13]

In Section Two, "Multiculturalism and Contemporary Wilderness Use," I specifically look at how wilderness discourse is used in outdoor recreation activities and industries and how white interests implicit in wilderness may impact who does and does not participate in outdoor recreation. Studies by the National Parks and Forests show that the majority of visitors to wilderness spaces are white with a slight majority of those being men.[14] These large-scale studies from 2008-2015 have sparked important

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[13]Shiva, 24.

[14] Taylor, Burke, Grandjean, and Gramann. *National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public 2008-2009: Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-visitors.*
USDA Forest Service, *National Visitor Use Monitoring Results USDA Forest Service National Summary Report,* 2008-2012.

discussions of diversity in outdoor recreation and have successfully brought about new efforts to increase access to wilderness recreation. I draw on the work of black, feminist geographer Carolyn Finney who traces the relationship between African Americans and wilderness and scholar Laura Burd Shiavo who reveals the National Parks to enforce white citizenship, nationalism, and American exceptionalism.

Mainstream articles in NPR and the New York Times have called attention to racial disparity in outdoor recreation and the reasons why it might exist.[15] There are myriad reasons why wilderness recreation is dominated by whiteness, these types of mainstream discussions argue that economic factors and public awareness are two of the most significant barriers to outdoor recreation access. Going camping or hiking can be expensive, require a car, time off work, equipment as well as knowledge and awareness of places to hike and how to stay safe. While I acknowledge the importance of these observations, I use them as an entry point for my critique of multiculturalism. I ask, how does the production of knowledge about wilderness continue to enforce white supremacy and American exceptionalism at the expense of Indigenous people and people of color even while advancing important ideas about diversity and accessibility?

Using the work of Jodi Melamed (2011) and her critique of liberal and neoliberal multiculturalism, I also argue that these conversations fall short of addressing the material inequalities and violence of racism and continue to perpetuate the same wilderness discourse that upholds white interests in the first place. I use two outdoor campaigns as case studies of how wilderness discourse in outdoor recreation is using multiculturalism to increase profit from the inclusion of people of color and expanding "diversity." REI, an outdoor gear company promotes a campaign called "Force of Nature," which is intended to increase women's engagement in wilderness activities. The National Parks Foundation campaign #FindYourPark/ #EncuentraTuParque also uses a multicultural approach to making wilderness accessible, while failing to address root causes of racial disparity. Jodi Melamed situates (neo)liberal multiculturalism in contrast to race radicalism, that is, knowledge, culture, and protest

[15]Glen Nelson, "Why Are Our Parks So White?" *New York Times*, July 10, 2015 https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/12/opinion/sunday/diversify-our-national-parks.html.

produced by and for people of color that truly challenges the material conditions of racism.[16] In this section, I also draw on the work of scholars Andrea Smith, Maile Arvin, and Lourdes Alberto who provide an Indigenous framework for critiquing multiculturalism in wilderness.

In the final section, "Towards Alternative Knowledges of Natural Space," I use the work of women of color feminists who emphasize multiple ways of knowing, as well as draw influence from the work of standpoint theorists, to argue that, ultimately, wilderness discourse is a construct that has emerged from a white, western way of knowing. In order to challenge white wilderness and create natural spaces that are not exclusive, violent, or colonial, we need to spread non-white, non-western, non-masculine ways of knowing. I adopt Jodi Melamed's term, "race radical," to describe a multiplicity of non-white knowledges of wilderness. In this section, I specifically draw on Patricia Hill Collins, Donna Haraway, and Vandana Shiva to argue that the production and uplifting of epistemologies of Indigenous people, people of color, women, and queer folks is a powerful challenge to racist knowledge and can also alter material conditions. Because wilderness is a discourse constructed to support whiteness and wealth, I argue it can (and has been) reconstructed to include complex ways of knowing that challenge settler colonialism and whiteness.

Landscape images in painting, photography, and drawing have been influential texts in the creation of wilderness examples and I look to landscape images as a possible medium for creating new understandings of natural space. To provide examples, I turn towards two different productions of ways of knowing natural spaces: a series of photographs by artist Naima Green and paintings by Cherokee artist Kay WalkingStick. The analyses of these productions are just brief examples of ways of knowing natural space that challenge whiteness and make space for people of color, women, Indigenous and queer people to participate in the production of knowledge about wilderness that will influence how we preserve and enjoy it. I end with these examples as a call to listen and make space for these ways of knowing.

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[16]Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 48.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This project draws on a diverse set of methodologies to provide an intervention into the current conversation on race in wilderness and to present alternative knowledges of natural spaces by lifting up the art and writing of people of color. Section One uses historical and rhetorical analyses of wilderness discourse to deconstruct the elements of wilderness discourse that produce and enforce oppression, violence, and discrimination. This section draws heavily on the fields of geography, ecology, Indigenous studies, feminist theories, and critical race studies. I begin by critiquing some of the prominent voices in wilderness discourse in order to make visible issues of race and gender. Tracing the history of wilderness discourse in the US, I use the works of Indigenous, black, and feminist scholars to deconstruct it.

Section One also relies heavily on the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Cheryl Harris who argue that whiteness operates as a form of property, possessive, or profit. They argue that whiteness itself is a form of profit and relies on Indigenous dispossession and exploitation of non-white bodies. Moreton-Robinson calls the white possessive a set of logics, which she explains are used

> to denote a mode of rationalization, rather than a set of positions that produce a more or less inevitable answer, that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control, and domination. As such, white possessive logics are operationalized within discourses to circulate sets of meanings about ownership of the nation, as part of commonsense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions.[17]

Moreton-Robison and Harris as well as the work of other race and Indigenous scholars such as Charles W. Mills, Andrea Smith, and Cedric Robinson all emphasize that whiteness, capitalism, and settler-colonialism are intimately tied.

Section Two, "Multiculturalism and Contemporary Wilderness Usage," focuses on wilderness discourse in outdoor recreation and the National Parks and Forests specifically. I use a content and rhetorical analysis of texts found on two outdoor industry websites to demonstrate the way that multiculturalism and representation often reproduce a racial capitalism in which whites still claim

[17]Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xii.

ownership and profit from wilderness spaces. This section uses an economic, materialist analysis to critique identity-based multiculturalism as well as a rhetorical analysis of outdoor recreation texts as case studies.

I have chosen to ground this section in the work of Jodi Melamed because she provides a framework for critiquing multiculturalism and for understanding how the production of knowledge is significant in the creation of material conditions. Melamed's work *Represent and Destroy* argues that liberal and neoliberal multiculturalism maintains the racial capitalist conditions that benefit whites at the expense of everyone else. She argues that multiculturalism and "pluralism restricts permissible antiracism to forms that assent to US nationalism and normal politics and prioritize individualism and property rights over collective social goals."[18] I employ her work because it focuses on the power of knowledge production, in her case through literature, and it provides an opening to think about challenging multicultural discourse through what she calls, race radicalism.[19]

I also call on Indigenous scholars such as Maile Arvin who, similarly, provide a critique of multicultural discourse and how it perpetuates erasure and dispossession of Indigenous people.[20] These authors provide critical scholarship on the way that Indigenous peoples are always erased, particularly through multicultural discourse. I use environmental justice scholarship as a contrast to multiculturalism, an example of Melamed's "race radicalism." I particularly use the literary analysis of Mei Mei Evans to understand race in wilderness narratives and why the production of knowledge about wilderness through stories and books actually contributes to the construction of the space itself. I use wilderness texts from REI's "Force of Nature" campaign and the National Parks Foundation website to ground my work in examples while relying on the scholarship of women of color and Indigenous women to influence the critique.

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[18] Melamed, 2011, 96.

[19] Melamed attributes this phrase to Cedric Robinson's "black radicalism."

[20] Iyko Day, "Tseng Kwong Chi and the Eugenic Landscape," *American Quarterly* Vol. 65, no. 1 (2013), 91-118.

Finally, Section Three, "Towards Alternative Knowledges of Natural Space," provides an analysis of visual art created by queer, Indigenous, and women of color that intervenes in the problematics of wilderness discourse and complicates knowledge and understanding of natural spaces. This section's methodology is significantly influenced by the work of Patricia Hill Collins, Vandana Shiva, and Donna Haraway who theorize concepts of "black epistemologies" (Hill Collins) and "situated knowledges" (Haraway) among many other feminists of color who have built and expanded these ideas. I analyze the works of art through a queer and Indigenous of color lens.

These theorists have done important work emphasizing the importance of the production of knowledge and argue that all knowledge is contextual. What they all emphasize is that there are multiple ways of knowing and that bringing marginalized knowledges to the fore can be an important step in challenging structures of oppression. I see the production of knowledges about wilderness spaces by women of color, Indigenous people, queer folks, as a challenge to the embedded racism and violence. Patricia Hill Collins adeptly advocates for in her section, "Black Feminist Epistemologies," knowledge production is always political, and as such, who and how knowledge is produced can be a revolutionary act. Indigenous women, Black women, Asian, Latinx, and queer folks have been producing knowledge about wilderness spaces for thousands of years, yet it does not receive the same attention and validity as white wilderness.

My goal in this section is to continue the argument that the production of knowledge and culture about wilderness can and will have an impact on the future of the environmental movement so, I provide examples of artists who are already doing so. I advocate for the multiplication and complication of knowledge about natural space as a starting point for thinking about the future of environmentalism and outdoor recreation. Rather than have this project be purely critical, I want to offer an option for responding to the problems with wilderness discourse I discuss.

SECTION ONE

A Wilderness Timeline from New World Explorers to National Parks

For many Americans wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth. It is an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity, the one place we can turn for escape from our own too-muchness. -William Cronon[21]

In the early nineteenth century American nationalists began to understand that it was in the wildness of its nature that their country was unmatched. While other nations might have an occasional wild peak or patch of heath, there was no equivalent of a wild continent. And if, as many suspected, wilderness was the medium through which God spoke most clearly, then America had a distinct moral advantage over Europe, where centuries of civilization had deposited a layer of artificiality over His works. -Roderick Nash[22]

The story has been written thousands of times, fiction, memoir, poetry, and painting: A lone man leaves the comforts of city and civilization to see the wonders of the American landscape. Maybe he carries some supplies with him, a pack, a knife and food, or maybe he marches bravely into the woods with nothing but the clothes on his back; or no clothes at all.[23] From here the story may unfold in one of a few ways--the man climbs a mountain, hunts a bear, and stakes his claim returning to civilization to proclaim his dominance over the uncontrollable wild. Alternately, the man is overcome by the sublimity of connecting with nature and spends days, weeks, or months communing with the landscape to gain clarity on God, higher beings, and the meaning of life. He returns to civilization occasionally to proselytize the wilderness lifestyle. Maybe, the man feels refreshed from his "break" from civilization and return to the wilderness to build an extravagant hunting lodge where he spends every summer. Perhaps he studies the science of non-human life and lament the loss of biodiversity, becoming a staunch conservationist preaching the evils of human ways. He may see the potential for wealth and devise ways to manipulate the forest, sculpt the landscape, or extract maximum resources.

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[21] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature,* edited by William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) 69.

[22]Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 69.

[23] Ibid., 141. Nash describes a man who goes into the Woods completely naked with only a knife. He becomes a media sensation and develops a great following as he travels the US proclaiming the wilderness lifestyle.

These stories appear in literature, art, popular media, and everyday imagery; calendars, commercials, books, and TV shows. These wilderness images are especially prominent in portrayals of American patriotism or government representations: license plates, passport books, dollar bills, and quarters. Wilderness discourse is not just pervasive, but it carries a particular significance--one that asserts the preeminence of whiteness and masculinity and the justification for white masculinity to dominate. There is a reason that this story features a white man climbing a mountain, and simply replacing this character with a woman, a person of color, a queer person, or an Indigenous person, does not have the same glorious outcomes. These stories that appear again and again from the first European explorers settling the "new world" to the founding of the National Parks are influential in the images, mythologies, and ideologies that shaped the founding of the US.

Wilderness discourse is both produced by and reproduces white men as the original owners of US land, superior beings, and beneficiaries of profit. It is both a product of social, political, and economic contexts *and* it helps shape these contexts. I have chosen wilderness discourse as my primary object of study in this section, because it is a lens into the way that whiteness is already working and permeating discourse as well as the ways discourse reinforces, alters, strengthens, or challenges racial power dynamics. This section outlines a timeline, from European explorers reaching what is now North America to the founding of the National Parks, in order to understand the function of wilderness discourse in the creation of the United States. That is, I read wilderness discourse as a text to uncover motives of racialized exploitation and I deconstruct it as a tool that justifies and perpetuates unequal distributions of wealth, citizenship, and the right to live. I hope to understand how whiteness operates as what Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls, "a regime of truth" and how wilderness discourse reflects and creates the possibility for the ongoing regime.[24] I argue that wilderness upholds whiteness through nine central tenets that can be seen in wilderness throughout history. In the table below, I outline these core beliefs about wilderness and how they have enforced white ownership, citizenship, and dominance.

[24] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 131.

Though they are broken down here for simplification and clarity, the myths work together and reveal themselves in different ways throughout the history below. Throughout the timeline that follows, I will reference where these tenets appear and how they are produced by referring back to this chart in footnotes.

Table 1

Myth	**Examples**	**Effects**
1. Wilderness is the opposite of civilization.	Dichotomies of civilization/wild, man/animal.	Wilderness is naturalized as something outside social construction. Wilderness conceals the exploitative and violent nature of capitalism.
2. Any human presence is a blemish to wilderness.	Native peoples banished from national parks. Conservation requiring the preservation of pristine wilderness.	Indigenous people are removed from land. Visitors to wilderness spaces are highly monitored and kept on clear paths (except in the case of resource extraction for profit)
3. Wilderness is the distinct pride of the United States.	Transcendentalism, Romanticism, Railroad industry advertising, Albert Bierstadt.	American exceptionalism. American identity is bound up in images of wilderness.
4. The American landscape was untouched and unaltered before European settlers arrived.	European settlers recorded 'empty' landscapes.	The existence of Indigenous peoples is erased and ignored; consequently the history of dispossession and genocide is erased and ignored. Allows white settlers to claim land as their own private property.
5. Wilderness is to be conquered, contained, and controlled.	The Edenic narrative, Manifest Destiny, prolific resource extraction.	Rampant resource extraction; maintenance practices like forestry; wilderness area is very strictly defined by law. Private property.
6. Wilderness is the site of the *sublime* experience- the means to connect to God or higher consciousness.	Cultural movements like transcendentalism, the hippie movement	Further mysticizes wilderness as place outside of social influence; limits wilderness experience to single type of connection making it accessible only to certain people.

7. Wilderness is completely naturally occurring, it contains no features of social and economic life and is blemished by the presence of human interference.	Evicting Indigenous people from future National Park land. The concept of "leave no trace."	Shapes wilderness as mystic, beyond social influence. Works to naturalize the underlying interests of white private property owners.
8. Women, Indigenous people, and people of color are too natural and too wild to understand the value of wilderness or to own it. They must, similarly, be conquered, contained, and controlled.	"Indian Residential Schools" Narratives portraying women and people of color as "natural" or "savage."	Women are not taken seriously; Indigenous people dispossess of land; both being forced to be more 'civilized.' Private property is seen as the only legitimate way to interact with land.
9. Wilderness is best enjoyed in a leisurely context; thus, it cannot be enjoyed by the laborer, farmer, slave, or other person who works the land- it is a distinctly upper-class activity.	Elaborate camping equipment. Transcendental and Romantic cultural movements.	Lower class people, farmers, slaves could not access wilderness.

Section One: Literature, Methods, and Framework

In 1967 year, Roderick Nash published the first edition of his highly influential and very popular book, *Wilderness and the American Mind.* This book is a history of American wilderness and is an important reflection of the cultural, social, and economic factors that influenced Americans' relationship to nature spaces. Due to its popularity, it has been updated three times since initial publication. The book is a trove of wilderness writings, documentation of the first preservation movements, and accurately conveys wilderness as fluid concept, influenced by economic, cultural, and social movements of different time periods.

I open with Nash's work because his book embodies a vast array of wilderness discourse and contains a multitude of primary sources that show the changing significance of wilderness throughout American history. That wilderness discourse is a construct rather than a static representation of a naturally occurring spaces is a necessary starting point for the intervention I present.[25] The book outlines primary

[25] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 7, p. 16-17.

documents on wilderness from early "new world" explorers to contemporary conservationists; essential evidence that I reference throughout this project. The book itself is a prime example of the wilderness discourse I seek to deconstruct. His book presents a structure for my interrogation of wilderness, which I outline here.

First, Nash highlights the close relationship between wilderness and the creation of the American nation-state. Through his historical review of wilderness discourse and the way it has permeated American discourse since the first explorers discovered the "new world", he argues that, "Wilderness was the basic ingredient of American civilization. From the raw materials of the physical wilderness Americans built a civilization; with the idea or symbol of wilderness they sought to give that civilization identity and meaning."[26] What is important about this argument is that wilderness had no small part in the development of ideas about America and it held material consequences for the construction of the nation. But I suggest a modification to his argument: Wilderness is a basic ingredient of *white settler* American civilization. From the raw materials of the physical wilderness and the exploitation of Indigenous and black bodies, white Americans built a civilization; with the idea or symbol of wilderness they sought to justify egregious acts of violence and ensure future ownership and profit for themselves. As the white settler United States established its voice, identity, and values, wilderness discourse both reflected and enabled white nationalism and racial capitalism while concealing the fact that it does so.

Second, Nash traces the etymology of the term wilderness itself. Prior to white settlement, the "new world" landscape was considered completely "uncivilized" and Indigenous people did not have vocabulary differentiating between terms like civilization and wilderness.[27] Nash points out that the term *wilderness* does not exist in many languages and cultures, particularly Indigenous cultures who have, according to the writings of those who *do* differentiate wilderness from nature, spent more time in close contact with natural spaces. Nash's book briefly acknowledges its focus on a *white* "American Mind," but makes no attempt to place this in conversation with non-white relationships to natural spaces. In fact, by

[26] Nash, xi.
[27] See Wilderness Tenet 1, p. 16-17.

calling the book *Wilderness and the American Mind,* and then exclusively focusing on the white, European's relationship to natural space, he perpetuates the notion that white wilderness is *the* universal wilderness. His explanation of the term wilderness itself points to the ways in which the concept itself is a product of Western dualities of nature/culture, wilderness/civilization.

Nash solidifies this duality by quoting a Chief of the Oglala Sioux writing, "We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills and the winding streams with tangled growth as 'wild.' Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and … the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people."[28] Nash presents the wilderness as a concept that distinguishes the "civilized" from the "savage" and the "modern" from the "primitive" as does much other wilderness discourse. He later describes an instance in which he tries to describe wilderness to a translator to convey to an Indigenous man living in Malaysia, but the concept was impossible to convey.[29] But, Nash never asks *why* this term exists in white, European culture and not for the Indigenous people he quotes. This question is central to my own intervention; however: Why did white European culture distinguish wilderness? What purpose does it serve? Whose values does it hold?

Perhaps inadvertently, by tracing wilderness back to Europe, Nash enforces my own argument: *Wilderness is a white man's concept.* Wilderness is a socially, economically constructed concept built by and for white, European settlers (mostly men) and it consequently reflects these narrow interests, values, and motivations. That the book hopes to capture "the American mind," implies that the American mind is indeed a white, European settler man's mind. The American mind is certainly not an Indigenous mind or a black woman's mind. The presumed universality of wilderness in Nash's book points to the larger way in which American wilderness is closely tied up in racial interest, dictating who is and isn't American, who can and cannot define its space. As such, I open my interrogation into wilderness and Nash's work with questions posed by the Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson: "To what extent does white possession circulate as a regime of truth that simultaneously constitutes white subjectivity and

[28] Nash., xiii.
[29] Nash, xiv.

circumscribes the political possibilities of Indigenous sovereignty? How does it manifest as part of common-sense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions and signs?"[30]

Though wilderness discourse has shifted and changed over time, it has remained a prominent discourse because it is assumed to be *separate* or *outside* of social and economic influence and thus conceals how powerfully it shapes concepts of man/animal and nature/civilization. Wilderness discourse is deeply disguised as a naturally occurring space, when in fact, tracing its history shows that it has constantly shifted, while maintaining the interest of whites. Though I present wilderness discourse below as a linear history, I do not intend to argue that it evolved in a straightforward way. Throughout the history, wilderness discourse held tensions and contradictions. The wilderness discourse of early explorers, for examples, continues to permeate the wilderness discourse of today. But, by tracing wilderness discourse through the foundation of the nation-state, it becomes clear that wilderness discourse has consistently played a role in justifying and enforcing white nationalism and racial capitalism with whiteness reaping the profits. Each of the nine fundamental tenets of wilderness outlined in Table 1 can be seen again and again throughout this history.

The Pristine Myth - Erasing Indigenous people (1400s -1830s)

One of the first and most important false narratives of wilderness discourse is that prior to European discovery, the North American landscape was entirely uncultivated, unaltered, and existing in a state of "pure" nature. That is, uninfluenced by the presence of humans.[31] Ecologists and historians have, for the most part, maintained this assumption based mostly on the writings of early explorers. Given that the majority of written documentation on ancient North America was the written observation of European explorers and was later reproduced as factual and unbiased evidence, this assumption made its way into modern science. To the European explorer, Indigenous people they encountered used no forms of

[30] Moreton-Robinson, 131.
[31] See Table One, Wilderness Tenet 4, p. 16-17.

agriculture or horticultural practices and lived "primitively" as hunter gatherers, too much a *part* of nature to alter it.

More recently, scholars have made significant challenges to this assumption: William Denevan offers a challenge to this monolithic narrative and instead, shows ecological and historical evidence that Indigenous people living in North America prior to European discovery and settlement, significantly altered the natural landscape through practices of hunting, fire, forestry, and planting.[32] His work has been corroborated by other ecologists and historians who have revealed the extensive systems of planting or burning in nearly every part of North America.[33] One early European explorer remarked in his journal that "The forests are convenient to ride and hunt in. The trees are far apart with no undergrowth on the ground, so that one can ride anywhere on horses.[34] Where this European saw naturally occurring wonders, were actually carefully cultivated spaces built through intentional practices of planting and burning.[35]

The widespread assumption of "virgin" wilderness carries grave consequences for the history and future of Indigenous peoples and is essential to the settler colonial project of the United States. By erasing the influence of Indigenous people, white settlers were able to stake original claim to the land they discovered. Without evidence of Indigenous presence and civilization, Europeans could claim *terra nullius*—that the land was not owned by anyone and thus available for taking. This claim to original discovery, original settlement, and the erasure of Indigenous presence is essential to the settler colonial narrative and allowed white settlers to justify their ownership of the land.

Indigenous scholar, Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls this "white possessive logics." She argues that the project of establishing whites as original owners, original cultivators, of land is also the

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[32] William M. Denevan, "The "Pristine Myth " Revisited." *Geographical Review* 101, no. 4 (2011), 577.

[33] Denevan's work above outlines many of the responses he received to his initial work that corroborated his findings. For the purposes of this paper I focused on Arturo Gomez-Pompa and Andrea Kaus, "Taming the Wilderness Myth" *Bioscience* V42, no. 4 (1992).

[34] Maud Carter Clement, *The History of Pittsylvania County Virginia* (Chatham: Mitchells Publications, 1952) http://www.victorianvilla.com/sims-mitchell/local/clement/mc/abb/02.htm, accessed September 17, 2018.

[35] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 7, p. 16-17.

foundation of establishing a nation-state that privileges the profits of whites at the exploitation (or erasure) of everyone else. "The existence of white supremacy as hegemony, ideology, epistemology, and ontology requires the possession of Indigenous lands as its proprietary anchor within capitalist economies such as the United States."[36] For the United States to *belong* to white Europeans, it must first be a new, uninhabited world (*terra nullius)*—a concept made possible in part, by the myth of virgin, pristine wilderness.

Such white possessive logics do not apply only to the dispossession of Indigenous lands. Race and legal studies scholar Cheryl Harris provides a useful framework for considering whiteness as property in her essay of the same name. She argues that

> The origins of whiteness as property lie in the parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples out of which were created racially contingent forms of property and property rights. I further argue that whiteness shares the critical characteristics of property even as the meaning of property has changed over time. In particular, whiteness and property share a common premise -a conceptual nucleus -of a right to exclude. This conceptual nucleus has proven to be a powerful center around which whiteness as property has taken shape.[37]

The history of wilderness exemplifies Harris' argument. The concept of wilderness has served to value human lives differently, determine who is worthy of profit, and created boundaries and rules about who can and who cannot access and use certain spaces.

In the early stages of European discovery, Indigenous people were forcibly excluded from their lands and Indigenous methods of relating to the land excluded Indigenous people from the idea of property. Virgin wilderness stood as the proof for white Europeans that Indigenous people had no stake or ownership of the land. Indigenous ways of relating to the wilderness offered evidence to European explorers that Indigenous people were uncivilized and primitive, not deserving of ownership.[38] Later in this thesis, I examine ways that other nonwhite men were excluded from wilderness spaces, either through

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[36] Moreton-Robinson, xix.

[37] Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property" *Harvard Law Review* Vol 106, 1707 (1992-1993), 1714.

[38] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 8, p. 16-17.

laws or acts of violence or through social and economic practices that made it difficult for certain people to access wilderness.

"Savages"- Indigenous people and wilderness

Erasing the presence of Indigenous peoples on US land is just one means through which wilderness discourse, as recorded by early explorers, created foundations for the white settler nation-state. Indigenous peoples were invisible in the North American landscape, not just because they did not alter it in ways recognizable to Europeans, but they were also seen to be too much a *part* of nature to have claim over it. Andrea Smith describes the consequences of seeing Indigenous people as already wild and natural:

> Unfortunately, the project of aspiring to "humanity" is always already a racial project[…]representation, which attempts to demonstrate Native peoples' worthiness of being universal subjects, actually rests on the logic that Native peoples are equivalent to nature itself, things to be discovered that have an essential truth or essence. In other words, the very quest for full subjecthood implicit in the ethnographic project to tell our "truth" is already premised on a logic that requires us to be objects to be discovered. Native particularity cannot achieve universal humanity without becoming "inauthentic" because Nativeness is already fundamentally constructed as the "other" of Western subjectivity.[39]

Making Indigenous people invisible is still important to enforcing the idea that the US was *terra nullius,* unowned land. Much discourse that purports to celebrate diversity or multiculturalism, romanticizes the lives and practices of long-dead native peoples, while concealing the contemporary realities, trauma, and legacy of genocide and dispossession. As I will elaborate on in Section Two, multicultural discourses (including those about wilderness) claim to address issues of identity and race while failing to be accountable to the material damage caused by settler colonialism.

Being part of nature casts Indigenous people as less than human, as being too wild, too much like the other beasts and creatures found in the wilderness.[40] By this narrative, explorers and settlers slaughtered thousands of native peoples, likening them more to bears than people. Killing and destroying

[39] Andrea Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism," *GLQ (16) no. 1-2 (*2010), 42.

[40] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 8, p. 16-17.

Indigenous people is part of the same justification for land theft and exemplifies another essential wilderness myth: wilderness must be conquered and controlled for the sake of progress and civilization.

There are abundant examples of explorers describing Indigenous people as wild savages. In 1845, Explorer Charles Lanman described how an Indian medicine dance at Leech Lake, Minnesota reminded him that wilderness was the fearsome environment of evil and unearthly creatures."[41] During the 1830s, explorer Josiah Gregg referred to wilderness as "savage haunts"[42] These quotes exemplify another, related wilderness tenet—that women and Indigenous people are too wild to understand the value of wilderness and so should be conquered and controlled.[43]

Christian morals and the evils of wilderness

The impulse to destroy wilderness during early new world settlement was heavily influenced by Christian religious beliefs. White settlers came from a tradition of Christianity in which wilderness was a representation of evil and enjoying its beauty was a sin of bodily pleasure.[44] New World explorers fought off beasts and natives with fervor and with the fear of God. "They shared the long Western tradition of imagining wild country as a moral vacuum, a cursed and chaotic wasteland. As a consequence, frontiersmen acutely sensed that they battled wild country not only for personal survival but in the name of nation, race, and God. Civilizing the New World meant enlightening darkness, ordering chaos, and changing evil into good."[45] Wilderness discourse of the time motivated killing and forced displacement of Indigenous people. It was not until later, the growth of the romantic and transcendental movements that a positive version of wilderness emerged, no less hostile to real Indigenous people.

Much of the Christian opposition to wilderness spaces derived from the Edenic narrative of Adam and Eve, which also demonstrates the close relationship between the villainization of nature and of women.[46] In the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, it is Eve's uncontrollable wildness that leads to the

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[41] Nash, 62 quoting Charles Lanman from 1845.
[42] Ibid., 28 quoting Josiah Gregg.
[43] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 8, p. 16-17.
[44] Nash, 19-20.
[45] Nash, 24.
[46] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenets 1, 5, and 8, p. 16-17.

downfall of mankind and God's decision to cast them from Paradise. In the Edenic narrative, "men become the agents of transformation. They become saviors, who through their own agricultural labor have the capacity to re-create the lost garden on earth."[47] In the foundation of the United States, it is again men (white men) who conquer and contain the wild virgin wilderness of the Indigenous people, in order to turn the land into a cultivated, godly garden. Settlers who forced Indigenous people to practice agriculture or who violently ejected Indigenous people from land, could justify their actions by believing they were restoring the garden of Eden.

Carolyn Merchant further marks the significance of the Edenic narrative in the creation of the United States and the development of capitalism, arguing that the turning of the "wild" back into the cultivated garden of Paradise (Eden) is the process that makes capital accumulation possible and barriers surmountable through science and technology.[48] She links the control of wilderness and its destructive tendencies to the development of the state and the idea of law and order. That is, civilizing the wilderness was foundational to the political, social, or moral "contract" of early political philosophers.[49] Yet, as Charles W. Mills importantly pointed out in his work *The Racial Contract*, "the establishment of society thus implies the denial that society already existed, the creation of society *requires* the intervention of white men, who are thereby positioned as *already* sociopolitical beings."[50] In other words, white settlers who established the United States by civilizing the wild (land or people), not only justified their actions through religion, but also felt that they were bringing progress and civilization to the "barbaric." Yet, this entire idea is premised on the idea that whiteness is civilization and everything existing prior (Indigenous societies) were less than human.

Just as European explorers could not fathom that Indigenous peoples used agricultural and horticultural practices, white settlers could not imagine that society existed prior to their settlement of the

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[47] Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in *Uncommon Ground* edited by William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 1996), 133.

[48] Merchant, 1996, 136.

[49] Ibid., 139.

[50] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 13.

wild.[51] To the settlers, everything they discovered in North American was pre-society, in a state of nature, and their actions were saving mankind from another fall from Paradise. Thus, the influence of Puritan religious values and the concepts of early political philosophers impressed both racialized and gendered values on the formation of the American state and justified white men's control over women and non-white people.

Overall, this early period of wilderness discourse was characterized by the erasure of Indigenous people to justifying the establishment of the US as white property. As the nation was officially founded and began to expand, wilderness continued to embody the values that allowed for the exploitation of anyone who was not a white man and the mass dispossession of Indigenous lands. These traits continue to be included in wilderness discourse during the mid and late 1800s, where they supported the growth of the capitalist economy through primitive accumulation.

American Westward Expansion- Exploitation and Foundations of Capitalism (1840s-1890s)

While the earliest "new world" explorers misrepresented the wilderness they encountered to conceal Indigenous presence, as more and more settlers began to build the United States as a nation, wilderness represented less of a wonder and more of a challenge or barrier.[52] For many colonists and westward settlers, wilderness made establishing homes and farms difficult in the Western US. As more "civilized" towns and cities were established post-independence, a class-based rift emerged in wilderness discourse. On the one hand, city dwellers first began to consider nature as a place of leisure and goodness,[53] while on the other, the wilderness still represented a considerable barrier to economic success and ownership of the entire continent. Driven by the need for capital accumulation and the values of private property, settlers sought to stake their claim on as much land as possible. The evil of the

[51] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 1, p. 16-17.
[52] Nash., "The Romantic Wilderness" *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 44.
[53] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 9, p. 16-17.

wilderness and its inhabitants (including Indigenous people) were seen as holding back the establishment of the United States and profitable resource extraction.

As Nash describes, during this period, there was still considerable tension between the conquering, civilizing goals of "pioneers" and the wilderness that got in their way. Though on the east coast, cities began to form creating leisure classes, many still viewed the western wilderness as a barrier to claiming land and conquering new frontiers. But this barrier, wilderness, also became a symbol of freedom and bravery. "Pioneers welcomed wild country as a challenge. They conceived of themselves as agents in the regenerating process that turned the ungodly and useless into a beneficent civilization. To perform this function wilderness was necessary, hence the westward urge."[54] By overcoming the challenges presented by wilderness, pioneers embodied these traits of freedom and conquering that are foundational to US nationalism and exceptionalism.

Though this section focuses on how wilderness helped build the settler colonial state through the dispossession of Indigenous lands, Manifest Destiny was an important time period for primitive accumulation and establishing the capitalist system that ensured the comfort of white citizens at the expense of other lives. Both before and after the Civil War, African Americans provided underlying labor for national growth and received none of the wealth of the growing settler state.

It is the early myths of wilderness that created the foundation for a nation state which favored white ownership, profit, and citizenship at the expense of non-whites. Moreton-Robinson makes clear that the project of settler colonialism is a racial project. That is, the erasure of Indigenous people, and the exploitation of African slaves, and other immigrants were necessary for capital accumulation. Cedric Robinson was the first to coin the term racial capitalism in his work, *Black Marxism*, but Jodi Melamed succinctly analyzes it:

> the term "racial capitalism" requires its users to recognize that capitalism is racial capitalism. Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups—capitalists with the means of production/workers without the means of subsistence, creditors/debtors, conquerors of land made property/the dispossessed and removed. These antinomies of accumulation require loss,

[54] Nash, 43.

> disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires. Most obviously, it does this by displacing the uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations onto fictions of differing human capacities, historically race.[55]

As wilderness differentiated along racial lines, who was civilized enough to make profit out of the raw materials of the wild, who was strong enough to conquer anything. The primitive accumulation that is the foundation of capitalism came with the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the conquering of wilderness space. Wilderness discourse was key in the accumulation of western lands and resources that enabled the white capitalist state to thrive because it justified the "taming" of wilderness at the expense of human life; a belief important to settlers and pioneers at the time and to contemporary denials of settler colonialism.[56]

Freedom and the wild west

The challenging fight against "evil" wilderness and the rush to claim land in what would become western states, brought new significance to wilderness discourse—the wild's connotation of freedom. This fundamental ideology of the United States drove people west, free to claim their land, wealth, and resources, and wilderness acted as the symbol of freedom. Manifest Destiny led pioneers to believe that the "wild west" was both empty and personally granted to them by god. The frontier embodied an adventure that proved the great freedom of movement and the freedom to get rich, fundamental to America. But those adventurous spirits going to retrieve their God-given land, were white people and their God-given land was Indigenous land, far from empty. Settlers proved their worth and their freedom by conquering the wilderness and its wild inhabitants.

The Homestead Act lawfully established that wilderness was a deserted landscape, *terra nullius*, meant for rightful taking by white settlers. Between the years 1776 and 1887, the US government had already seized, violently or through legal channels, 1.5 billion acres of land from Native Americans. Since then, much more land has been taken leaving only about 52.6 million acres of federally owned land

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[55] Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism" *Critical Ethnic Studies* Vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2015), 77.
[56] See Table One, Wilderness Tenets 5 and 8, p. 16-17.

designated as Native American Reservations.[57] The Indian Appropriations act of 1851 established the Reservation system, which forced Indigenous people to live on small parcels of land. Prior to this, settlers employed violent militias to displace Indigenous people while at the same time the US government implemented manipulative deals and decreed executive orders to take Indigenous land.

The language of Manifest Destiny is closely linked to wilderness—again, the slaying of wild spaces and wild beings in them or relegating to smaller and smaller parcels of land. When lands were forcefully cleared of Indigenous residents, they could then actually be the "pristine" landscape the first explorers imaging, erasing the violent history that had been perpetrated by settlers in this space. The myth of *terra nullius* embedded in pristine wilderness discourse not only paved the way for Europeans to stake legal claim to the land, but allowed them to do so without blemishing the origin story of the US with the brutal genocide of Indigenous people.[58]

Westward migration and the language of Manifest Destiny served many necessary processes in the creation and expansion of the US, including this notion that bringing civilization to the wilderness and the "barbaric" people that lived there, was a moral imperative. The Homestead Act also provided economic incentive for white settlers to gain state-sanctioned ownership of land which had been used by Indigenous peoples for generations. The wilderness discourse of the early to mid-1800s commonly used the words "conquer" "vanquish" "subdue" or "conversion" when talking about wilderness.[59] While later romantic and conservation discourses shifted this tone towards wilderness, the same vocabulary still appears in contemporary wilderness discourse. Still in other cases, wilderness is seen as the enemy of civilization.

Women and wilderness

As eco feminists have written about extensively, the desire to conquer wilderness, closely mirrored attitudes towards women, who like Indigenous people, were often seen as too wild, unstable, or

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[57] Claudio Saunt, "The Invasion of America: How the United States Took Over an Eighth of the World," http://invasionofamerica.ehistory.org/, accessed September 17, 2018.

[58] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenets 2 and 3, p. 16-17.

[59] Nash, 27.

natural.[60] Carolyn Merchant provides her own history of concepts of the natural world in relation to gender. As she shows, nature has been described as both the "nurturing mother"[61] and the "stepmother who wickedly conceals her bounty from the deserving and needy children"[62] Later, during the growth of the scientific revolution, "the need for prying into nature's nooks and crannies in searching out her secrets for human improvement"[63], or "the witch, the symbol of the violence of nature, raised storms, caused illness, destroyed crops, obstructed generation, and killed infants. Disorderly woman, like chaotic nature, needed to be controlled."[64] Foundational ecofeminist theorists Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies along with Merchant, all see the scientific revolution as the major turning point in ways of thinking and interacting with the natural world that justifies the exploitation of women and the environment.

The scientific revolution, of course, began long before settlers began forging west during the 1840s, but the values of science were much a part of settlers' relationship to wilderness and towards women. Manifest Destiny and the oil boom saw wilderness predominantly for its potential profit. While the wilderness represented a disordered challenge to profit and ownership, the reductionism common to scientific thinking ordered chaos and fragmented the whole into manageable parts. The westward pioneer saw the land as gold and oil, potential profit, rather than part of a complex system. As Shiva writes, "reducing organic wholes to fragmented separable and substitutable parts has been the reductionist method of going beyond nature's limits."[65] The wilderness of the west may have represented a challenge, but by starting practices of forestry, mining, and destruction, man could overcome nature and its limits.

White settlers' reductionism and determination to conquer human limitations are core values of capitalism. But, "only those properties of a resource system which generate profits through exploitation and extraction are taken into account, properties which stabilize ecological processes but are

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[60] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 8, p. 16-17.

[61] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins,1989), 2.

[62] Ibid., 33

[63] Merchant, 33.

[64] Ibid., 127.

[65] Vandana Shiva, "Reductionism and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science," in *Ecofeminism,* edited by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (Halifax: Fernwood Publications, 1993), 28.

commercially non-profit generating are ignored and eventually destroyed."[66] So, while a new class of nature "experts" emerged to plan efficient forests, drill for oil, and transform landscapes into productive sites of profit, wilderness presented a new barrier—What was to be done with the vast tracts of desert and mountain that presented no opportunity for productive development?

Transforming "useless" land

As settlement moved west, pioneers encountered new landscapes without the same capacity to host civilization as the east coast. White settlers who encountered deserts and mountains first saw these spaces as useless wastelands--no farming was possible, resource extraction too difficult or impossible. Here again, the distinction of the term wilderness from other natural spaces indicated these spaces as barriers to be overcome. The capitalist view of the pioneers required a reductionism and fragmentation of natural spaces. The white settler saw the western landscape only for its potential profit, breaking it down into manageable parts to be controlled and owned. This perspective is a stark contrast to the ways that Indigenous people interacted with land and resources. The white settler backed by the demands of capital accumulation, asserted through violence and dispossession, that western notions of private property would ensure he profited. Wilderness was not to be worked with or understood, it was merely a chaotic space to be ordered for the sake of extraction and accumulation.

But, as capital accumulation in the sense of pure resource accumulation, could not be extracted from, for example, Yosemite's dry, rocky landscape, new ways of using wilderness for profit began to emerge. The traditionally "unproductive" land of canyons and mountains found value in the realm of capitalist productivity through tourism. Whereas traditional farming or cultivating land had once made land productive in the eyes of the pioneer, in the face of rapidly expanding industrial capitalism, productivity came to mean profit through capital accumulation. Indigenous people and women who lived self-sustaining lifestyles in these areas were, again, cast as too much a part of nature to be able to satisfactorily perform capitalist labor. The only valid form of labor is that performed by the white man,

[66] Ibid., 24.

who uses his power to overcome the challenges and evils presented by the wilderness. The changing views towards wilderness led by Romantic writers and painters enabled these wilderness areas to take on a new value.

Coinciding with the reduction of natural spaces into profitable parts, was the capitalist necessity to value only such labor that resulted in profit—in other words, the labor of Indigenous people that had been cultivating this land for generations and the domestic work of women who accompanied men to western settlements, was seen as a natural biological process, not a form of valid labor.[67] As a result, Indigenous people and women must be controlled or transformed into productivity.[68] White settlers, backed up by law, stole land and either killed its Indigenous residents or forcibly relocated them into reservations where they were supposed to participate in the capitalist economy, as dictated by the government. This trend of dispossessing Indigenous lands and forcing people to be participants in capitalism, has appeared globally, driven particularly by wildlife and conservation NGOs. For Indigenous groups who were self-sustaining and highly reliant on the wilderness in which they lived (whether or not they saw it as such), entry into the capitalist economy resulted in poverty, homelessness, and depression.[69]

As for the lands deemed "unproductive" a number of influences helped shape these barren wilderness areas into potential sites of profit: The growing popularity of Romantic and Transcendental writing, the power of the railroad industry, a new movement called *conservation*, and a national search for American identity. As William Cronon writes, "it is no accident that the movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas began to gain real momentum at precisely the time that laments about the passing frontier reached their peak. To protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation's most sacred myth of origin."[70] These cultural and economic movements converged during the late 1800s and led to the creation of the National Parks.

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[67] Shiva, 26.

[68] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenets 8 and 9, p. 16-17.

[69] Mark Dowie. *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009).

[70] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 77.

American Nationalism - white citizens and the founding of the National Parks (1880s-present)

When one thinks of American wilderness, the National Parks are sure to come to mind. They've been called "America's best idea" and as such, embody many of the values of American exceptionalism discussed in the section above.[71] This "environmental nationalism" though emerged out of changing relationships between US settlers (now, citizens) and the wild that stood in the path of their claim to land.[72] During the late 1800s, a larger leisure class emerged who were proponents of wilderness being valued in itself, of wilderness being a way to connect to a higher way of being.[73] Though this was a shift from the Frontiersman's vengeance against the wild, the assumptions embedded in this wilderness were no less problematic. During this period of the founding of the parks and conservation movements, wilderness discourse was embedded into law, solidifying the connection between notions of citizenship and wilderness.

The discourse of early white European settlers, discussed above, continued to influence the changing concept of wilderness as the white men of the United States worked to build a sense of identity and culture as a nation. The powerful influence of Transcendentalism and Romantic writers like Henri David Thoreau and the support of politicians who believed in the rugged individualism of wilderness, led to the growing popularity of national parks and conservation movements. "Enthusiasm for wilderness based on Romanticism, deism, and the sense of the sublime developed among sophisticated Europeans surrounded by cities and books. So too in America the beginnings of appreciation are found among writers, artists, scientists, vacationers, gentlemen-people, in short, who did not face wilderness from the pioneer's perspective."[74] These cultural and literary movements only found success, however, when they aligned with the interests of major industries--namely the railroad and tourism industries.[75]

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[71] Ken Burns, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea,* PBS, 2009. DVD.

[72] Michael Ziser and Julie Sze, "Climate Change, Environmental Aesthetics, and Global Environmental Justice Cultural Studies," *Discourse,* Vol. 29, No. 2 & 3 (2009), 390.

[73] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 6, p. 16-17.

[74] Nash, 51.

[75] Nash, 105 and 118.

Beginning with the first state and national parks in the late 1800s, Indigenous people have experienced violence and forced removal from their land and from ever-shrinking lands allotted to them by the US government. At the same time, African Americans, only recently emancipated, were still struggling for basic human rights, making white men, once again, the main contributors to the National Parks. The National Parks gained traction as a symbol of American identity, excluding Indigenous people from the land became central to securing this symbol of America also as a symbol of whiteness. Nash writes, "creation of a distinctive culture was thought to be the mark of true nationhood. Americans sought something uniquely 'American,' yet valuable enough to transform embarrassed provincials into proud and confident citizens."[76] Writers and adventurers expounded on the glory of wilderness, its connection to freedom, its exceptionalism compared to Europe. Like Manifest Destiny, wilderness was seen as a gift from God to celebrate the glory of the new nation of America.[77]

In order to call this space *home*, to call it the symbol of American identity, *terra nullius* had to be truly embodied by the white settlers. If the National Parks were to truly represent the white settler nation-state, they must belong to the white settler: "The sense of belonging, home, and place enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject--colonizer/migrant-is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our[Indigenous] rights under international customary law"[78] The National Parks and the wilderness discourse surrounding them, exemplify the convergence of many interests of the white patriarchal ruling class: the justification for dispossession and genocide of Indigenous people, the erasure of this violence from American history, the transformation of "useless land' into profit, and a rationale for American exceptionalism.

Philip Burnham writes extensively on the relationship between Native Americans and National Parks in his book *Indian Country, God's Country*. I use his ethnographic and historical research on the relationship of Indigenous peoples with the National Parks to demonstrate the link between solidifying

[76] Nash., 67.
[77] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenets 3, 6, and 9, p. 16-17.
[78] Moreton-Robinson, 3.

settler colonialism, white nationalism, and wilderness. But first, I turn towards the cultural movements and wilderness discourse that created the context for the creation of the parks.

Cities versus the wild

The first significant shift in attitude about wilderness came from the growth of cities and a rapid decline in the quality of life in cities during the late 1800s. The poverty and terrible work conditions of the industrial revolution transformed the pristine wilderness into a welcome break from city life. Whereas wilderness used to be the sign of evil and temptation, it now appeared in contrast to the obvious poverty and exploitation of industrial capitalism. Wilderness discourse then presented nature as an antidote to the ills of civilization. Of course, since railroads were relatively new and cars had not yet been invented, it was only the wealthiest class who had access to the reprieve of wilderness. The fetishism of wilderness served an important purpose in concealing growing inequalities, poverty, and exploitation during this stage of capitalism.

Wilderness as the cure for the evils of society reinforced the notion that wilderness was void of all social influence, a completely natural occurrence and provided an excuse for not addressing the poor conditions in cities.[79] Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that watching someone labor in wilderness ruined it because wilderness should be pure and outside of social and economic relations.[80] The wilderness of the new leisure class reflected another shifting attitude about freedom—city and social life was a constraint on the natural urges of man. Western explorer Josiah Gregg described wilderness as "perfect freedom" and upon returning to cities, found his "physical and moral freedom are invaded at every turn by the complicated machinery of social institutions."[81]

This shift also paralleled a shift in the association between women and nature. Whereas earlier periods saw women as being too wild and needing to be controlled, women now became symbols of the domesticity of city life. The city represented women's weakness and passivity while the wild stood for a

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[79] See wilderness tenets 7 and 9, p. 16-17.

[80] W.T.J. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," *Landscape and Power*, Edited by W.T.J. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 15.

[81] Ibid., 65.

place for men to be themselves—show their bravery and strength. Recreational hunting became a common pastime for wealthy men to express their masculinity. These wealthy men who built hunting lodges and vacation homes though, "went to the wilderness not as a producer but as a consumer, hiring guides and other backcountry residents who could serve as romantic surrogates for the rough riders and hunters of the frontier."[82] Whereas Indigenous practices of hunting for food was highly regulated and often prohibited, these shows of masculinity and dominance became common among white upper class men.

That wilderness could not be blemished by the evils of city life and civilization made it all the more powerful as a discourse that concealed violence and exploitation of poor people, people of color, and Indigenous people. Wilderness discourse of the time implied, if only people would go out and commune with wilderness, the cities would not be such dirty shambles of poverty and violence. As discussed above, Cedric Robinson and Jodi Melamed argue that capitalism is necessarily exploitative of nonwhite people.[83] Yet, in order to perpetuate capitalism and prevent uprising or resistance, the white men of predominantly benefit from capitalism, must conceal its inherently exploitative qualities. Wilderness provides a perfect scapegoat. By making wilderness the primary focus of American identity, wealthy men could avoid the massive inequalities resulting from industrial capitalism. It also turns the responsibility away from a structural issue of racial, patriarchal capitalism, to a problem of individuals. In other words, the blame is shifted from industries and their wealthy owners exploiting laborers and governmental policies favoring the wealthy and industry owners, and instead makes it an individual choice. If people choose to relax in the wilderness, they would not feel the stress of poverty and the alienation of capitalist labor that is so obvious in city life.

During this time, wilderness discourse moved from a labor of conquering, to a place where labor does not exist.[84] People (lower class farmers, slaves, rural populations) could not achieve the

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[82] Cronon, 78.
[83] See page 9.
[84] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 7, p. 16-17.

transcendental moment when their relationship to nature was that of capitalism-- labor, resources, exploitation, which alienated them.[85] The cultural and discursive shift away from wilderness as a place of labor also served to conceal slavery and post-slavery sharecropper labor. For the farmer or sharecropper, as well as for the poor factory worker, the possibility of experiencing the sublime wilderness was prohibited by economic and social barriers. Thus, while wilderness was offered as an antidote to the exploitation of city capitalist life, the impetus was placed on individual choice to go to wilderness, completely ignoring the structural issues preventing access. Consequently, it was those who most benefitted from capitalism that were granted the possibility of leaving it or forgetting it. Only the white wealthy were granted access to a clean, worry-free environment. As William Cronon writes, "only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land."[86]

African Americans and wilderness

While much of the Manifest Destiny period of wilderness discourse served to relegate Indigenous people to history, exploit them for profit, or erase them completely, another cultural and aesthetic shift in wilderness discourse directed attention away from slavery. As educated, city dwellers described wilderness as a place to get close to God, as a valuable resource in itself, artistic focus shifted from city or pastoral and farming landscapes, to the pristine wilderness.[87] This shift coincides with the abolition of slavery. Art historian Paul Outka describes how

> Slavery made the white racial identification with the pastoral landscape dangerously unstable. And it often did so eruptively, "intruding" on the white pastoral in a way that mirrors, though does not simply replicate, white sublime experience." Sublimity "provided a structure for white subjects to recoil from a pastoral identification that was increasingly contaminated by slavery in favor of an ever-retreating, infinitely available wild.[88]

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[85] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 9, p. 16-17.

[86] Cronon, 80.

[87] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenets 2, 6, and 9, p. 16-17.

[88] Paul Outka, *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance (* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 37.

Outka's observation reinforces my argument that the "natural-ness" of wilderness concealed the power dynamics embedded within it. Wilderness discourse has been essential to erasing the exploitative nature of (racial) capitalism, including slavery as well as the dispossession of Indigenous lands. It was cultural movements and discourse about wilderness, such as paintings, that enabled this erasure to take hold. I further discuss the significance of landscape artwork in Section Three.

Conservationism

The wilderness discourse leading up to the creation of the National Parks contained many of the same values of white American capitalism--the rhetoric of freedom, hard work, masculinity, and individualism appeared commonly in the writings of John Muir, considered one of the founders of conservation, and his support in the federal government, Theodore Roosevelt. President Roosevelt believed that wilderness recreation was a cure for national laziness and that recreating in wilderness would make them productive again.[89] Roosevelt was also a major supporter of conservation, the emerging movement founded on pristine wilderness, that saw wilderness as worthy of being preserved without *any* human interference.[90] Roosevelt once wrote that "every believer in manliness...every lover of nature, every man who appreciates the majesty and beauty of the wilderness and of wild life" should support preservation.[91] This quote demonstrates the gendered assumptions about wilderness enjoyment, the exceptionalism of American wilderness, and gave federal, legal support to the idea that civilization and wilderness were incompatible, that wilderness must remain preserved in its "naturally occurring" state.

Muir also wrote dozens of articles on the beauty of wilderness, especially Yosemite, and his views that humans only destroy the value of nature. On multiple occasions, he successfully lobbied the federal government to set aside large tracts of land to become the National Parks. Muir, like frontiersmen and early settlers, saw Indigenous people as a "blemish" to the landscape and an evil force to be

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[89] Nash, 151.

[90] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenets 2, 3, and 5, p. 16-17. Conservation presented a new way of maintaining control over wilderness spaces.

[91] Nash., 150.

eliminated. Thus, the National Parks, began with a violent relationship towards Indigenous peoples and solidified the value of wilderness, that humans are always a blemish to pristine natural landscapes.

Conservationists held considerable influence in government law and decision making processes and have been a major force in implementing the preservation of wilderness lands. Conservation organizations have considerable budgets and are no small voice when it comes to standing up for the natural world. Yet, the central tenets of wilderness discourse that enable settler colonialism and racial capitalism can be found in most conservationist texts and at the root of the movement itself. In section two, I will go into more depth about how the racist history of wilderness discourse permeates contemporary conservation movements, even those who claim diversity or multiculturalism.

National Parks: Violent beginnings

Yellowstone was the first area officially designated as a National Park by the US government in 1872. During the 1860s and 70s, Yellowstone land was used by a variety of tribes who were either displaced there by prior conflicts or who came and went from the land for hunting and resources. These included the Crow, Bannock, Blackfeet, Sheepeater Shoshone, and Nez Perce. In 1879, more than 50 Sheepeater were killed by the US Army who chased this "enemy" tribe for days.[92] The Nez Perce blatantly refused to move to the reservation set aside for them by the US government, and in defiance, held several tourist visitors to Yellowstone captive. In 1890, all Native people were officially banished from Yellowstone land although many tribes continued to use small areas for hunting. The Havasupai faced a similar fate as their reservation on the edge of the Grand Canyon was incorporated into conserved land by the government. In 1898 the Havasupai were forced off of government land by the forest supervisor and restricted to a small village. Unable to live without the plant and animal resources of the surrounding area, the Havasupai were left with no means of survival.[93] The creation of Glacier National Park in 1910 proved no less violent or manipulative than the creation of Yellowstone 30 years before.

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[92] Philip Burnham, *Indian Country, God's Country: Native Americans and the National Parks* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000), 22.

[93] Benjamin Johnson, "Wilderness Parks and Their Discontents" *American Wilderness: A New History.* Edited by Michael Lewis. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 122.

These early acts of violence by the state are just a few examples of the myriad ways in which native people were forced into smaller and smaller parcels of land, often with weak soil and resources. While literal violence in the formation of the first parks shaped National Parks spaces as environments of hostility for Indigenous people, the legacy of violence lives on. Today, over one hundred years later, Native Americans are still confined to reservations and suffer extreme poverty, unemployment, and lack of land. Though underreported, Native Americans are the demographic most likely to be killed by police.[94]

Manipulating treaties and agreements

Wilderness discourse also permeated law-making around the National Parks. Conservationists and the US government had a relatively easy time manipulating Indigenous people to relinquish their land since in 1871 formal treaties had been abandoned in favor of "Indian agreements."[95] This informality lent great benefit to the US government who could arrange sales where "the bulk of payments was deferred to future years; Congress bought sufficient time to raise the balance through public land auctions; and large amounts of cash were kept out of the hands of Indian people[…]It was a bitter irony. For the government had devised a strategy by which Indians themselves would foot the cost of the annuities first promised them by agreement or treaty".[96]

In 1906 the passage of the Antiquities Act gave sweeping powers to the US government to seize native land that was deemed historically significant. Much of the land deemed historically significant was land valued by white Americans for its *sublime* quality. The Antiquities Act also prompted the National Parks Service to begin preserving some artifacts of Indigenous culture. As contemporary Indigenous people continued to be killed and corralled into reservations, the NPS began to celebrate the cultural artifacts of long dead native people and tribes.[97]

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[94] Stephanie Woodard, "The Police Killings No One is Talking About" *In These Times*, October 17, 2016 http://inthesetimes.com/ features/native_american_police_killings_native_lives_matter.html

[95] Burnham, 44.

[96] Ibid., 45.

[97] Ibid., 50.

In response to the move from violence to legislation as a means to regulate native populations, many Indigenous people also brought their resistance to the government through the courts. Native people have had varying levels of success in reclaiming land through judicial means. In those that were able to maintain control of certain land areas such as the Oglala Sioux in the Badlands National Park and Havasupai with the Grand Canyon National Park, these victories only occurred over 50 years after their land was originally taken.[98] With the shift to legislative means of control, the US government found new ways to regulate the movement and ownership of Indigenous people.

Criminalizing Indigenous use of land

While displacement and violence were happening on the ground during the formation of the National Park System, the legislation on the parks being introduced in Washington upheld white claim to the land. By examining the Organic Act of 1916, which officially founded the National Parks System, it becomes clear that laws were being designed to privilege white use of the parks land, while continuing to criminalize Indigenous practices.

The Organic Act was a landmark law establishing the purpose of the park system and locating its management in the Department of the Interior. The act states,

> The fundamental purposes of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.[99]

It cannot be denied that this declaration is essential to the continued protection of natural areas in the US, but during this time, the enjoyment of the parks was limited to upper-class whites, since Native Americans were being forced off the land and most black Americans were struggling to gain basic human rights.

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[98] Johnson, 127.

[99] National Parks Service, "Organic Act of 1916" https://www.nps.gov/grba/learn/management/organic-act-of-1916.htm.

Further down, the act begins granting concessions to certain industries and uses of the land. The Secretary of the Interior may "grant privileges, leases, and permits for the use of land for the accommodation of visitors in the various parks, monuments, or other reservations herein" and may "grant the privilege to graze livestock within any national park, monument, or reservation herein referred to when in his judgment such use is not detrimental to the primary purpose for which such park, monument, or reservation was created" and "the Secretary of the Interior may grant said privileges, leases, and permits and enter into contracts relating to the same with responsible persons, firms, or corporations without advertising and without securing competitive bids" and finally may

> authorize such grantees, permittees, or licensees to execute mortgages and issue bonds, shares of stock, and other evidences of interest in or indebtedness upon their rights, properties, and franchises, for the purposes of installing, enlarging or improving plant and equipment and extending facilities for the accommodation of the public within such national parks and monuments."[100]

These provisions not only provided leeway for businesses, predominantly white owned at the time, but clearly made no exceptions for the ways in which Indigenous people used the land. Though they occupied the land first and sustainably used them for grazing and hunting, legislative acts in the park specifically prohibited this behavior. Again, the validation of capitalist labor that resulted in profit was written into law, while all other relationships to the land that were not strictly profitable, were prohibited.

Considering the punishment, imprisonment, and even killing of Indigenous people who continued to hunt or graze on National Park land, it is clear that these acts were written to advance the interests of whites and criminalize the behaviors of Indigenous people. Today, behavior in National Parks is still regulated by particular notions of what it means to experience nature. Quiet contemplation and hiking "without leaving a trace" are condoned behaviors, while large, loud groups are frowned upon, a point I will elaborate on in Section Two.

Legal battles over ownership and claim to land still occur today and play a significant role in Indigenous people's relationship to National Parks. The precedence of violence and forced relocation also

[100] National Parks Service, "Organic Act of 1916."

have a lasting social impact and have created a legacy of trauma. Social geographers emphasize the importance of space in the "reproduction of daily life."[101] By forcibly altering the space and location where native populations reproduced their daily life, the very structure of native life was manipulated. Many Indigenous people clung to traditions and ways of life as a means of resistance, but the colonization enacted through displacement reverberates today in native communities and reservations. As discussed above, reservations are often locations of high poverty, drug addiction, and unemployment and suffer from unreported violence by state actors such as the police. Though not all of this came as a direct result of the formation of National Parks, the histories are closely linked.

Industry and the National Parks

Two main industries had a major impact on the formation of National Parks: railroad companies and tourism. The complex influence of these two industries in the US government is far too lengthy to cover in great detail, but for the purposes of this project, it is important to understand the great role these industries played in swaying the public and politicians' opinions and who was profiting from the flourishing of these businesses. Railroad companies in particular, saw huge profit to gain from the creation of National Parks. Since railroads were the only form of transportation stretching west to parks like Yosemite and Yellowstone, railroad companies pushed hard for the parks as incentives for travelers. Burnham writes, "Since the beginning tourism—in the form of railroads—had been the political salvation of the parks. The Northern Pacific Railroad lobbied to set aside Yellowstone, underwrote lecture tours promoting the idea, and owned a series of hotels by the 1880s that served park visitors."[102]

What is demonstrated by the brief understanding of the role of industry, is that the National Parks space was set aside and legitimized by the national government only when there was profit at stake. The willingness of the government to create legislation validating the preservation of the parks came only after the railroad and tourism industries demonstrated the immense profit in transforming this "useless"

[101] Jeffrey P. Shepherd, "At the Crossroads of Hualapai History, Memory, and American Colonization: Contesting Space and Place" *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 32 No.1 (2008), 32.

[102] Burnham, 61.

land into a tourist site. From the very beginning, the parks space was imparted with an economic value by the state: a value that would only be enjoyed by a few wealthy, white Americans. Conservationists and cultural movements like Romanticism did influence the founding of the parks, but the Organic Act and the subsequent land preservations would not have happened without the influence of tourism and the railroad. Industry and advertising continue to play a large role in wilderness spaces and discourse today, as I will investigate in Section Two.

Conclusion: The Myth of the Commons

Enthusiasm for parks grew and many powerful and wealthy (white) men formed wilderness organizations and recreation clubs. Nash calls this, the emergence of the "wilderness cult."[103] This interest in spending time outdoors in wilderness for the sake of one's personal identity was rooted in individualism and had an ambivalent relationship to Indigenous people—they were both celebrated for being attuned to nature, but still feared for being too wild.[104] Ultimately, however, these organizations exercised great influence on the middle and upper class, paving the way for American wilderness to be a popular destination for travel and leisure.

Like wilderness on the whole, National Parks have become naturalized as accessible public spaces, open to all to enjoy. Often referred to as "commons," their history makes it hard to believe that this public space could truly be accessible to non-white citizens. Public space, like all space, is imbued with power structures and the National Parks, Forests, and other wilderness areas are no different. Whites, considered true citizens, are granted open access and ownership over these spaces, while others are denied or even deemed to be less than people, noncitizens.

The National Parks mission statement is,

> The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future

[103] Nash, 141.
[104] Nash paraphrasing Frederick Jackson Turner, 146.

> generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.[105]

Yet, the history of the parks makes clear that only white citizens are deserving of a clean, pristine wilderness and the futurity to enjoy it. The history of the National Parks also demonstrates how access to wilderness spaces and specific uses of these spaces that are racially discriminatory are not only embedded in representations of US identity but are ingrained in law.

The history of American wilderness sketched throughout this section, provides evidence that wilderness is neither a static concept nor a naturally occurring phenomenon. Rather, wilderness discourse has been a central feature of US national building. From the first explorers who erased the presence of Indigenous people and consequent violence against them to Frontier settlers who conquered wilderness to stake their claim on resources and restore "Paradise," wilderness discourse has been both a reflection of and a tool to perpetuate the interests of white, wealthy men. Wilderness justifies settler colonialism, asserts masculinity, and distracts from the exploitation of racial capitalism all while being presented as a natural, egalitarian space of the commons.

In the next section, I take this timeline forward to contemporary wilderness discourse. Specifically, I look at wilderness recreation discourse, how it carries on many of the values of its early history and how an attempt to incorporate a multicultural diversity has failed to challenge the underlying reinforcement of settler colonialism and racial capitalism.

[105] National Parks Service, "About Us" https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm.

SECTION TWO:

Multiculturalism and Contemporary Wilderness Recreation

I'm writing to you today because we believe the outdoors is—and should always be—the world's largest level playing field. - Jerry Stritzke, CEO of REI[106]

*Every park is different to every person — they offer moments when you learn something about yourself in the most unexpected places. These stories from park lovers like you are as diverse as the parks they've visited. And if you're anything like us, they'll inspire you to get up and find **your** park. You may be surprised by what you find.* - National Parks Foundation[107]

In this section, I discuss how wilderness discourse plays a role in race and wilderness recreation today. Particularly, how the history of wilderness has impacted who and how people use designated wilderness spaces in the US and why a multicultural, diversity approach to recreation will not challenge the underlying interest in whiteness that wilderness discourse serves. While wilderness discourse today has shifted to support the inclusion of race and gender diversity, the core tenets of wilderness have not changed.

As I demonstrated in Section One, throughout history, wilderness has been a white man's concept. Literally, in many cultures and languages the concept of wilderness does not exist, and more subtly, in the way that wilderness has enforced settler colonialism, racial capitalism, American exceptionalism, and white supremacy. By extensively covering the relationship between wilderness discourse and establishing American exceptionalism, white citizenship, and erasing violent histories, I intend to show the power of concepts that are deeply embedded in our everyday lives. It is the production of knowledge that allows settler colonialism to continue being erased from history; it is the proliferation of ideas that makes it possible for us to forget the violence of slavery; it is the complexity of concepts that are shaped and shape material conditions that allows us to see women and the natural world as exploitable.

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[106] Jerry Stritzke,. "Force of Nature: Let's Level the Playing Field," *REI*, published April 2, 2017, https://www.rei.com/blog/news/force-of-nature-lets-level-the-playing-field.

[107] National Parks Foundation, #FindYourPark, findyourpark.com.

I want to be clear that I am not arguing that the space of wilderness itself is inherently a space of violence and dispossession and I do not intend to argue that the history of wilderness discourse has a direct, causal relationship to who uses wilderness spaces today.[108] Rather, I argue it is the white epistemology of wilderness that protects white interests that has been universalized as the *only* way of knowing natural space that presents a problem. Natural spaces that could be deemed "wild" have had significant value for revolutionary, radical, anti-racist struggles as well as cultural importance. For example, the Great Dismal Swamp of North Carolina embodied the traits of a wild landscape—seemingly uninhabitable, uncultivated, teeming with dangerous plants and animals—yet this landscape was transformed into a refuge for escaped slaves who lived peacefully among Indigenous peoples. What is significant, is that who and how wilderness is known impacts how it is used and who gets to define it.[109] That is why I continue the history of wilderness discourse to the present to examine the way it intersects with multiculturalist discourse in order to ask questions such as: How does the production of knowledge about wilderness space impact who visits it and what they do there? How are people made to feel welcome or unwelcome in wilderness spaces? How do contemporary wilderness discourses continue to protect the interests of white property and profit while simultaneously seeming to promote diversity and inclusion? How does wilderness discourse participate in protecting and concealing the ongoing racialized motives of racial capitalism?

I investigate these questions through two case studies of contemporary multicultural discourse in wilderness recreation industries. The first, #FindYourPark, is a campaign of the National Parks Foundation that upholds a narrative of American exceptionalism, while hiding the history of Indigenous dispossession. The campaign continues to vanish the entire existence of Indigenous people, perpetuate dispossession through privatization, minimize the violent history of slavery, and equates wilderness

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[108] Again, I point out that I believe wilderness is one way of knowing natural space. I do not believe that natural spaces are "inherently" anything, but they do exist as spaces that humans have a material interaction with. See Cronon, 1994 for more on constructivism.

[109] For more on the significance of knowledge production and their impact on power relations see Vandana Shiva's section "Reductionism and regeneration: A Crisis in Science," in *Ecofeminism.* (Halifax: Fernwood Publications, 1993), 22-35.

recreation with American nationalism and citizenship. The second case study is of REI's advertising campaign "Force of Nature," which attempts to put women "front and center" in outdoor recreation. In this case study, I show how increasing representation does not challenge capitalism or the nine tenets of wilderness that advance discourses of science, technology, and progress that conceal exploitation and have erased knowledges produced by women and people of color.

Wilderness visitors in the 21st century

A study of National Forests visitors conducted from 2008-2012 found that 36.1% of forest visitors were women while 63.9% were men.[110] The study also found that 95.2% of visitors were white, 2.4% American or Alaskan Native, 2.1% Asian, and African Americans and Pacific Islanders each made up 1.1%. In a separate question about ethnicity, 5.4% of visitors identified as Hispanic or Latino. Similar statistics have been reported by the National Parks Service in a comprehensive survey conducted in 2008-09.[111] A study of rock-climbing groups and associations found that only about 1% of affiliated members identified as a person of color.[112] Appalachian trail hikers were found to be 96% white.[113] Beyond statistical information, stereotypes abound—"black people do not go camping"; "white people love hiking and skiing" and many others.[114] These stereotypes present in popular media and everyday conversation

[110] USDA Forest Service, *National Visitor Use Monitoring Results USDA Forest Service National Summary Report*, 2008-2012.

[111] Patricia A. Taylor, Burke D. Grandjean, and James H. Gramann. *National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public 2008-2009: Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-visitors.* Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/SSD/NRR—2011432, National Park Service, Fort Collins: 2011.

[112] Indigo Johnson. "Diversity Climbing: A Difficult Conversation." *Climbing,* September 15, 2016, https://www.climbing.com/people/diversity-in-climbing-a-tough-conversation/.

[113] Mariposa, "2017 Appalachian Trail Thru-Hiker Survey," *The Trek*, November 29, 2017, https://thetrek.co/appalachian-trail/2017-appalachian-trail-thru-hiker-survey-general-hiker-stats/.

[114] Laura Burd Shiavo discusses some common stereotypes in her work, "White People Like Hiking: Some Implications of NPS Narratives of Relevance and Diversity," *The Public Historian,* Vol. 38, No. 4 (2016). Another article by Ryan Kearney, "White People Love Hiking. Minorities Don't. Here's Why" *New Republic*, published September 6, 2013, elaborates on these by linking to a popular blog called "Stuff White People Like." See also Meraji's article on *Code Switch, NPR.*

help perpetuate the idea that outdoor recreation is for white people. One example is a popular blog called "Stuff White People Like" which lists camping as a white activity.[115]

News media, outdoor industries, and scholarly work have all called attention to the many factors that have contributed to these racial disparities in outdoor recreation. [116] Many of these conversations focus on factors such as cost and accessibility of National Parks. Parks often have entrance fees, they can be far from cities and require one to have enough time off work, to have reliable transportation, and the funds to pay for hotels and restaurants throughout the trip. Outdoor sports such as hiking, climbing, or water sports often require expensive lessons and extensive equipment. Other conversations about the 'diversity problem' in wilderness, focus on lack of education or awareness, a necessary factor to consider, but as I will elaborate below, this conversation follows a logic that assumes that people of color have no existing knowledge of or relationship to land. I believe that despite some of their problems, these conversations are important and necessary. There is no single reason why more white men tend to participate in outdoor recreation and all of these factors are important to consider. I, however, in the following section, focus again on the role of discourse. Specifically, I focus on a third common conversation about the 'diversity problem,' which celebrates multiculturalism and representation. It is this approach that I critique for the ways in which it replicates the same wilderness discourse that solidifies and conceals whiteness that I revealed in Section One.

According to Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation is a rapidly growing industry that was worth nearly $887 billion in 2017.[117] Recreation itself is closely linked to many other industries that operate to facilitate leisure activities in wilderness spaces. For the purposes of this section, I discuss everything from hiking and camping, to climbing, mountaineering, biking, water, and other adventure sports to outdoors gear and clothing sellers, hotels and camping sites, guided activities, literature, and art.

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[115] Stuff White People Like, "#128 Camping," published August 14, 2009. https://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/

[116] Articles on diversity in National Parks can be found in the New York Times, NPR, Al Jazeera, USA Today, The Guardian, and National Geographic, to name a few.

[117] "Govt Data: Americans Love Outdoor Recreation," *Outdoor Industry Association,* February 14, 2018, https://outdoorindustry.org/article/govt-data-americans-love-outdoor-recreation/

Advertising and travel industries continue to have a huge voice in wilderness visitation, just as when they helped influence the founding of the National Parks. In each of these many realms that intersect with wilderness, multiculturalism has emerged as a dominant conversation. Company websites, blogs, and social media accounts feature images of racially diverse groups enjoying the outdoors; associations and organizations meet at conferences to discuss why their members are mostly white; schools partner with programs that introduce wilderness to students living in urban environments; news media and literature call attention to the 'diversity problem' in the outdoors.

The conversation about diversity in outdoor recreation does have a particular focus on *wilderness* recreation. In the same way that Europeans differentiated wilderness from other natural spaces, the contemporary outdoor industry differentiates hiking in the pristine wilderness from picnicking in an urban park. The statistics reported above, present a problem with wilderness in themselves—how we understand outdoor engagement hinges on many of the nine tenets of wilderness outlined in the introduction and Section One. Wilderness is a *sublime* experience bringing one closer to some kind of enlightenment. Wilderness is far from the dirty life of urban civilization. Wilderness spaces should extract maximum profits--either from resource extraction or tourist industries. Wilderness is what makes one uniquely, exceptionally American.

It is exactly the specificity of what is considered wilderness recreation and the universalization of these notions that makes wilderness discourse problematic and multiculturalism ineffective. Studies that broaden the definitions of outdoor recreation or include state and city parks closer to urban areas have found that racial disparity is not nearly as extreme as the National Parks and Forest surveys discovered.[118] It is also the specificity of wilderness (wild, sublime, remote, pristine) that assumes non-white people lack knowledge or a meaningful relationship to natural space. Since other ways of relating to natural spaces may not meet the criteria of wilderness,[119] Indigenous people and other nonwhite people are assumed to

[118] Laura Burd Shiavo, "White People Like Hiking: Some Implications of NPS Narratives of Relevance and Diversity," *The Public Historian,* Vol. 38, No. 4 (2016), 220.

[119] Carolyn Finney in her book *Black Faces, White Spaces,* provides an in-depth analysis of African Americans' relationship to natural spaces. Indigenous spiritual practices are another example of

have no relationship to wilderness and they are in need of being taught how to do it or provided role models and show them how. In a recent example, widely discussed in the news and on social media, a white woman in Oakland, CA called the police on an African American family setting up a barbeque in a lakeside park claiming that their use of this outdoor space was illegal.[120] There are dozens of other instances of harassment or criminalization of activities like barbequing, street vendors, or listening to music in wilderness. In fact, as discussed in Section One, the National Parks were founded by criminalizing the practices of Indigenous people while permitting white, middle and upper class recreational visitors. The discourse of multiculturalism presents wilderness recreation as a singular practice, based on the white man's experience and implies that the root of the 'diversity problem' is lack of information or representation.

I do not wish to engage in a discussion about the psychological or physical health benefits of spending time outdoors and whether or not one *should* spend time in the outdoors. My point is rather, that multicultural wilderness discourse prescribes a relationship to the natural world that is circulated as universally better or more true than others. This discourse is replicated in the same problematic ways that assert racial capitalism in which white property and profit are preserved.

Section Two: Literature, Methods, and Framework

Throughout this section I offer a critique of the multiculturalism that has become so pronounced in wilderness discourse. Multiculturalism has emerged in several phases: racial liberalism (1940s-60s), liberal multiculturalism (1980s-90s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s).[121] The earlier forms of multiculturalism were important in the development of literature and culture, but multicultural discourse did not popularly interact with wilderness until the 1990s and really, the 2010s. The statistical information

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another widely ignored way of related to natural space. Farmers and other laborers who work closely on land are similarly excluded from the *wilderness* relationship to nature.

[120] Carla Herreria, "Woman Calls Police on Black Family for BBQing at a Lake in Oakland, *Huffington Post*, published May 18, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/woman-calls-police-oakland-barbecue_us_5af50125e4b00d7e4c18f741.

[121] Melamed, 2011, 1.

released by the National Parks service in 2008 has galvanized the largest discussion yet about race in the outdoors.

One reason for this, is that throughout the 1940s all the way through the 80s, rural spaces were still dangerous sites of racial violence. The National Parks themselves were not officially desegregated until 1945. From discrimination and harassment to lynching and violence, white violence towards African Americans prevented many from traveling into wild or rural areas of the US and this feeling of fear lingers for many African Americans.[122] Similar violence plagued Mexicans and Mexican Americans along the southern border.[123] The history of genocide and Indigenous dispossession cast a shadow over those spaces for many Indigenous people. Violence and poverty also severely affected Indigenous communities who rarely visited wilderness recreation areas or whose reservations were in or adjacent to parks where they were forced to perform or sell cultural items to make a living.[124]

But, as a new emphasis on diversity and antiracism emerged in the 1990s, this discourse permeated that of wilderness too. Melamed points out why this discourse is so problematic: "Liberal multiculturalism socialized whites to see themselves as good antiracists by virtue of their antiracist feeling and desire for diversity, even as whites continued to accrue unearned benefits from material and social arrangements that favored them."[125] The underlying effects of liberal multiculturalism uphold white profit, citizenship, and ownership, many of the same values upheld in wilderness. The fallacy of liberal multiculturalism is that even if more racially diverse people start visiting National Parks, it does not change who is profiting from their visit or who feels welcome. It does not uncover the history of

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[122] Examples of this fear can be found in a woman interviewed in the New York Times article by Glen Nelson, "Why are our parks so white?" from July 10, 2015. Another example is the essay "Black Women and the Wilderness" by Evelyn C. White published in *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*, editors Becky W. Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 283. Or this recent blog post by Latria Graham, "We're Here, You Just Don't See Us," *Outside Online*, published May 1, 2018, https://www.outsideonline.com/2296351/were-here-you-just-dont-see-us

[123] William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[124] Burnham, 251.

[125] Melamed, 2011, 37

Indigenous dispossession and genocide that wilderness conceals, and it provides a way for white people to continue not recognizing their own complicity in perpetuating inequality, discrimination, and exploitation.

Neoliberal multiculturalism, as it evolved in the 2000s, is closely tied to the economic goals of neoliberal capitalism and can be seen exemplified in the two case studies I present below. Wilderness and multicultural discourse present as natural, the exploitation of nonwhite bodies for ever increasing profits for whites. Melamed elaborates,

> As a unifying discourse, neoliberal multiculturalism has disguised the reality that neoliberalism remains a form of racial capitalism[…]Race has continued to permeate capitalism's economic and social process, organizing the hyper-extraction of surplus value from racialized bodies and naturalizing a system of capital accumulation that grossly favor the global North over the global South."[126]

Neoliberal multiculturalism constitutes whites as "global, multicultural citizens, and its disciplinary function, providing grounds for exclusion and inclusion that separate "good" from "bad" [Muslims] and naturalize privilege and stigma."[127] I use these definitions to understand how the intersection of multiculturalism and wilderness in the two examples below, enforce systems of exploitation, exclusion, and stigma, while concealing the fact that they do so. Neoliberal multicultural discourse fails to address embedded racism in wilderness and bolsters an antiracist discourse that still values at its core, the interests, ownership, individualism, and property rights of whites.

#EncuentraTuParque / #FindYourPark

As I have discussed in Section One, the development of wilderness discourse was closely related to a project of finding a national identity and promoting American exceptionalism.[128] In addition, the process of categorizing Indigenous people as "too natural" set boundaries on who was and was not civilized enough to be an American. With the expansion of National Parks throughout the 1900s to the 58 parks and 14 forests the US has in 2018, wilderness became a space accessible only to middle and upper

[126] Ibid., 42.
[127] Melamed, 2011, 142.
[128] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 3.

class whites. Enjoying wilderness for leisure became the only acceptable way of spending time there (with the exception of extracting nonrenewable resources from it).[129] Wilderness leisure became prescribed in very specific ways—hiking, camping, climbing, fishing, and adventure sports were popular past-times for Park and Forest visitors.

Black feminist geographer Carolyn Finney argues this point in depth in her book *Black Faces, White Spaces.* She writes that only "certain human experiences of the American landscape are relevant and valued" as being an American appreciation of wilderness.[130] Historian William Cronon remarks on this too, writing that for the wealthy, urban elites who first started vacationing in the wilderness,

> wild land was not a site for productive labor and not a permanent home; rather, it was a place of recreation. One went to the wilderness not as a producer but as a consumer, hiring guides and other backcountry residents who could serve as romantic surrogates for the rough riders and hunters of the frontier if one was willing to overlook their new status as employees and servants of the rich.[131]

From early on, a meaningful relationship to wilderness was defined by wealthy white men.

This singular way of appreciating wilderness was also closely tied to building American identity. The campaign for the National Parks was closely associated with the shaping of an exceptional American identity. The discourse of multiculturalism "equates visiting national parks with feeling connected to nature and closely associates a connection with nature to more complete participation in the nation."[132] The wilderness and multicultural discourse used by the National Parks Foundation to promote the parks provides ample opportunities to examine how these discourses continue settler colonial erasure and promote American exceptionalism.

The campaign, #FindYourPark, was released by the National Parks Foundation in 2016 on the hundredth anniversary of the parks and is asserts that all the diverse people of the US can find some way to identify with a National Park. There are a number of components to the campaign--videos and images,

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[129] See Table 1, Wilderness Tenet 9.

[130] Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 77.

[131] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).

[132] Shiavo, 214.

a search tool that allows you to find parks based on activity or location, several blogs about stories and experiences in National Parks, ways to donate and volunteer for the parks, a National Parks gift shop, and social media photo contests. The name of the campaign itself, #FindYourPark, is a social media hashtag used to share photos and videos of the parks. The website describes the campaign: "Find Your Park is a collaboration between the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service, designed to encourage people to find their personal connections to our national parks. Through innovative search and curated experiences, people from all walks of life can find their own park on our website."[133] The images and written content on the campaign's website provide ample examples of multicultural discourse in wilderness.

Multiculturalism and wilderness discourse are immediately apparent on the home website for the campaign. The campaign boasts that there are "endless ways for you to dive in and FindYourPark."[134] The stories page features images of people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds exploring parks around the country (Appendix 1, Image 1.1). The language and imagery of #FindYourPark closely mirrors Romantic and transcendental discourse. Vocabulary such as, "natural wonders," "escape the city," "preserve," and "adventure" appear again and again in the stories and experiences (Appendix 1, Image 1.2). The images of National Parks mirror those of influential painters like Albert Bierstadt, who embody the pristine, wondrous landscapes that are the pride and symbol of America (Appendix 1, Image 1.3). On several occasions, the website takes on overt issues of race. There are some discussions on learning about Indigenous Hawaiian culture or honoring killed slaves, yet patriotism and pride for the parks and wilderness wonder remain, as Finney wrote, the only American way to appreciate these spaces.[135]

For example, the African Burial Ground National Monument is offered as a 'park experience' for those interested in arts and culture, children's programs, historical, and tours. The description of the park

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[133] "About," #FindYourPark, National Parks Foundation, accessed December 27, 2018, https://findyourpark.com/about.

[134] "Experiences," #FindYourPark, National Parks Foundation, accessed December 27, 2018, https://findyourpark.com/experiences.

[135] "Your Parks," #FindYourPark, National Parks Foundation, accessed December 27, 2018, https://findyourpark.com/your-parks.

states, “This monument in Manhattan honors African Americans and offers an education on the hardship they endured in early America.”[136] Of course, education on the history of African Americans is necessary and important, but this brief description dramatically minimizes the history of racism and turns it into a vacation activity. Similarly, the Alcatraz Island park experience says it is a great place for those interested in birdwatching, shopping, wildlife viewing, and history, yet it makes no mention of the Indigenous occupation of Alcatraz from 1969-71. This occupation was a highly significant moment for Indigenous organizing and sovereignty movements.

Rather than uncover their complex histories, #FindYourPark promotes parks like The African Burial Ground Monument and Alcatraz Island as part of the patchwork of diversity that makes up America. The discourse suggests that by acknowledging the history of slavery by visiting a monument, one embodies the spirit of equality and freedom of America. As Melamed articulates, this discourse allows people to feel like antiracist, multicultural subjects simply by going on vacation to a monument. Visitors to parks that do acknowledge the history of racism in America or celebrate nonwhite Americans can feel as though they have honored racial diversity while doing nothing to address contemporary issues of racism and inequality.

National Parks for profit

#FindYourPark hopes to appeal not only to white visitors who can pride themselves of their multiculturalism, but it also hopes to open new markets for tourism. Probably the most jarring and obvious sign that the multiculturalism is linked to increasing profit, are the large logos for Foundation sponsors that hover at the bottom of every page of the campaign website (Appendix 1, Image 1.4). Subaru, Budweiser, American Express, and Union Pacific announce their support of visiting National Parks. In the same way that the railroad lines had major influence in lobbying for the creation of National Parks, these companies see something to gain from wilderness.[137] Despite the obvious display of

[136] Your Parks,” #FindYourPark, National Parks Foundation, accessed December 27, 2018, https://findyourpark.com/your-parks.

[137] See page 43.

advertising, wilderness discourse operates to naturalize and conceal the motives of the industries backing the National Parks.

In her article, "White People Like Hiking," Laura Burd Schiavo reminds us that attempts like #FindYourPark that encourage non-white people to visit parks by finding something to connect to, has benefit for the parks and related industries in the form of profit. She writes, "The ethical imperative to make these "tangible reminders of our nation's past" relevant to those who do not visit in the same proportion as their "white" compatriots also has a clear marketing rationale: when someone's history is acknowledged, he or she is more likely to feel connected, or less likely to feel excluded, and thus more likely to visit."[138] As I discussed in Section One, the National Parks formed, in part, as a way to make profit from land that was not useful for agricultural or extractive industries. Most National Parks require an entrance fee, for example Yosemite National Park charges $35 for individuals driving or $20 per person for people entering in small groups or on foot. Once there, lodging can range from $25 per night camping to upwards of $500 per night to stay in the Yosemite Hotel.[139] There are also dozens of restaurants and hotels in and around the park. By appealing to new, diverse visitors to parks, tourist industries gain new markets and new consumers. Yet, this motive is cloaked in the discourses of wilderness and multiculturalism.

The privatization of so called public or "common" lands like the National Parks is particularly apparent at Yosemite and its relationship to the global food service, uniform, and hospitality company, Aramark. Within Yosemite National Park, Aramark operates not just hotels, but it manages the employees of concession stands, ski activities, hiking guides, parking lots, gift shops, and staffs custodians.[140] Aramark has been widely criticized for low wages, unsafe working conditions, withholding pay, and firing or eliminating the positions of employees who filed workplace discrimination claims or reported

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[138] Schiavo, 207.

[139] "Yosemite: National Park California," *National Park Service*, https://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/eatingsleeping.htm. Accessed December 2, 2018.

[140] "Careers," *Aramark*, https://careers.aramark.com/ListJobs/ByKeyword/yosemite/Page-1/. Accessed December 2, 2018.

unsafe conditions. The company is a large food provider for both public schools and prisons, where they have faced a number of lawsuits regarding food safety.[141]

What the relationship between Yosemite and Aramark points out, is that, despite its project imagery of diversity and inclusion, National Parks are moving closer to private industries and are deeply connected to exploitative labor conditions. Far from open commons free from the exploitative conditions of city, capitalist life, the National Parks are closely intertwined with exploitative industries and the privatization of land. Though no statistics on Aramark specifically were available, nationally, workers of color are far more likely to be paid a poverty-level wages.

The growing influence of multinational corporations like Aramark, moves resources, land, and wealth towards smaller groups of wealthy elites at the expense of everyone else. In the case of Aramark, this wealth is then reinvested in even more exploitative industries like the prison-industrial complex and medical-industrial complex. Privatization, historically has been a significant component of settler colonialism. Privatization not only facilitates rapid accumulation for wealthy elites, labor exploitation, and land theft, but it is also antithetical to many Indigenous ways of relating to land. Yet, despite all of this, the discourses of multiculturalism and wilderness provide expansive cover, concealing the inner workings of racial capitalism such as Aramark's operations in Yosemite.

The sublime quality of wilderness discourse and the notion that wilderness always stands in opposition to city life further conceal the capitalist workings of National Parks. As I demonstrated above, parks are rife with corporate interests and thousands of workers maintain parks in the condition you can find them in today. Yet, wilderness discourse allows the millions of visitors to National Parks each year "leave no trace" on the pristine landscape, while walking on carefully crafted trails through minutely managed forests. Like the leisure class of the late 1800s and early 1900s that supported the creation of the National Parks, visitors today got to wilderness as a reprieve from the exploitation and alienation of city

[141] One such example is: Kamala Kelkar, "Prison Strike Organizers to Protest Food Giant, Aramark," PBS NewsHour, January 8, 2017, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/prison-strike-protest-aramark.

life. In contrast, the Aramark employees at Yosemite, working for poverty wages, labor to produce the effect of no labor. White, middle class city dwellers and people who see themselves as multicultural subjects, can access the pristine landscape of Yosemite and imagine that they are in a place free of labor exploitation. But, for the Aramark employee, the wilderness of Yosemite is not a reprieve, but a space of exploitation, labor, and alienation.

One of the ways that privatization and exploitation is concealed within multiculturalism is through, as discussed in Section One, the narrative of wilderness and the sublime. Art historian W.T.J Mitchell links the sublime more specifically to the alienation of labor, writing, "As a fetishized commodity, landscape is what Marx called a 'social hieroglyph,' an emblem of the social relations it conceals. At the same time that it commands a specific price, landscape represents itself as 'beyond price,' a source of pure, inexhaustible spiritual value."[142] #FindYourPark employs the sublime by offering you the opportunity to "tune into PARKTRACKS, an innovative audio experience to help counter the hustle & bustle of city life, and tap into the trends of tranquility and mindfulness," (Appendix 1, Image 1.5) The sublime, relaxing qualities of wilderness discourse through PARKTRACKS, upholds wilderness as the universal cure to the "evils" of civilization. It does not question how, for example, a farmer or Yosemite Aramark employee might relate to this same space or how someone from an urban environment, may not feel the same level of "tranquility and mindfulness." It again makes the white, middle and upper class relationship to nature, a universal one that conceals that this experience of wilderness is highly constructed and distracts from capitalist labor exploitation and dispossession through privatization.

Erasing Indigeneity

Besides concealing capitalist exploitation, multiculturalism and wilderness pave the way for whites to create knowledge about Indigenous people and people of color in ways that erase their existence and the history of dispossession and violence. The "hippie" lifestyle made popular in the 1960s and continuing today, points to this relationship between wilderness, multiculturalism, and the ongoing

[142] W.T.J. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," *Landscape and Power,* Edited by WJT Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 15.

erasure of settler colonial violence. The hippie culture, and more contemporary cultural movements of "communing with nature," "reconnecting with our roots," and other outdoors-based lifestyles that romanticize wilderness also often appropriate elements of Indigenous culture. Examples include fashion elements, using the word "tribe," and using or altering traditional spiritual practices.[143] #FindYourPark engages with the popularity of hippie culture as well, by promoting road trips and using phrases like "tap into tranquility," (Appendix 1, Images 1.2 and 1.5).

Moreton-Robinson discusses this cultural movement in Australia, yet her argument rings true in the US as well. Hippie culture's "symbolic appropriation of the sacred as a way that white Australia can seek to achieve the unattainable imperative of becoming Indigenous in order to erase its unbelonging."[144] By taking ownership over Indigenous culture and people, whites once again justify their claim to original ownership, they seek to make themselves Indigenous. #FindYourPark promotes the idea that every person can find some sense of ownership or connection to a park. The website states, "National Parks are as unique and varied as the people who visit them." #FindYourPark uses this multicultural discourse to conceal the fact that all park land is stolen land and transforms dispossession into universal ownership. The discourse of wilderness and #FindYourPark appropriates nonwhite cultures in order to erase "unbelonging." Like in the examples above of the African American burial ground monument and Alcatraz Park, #FindYourPark celebrates diverse culture without interrogating the structures of power, exclusion, and violence closely linked to these cultures and histories.

Maile Arvin addresses Indigenous appropriation in her article "Acting Like a White Person Acting Like a Native." For Arvin, multicultural and human rights discourses have contributed to Indigenous peoples as "always already vanishing."[145] The appropriation of Indigenous cultures and

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[143] An example of this is the now closed "adventure lifestyle media platform", Altitude Seven, which used multicultural wilderness discourse to sell gear to women. They asked people to "join their tribe."

[144] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 10.

[145]16. Maile Arvin, "Acting Like a White Person Acting Like a Native: Ghostly Performances of Global Indigeneity," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1(1), Spring 2015, 104.

practices has served to homogenize indigeneity, while erasing the lives of real Indigenous people today. Practices such as demonstrations of native dance and culture in National Parks are part of the multicultural project, which depoliticizes issues of Indigenous people. "[M]any varieties of multiculturalism, even those that are loudly antiracist and purport to seek social justice, are fundamentally based on colonial practices, with violent consequences that require critical intervention."[146] National parks initiatives that promote diversity or multiculturalism projects, such as preserving native artifacts, require a closer look to understand the ways in which these practices may contribute to ongoing colonialism against present day Indigenous people.

#FindYourPark contains dozens of examples of multicultural celebrations of Indigenous people that fail to recognize the material effects of history. At the same time as whiteness claims ownership over an essentialized version of Indigeneity, it freezes real Indigenous cultures and peoples as permanently a part of history. Some examples include featured tours of Assateague Island National Seashore, a tour of an ancient Pueblo house at Aztec Ruins National Monument, and Big Hole National Battlefield. These examples purport to celebrate or even honor native people as part of American history without acknowledging any culpability in their dispossession and genocide or any discussion of the lives of contemporary Assateague, Pueblo or Nez Perce people murdered or forced from these lands. Other suggested visits proposed by #FindYourPark more overtly celebrate settler colonial history such as Bent's Old Fort in Colorado, a major outpost for western pioneers and one of the only white American settlements between Missouri and Mexican settlements or Indigenous lands to the west. By promoting these parks, #FindYourPark incorporates Indigenous culture into American history and takes control of creating the narrative of history.

Another example is the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail in Hawaii, featured on the #FindYourPark website. Its description reads, "A more conscious effort to protect Native Hawaiian cultural and natural resources has improved this gem of a historic trail." In this one sentence, the US

[146] Arvin, 104.

government casts itself as the savior, both owning and protecting Indigenous land and culture, rather than the state that caused its destruction in the first place. The description implies first, that the US government gets to make decisions about what and how to preserve this land and second, that the preservation of ancient cultural practice is for the exotic entertainment of non-Indigenous visitors. The invitation to visit Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail includes no critical conversation about past and contemporary Indigenous cultural practices or connections to this land. This description's lack of discussion of land rights in general, completely erases the dispossession of Indigenous Hawaiian land just 60 years ago. The preservation of culture celebrated by #FindYourPark, stands in for more radical sovereignty and land movements led by Indigenous people to reclaim their land and space from settler colonialism. As described in Section One, the exotic spectacle of ancient cultural practices were used to draw in more tourists to National Parks. The example of the Ala Kahakai trail is no different. The façade of multicultural discourse, the appreciation of Indigenous culture, casts white settlers as the benevolent conservationists and minimizes the agency and existence of contemporary Hawaiian people themselves.

Multicultural wilderness not only controls the history of Indigenous people, but also the narrative of all non-white people in wilderness. Part of defining an American subject/citizen through wilderness discourse occurs in the transcendental notion that connecting with nature is connecting with a higher being. #FindYourPark says that parks are where people "find their serenity, their moments, and their adventures."[147] "They give unforgettable feelings and memories."[148] Like Romantic writers fawning over natural landscapes, #FindYourPark implies that nature is divine. But the sublime is not universal. In her essay "'Nature' and Environmental Justice," Mei Mei Evans looks at attempts by people of color or queer people to have a transcendental or sublime experience in natural spaces and shows that,

> [T]hose who have been socially constructed as Other (i.e., not white and/or not straight and/or not male) are viewed as intruders or otherwise out of place when they venture into or attempt to inhabit Nature. In other words, we can see the way that representations of U.S. Nature as a physical location are overdetermined as white, male, and heterosexual when we look at what happens to people who are *not* white, male, and/or straight when they attempt the same sort of transformative experience in nature. The same paradigm has led to notions of some folk as being

[147] "Experiences," *Find Your Park,* findyourpark.com/experiences
[148] Ibid.

> less deserving than others not only of access to nature but of the right to clean, uncontaminated environments in which to live and work.[149]

Evans uses three examples of wilderness narratives told by a black woman, a black man, and a gay man, to demonstrate how their nature narratives tear apart a mythological understanding of wilderness. Through their feelings of fear, discomfort, physical harassment, and inability to achieve the ultimate wilderness "sublime" moment, Evans makes clear that a dominant wilderness narrative is incompatible with the experiences of these "Others." Importantly, Evans argues that ideological nature, which privileges whiteness and maleness, is not just rhetorical, but that such a construction of wilderness carries real material consequences for those excluded by it. These material manifestations include fear of violence and a sense of limited mobility and ownership of natural spaces. Evans emphasizes that wilderness has been socially constructed as not only a white space, but a straight and masculine space as well.

Despite the reproduction of wilderness as defining American citizenship, the blatant advertising, and the universalizing of recreation, #FindYourPark does make some important steps towards recognizing complex relationships to natural spaces. First, the campaign is premised on the understanding that people do have different ways of connecting to different spaces, connections based on history, context, and identity. Unfortunately, the effort to change this leans more towards assimilating difference and celebrating America rather than embracing contradictions and complexities. Second, the entire website is available in Spanish, a necessary step for granting access to these spaces for the large number of Spanish speakers living in the US. A next step could be adding more language options, and shifting the discourse to be less focused on patriotism and citizenship, so that even undocumented residents feel welcome. Finally, the campaign features the stories of women and people of color who have found a unique connection to the parks, and their voices do matter here. A lot of work also needs to be done to feature the voices of the Indigenous people whose land was taken to create the parks.

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[149]Evans, 183.

Force of Nature

Because of its connection to American identity formation, the campaign #FindYourPark is exemplary of the way that multiculturalism is used alongside wilderness discourse and how it fails to truly challenge structures of power. To address specifically how wilderness discourses of adventure and science are utilized in conjunction with multicultural discourse to perpetuate exploitative power structures, I look at another example of contemporary wilderness discourse: REI's "Force of Nature" campaign. Though it is not framed as such, at its core, "Force of Nature" is an advertising campaign, that seeks to engage more diverse consumers by celebrating diversity in outdoor recreation.

"Force of Nature" was started in 2017 as a campaign by outdoor gear seller, REI, to promote the involvement of women in the outdoors. The campaign started with a focus on women, however, the conversation has expanded to include advocating for racial diversity, body positivity, and acceptance of various sexualities in outdoor recreation. Central to the campaign, is the notion that everyone *should* be participating in outdoor activities and that representation is the reason why there are fewer women and people of color in the outdoors. REI targets this problem by offering diverse role models that encourage everyone to go out to wilderness, have an adventure, and conquer a mountain. In a letter introducing the campaign, the CEO writes "A casual look at any portrayal of the outdoors—movie, magazine, catalog, store, bookshelf—shows male imagery, heroes and stories. This doesn't honor or accurately depict the important role that women play in the outdoors. As the saying goes, "You can't be what you can't see."[150]

The narrative of wilderness adventure is at the heart of "Force of Nature." The mission reads, "We're telling stories of adventurers, makers and rule breakers. We're closing gaps in gear design and bringing women together outdoors with over 1,000 classes and experiences nationwide. We're making outside the largest level playing field on earth[...] Choose your next adventure,"[151] (Appendix 2, Image 1.1). This mission is an example of both neoliberal multiculturalism and neoliberal feminism, wherein choice represents freedom. The idea of "Force of Nature" is that by *choosing* an outdoor role model, the

[150] Stritzke, "Force of Nature: Let's Level the Playing Field,"
[151] "Force of Nature," *REI,* https://www.rei.com/h/force-of-nature.

barriers to wilderness recreation can be easily broken down. The campaign also celebrates adventure in much the same way as the pioneers—conquering obstacles is a sign of freedom and individualism.

As discussed above, representation as a solution to the 'diversity problem' in wilderness is based on the assumption that nonwhite cultures and peoples do not relate to wilderness or, are already a part of wilderness. Rather than discussing the multitude of ways one might connect to natural spaces, "Force of Nature" assumes that the white wilderness way is the only possible means of connecting to natural spaces. I emphasize that I do not mean to undermine the importance of making wilderness recreation more accessible and offering opportunities to diverse racial and gender groups, but I argue that this form of multicultural representation easily slips into the role of prescribing what is the right and wrong way to interact with wilderness. As Schiavo pointed out, framing wilderness in this singular way also creates a lack—if one does not go to natural spaces for wilderness adventure, it is because of a lack of knowledge or experience. By assuming a lack of knowledge, campaigns like "Force of Nature," erase hundreds of complex histories, experiences, spiritual practices, scientific, and emotional ways that people of all races, genders, ages, ethnic groups, and abilities have connected with natural space. REI also offers a prescribed notion of feminism in which women have to be just like men to prove themselves. "Fearless women" are those that scale mountain tops and kayak rapids. Again, "Force of Nature" projects neoliberal feminism as the only form of feminism, ignoring hundreds of other ways that women empower themselves.

But the fear of the thrill is not the only thing keeping people from wanting to spend time in wilderness. As I have mentioned before, the fear of violence, discrimination, erasure, or simply feeling unwelcome or unprepared can be a deterrent to people. As one blog on "Force of Nature" outlines the experience of Summer Winston, a woman of color who found herself isolated in the climbing community. She spent most of her life afraid of the outdoors because of the connection between wilderness and racial violence she witnessed in her hometown. Yet, when she did go camping for the first time, she felt inspired

and alive and wanted to continue spending time in wilderness.[152] Thousands of other women, Indigenous, and queer folks *do* find immense value in wilderness recreation and have founded groups that education and promote outdoor engagement.[153] But, what matters is who and how this knowledge about using wilderness space is produced. This blog post is written by a white woman about women of color, and while it features an important story, it also established REI as a progressive, antiracist company. REI attracts new customers through multiculturalism while continuing to isolate other ways of knowing natural space. As Melamed emphasizes, "Pluralism as the horizon for thinking on race matters restricted permissible antiracism to forms that assented to US nationalism and normal politics and prioritized individual and property rights over collective social goals."[154]

Having women of color role models in the outdoors, having groups dedicated to being safe spaces for women of color to spend time in wilderness are extremely important, but there is also a need to look towards the "collective social goals" Melamed brings up. Representation is one way in which individuals might find a connection to wilderness, like in the blog post above, but this kind of multiculturalism fails to address structures of racism and capitalist exploitation. REI will always be more interested in profits and ownership than collective interest, but right now, multiculturalism is profitable. In the same way that the National Parks transformed "useless" landscapes into a profitable industry, "Force of Nature" sells the intangible "adventure," transforming it into profit. A whole page of adventures, "Greek Island Women's Adventure," "Sedona Women's Adventure," and dozens more, offer women the opportunity to buy adventure for thousands of dollars (Appendix 2, Image 2.2).

As discussed in Section One, the scientific revolution and the expansion of industrial capitalism helped engrain the idea that humans are superior to nature and technology is the key for overcoming barriers.[155] Technology and the push for surmounting ever greater challenges is prevalent in the

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[152] Julie Ellison, "Meet the Women Who Are Helping Create a More Inclusive Climbing Community," *REI Blog*, https://www.rei.com/blog/climb/meet-the-women-who-are-helping-create-a-more-inclusive-climbing-community.

[153] Some examples of these organizations include Outdoor Afro and Indigenous Women Hike.

[154] Melamed, 2011, 34.

[155] Shiva, "Reductionism and Regeneration."

contemporary wilderness discourse of REI. Whether or not those practicing wilderness recreation are diverse (in terms of gender, size, race, sexuality) does not change the idea that wilderness is a space to be conquered. REI is a company that sells outdoor gear—that is, technology that makes it possible for humans to hike longer, carry more, ride taller rapids, summit higher peaks.

Making gear for women is a central part of the "Force of Nature" campaign. In his letter launching the campaign, REI CEO places gear third: "*We hear you.* Through the years, gear designed for women has improved, but there is still a gap between the quality of men's and women's gear. We are partnering with brands to increase focus on building world-class gear designed for women. We're also working hard inside our own co-op brands and with vendors to offer expanded extended sizing options." While there is now more gear that encompasses more people, that also means more customers and more profit (Appendix 2, Image 2.3).

Outdoor adventure and the "specialist"

The "Force of Nature" website easily links visitors to the regular page for REI and its products. A quick glance is overwhelmed with skis that go faster, sleeping bags that protect you from colder temperatures, bigger tents, socks that help you run longer, water bottles that store more, climbing shoes that help you grip slipperier surfaces, rain coats that keep you drier, and on and on. Going hiking is not just walking in the woods, but it necessitates proper gear and training to walk at a certain pace. Rock climbing has a competitive hierarchy of skill levels, water activities extensive practice, knowledge, and skill. There is not only the specialist who decides how and in what way to experience the wilderness, but there is also the specialist who determines the products and gear necessary to go to the wilderness. Quite literally, you need someone trained as a "gear specialist" to fit you for the proper pack and the right shoes.

This constant desire to overcome of barriers through advanced technology and fragmentation is an important aspect of Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist work on the role of science and the specialist. The domination of nature and women, she argues, and I would add, the exploitation and invisibility of non-white people, is made possible through reductionism and the valuing of "specialist" knowledge over everything else, which is considered ignorance. She writes,

> There seems to be a deception inherent in divided and fragmented knowledge, which treats non-specialist knowledge as ignorance and through the artificial divide, is able to conceal its own ignorance. I characterize modern, Western patriarchy's special epistemological tradition of the 'scientific revolution' as 'reductionist' because: 1) it reduced the capacity of humans to know nature both by excluding other knowers and other ways of knowing; and 2) by manipulating it as inert and fragmented matter, nature's capacity for creative regeneration and renewal was reduced.[156]

Shiva's argument is key in contemporary multicultural, wilderness discourse, which validates wilderness conquering, sublime, exceptionalism, all the central tenets, while casting all other forms of relating to nature as ignorant. Multicultural wilderness reduces natural elements to peaks to be topped, hills to be skied, or trails to be run in shorter and shorter times.

The specialist knowledge itself emerged out of growing popularity in the fields of forestry and botany. The ability to map and measure large areas, to identify the Latin names of trees and birds and classify them in a hierarchy made wilderness "knowable" only by someone who is highly trained. Nash describes the emergence of these fields: "John Clayton, Peter Kalm, Andre Michoux, and the native, self-taught botanist, John Bartram, revealed considerable excitement about the American wilderness as a natural laboratory, not just as the raw material of civilization."[157]

By looking at fragmented sections of nature, the "specialist" can devise ways of overcoming natural limits. If the wood is separate from the tree, from the forest, from the humans, animals, and other plants that coexist with it, it is much easier to see possibilities for exploitation. Early forestry practices and geographers who mapped the North American landscape saw the space as a collection of parts to be transformed into mass logging operations that simply maximize profitable wood through new technologies of planting and clearing. Wilderness recreation has a similarly fragmented approach to overcoming natural limits. Equipment and technology now allows for humans to climb ever higher mountains, to cross more dangerous waters. Overcoming natural limits asserts human dominance over wilderness. It creates the opportunity for humans to claim space never before possible. And, exceeding natural limits aligns with capitalist progress ideology, that is, advancements in technology and control

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[156] Shiva, 23.
[157] Nash, 53.

over more spaces helps march humans towards better and more ways to profit. The relationship between the specialist and the wilderness is that of extracting value and constantly looking for ways to improve and overcome barriers to progress.

The reductionist view of the specialist not only enforces capitalist ideologies of progress, but it also has justified the exploitation of women and nature. Knowing wilderness through the lens of science requires one to know how to break down wilderness into its fragmented pieces in order to analyze them. There is a specialist in conservation that decides that Indigenous practices will destroy biodiversity, while tourism will not. There is the specialist who knows how to climb the precipice, measure, and map it. Shiva writes, "Reductionist science is a source of violence against nature and women, in so far as it subjugates and dispossesses them of their full productivity, power, and potential. The epistemological assumptions of reductionism are related to its ontological assumptions: uniformity permits knowledge of parts of a system to stand for knowledge of the whole."[158] The wilderness specialist also enforces a racial capitalism, wherein whites not only benefit economically from ownership of land, but where only specialist labor (those led by whites of tourism, railroads, outdoor retail) produces profit at all and all other forms of labor (by women, by people of color, and Indigenous people) are considered "natural" or "biological."[159]

Conclusion

Through these two contemporary examples of wilderness discourse #FindYourPark and "Force of Nature," I have shown that multiculturalism is often used in relation to wilderness to conceal and perpetuate whiteness. That multiculturalism and diversity are so common within wilderness discourse hides the way that wilderness continues to exclude some and prioritize others. Multiculturalism constitutes antiracist subjects, companies, or organizations while doing little to target structures of inequality and exploitation. Having revealed that multiculturalism is not a substantive challenge to the

[158] Nash, 24.
[159] Shiva, 26.

problems with wilderness, I turn to the production of knowledge about natural space by nonwhite men. I look at how productions of knowledge, in this case, art, by women of color and Indigenous people intervenes in wilderness to complicate and shift our understanding our wilderness space. This is essential as we consider the future of our planet and both the people and non-human life that are in grave danger of destruction.

SECTION THREE

Towards Alternative Knowledges of Natural Spaces

Appreciation of landscape as an aesthetic object cannot be an occasion for complacency or untroubled contemplation; rather, it must be the focus of a historical, political, and (yes) aesthetic alertness to the violence and evil written on the land, projected there by the gazing eye. - W.T.J Mitchell[160]

In this final section, I offer two examples of how the creation of knowledge about wilderness can function as a critique of white wilderness discourse and produce new understandings of natural space. I examine two artists who are part of a constellation of knowledges of wilderness spaces, as examples of what Jodi Melamed calls, "race radicalism." I have chosen photographer Naima Green and painter Kay WalkingStick, whose work, I find, provides clear examples of intervention in white wilderness discourse and offers new lenses through which to see natural space. Green identifies as a black woman and WalkingStick as Cherokee woman. These two artists' works are examples of "situated knowledges," in that they reflect the standpoint of the artists identities, while also contextualizing themselves and their art within larger structures.[161] I have chosen visual artists because of the strong tradition of landscape painting in America, which closely reflects the nine problematic tenets of wilderness. By using and altering landscape images, these artists offer a clear challenge to this tradition and the oppressive, violent, exploitative, and exclusionary features of white wilderness. I analyze the works of photographer Naima Green and painter Kay WalkingStick through different possible lenses of analysis--a queer of color lens and an Indigenous sovereignty lens.

Below, I explore how different ways of knowing wilderness spaces, different ways of using it, different ways of producing knowledges about it, different social and cultural practices within it, and different interpretations and portrayals of it, can complicate wilderness discourse. Just because wilderness embodies and upholds many problematic assumptions, does not mean it should be abandoned completely. Instead, I advocate for white wilderness to be just one discourse of many discourses about natural or wild

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[160] W.T.J. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," *Landscape and Power,* Edited by WJT Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 29.

[161] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Feminist Studies, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 584-585.

spaces. In the way that Patricia Hill Collins theorized and uplifted Black Feminist Epistemology, I want to explore the possibilities for a Black Feminist, queer of color, Indigenous, and disabled wilderness.[162] As I have demonstrated throughout this project, wilderness is a constructed discourse that refers to natural space in a specific and problematic way. As such, wilderness can also be deconstructed, reconstructed, and changed to intervene in the problematic assumptions that wilderness discourse thus far has made. For the rest of this thesis, I will use the term white wilderness, to represent that, though the understanding and usage of wilderness as it is commonly used has been powerfully universalized, it does not have to be the only understanding of natural spaces.

In *Represent and Destroy,* Jodi Melamed offers the term "race radicalism," which she describes as "antiracist thinking, struggle, and politics that reckon precisely with those aspects of racialization that official liberal antiracisms screen off[…]Race radicalisms are materialist antiracisms that prioritize the unevennesses of global capitalism as primary race matters."[163] I use Melamed's term as a way to describe the epistemological challenges to wilderness that I see as a possible intervention and way forward. Melamed goes on to say that,

> What unifies the category of race radicalism is the attempt to rupture how race as a sign has been consolidated with the cultural, ideological, political, and material forces of official antiracisms and to reconsolidate race as a sign with the cultural, ideological, political, and material forces of worldly and racial antiracist movements, which have crucially analyzed race within the genealogy of global capitalism."[164]

I apply Melamed's concept of "race radicalism" to the art works of Green and WalkingStick in order to provide examples of how wilderness might be challenged.

Naima Green's *Jewels from the Hinterland* is an ongoing photography project that Green started in 2013 (See Appendix 3). Each photo in the series features a portrait of a person of color leisurely reclining in a natural environment. The series features women, men, and nonbinary people who identify

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[162] Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Epistemology" in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 251.

[163] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 47.

[164] Melamed, 2011, 49.

as part of the African diaspora and identify as comfortable in the outdoors (Appendix 3, image 3.1). In nearly all the photographs, the subject looks directly at the camera as they stand or sit at ease with the surrounding landscape. While the photos have a clear focus on the natural elements, flowers, grasses, trees, sky, and sun, there is no attempt to erase the human intervention in these spaces, which contain some buildings, roads, lamp posts, electrical lines, or other man-made infrastructure (Appendix 3, image 2). In interviews about her work, Green emphasizes that she is interested in seeing the natural elements present in cities, rather than a faraway wild. The natural landscape is present in the everyday lives of city dwellers.[165]

Kay WalkingStick is a prolific artist who began painting in the 1960s and continues to make works today (See Appendix 4). She first became interested in landscapes and diptychs during the 1980s and revived a series of landscapes around 2010-2011. During the 80s, her landscapes were often abstract and demonstrated her "situated", and emotional perception of the space.[166] In later landscapes, she makes a more explicit reference to Bierstadt style landscape paintings, overlaid with Native American designs. Below, I examine a variety of her landscape diptych paintings as well as some of her works that specifically address Native American history.

These artists do not simply take a multicultural representational approach to wilderness inclusion. They use the significance of wilderness landscape to critique and challenging the American wilderness landscape, not as an invitation for more queer people, Indigenous people, and people of color to assimilate to the state-sanctioned version of wilderness recreation, but in a way that highlights the power and importance of the natural environment and begins to build a new wilderness discourse.

Section Three: Literature, methodology, and framework

One of the places where wilderness discourse has been the most apparent is in landscape images, specifically the landscape tradition of painting. Like wilderness, landscape is not an objective portrayal of

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[165] Green, Naima. 2014. "Jewels from the Hinterland." *BKLYNR* Issue 26. https://www.bklynr.com/jewels-from-the-hinterland/

[166] Kay WalkingStick, "Artist Statement," 2010, http://www.kaywalkingstick.com/statement/index_new.htm.

space, but carries cultural and political values of ownership and oppression. Art historian W.T.J Mitchell argues that landscape is not just an image but is a function of imperialism. He writes,

> Appreciation of landscape as an aesthetic object cannot be an occasion for complacency or untroubled contemplation; rather, it must be the focus of a historical, political, and (yes) aesthetic alertness to the violence and evil written on the land, projected there by the gazing eye. We have known at least since Turner-perhaps since Milton-that the violence of this evil eye is inextricably connected with imperialism and nationalism. What we know now is that landscape itself is the medium by which this evil is veiled and naturalized.[167]

It is because of the ways landscape exemplifies white wilderness, that I have chosen landscape as a means for analyzing and understanding ways of knowing wilderness in this final section. These two artists, Green and WalkingStick, also are particularly attuned to what Mitchell is arguing. Their work calls attention to "violence and evil written on the land" and they transform landscape from "complacency or untroubled," to a location of subversion.

Landscape art is one manifestation of white wilderness discourse that demonstrates the shifting meaning of wilderness. American landscape imagery perpetuates claim and ownership over Indigenous people and lands through Manifest Destiny and frontier imagery. American landscapes have been essential in shaping American identity including who is and is not granted citizenship and accessibility to this identity. Not only has the American landscape played a pivotal role in colonial discourse, tracing the transition from pastoral to wilderness landscapes in the US indicates that the move towards wilderness imagery in art came as a response to the transition from slavery to reconstruction. Scholar Paul Outka analyzes the role of the sublime in wilderness narratives and imagery, arguing that the sublime operates to conceal the construction of wilderness, covering over the existence of indigenous people, and building a mythology that wilderness is a perfect place that exists outside of social constructions.[168] The sublime element of wilderness is apparent in narratives and images particularly from the Romantic and Transcendentalist cultural periods and can be seen today in most cultural and media images of the

[167] W.T.J. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 29-30.
[168] See page 37 for a further discussion of slavery and landscape.

American landscape: untouched forests, majestic mountains, tranquil lakes without the "blemish" of humans, particularly humans in "nonnormative" (read not straight, white) bodies.

Landscape painting and photography has also been a way in which white wilderness has been naturalized. The ubiquitous landscapes of painters like Albert Bierstadt that claim to accurately and objectively convey wilderness spaces, again universalize the experience of the wealthy white man.

> Landscape as a cultural medium thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology: It naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site.[169]

Here, Mitchell points to both the assumed universality of the traditional landscape, but also the power dynamics concealed within landscape and how it operates. Green and WalkingStick's work intervenes this process Mitchell describes by disrupting the production and naturalization problematic ideologies of wilderness and by challenging the viewer not to succumb to the "givenness" of wilderness.

Challenging a single way of knowing

As discussed in Section Two, the work of ecofeminist scholar Vandana Shiva challenges the production of scientific or "specialist" knowledge because the specialist must always sit in opposition to the ignorant.[170] Since the scientific revolution, women, people form the global south, queer, and Indigenous people rarely find their voices, experiences, and ways of knowing included in scientific, specialist knowledge. Wilderness discourse enables this in some ways—by reinforcing who is civilized enough to be a specialist (white, heterosexual, able-bodied men) and who is too natural to have an objective understanding of the world (anyone who is not a white, heterosexual, able-bodied man). Science, as Shiva writes about, assumes a detached, fragmentation and reductionism that allows the knower to believe they transcend their position and can objectively know the truth or fact of something. The European wilderness explorers who fragmented natural spaces to be able to overcome or control the

[169] Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 2.
[170] See page 67 for further discussion of science and the specialist.

landscape for their own needs, had the privileged position to promote their way of knowing as the only way.

Like Shiva, Patricia Hill Collins challenges the production of a singular way of knowing because assumptions like this nearly always reproduce epistemologies of privileged people over everyone else. "Far from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why."[171] While the first two sections deconstructed wilderness in order to understand its power relations and who defined and shaped the meaning of the space, this final section focuses on the importance of epistemology in transforming these power relations and shifting who is believed and why.

Donna Haraway makes an important intervention into the feminist conversation on objectivity with her work "Situated Knowledges." In between a totally constructivist perspective and an objective reality perspective, Haraway suggests that there are many ways of knowing something and that all knowledges must be contextualized. She writes, "So, with many other feminists, I want to argue for a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing."[172] Her goal here, matches my own in that I hope to see not a singular way of knowing wilderness that turns white wilderness on its head, but rather, a multitude of knowledges that are constantly questioning and shifting. This will be particularly important for the future of natural life on earth as humans struggle to end damaging practices and destructive uses. Conservationism has proven to have limited effectiveness and little draw beyond white wealthy men (who started the movement for themselves and for industry). I want to collectively imagine ways in which to transform economic and social structures to prevent further catastrophic destruction, in a way that also addresses other system issues of racism, sexism, ableism, and more.

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[171] Hill Collins, 270.
[172] Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 584-585.

Haraway's work modifies standpoint theorists who see ways of knowing "from the bottom" as more accurate than the "view from the top." Other theorists take on this claim in various ways, "Living life as Black women requires wisdom because knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions has been essential to US Black Women's survival."[173] I do not intend to stake a claim in the conversation about standpoint theory and objectivity, rather, I want to use the ideas presented by both of these feminist scholars about multiple ways of knowing as complication of, a challenge to white wilderness. I also see a focus on the production of knowledge as a way to intervene in white wilderness in a way that multicultural discourse cannot. While multiculturalism ultimately normalizes and invisiblizes whiteness and capitalism under the guise of challenging inequalities, I look at "race radicalisms" to show that productions of knowledge can be a way to challenge multicultural and white wilderness. In the rest of this section I focus on two main ways of knowing nature that intervene in the problematic assumptions of wilderness discourse. I use examples of artists, but there are many more ways in which women, people of color, and Indigenous people are challenging wilderness, both intentionally and simply through their own everyday production of knowledge about this space.

Queering as Resistance: Jewels from the Hinterland

In the following analysis of Naima Green's photography, I use *a queer of color critique* as a framework and verb that is one possible way of knowing that challenges and disrupts not only heteronormativity, but normativity in general. As Sarah Ahmed writes, "It is for a very good reason that queer theory has been defined not only as heteronormative but anti normative."[174] This anti normative practice has been deployed by the artists to challenge oppressive structures within white wilderness discourse and can be used as a framework for viewing the works of art. As I argued above, there are a multiplicity of ways of knowing wilderness and ways of producing wilderness discourse. I present two

[173] Hill Collins, 275.

[174] Sarah Ahmed, "Queer Feelings" in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* edited by Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 426.

possible examples, out of many, as a way to begin thinking about more complex relationships between humans and wilderness. I suggest that the photography of Naima Green is, in many ways, a queer of color critique of wilderness and I use this method analysis to read her work.

Queering as a deconstructive methodology to examine wilderness is effective because of the ways it reveals the underlying normative structures of wilderness landscape. As discussed above, wilderness discourse and imagery are particularly significant in the construction of American identity, citizenship, and ownership. The enforcement of normative values of American identity as white and heterosexual requires these norms to be continually replicated both through bodies, the law, discourse, and cultural production. In their work *Queering Contemporary Asian American Art,* Laura Kina and Jan Christian Bernabe discuss why art is a significant location for deconstructing the normative. They write, "For the nation to succeed, its citizens must reproduce, not only on the corporeal level but in replicating national culture on the abstract level in order to be a part of the imagined heteronormative community at large."[175] Reproducing a white, heteronormative nation through culture is an essential part of justification and erasure of violence and oppression towards "nonnormative" bodies.

The relationship between wilderness and "nature" presents another opportunity for a queer intervention. An emerging field of queer ecology takes up a postmodern, queer criticism of the environment because it is closely linked with normalizing race, gender and sexuality.[176] Queer people are often described as "unnatural," that is unable to achieve full subjecthood under the state nor able to be a part of the natural world. While this positionality often results in the state seeing queer bodies, specifically queer bodies of color, as disposable, it also opens up the possibility for queerness to intervene in the binary of nature/man.

In thinking about queerness and space, Sarah Ahmed's work on comfort and affect is a useful tool for analysis. She writes,

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[175] Laura Kina and Jan Christian Bernabe editors, *Queering Contemporary Asian American Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 7.

[176] Nicole Seymour, *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 2.

> The closer that queer subjects get to the spaces defined by heteronormativity the more *potential* there is for a reworking of the heteronormative, partly as the proximity 'shows' how the spaces extend some bodies rather than others Such extensions are usually concealed by what they produce: public comfort. What happens when bodies fail to 'sink into' spaces, a failure that we can describe as a 'queering' of space? When does this potential for 'queering' get translated into a transformation of the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality?[177]

I connect her questions to my overarching research questions about how and why certain people do or do not feel welcome or comfortable in wilderness spaces.

Finally, my analysis is significantly influenced by the work of Jose Esteban Munoz and his queer of color critiques of art and culture. The two artists' works below use disidentification to deconstruct wilderness landscape. But as Munoz writes, "disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture."[178] I suggest that these are just some of the many ways that new knowledges about wilderness can crack open the dominant meaning and create spaces for more people to feel welcome, more ways of knowing and using natural space.

Green's photography is an intervention in wilderness discourse and a queering of wilderness landscapes in a number of ways. First, her work conveys playfulness, joy, and leisure, distinctive features of queer studies and art. In some of the photographs, the subjects are partially shrouded by grasses or flowers, some recline on tree stumps or in grass, while others just stand with an easy stance (Appendix 3, image 3.3). Pink and red flowers, blue sky, or deep green foliage give the photos a vibrant and positive feeling. Green herself has discussed the importance of leisure in her work, which presents a challenge to the normative way that black bodies are portrayed in natural spaces. Many people can only imagine labor and hard work, not free time and enjoyment. In an interview, Green describes an interaction she had with a former classmate. She said, "that's the first thing that comes to his mind? Black people and land and slavery? And this is a well-educated man who went to Columbia with me! So my photography also becomes a way of saying that we are in these green spaces for leisure. We are in these spaces to play. To

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[177] Ahmed, 428.

[178] Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.

play!"[179] By acknowledging and then subverting these assumptions about blackness, leisure, and ease, Green recreates wilderness as a space of comfort for black bodies.

Jewels from the Hinterland The quiet, delicate beauty of flowers or grasses counteracts the harshness of most images of urban black Americans. "This lack of perceived humanity is what makes violence against black bodies and black people so much easier to take part in. One stereotype around blackness is that of incredible strength-and to be able to withstand so much violence one must be strong."[180] As wild environments have also often been sites of violence against people of color, the leisurely stances of the subjects is a reclamation of spaces dominated by images of lynching and other violence. Though there is a joy to the images, most of the subjects face the camera with a serious gaze conveying the gravity of the historical traumas invoked in the image. This disidentification nods to the realities of historical violence against African Americans in natural landscapes, while simultaneously moving towards a queer, healing relationship between black people and nature (Appendix 3, image 3.4).

In many of the photos, the subject is at the center of the frame, but some of the flowers, grasses, or tree branches shroud or cast shadows on part of the body as if the subjects are being embraced by the natural elements or are emerging from them. The dissonance between the way the subjects are *in* the landscape and the surprise of a black subject being in such a landscape deconstructs normative assumptions about blackness and wilderness. Being both in and clearly standing out from the natural elements critiques the way that wilderness discourse presents humans as in opposition to or outside of nature. Instead, the people photographed are both a part of and separate from the landscape (Appendix 3). In outlining her practice for collecting photos for the series, Green makes clear that the subjects self-identify as black and as people comfortable with nature, which brings agency to the photographed. As Green herself identifies as a black woman who feels a strong connection with the outdoors from her

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[179] Jessica Lynne, "In Conversation with Naima Green," *Arts.Black,* March 2, 2016, http://arts.black/2016/03/in-conversation-with-naima-green/

[180] Zio Baritaux, "Naima Green's Quietly Radical Portraits of People of Color in Parks." *Vice i-D.* Published November 16, 2016. https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/59b773/naima-greens-quietly-radical-portraits-of-people-of-color-in-parks

childhood experiences, the consuming gaze of the photographer is transformed into one of care and connection.

As Cathy Cohen argues in her seminal work, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," subjects are queer not only because of their sexuality, but because of the relationship to heteronormative structures.[181] Green's work presents a queering of wilderness because it challenges the disposability of black bodies under a system of heteronormative, white supremacist violence. The lush growing foliage and green spaces of her work imply fertility, flowering, and future for black people. They call for a healthy, growing environment for living in, but not the decontextualized pristine wilderness apart from human life, rather a world in which nature and human overlap one another. Green writes in an interview, "Structurally, no one wants to see black and brown bodies in growing lush green spaces or see the resilience and the livelihood and the humanity. People don't want to see that,"[182] Yet, her work brings the people alive, their vitality and growth. Time is queered, in the "hinterland," it is always summer, always growing.

White wilderness narratives have served to grant clean, safe environments to some, while limiting access to others. Making visible the link between environmental damage and forms of oppression like racism, sexism, and homophobia, has been a major project of the environmental justice movement. In a literary analysis of two environmental justice novels, Rachel Stein emphasizes that environmental damage is closely linked to the erasure and death of black women and queer bodies.[183] While the pristine American landscape embodies fertility and futurity for the white able body, its inaccessibility to non-white, able, heterosexual bodies also cuts off access to a healthy, clean, and fertile future for queer people and people of color.

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[181] Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics." GLQ (1997) 3 (4): 437-465.

[182] Lynne, "In Conversation with Naima Green."

[183] Rachel Stein, "Gender and Environmental Justice in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* and Barbara Neely's *Blanche Cleans up*," *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy,* edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 194-212.

The title of the series itself represents a disidentification with blackness and wilderness spaces. Besides literally meaning the rural area outside a city or town, hinterland has historically used to refer to areas just outside of colonized territory in Africa and Asia. Ecofeminist Maria Mies writes about how the hinterland is a central part of the 'wonder' or 'sublime' experience of wilderness that is completely removed from civilization. She writes that,

> This yearning, this desire for nature is not directed to the nature that surrounds us, even in a city, or of which we are a part. It is rather fixated on the nature which has explicitly been externalized by White Man, which has been defined as colony, backward, exotic, distant and dangerous, the nature of Asia, Africa, South America. This nature is the 'Hinterland' of white civilization.[184]

The name of Green's work nods simultaneously to the relationship between wilderness landscapes, racism, violence, and death while she also builds the hinterland as a queer realm of possibility through her work.

Feminist Indigeneity: Kay WalkingStick

In Naima Green's work, I contend that she uses a queer of color analysis and a production of knowledge from her own standpoint. She situates her work in larger structures of racism, histories of art, as well as personal experience and the experiences of the people she photographs. Another example of this radical contextualization, the "situation" of knowledges as Haraway called it, is the Cherokee, mixed race, feminist painter, Kay WalkingStick. She too situates herself inside wider discourses on Indigeneity, art, and gender. I use her work as another example of ways of knowing wilderness that challenges or alters the embedded assumptions that favor white uses and meanings over all others.

Kay WalkingStick's art has spanned many styles and subjects, but in this analysis I focus on her diptych landscape paintings. In these works, she often paints landscapes from the western US on one side of the diptych and the other side she overlays the landscape with Native American designs or weaving patterns. In the case of *New Mexico Desert* (2011), Navajo patterns cross over the right side of the diptych (Appendix 4, image 4.1). In many other diptychs, the landscape is contrasted with another, abstract

[184] Mies, 133.

image, which WalkingStick writes, is an exploration of her own body being and being in landscapes (Appendix 4, image 4.2).[185]

Her landscape paintings are both an acknowledgement, and a subversion, of traditional landscape painting and photography. Artists like Albert Bierstadt were integral to the creation of the American landscape which is majestic and empty. His work never featured signs of human life, but instead represent the perfect example of the nine tenets of wilderness. WalkingStick's landscapes take after this tradition in some ways, but her work alters wilderness in several ways: In *New Mexico Desert* (2011), she stakes an Indigenous claim on the landscape. By imprinting it with Navajo patterns, one must look through a lens of these patterns to see the landscape. It is a constant reminder of Indigenous presence, a stamp or a seal marking the presence. But because you can also see the landscape through the pattern, it turns into a lens, a reminder that this land was stolen and to imagine what the landscape might look like through Native American eyes.

In her Artist Statement, WalkingStick writes that as she explored landscapes from the 80s onward, she began to see the landscape as a representation of herself and her body. In contrast to landscape paintings that attempted to erase Indigenous presence by representing empty land, void of human influence, WalkingStick describes her landscape as *being* her. In traditional landscape, Indigenous presence was completed erased, in WalkingStick's work, it is everywhere. This is particularly apparent in works that are explicitly linked to her personal experience—such as *The Abyss*, a waterfall landscape painted after her husband's death (Appendix 4, Image 4.3). Some of her works explicitly reference figures (Appendix 4, Image 4.4), while others convey WalkingStick's presence through her interpretation of the landscape, which conveys emotion and memory through color and stroke as opposed to a 'realist' perspective.

Much of WalkingStick's work is influenced by feeling and memory as much as perception. Instead of attempting to capture an objective image, she allows her perception and emotion to impact the

[185] Kay WalkingStick, "Artist Statement," 2010, http://www.kaywalkingstick.com/statement/index_new.htm.

work. In her artist statement she writes, “The landscape is based on site sketches and photos, and the figures from imagination, so these are neither a depiction of a specific place nor an activity, but a suggestion of how a place and an activity would feel. They describe a psychological state.” This presents itself also, in the way that she creates her works which emphasizes process as much as product.

Another theme in some of WalkingStick’s landscapes, is memorializing and remembering events of Native American history. Two of her works, “Farewell to the Smokies” (Appendix 4, image 4.5) and the “Chief Joseph” series (Appendix 4, image 4.6), specifically comment and acknowledge Indigenous genocide and dispossession. Throughout her various phases as an artist, WalkingStick grapples with her relationship to Indigeneity. She often mentions her experience as being mixed race and the influence of feminism on her work. In an interview, she indicates a reluctance at doing paintings about dispossession, something that she originally saw as an overused trope of Indigenous art. Yet, she found her own way of portraying the trail of tears and Chief Joseph.[186] Though her work in many ways is deeply influenced by her Cherokee heritage, even these two paintings that specifically address Native American histories are not identarian. Her paintings are complex representations of WalkingStick, her personal, and ancestral experience. That many of her works are diptychs, allows her to express complexities and two visions of one thing.

The complexity and abstract nature of WalkingStick’s landscapes though, do not detract from her central, powerful message: “This is our beloved land, no matter who walks here, no matter who “owns” it. This is our land. Recognize us and honor this land.”[187] By placing herself always in, always being the landscape, WalkingStick stakes a claim on the space. The Native American patterns and designs that frequently pop up in her works also stake claim on the spaces. One art critic describes the importance of her work, writing “Geology is witness to cultural memory. And then these designs are a way of

[186] Mark Wedel, “Kay WalkingStick rewrites the narrative of Native peoples through her artwork,” *Second Wave,* June 8, 2017, http://www.secondwavemedia.com/southwest-michigan/features/Kay-WalkingStick-rewrites-the-narrative-of-Native-peoples-through-her-artwork-0608.aspx.

[187] Kay WalkingStick, “Artist Statement.”

reasserting the fact that these are Native places that can't be separated from Native experience, history, and the history of this country." Indigenous people and their culture can never be separated from the land that was stolen from them. WalkingStick shows this not only in the paintings themselves, but how she creates them—her own intimate relationship to wilderness spaces and her love and awe at spending time there.[188]

WalkingStick's paintings are also an important practice of keeping Indigenous culture alive, contemporary, and relevant. Rather than simply preserving a static culture, her work makes clear that "Native people are part and parcel of our functioning world, our whole world, our nation. That we are here. That we are productive. And that we are speaking to others," she says. "We are part of the mainstream culture."[189] While white wilderness participates in making Indigenous people invisible relics of the past, her landscapes combine the celebration of tradition with contemporary art practices. WalkingStick shows Native Americans and Native American culture in a way that is complex, evolving, and alive—and her work also grapples with her identity not only as Indigenous, but also as a woman, and as a mixed-race person.

Other examples of challenging wilderness space

These two artists are just two of a multitude of possibilities for complicating wilderness discourse and art is just one medium of doing so. Organizations like Outdoor Afro and Indigenous Women Hike combine an appreciation for wilderness recreation with a critical view of the history of wilderness. The organization Outdoor Afro, creates community and opportunities for African Americans to engage in outdoor recreation and conservation movements with a clear focus on the needs, wants, and histories of black Americans in outdoor spaces. In an interview, the director of Outdoor Afro describes an activity the group often facilitates with people going hiking for the first time. The leader of the activity will ask the

[188] Kay WalkingStick, "Artist Statement."

[189] Menachem Wecker, " A Long Overdue Retrospective for Kay WalkingStick Dispels Native Art Stereotypes," *Smithsonian.com,* December 4, 2015, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/long-overdue-retrospective-kay-walkingstick-dispels-native-art-stereotypes-180957451/.

group what some of their favorite memories of being outdoors are, and for many African Americans, their closest memories of the outdoors are not the majestic mountains of wilderness, but family members' backyards, gardens, or barbequing in city parks. The organization makes a point to value all elements of the outdoors. A trip leader from Washington DC says, "It's important for us to remember that nature is really anything outdoors, it's not just these big spaces like Yosemite."[190] The organization simultaneously values the complex relationship between black Americans and the outdoors. One that includes violence and fear, but also community connection. At the same time, they work to grow access, safety, and comfort for African Americans in what have historically been white wilderness areas.

The idea that all nature is valuable nature, not just wilderness, is also a central feature of environmental justice organizing. This activist movement started in urban environments who were concerned with how environmental degradation most severely impacted poor communities of color. The movement is resolutely anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-capitalist making it a powerful force in not just redefining what is valuable nature (i.e. not just wilderness, but urban spaces, and human life), but also challenging corporations and governments to change their practices.

Another collective, Indigenous Women Hike, uses hiking as a practice of decolonization. Their website proclaims, "Decolonization is not a metaphor." Indigenous Women Hike is a group of Paiute women who are hiking ancestral trade routes as means of honoring their history and land, recognizing traumas, and reclaiming space. Their trip is closely tied to eight points of action that they hope to accomplish. A few of which are: "All people need to recognize the cultural significance of the land where they are recreating and respect the Paiute communities that host them," "There is unresolved collective and intergenerational historical trauma. (re)Connecting to our land is one method of healing for the mental and physical health in Paiute communities" and "All Paiute people should have access to

[190] Shereen Marisol Meraji, "Outdoor Afro: Busting Stereotypes That Black People Don't Hike Or Camp," *Code Switch, NPR,* July 12, 2015, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/07/12/421533481/outdoor-afro-busting-stereotypes-that-blacks-dont-hike-or-camp

celebrating their land by practicing outdoor sports that are considered privileged such as, but not limited to; climbing, hiking, etc."

Though the artists I discuss in this section are mostly contemporary, complex wilderness epistemologies and uses have existed over time. One example, is the Great Dismal Swamp of North Carolina, a remote, "uncivilized" wilderness area. Yet this space was transformed by a community of escaped slaves who lived harmoniously with Indigenous peoples of the region. By focusing attention on these examples along with the artists analyzed above and the everyday practices of diverse people in relations to wilderness spaces, I hope to offer a starting point for a way to intervene in white wilderness.

Conclusion

Feminists, scholars of color, and environmental justice activists have been at the forefront of understanding how knowledge production creates and upholds systems of oppression and exploitation. In this section I outline how feminists, artists, environmental justice activists, and ordinary people of color create alternative knowledges of natural spaces that present challenges to white wilderness. The two artists and few organizations I present here are just a beginning. The movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline in Standing Rock in 2016 and 2017 is just one example of how race radical wilderness is integral to environmental movements. This movement not only fought to prevent the construction of the pipeline for the conservation of pristine wilderness, but centered the history of settler colonialism and sacred Indigenous land. The Indigenous-led movement drew connections to global issues of Indigeneity and drew large numbers of Indigenous people from around North and South American to fight the pipeline alongside the Standing Rock Sioux. In this final section, I uplift these examples as an important way forward for environmental movements; movements that embrace multiple ways of knowing, celebrate complexities, and address interconnected systems of power.

CONCLUSION

This seed for this thesis was first planted when I read William Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness." The reading was one of those moments when something that has been tickling, bothering under the skin for some time suddenly made sense. The reading came, also, as I was grappling with understanding the racial dynamics of my hometown, Asheville, NC, a very white, very 'outdoorsy' place. Growing up I was surrounded by self-proclaimed hippies, liberals, artists, activists who flocked to the mountains to connect to nature. North Face and Patagonia were the brands of choice for those who could afford them. Wearing Chacos or going skiing on the weekends was a marker of coolness. Outdoor adventurers stormed the town every summer. Wilderness conservation was a popular belief system, proclaimed on bumper stickers that said "Preserve Our Mountains" or "Save the Hemlocks." At the same time, my high school had a fairly sizable population of students of color (around 33% in 2007, I believe). When I rode the bus home from school, we passed through the two isolated housing projects where most African American students lived. Yet, their presence was nearly absent from, erased from the culture of the town. In the surrounding rural mountain areas, outside the city, poverty plagued families who relied on farming for their income. If my parents took me hiking on the weekend, I rarely spotted a student of color from my school, I never saw the 'country' students who attended the rural county high schools. I might, though, witness a member of the Cherokee nation performing Indigeneity without a trace reference to the Trail of Tears, the contemporary reality of those living on the reservation. Cherokee was a popular wilderness destination, the performers and craft sellers just a part of the wilderness backdrop to be consumed by us white wilderness leisurers. The dominant outdoors, wilderness culture of the town seemed to erase the presence of poverty and racism, even while that culture boasted liberal multiculturalism. I began to see that outdoor leisure, camping, hiking, skiing, was not a universal experience.

When I began my Masters in Critical Ethnic Studies, the reasons why this bothered me became a little clearer. I re-read Cronon and realized that his analysis did not just apply to class and gender, but that race is intimately connected to wilderness too. My own stake, my own whiteness, led me to make

decisions about the scholars and artists I chose to include in this research. As I argue in Section Three, I believe in the importance of who and who knowledges are produce and as such I hope that this project is an opening for thinking about wilderness knowledges. I also wanted to leave the project on a note of hope, one that put the power to create discourse, to change and shape power structures, in the hands of Indigenous women, women of color, and any other person who has been slighted, excluded, discriminated against, or experienced the violence of white wilderness.

In the last three sections I have outlined the way that wilderness both produces and is produced by the racial power structures essential to racial capitalism in the United States. I have demonstrated that the concept of wilderness has evolved yet has consistently held the values of white, wealthy men, which may influence the way that wilderness is used today. I argued that attempts at multiculturalism in wilderness discourse have only further concealed the racialized power structures within it, rather than challenging them. Instead, I offer 'race radicalism' as an option for considering how we might reshape wilderness discourse to reflect diverse experiences and challenge hierarchies of racism.

Systems of exploitation, exclusion, violence, and discrimination are sustained through discourses that reinforce them. A strictly materialist approach does not encompass the power of discourse in circulating complex power relations, while a strictly cultural approach would not see the close relationship between discourse and the supremacy of racial capitalism, which favors profit for whites by exploiting people of color. I offer wilderness as just one place where white patriarchal supremacy has been upheld. As Roderick Nash points out in his book *Wilderness and the American Mind,* wilderness discourse was crucial to the founding of the United States, to its search for identity and exceptionalism, and as such it deserves analysis to understand how wilderness participated or justified settler colonial violence and exploitation and continues to erase violence and discrimination towards people of color and Indigenous people. Though I cannot argue a direct causal link, I believe that by looking at how white Americans defined wilderness and how that definition was universalized, we might have a greater insight into the ways that different racial groups interact with wilderness spaces today.

I believe that the implications of this project are manifold: the idea that wilderness is itself a social construct unsettles and de-naturalizes many assumptions we make about who and how wilderness space is used. In a time of ecological disaster (which includes damage to human life), these implications are particularly important. How does conservation maintain wilderness in a way that does not challenge capitalism? How does it exclude, or marginalize certain people and prevent them from wanting to engage in a movement against climate change? Or even, how does it advocate for a movement that is exclusive and hierarchical, monolithic and based in white ways of knowing? My goal is to unsettle the hierarchy of natural spaces that white wilderness has helped promote. Environmental movements that use only a white wilderness discourse privileges protecting natural spaces like Yosemite or Joshua Tree over, for example, the Chicago river or your neighborhood park. Privileging these spaces also means prioritizing futurity for those who have access to white wilderness over those who do not.

Understanding humans' relationship to natural spaces seems to me more urgent than ever as we face new predictions of imminent climate disaster. Wilderness plays a role in this in many ways--It reveals the intimate relationship between capitalism, racism, settler colonialism and other forms of structural oppression. As Americans, and people around the world, organize to limit climate disaster, this organizing cannot be done in isolation. An end to environmental destruction must also be an end to white supremacy and racial capitalism. A multicultural approach to conservation, will not challenge the core structures that enable exploitation of people and the environment.

I leave this project with many gaps. This small analysis of wilderness is closely focused on the history of the United States but could and should be applied transnationally. Because I focused on three different elements--history, debunking multicultural wilderness, and race radical knowledges of wilderness--my history section itself is extremely brief. This particular history focuses mostly on settler colonialism and Indigenous history, but an equally robust history could be written about African American relationships to natural spaces, Chinese American, Mexican American, queer, or disabled relationships. Similarly, this paper focuses on how whiteness operates, but does not address the complex

ways, for example, slavery and settler colonialism, anti-black and anti-indigenous logics interacted with each other and well as with land and wilderness.

Finally, it is my hope that Section Three provides a small starting point for considering other race radical ways of knowing wilderness. As I discuss, art and culture are just two small ways in which wilderness knowledges can be produced, challenge whiteness. I leave this project as a starting point for both the production of new knowledges, but also a call to listen and uplift the many race radical knowledges that are already being produced, created, and practiced.

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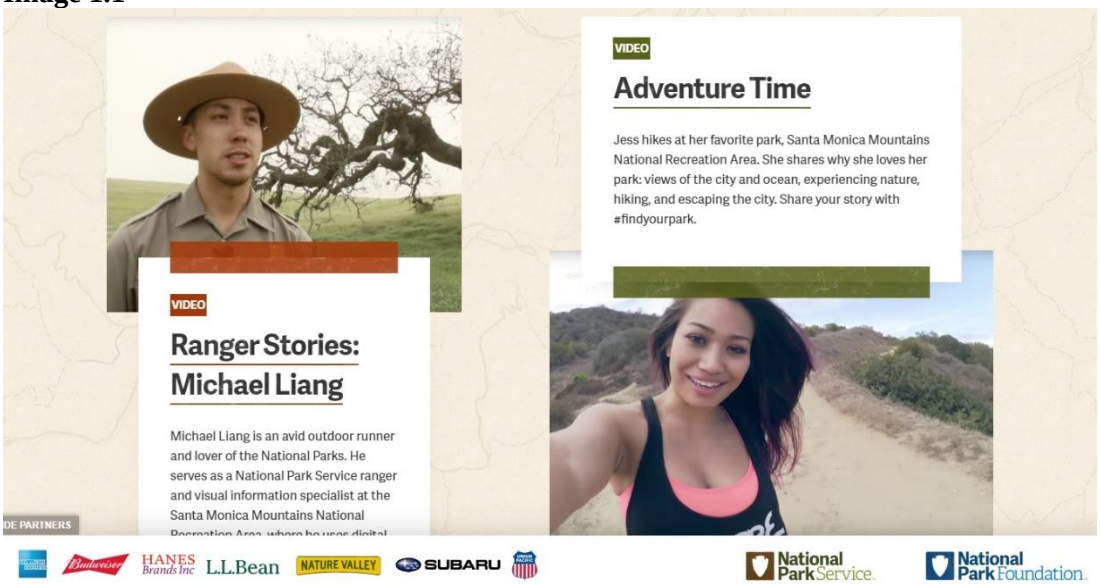
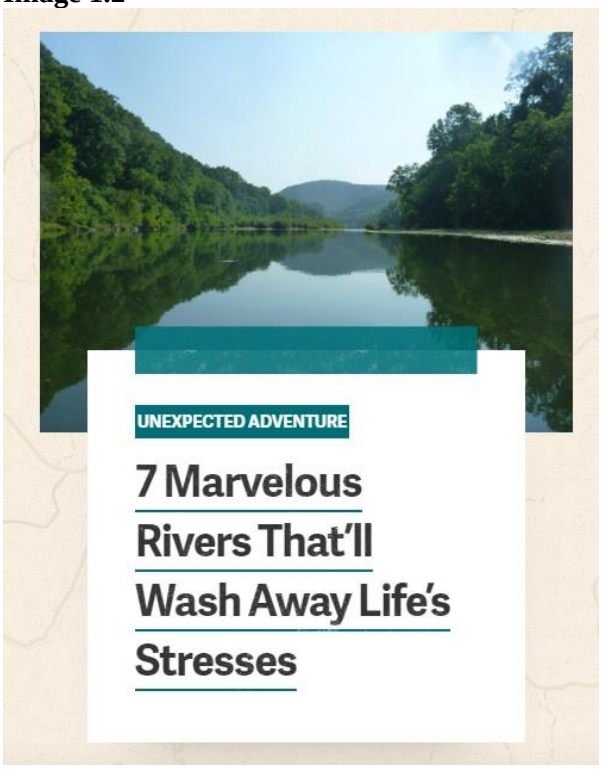
APPENDIX 1

Image 1.1



"Stories," Find Your Park, National Parks Foundation. Findyourpark.com

Image 1.2



"Experiences," Find Your Park, National Parks Foundation. Findyourpark.com

Image 1.3

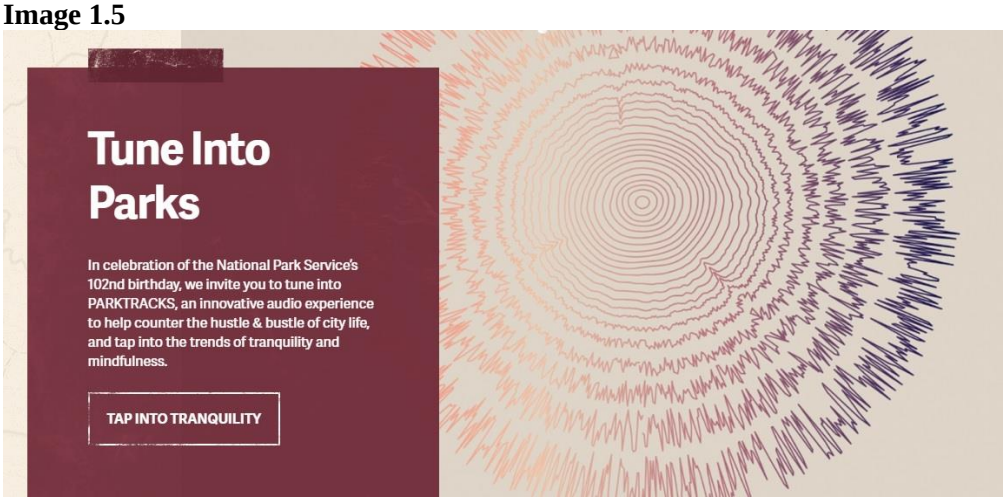
Albert Bierstadt “Kerns River Valley,” 1871

“Finding your way” #FindYourPark, 2016

Image 1.4

“Home Page,” Find Your Park, National Parks Foundation. Findyourpark.com

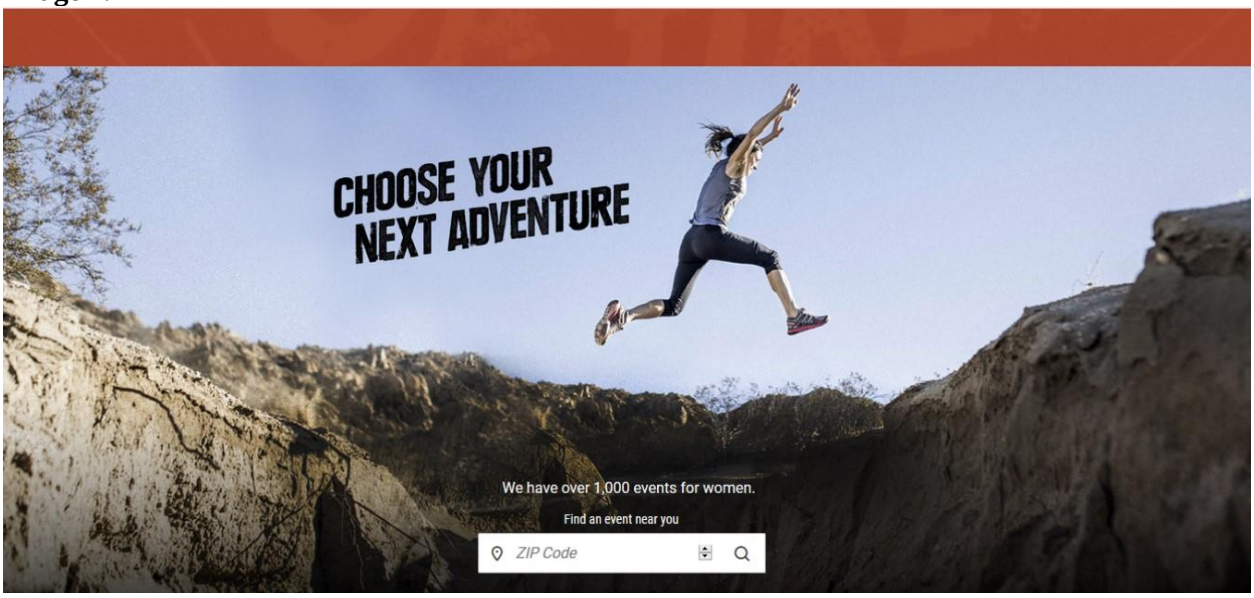
Image 1.5



“Home Page,” Find Your Park, National Parks Foundation. Findyourpark.com

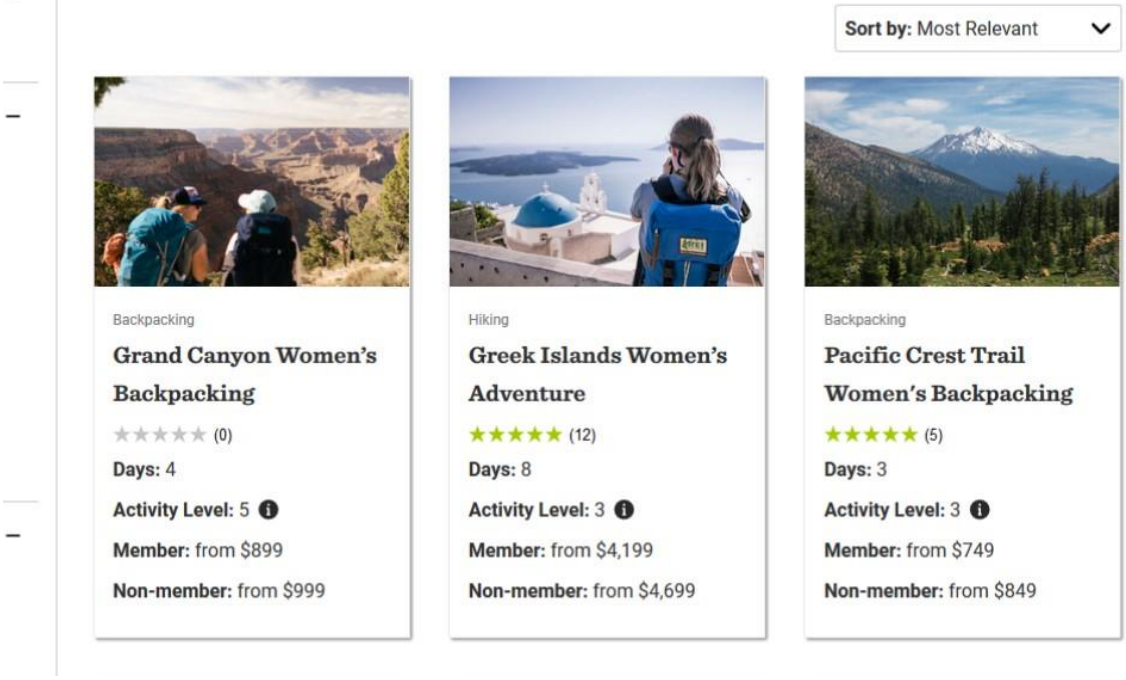
APPENDIX 2

Image 2.1



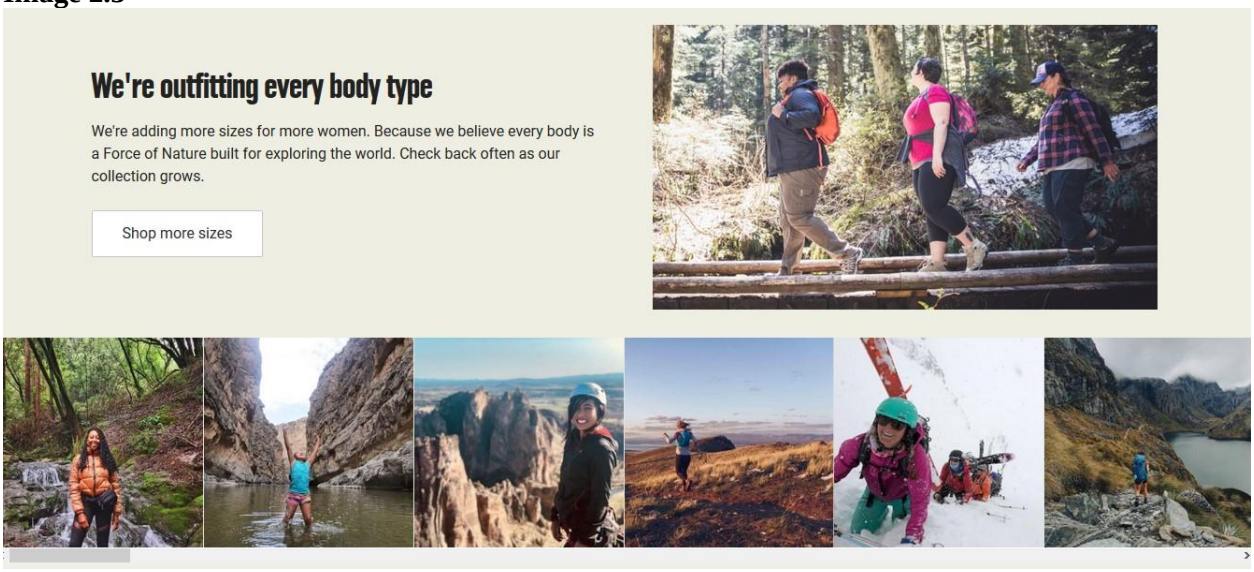
"Force of Nature," REI, https://www.rei.com/h/force-of-nature.

Image 2.2



"Women's Trips," REI, https://www.rei.com/adventures/t/womens.

Image 2.3



"Force of Nature," REI, https://www.rei.com/h/force-of-nature.

APPENDIX 3

Image 3.1:

Lee, Central Park, 2015

Image 3.2:

Sade, Harlem, 2013

Image 3.3:

Salome, Brooklyn Botanical Garden

Image 3.4:

Ryan, Prospect Park, 2014

APPENDIX 4

Image 4.1

New Mexico Desert, 2011

Image 4.2

The Four Directions: Stillness, 1994

Image 4.3

The Abyss, 1989

Image 4.4

Blame the Mountains III, 1998

Image 4.5

Farewell to the Smokies, 2007

Image 4.6

Chief Joseph Series, 1974-76