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Race and Environment: Rhetoric of the Early Environmental Movement

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Abstract

Prior research emphasizes the influence of Eurocentric, Western discourses in the creation of federal environmental policy and national parks. Through a discourse analysis, this study seeks to investigate the influences of John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and Western, Christian rhetoric within the Congressional debate around the creation of national parks and environmental efforts. This analysis seeks to trace the dominance of Eurocentric discourses in environmentalism and to unearth indigenous actors' perspectives and arguments. Future research must seek to investigate and amplify indigenous history and perspectives to recover subjugated discourses in environmentalist efforts.

Key Words

International Relations, Racial Discourse, Environmental Policy, Native American History, Discourse Analysis, Poststructuralism, Postcolonialism, Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, Sierra Club, National Parks Service.

I. Introduction

National parks are a cornerstone of American culture, society, and the environmental movement. From endangered species protections to monument management, the Department of the Interior and the National Parks Service aim to protect American natural and cultural resources for the historical record and the enjoyment and education of citizens. Yet, at the onset of the environmental movement at the turn of the twentieth century, white activists, legislators, and scholars dominated the dialogue around how to properly conserve and preserve the wilderness. The perpetuation of white settlers' historical perspectives and knowledge actively subjugates and undermines indigenous experiences and histories from the discourse of environmentalism, and land management.

John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt are two of the most prominent actors in the rise of the early environmental movement in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. They demonstrate the idealization of Western landscapes through religious connotations. However, Muir and Roosevelt also emphasize Christian allusions and racial distinctions between white and indigenous people actors. They uphold and promote notions of American society and progression that favor Western, white actors. The prominence of these Eurocentric discourses within the environmental movement, and amongst environmental actors, actively subjugates, diminishes, and dehumanizes indigenous actors. Muir and Roosevelt elevate a discourse of environmentalism that actively excludes indigenous actors, and that effectively removes indigenous knowledge and perspectives from American environmental history. This erodes indigenous sovereignty land, and it eradicates indigenous culture and existence from the landscape. Congress actively diminished indigenous history and sovereignty within the debates of federal national parks and environmental policies.

White Americans perpetuate the myth of a virgin, pristine frontier which removes indigenous culture and ancestry from the landscape, and which upholds Christian, Western ideals in the expansion of America. This allows white Americans to subjugate indigenous actors and knowledge within the discourse of expansion and conservation, and to delegitimize indigenous sovereignty and agency. The mobilization of Western, Christian rhetoric in the early environmental movement enabled white settlers to exclude indigenous history and actors from foundational conservation and preservation efforts, and pose indigenous actors, knowledge, and history as a threat to Western civilization. Eurocentric discourse in the early environmental movement seeks to illegitimate indigenous sovereignty and agency, and it aims to erase indigenous culture, knowledge, and experiences from the environmental history of the United States.

II. Literature Review

Civilization and Race

Intellectuals theorize on the emergence of racial differences, and their connection to civilization and development. Hobson (2012) outlines the rise of defensive and offensive racism which scholars mobilized to justify settler colonialism in the late eighteenth century. Defensive and offensive racism emerged in 1760, and they were prominent theories until about 1914 (Hobson 2012, 314). Hobson (2012, 8) notes that “defensive racism is the belief that the white race must avoid coming into contact with the non-white races for fear of racial contamination (especially through miscegenation or blood-mixing).” Defensive racists argue that non-white individuals corrupt the racial purity of white individuals, so people of color threaten white bloodlines (Hobson 2012, 8). Defensive racism assumes that each race has “natural development trajectories,” so intermarriage and miscegenation would disrupt racial development (Hobson 2012, 317). Defensive racists emphasize racial segregation for white individuals’ protection which amplifies arguments of white supremacy and domination compared to other races, and the need to maintain racial purity.

While defensive racism asserts that societies must segregate people of color and white individuals, liberal paternalism argues that white individuals must civilize non-white groups (Hobson 2012, 314). Liberal paternalism establishes that non-Western, non-white individuals may ascend to the same level of civility as white individuals through white individuals’ assistance and education. Hobson (2012, 285) reports how ““progressive humanitarian intervention was subverted by a racist-imperialist discourse in the nineteenth century. Intellectuals believed that non-white individuals may progress to a civilized state of development through white individuals’ aid and education (Hobson 2012, 285). Liberal paternalism argues

that people of color and non-Western societies were civilizationally inferior to the West, but white individuals have the capacity to civilize people of color out of barbarism and savagery (Hobson 2012, 285).

While liberal paternalism underscores civilizing missions, offensive racism presents an imperial and explicitly violent argument for white supremacy. White individuals claim that they face a “direct threat to white civilization” from non-white individuals (Hobson 2012, 9). Other intellectuals also argue that non-white individuals hold “very little agency,” so this validates the “noble mission in spreading civilization across the global frontier” (Hobson 2012, 9). Offensive racists perceive people of color as a threat to white civilizations (Hobson 2012, 9). Therefore, white individuals must actively subjugate, and even take violence against, non-white individuals (Hobson 2012, 9). One strand of offensive racism asserts that non-white individuals, particularly Asian individuals, threaten white civilization (Hobson 2012, 108). Meanwhile, other offensive racists argue that imperialism and globalization offer opportunities for “racial exterminism” against non-white individuals, for they believe that people of color do not have enough agency to develop (Hobson 2012, 110). At the end of the nineteenth century, the predominant theory was offensive racism, in which white individuals perceived non-white groups as threats to the survival of the white race.

Offensive racism enables the rise of violence against people of color, for it articulates that non-white individuals threaten the survival of white individuals. Theodore Roosevelt claims that “only through an acceptance of the necessity of inflicting unremitting violence against savage races can human progress be assured” (Barder 2021, 90). Offensive racists argue that non-white individuals present an obstacle to the progression and sustenance of white civilization. Roosevelt’s beliefs reflect the wider recognition that “there was nothing inherently inevitable in

the continued supremacy of the white American-European races” (Barder 2021, 90). While defensive racism aims to preserve white civilization and racial purity, offensive racism validates violent actions against people of color, and the forceful displacement of individuals (Barder 2021, 90). This aligns with Hobson’s (2012) discussion which emphasizes offensive racists’ and defensive racists’ anxiety about the loss of white racial superiority, and the perception of an existential threat from non-white individuals. Offensive racism demonstrates how fears of subversion within white settlements drive violence against non-white individuals and goals to eradicate and erase people of color’s cultures, knowledge, and history.

Climate Impacts Race

In the late eighteenth century, scientific discoveries in biology and speciation drove interest in acclimatization and climatic studies. While first explored in studies of flora and fauna, this dialogue extended into theories on human development and geography. The rise of the “travel-account genre” drove interest in climatic studies as the wealthy elite of European states traveled to regions and observed new cultures and societies, and scholars and colonial administrators also recorded their travels (Grove 1995, 162). Within the records and colonial debates, Grove (1995, 161, 162, 164) discusses how scientists recorded that climate impacted the development of species. As a result, intellectuals claimed certain climates would degenerate individuals’ moral qualities. Grove (1995, 162). With the rise of documentation of the new terrain, theories emerged to rationalize white domination against non-white individuals through climatic and scientific differences.

Concerns about white individuals’ survival in colonies and settlements generated a hierarchy of civilization and morality. In the colonial tropics, Europeans believed that they “were at persistent risk from inter-racial liaisons and other morally corrupting associations”

(Livingstone 1999, 103). White colonists were insecure in territories where non-white individuals lived, and this insecurity manifests in scientific racist arguments that warmer climates can drive biological inferiority. Hobson (2012, 8) emphasizes how defensive racists resent miscegenation as a result of “fear of racial contamination.” As Bankoff (2011) similarly establishes, European colonists deduced that people from more tropical climates, which presented unknown conditions for colonists, curated undesirable racial characteristics. Thus, the colonists believed that indigenous individuals were barbaric, savage, or uncivilized as a result of biological inferiority, compared to the development of white actors in temperate climates (Bankoff 2011). The segregation of individuals, tied to climate and dangerous conditions, contributed to a wider discussion of who was included within the ideal of civilization.

Within colonial administrations in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, theories emerged to justify white domination and the subjugation of non-white individuals in tropical climates. Monogenist theories asserted that all people emerged from the same place, and then relocated to new climates (Tambe, 2011, 115). As a result, people in sub-equatorial and equatorial climates experienced greater degeneration, as a result of the languid heat and warm temperatures, than people in temperate climates (Tambe, 2011, 115). This theory aligns with Lamarckianism, which discusses how climate can alter racial differences relatively quickly, and that they can change within generations (Hobson 2012, 7). Hobson (2012, 7) articulates how Lamarckianism emphasizes that “racial characteristics are not fixed and immutable, but can change, evolve, and not infrequently progress over time.” Under these theories, white individuals in tropical climates could degenerate in the tropical colonies, for the new climate could impact their biological characteristics. This established that climate was

imperative to how people evolved, and their productive capabilities. Therefore, race and developmental capabilities were not fixed.

As theories amplified the belief that race and racial development were malleable, civilizational policies in the United States utilized religion to attempt to “civilize” indigenous individuals. Calloway (2019, 246) notes how “Americans sought to eradicate the Indians’ way of life at the same time as they took away their lands,” and how this included missionaries and the spread of Christianity in Indian country. White settlers paternalistically believed they could force indigenous individuals to Westernize and to appear “civilized” according to Eurocentric standards. Calloway (2019, 249) continues that, “missionaries and other groups in American society believed that it was their duty to ‘civilize’ the Indians by destroying their traditions and culture and transforming them into Christians.” In the early nineteenth century, the United States enforced policies that assumed that indigenous people *could* assimilate into Western civilization. Thus, white settlers and the American government placed importance on the unfixed civilization differences between indigenous and white people.

In the mid-nineteenth century, theories about development related to race evolved. Polygenist theories argue people developed in different climates, which establishes that climate would not have generational impacts on racial characteristics (Tambe, 2011, 116). In the mid-nineteenth century, scientists and geographers started to recognize race as a more static characteristic relative to climate (Tambe, 2011, 116). Darwin’s research demonstrated that racial changes were possible only after *millennia* (Tambe 2011, 2015). Yet, Darwin’s conceptions about evolution and speciation drove the conception that indigenous people and white settlers were two “distinct” civilizations that “could not coexist” as a result of static, racial differences (Grove 1989, 184; Bard 2021, 82). White individuals did not fear domination, white settler colonists

feared their survival in the tropical regions (Grove 1989, 184). Theorists asserted that white civilization and race may only progress through the clear subjugation of people of color (Bard 2021, 81). Through the nineteenth century, the paternalistic, civilizational policy framework of expansion moved clearly towards offensive racism that sought to eradicate indigenous societies and cultures to protect a white, Christian, and Western notion of civilization.

Religion in Environmentalism

Christianity was a fundamental notion in the idealization of white, Western civilization. In the mid-eighteenth century, colonization in the tropics heightened the conception that land was paradisaical and godly, and that it was something to protect. Grove (1989, 201) applies the argument that Mauritius was a “physical and social paradise, and one which, climatically, enjoyed a ‘perpetual spring’ – the term used by Dante to describe the island of ‘earthly paradise.’” Environmentalism evokes religious symbolism that ascribes a level of purity to land and wilderness (Nelson 2003, 68). Nelson (2003, 68) further refers to environmentalism as appealing to “the fall of mankind from a previous, happier, and more natural and innocent time.” Environmentalists’ appeal to a sense of purity and innocence captures an allusion to the paradisaical elements of the Garden of Eden in the Book of Genesis, and Eve’s purity before she sinned (Nelson 2003, 68). Environmentalists idealized a masculine savior to the wilderness, and the return to an untouched, virgin landscape (Nelson 2003, 68).

The religiosity of the environmental movement, and the calls to return to a virgin, untouched wilderness, destabilizes indigenous sovereignty and history within the landscape. Grove (1995, 233) notes how there was “a wider attempt to rebuild a ‘virtuous’ or ‘natural’ society by restoring and elevating its suppressed and innate ‘wild’ elements.” Christian religiosity was fundamental to the early environmental movement, and how white Christians

attempted to rebuild a virgin, Edenic landscape (Grove, 1995, 233). Yet, Dina Gilio-Whitaker (2019), a Colville tribe member, and an indigenous and environmental scholar, underscores how a virgin, untouched landscape did not originally exist. Gilio-Whitaker (2019) highlights how “this logic completely evades the fact of ancient Indigenous habitation and cultural use of such a place.” The movement removes the importance of how indigenous people utilized and engaged with the landscapes before the arrival of white settlers (Gilio-Whitaker 2019). Only white, Christians’ ideals of land usage were valuable and legitimate, and it subjugates indigenous experiences and knowledge. The environmental movement sought to erode and delegitimize indigenous sovereignty.

The idealization of land and wilderness removed traditional knowledge and indigenous actors. Merchant (2003, 382) captures how thinkers, such as the American naturalist John Muir, called for the creation of a “pristine” landscape, which invokes the sense of “edenic” natural landscapes. Dorsey and Harlow (2003, 63) note how “the Puritan narrative consecrated the journey into the wilderness, distinguishing America as a chosen nation with a divine purpose.” Muir’s use of Biblical themes upholds the idealization of white, Christian societies within expansionism and environmentalism (Merchant 2003, 382). Muir’s appeals to a virgin, Edenic landscape upholds the advances in the idea that there were no sophisticated societies that existed before the arrival of white settlers (Gilio-Whitaker 2019). Christian arguments for environmentalism amplify the supremacy of white individuals as it appeals to white, Christian values. The advancement of Christianity in the environmental movement underlines how, in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Eurocentric discourses underscore the need to protect and preserve white civilization from degradation.

In the mid-nineteenth century, offensive racism dominated expansionism. Scholars note how naturalists, particularly John Muir's works, excluded indigenous knowledge and participation in environmental preservation efforts. Muir's "theocratic ethic, which was grounded in God manifested within nature, did not explicitly include the entire human community" (Merchant 2003, 387). Muir's attention to Christianity excluded people of color and indigenous people from his framework of which individuals could engage in conservation efforts, and which individuals were civilized enough to engage in that work (Merchant 2003, 387). Muir did not suggest violence against indigenous individuals, yet he devalued their knowledge relative to white, Christian civilization (Merchant 2003, 387). The attention to Christianity and Western norms facilitates the erasure of traditional knowledge as valuable, and it imbues the formation of environmentalism with greater attention to white, Western conceptions of nature and wilderness.

As a result of white, Christian environmentalism, Americans subjugated indigenous knowledge, cultures, and lives to propagate Westernized conceptions of conservation and land management. Pesse (2018, 116) emphasizes how the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 codified, "made any traditional practice of using nature to maintain a healthy ecosystem not only false, but federally illegal." The early emergence of naturalist discourse and discussions on National Parks implemented white lawmakers' ideals and policies for conservation, and this undergirded the hierarchy of knowledge within racial domination (Pesse 2018, 116). The emphasis on Christian values for preservation, as well as the scientific and civilizational subjugation of people of color, enabled the exclusion of people of color from the environmental movement. This highlights the paternalistic framework of civilizing individuals to eventually be capable enough to utilize the land properly.

National Park Creation

The creation of national parks demonstrates how environmental efforts excluded indigenous knowledge and individuals through ideals rooted in Western society, Christianity, and white domination. Kashwan et al. (2021, 6) note how British colonial law “instituted game laws prohibiting subsistence hunting of small game while allowing trophy hunting for white Americans and Europeans, a practice that continues to this day.” Restrictions of indigenous practices and the enclosure of land disproportionately favored colonial interests, and it diminished the agency of indigenous tribes. The “national parks and wilderness areas were set aside for the benefit of white American tourists,” however, “by redefining wilderness as the polar opposite of civilization, wilderness in its ideal form could be viewed as free of people, while civilization by contrast was filled with people” (Merchant 2003, 381) As the environmental movement constructs the appeal to a virgin landscape, a paradisaal state before the sins of modernity and industrialization, it erases the sophisticated indigenous civilizations which existed before the arrival of white settlers (Merchant 2003, 381). The prominence of Christianity and the absence of indigenous actors and history highlights the importance of white, Western individuals within the conservation movement.

The creation of national parks spurs ideologies of the valuation of individuals’ treatment of the land in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Spence (1996a, 36) discusses how “tourists and park managers believed that only citizens of an emerging world power could experience the mountains with appropriate awe and reverence.” White settlers asserted that indigenous people were not civilized enough to recognize the importance of the landscapes that they inhabited. Spence (1996a, 36) notes how “only citizens of an emerging world power” could utilize the landscape properly, and it insinuates that citizens of the land were Christian and white. White settlers advanced racial and civilizational arguments to remove indigenous people from land, and

to impose white, Western policies on the land. Yet, “nearly all parks and other so-called ‘wilderness’ are also the ancestral homelands of native and indigenous peoples, many of whom were forced off their lands through colonial conquests” (Kashwan et al. 2021, 6). Therefore, the environmental movement fabricated the existence of an untouched, virgin landscape before industrialization (Kashwan et al. 2021, 6). White settlers undermined and subjugated indigenous knowledge and practices which demonstrates the hierarchical valuation of white and indigenous people.

The creation of national parks in the West captures a shift in how the American government and white settlers perceive indigenous actors. Before 1890, Spence (1996a, 39) discusses how under state control, indigenous people coexisted in Yosemite Park with the white tourists, and the park did not implement the “removal or restriction of the Yosemite Indians.” In the mid-nineteenth century, white artists and naturalists believed that indigenous people, “complemented or completed a wilderness scene,” and there is a “romantic hyperbole” that thinkers employ to describe the intrigue of indigenous people in Yosemite (Spence 1996a, 35, 36). However, when Yosemite fell under federal control, the government amplified concerns that the presence of the indigenous people presented a threat to white individuals, and the state and federal governments questioned why the Yosemite would not leave (Spence 1996a, 38, 40). In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, there was a growing shift in which white actors perceived indigenous people, knowledge, and culture as a threat to Western, Christian civilization.

Indigenous people faced exclusion throughout the creation of national parks, and groups faced removal, restrictions to access land, and exploitation. A petition written on behalf of the Yosemite Tribe in the late 1880s called for compensation for the degradation of their society through the presence of the white settlers; however, this petition was not included in the

Congressional debate about Yosemite as a federal park (Spence 1996a, 42, 43). In the creation of Glacier Park Act in 1910, the government restricted the hunting grounds of the Blackfeet nation, yet presented the individuals on the grounds as “living museum specimens” for the enjoyment of the tourists (Spence 1996a, 45). The duality of the exclusion of indigenous peoples’ use of the resources, yet their exploitation in particular events or promotions for the parks, persisted in Yosemite National Park in the early twentieth century (Spence 1996a, 46). Spence (1996a) provides an influential analysis and a study of how indigenous people sought to resist their removal from their ancestral homelands, yet the power and dominance of the United States to enact policies that excluded and subjugated indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and values.

As the creation of national parks explicitly dismissed indigenous knowledge and histories, it also indicates the attention to civilization within the environmental movement. Grove (1989, 183) notes how, “a language of moral disapprobation... was used to condemn the activities of Africans and used to justify the forest reserve as a tool for their expulsion from land” (Grove 1989, 183). Arguments emerged which condemned the actions of indigenous individuals in English colonies in Africa (Grove 1989, 183). This showcases arguments in which white individuals held greater civility and intellect, rooted in scientific reasoning, and thus white individuals should control the landholdings. The expulsion of indigenous individuals from territories is ethnocidal, yet it also promotes the ideology that indigenous people are “villainous” and that they lack the knowledge to adequately preserve and conserve the environment (Colchester 2000, 1365, 1366). As scholars embedded conservation and preservation of land, and expansionism, into the ideals of Western societies, white settlers believed that indigenous groups posed a potential threat to white settlers’ survival *and* their civilization.

American Conservation Movement and Theodore Roosevelt

White individuals in the American environmental movement in the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century perpetuated the notion that white Americans were more civilized, and more equipped, to conserve and preserve the wilderness on the Western frontier than indigenous people. Dorsey and Harlow (2003, 63) exemplify how President Theodore Roosevelt curated the myth of a virgin American wilderness; Roosevelt wanted white Americans to dominate and conquer the wilderness, and the individuals within it. Offensive racist dialogue was persistent in American environmentalism within the mid-to-late nineteenth century, for it asserts that white settlers must master indigenous individuals. As a result, Roosevelt, “lived outside the cash nexus, in a pre-capitalist Eden; yet he made the woods safe for bourgeois society by killing or removing the Indians” (Slotkin 1981, 612, 613). Roosevelt perpetuated the Eurocentric and offensively racist discourse that white settlers must dominate the western wilderness, as well as the indigenous people within the landscape (Slotkin 1981, 612, 613).

Roosevelt’s Myth of the Frontier accentuates the religiosity of expansionism and conservation. Puritans’ rhetoric in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries believed that their missions into North American territory paralleled the “Israelites’ struggles to reach their promised land” (Dorsey and Harlow 2003, 63). The Myth of the Frontier contained a similar religiosity that articulates the supremacy of white, Christian settlers in the U.S. (Dorsey and Harlow 2003, 63). As environmentalists and expansionists invoked civilizational discourse in the Frontier Myth, they accentuated the importance and dominance of white Christian societies over indigenous individuals. Dorsey and Harlow (2003, 63) note that “the Puritan narrative consecrated the settlers’ journey into the wilderness, distinguishing America as a chosen nation with a divine purpose.” Roosevelt crafted an exclusionary perception of pioneering and

conservationism work which amplifies the mystic notion of the wilderness, yet violence against indigenous peoples (Dorsey and Harlow 2003, 63).

As Roosevelt created a notion of an Edenic wilderness fit for white settlers, he expanded upon the existing theorizations that utilized science to validate racial hierarchies and domination. Dorsey and Harlow (2003, 63) discuss how, alongside Roosevelt's conceptions of environmental protections, Roosevelt argues that racial violence was necessary to preserve white civilization (Slotkin 1981, 621). Racial violence was fundamental and intentional in the expansion of the United States. Barder (2021, 73) notes how Slotkin's theory classifies this as "the sublimation of class conflict into racial extermination and the expansion of the 'frontier.'" Roosevelt's aim to expand into the Western frontier, and to master it with masculinity, was a function of his arguments that American expansionism was an integral component of America (Barder 2021, 86, 90). This establishes the United States as a white country, and therefore the preservation of the environment and natural resources was for the benefit, enjoyment, and use of white settler society (Barder 2021, 86, 90). Roosevelt heightened the discourse of white, Christian men in environmentalism.

Roosevelt supports the process of "civilizing" indigenous people to eradicate indigenous cultures. Wertheim (2009, 500) highlights the importance that Roosevelt ascribes to white individuals civilizing other racial groups. Roosevelt viewed wars against non-white individuals who refused to attempt to assimilate as fundamental to American expansionism and the preservation of white civilization and the white race (Wertheim 2009, 498). Roosevelt "indulged in an unmitigated white racial triumphalism which... denied non-white racial agency" (Hobson 2012, 315). Roosevelt eroded indigenous actors' humanity and personhood through his policies and rhetoric (Hobson (2012, 315). Wertheim (2009, 500) notes how Roosevelt argued that "for

the lowest races, perpetual subjugation, if not extermination, was the only way to bring civilization to their lands.” A fear of non-white individuals drove the desire to dominate people of color. Within discussions of expansion, environmentalism, and land use, Roosevelt subjugates people of color and indigenous peoples, and he makes exclusionary boundaries between indigenous actors and American society (Wertheim 2009, 500). Roosevelt effectively establishes how white environmentalists sought to conserve and preserve land for white Americans and for the advancement of white civilization (Wertheim 2009, 500).

III. Theory

Poststructuralism

To further engage with the establishment of dominant environmental discourses at the turn of the century, and the exclusionary bounds between white actors and indigenous actors, Poststructuralism provides a useful lens to analyze white settlers’ rhetoric and the subjugation of indigenous voices. Poststructuralists discuss how knowledge and ideas shape the world and individuals’ sense of identity and self. Poststructuralists investigate “the social and cultural construction of the various structures that give meaning to our everyday lives” (Campbell and Bleiker 2016, 204). Knowledge structures the world, individuals’ perceptions of the world, and the other individuals they interact with, so “language is central to the constitution of social life” (Campbell and Bleiker 2016, 207). As knowledge can govern how individuals recognize and understand the world, the dissemination of knowledge shapes societal bounds of thought and power in which certain individuals and ideas are included and accepted, and others are not (Campbell and Bleiker 2016, 207). The spread of knowledge between actors, as well as how “socio-cultural structures” reinterpret and diffuse knowledge, enables the dominance of particular discourse as particular actors effectively harness particular rhetorical commonplaces

and symbols (Campbell and Bleiker 2016, 207). Knowledge and ideas constitute individuals, as well as the structures which they interact within. Therefore, as actors mobilize particular rhetoric and language to advance certain knowledge, this allows for the domination of a certain discourse.

Poststructuralism demonstrates how knowledge and ideas constitute actors and the structures which actors exist within. Discourse between actors is extremely important. Communication between individuals, in the form of particular rhetoric, word choice, or symbols, can create bounds of behavior and expectations that create a system of knowledge that renders certain practices possible and acceptable (Campbell and Bleiker 2016, 208). Foucault (1980, 93) writes, “relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse.” Foucault (1980, 93) establishes how discourse constitutes the structures that actors exist within, and the existence of the structures makes certain discourse possible. Power structures what is considered within the bounds of possibility; actors reinforce the structures through particular accepted rhetoric and language (Foucault 1980, 93). As actors mobilize particular symbols and language, they redefine the bounds of who they are within the society relative to the other actors.

Discourse is an instrument for the dissemination of knowledge through a society, and discourse shapes individuals and how they recognize themselves within society. Discourse between actors is a system of knowledge that produces the parameters of individuals’ identity, for the rhetoric and symbols actors mobilize produces hierarchical relations between actors enabling the exclusion of particular knowledge and identities (Campbell and Bleiker 2016, 209). Foucault (1980, 92) writes of the “domination-repression” mode of “analysis of power,” in which there is “struggle and submission” of two discourses where one discourse subjugates the other. Poststructuralism emphasizes how particular ideas, knowledge, or ideals are “excluded,” and

“particular events, problems, and actors... are thereby understood as constituted by an order always dependent upon the marginalization and exclusion of other identities and histories.”

(Campbell and Bleiker 2016, 208). An actor’s ability to mobilize particular rhetorical commonplaces influences their capacity to build a more dominant discourse and to gain power within the society through policy.

Through the importance of systems of knowledge and discourse, Poststructuralists emphasize the role of social boundaries and the subjugation of knowledge. Foucault (1980, 82) asserts that subjugated knowledge is not recognized as acceptable within the dominant discourse, and it is suppressed within society. Foucault (1980, 83) conducts “genealogical research,” and a study of the emergence of particular discourses, and how actors deploy particular language and rhetoric to advance certain ideas that amplify their discourse, and which thus subjugate others’ ideas. Power interacts with the dissemination of knowledge; the use of particular symbols and rhetoric enables actors to gain power within the hierarchy of knowledge if they align with the dominant discourse (Foucault 1980, 83). Actors can establish the boundaries of themselves compared to other actors

Jackson (2006) discusses relationalism, an offshoot of Poststructuralism, which underscores how rhetorical commonplaces are imperative to generate acceptable social boundaries. Relationalists demonstrate the importance of discourse, and how it allows for subjugation and domination of knowledge and ideas within a state. Relationalism provides key insights into how actors can mobilize certain rhetorical commonplaces in their discourse to render some social actions, behaviors, ideas, and identities acceptable, and others unacceptable (Jackson 2006). It establishes how the social boundaries of a state are malleable through language and rhetoric, and that discourse generates a system of knowledge that determines what

is possible for an actor's identity. This theory provides a foundation for the discussion of race and environment in the late nineteenth century, and the intersections of racial discourse and conservation.

Postcolonialism

Poststructuralism is a useful lens to investigate the Environmental movement as it demonstrates how language and discourse constitute actors, and it constructs structures which actors exist within, and reinforce, through their actions (Campbell and Bleiker 2016, 209, 210). Postcolonial frameworks articulate how discourse and knowledge generate bounds of civilizations, and how racism enables the creation of different civilizations. The West generates an idea of the "Orient," a foreign Asian entity (Said 1978, 57). Eurocentric discourses underline how "Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant... it is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator" (Said 1978, 57). Said (1978 2,3) captures how Western individuals created the division between the Orient, Asia, against the Occident, Europe and the West. Western actors define themselves in terms opposite to Asia. Postcolonialism highlights how Western actors deployed racial distinctions and demarcations to build differences and hierarchies between racial groups and perceived 'civilizations.' As Orientalism constructs what is acceptable within the Occident, it generates a civilizational and racial separation (Said 1978 2, 3). Postcolonialism focuses on the establishment of boundaries and divisions rooted in race and civilizational perceptions of actors.

Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism, and the Environmental Movement

I utilize Poststructuralist and Postcolonial frameworks to understand the use of Christian ideals within environmental rhetoric in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and how this informed the romanticism of nature with Biblical allusions. White settlers forcibly removed Native

Americans from their ancestral lands in the early nineteenth century (Calloway 2019, 249). By the mid-nineteenth century, white settlers claimed that indigenous Americans' cultures, knowledge, and ideas could not exist within a Western, Eurocentric American civilization (Bard 2021, 81). Offensive racism in the mid-to-late nineteenth century facilitated the eradication and extermination of indigenous individuals, culture, personhood, and sovereignty.

Throughout the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, white settlers asserted the notion that indigenous culture could not coexist with Western society (Bard 2021, 71, 79, 81). White settlers did not believe that indigenous people could civilize to the same teleology as white individuals (Bard 2021, 71, 79, 81). In the Environmental movement, the American naturalist John Muir deploys Christian, religious and romantic prose that compares nature in the United States to Christian ideals, and which explicitly removes indigenous people from a perceived "pristine" landscape. The use of these symbols and language generates Eurocentric boundaries of who is included within the Environmental movement and American culture. Muir romanticizes the West and imbues it with Christian religiosity, and he amplifies the importance of white settlers' activism to protect the landscapes. Yet, this actively subjugates, diminishes, and invalidates indigenous people, knowledge, and history within the West.

IV. Research Design

In my study, I will conduct a rhetorical version of a discourse analysis. Neumann (2008, 62) discusses how a discourse analysis is a study of particular texts or other "utterances" of particular ideas or knowledge. Neumann (2008, 62) notes how a discourse "constrains what is thought of at all, what is thought of as possible, and what is thought of the 'natural thing' to do in a given situation," so discourse bounds what actors consider possible within their society. The dissemination of particular rhetoric and symbols enables the formation of what is acceptable and

“truth” within a society (Foucault 1980, 92, 93). Neumann (2008, 71) emphasizes how the chronological discussion of discourse is imperative, for it establishes how letters, speeches, or other texts enabled and facilitated particular actions, and not others. Neumann (2008, 71) discusses how “showing how each text is made possible by the preceding texts, often it is possible to find a prehistory to the main representation.” This connects to Foucault’s (1980) genealogical historical study, and how discourse emerges as actors employ particular commonplaces which advance a certain ideology or framework. Neumann (2008) further highlights the importance of the genealogical nature of a discourse analysis, and how particular documents emerge from each other chronologically and temporally.

In my study, I employ this model of a discourse analysis to unearth how Western, Christian narratives dominated environmental discourses. Eurocentric rhetoric within the movement enabled the subjugation of indigenous knowledge and ideas within American culture, and this makes possible the severance of indigenous sovereignty to their land base. I focus on Jackson’s (2006) work, as Jackson (2006) utilizes documents such as speeches and telegrams to demonstrate how two politicians in Germany, Kurt Schumacher and Karl Adenauer, employed particular rhetorical commonplaces to attempt to become the chancellors of the Federal Republic of Germany after World War II. Jackson (2006) showcases how Adenauer skillfully utilized particular language and rhetoric to propel the Federal Republic of Germany into Western civilization, and how that policy stance allowed him to become the chancellor of Germany. As a result, Adenauer skillfully subjugated Kurt Schumacher’s policies which reflected more democratic socialist beliefs which Adenauer portrayed as non-Western (Jackson 2006). Jackson’s (2006) work usefully establishes how discourse makes certain actions possible, and renders others impossible.

Jackson (2009, 192, 193) utilizes a genealogical analysis to demonstrate the different “discursive shifts” which occur within a particular institution, and how actors mobilize particular rhetorical commonplaces to create a dominant discourse that effectively creates a hierarchy of ideals that generates what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Jackson (2009, 193) writes that through a discourse analysis, “instances of writing, speaking, and other forms of discursive performance should be scrutinized in order to identify significant shifts and moments of discontinuity” to genealogically trace the production of rhetorical commonplaces. This emerges from Foucault’s (1980) work which demonstrates how genealogically examining discourses showcases the subjugation and domination of knowledge and ideas. A discourse analysis is a foundational method of study to understand how racial discourse interacted with environmentalism at the turn of the century, and the domination of Eurocentric discourses.

I utilize a discourse analysis approach to investigate various texts within the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to capture how the environmental movement further subjugated indigenous individuals and their sovereignty over their ancestral lands. I discuss the creation of Yosemite National Park, Mesa Verde National Park, and the damming of Hetch Hetchy, a waterway in Yosemite National Park. I focus on texts from John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and Congressional records related to the passage of environmental policies. I utilize a rhetorical analysis of passages within Muir’s *Picturesque California*, and *The Wild Parks and the Forest Reservations of the West*, a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt from 1907, and a submission to the *Sierra Club Bulletin* on the Hetch Hetchy Valley. I evaluate Muir’s appeals to the populace and lawmakers for environmentalism through religious word choice and allusions to Biblical ideas or stories. Furthermore, I include a discussion of how he describes indigenous

people relative to the territory and the landscape, as well as how he compares indigenous people to white Americans and civilization.

Alongside Muir, I examine Theodore Roosevelt. I include Roosevelt's State of the Union Address from 1902, and a speech he made in Flagstaff, Arizona in 1903. Furthermore, I analyze his "Conservation as a National Duty" speech in 1908. Across Roosevelt's texts, I will discuss his appeals to religious word choice, however, I will also expand this into an analysis of how he relates the religiosity and magnificence of American natural landscapes to Western expansion and Western civilizations' progression. I highlight how he aims to preserve and conserve American natural landscapes and resources for the use of white individuals and American society. I also note how Roosevelt addresses indigenous individuals and communities in his speeches alongside his discussions on the environment, and how he emphasizes the need to 'civilize' indigenous actors. Moreover, Roosevelt employs offensively racist assumptions that indigenous culture and knowledge cannot coexist with white settlers' cultures.

Lastly, to demonstrate the policy outcomes of the Western, Christian narrative of environmentalism, I include debates within the Congressional record relative to the creation of Yosemite National Park in 1890, Mesa Verde National Park in 1901, and Hetch Hetchy in Yosemite in 1908, and 1913. I will examine the particular rhetoric and word choice actors utilize within the laws which create national parks, and how Congress mobilizes religious discourse to advocate for the passage of conservation or preservation of the laws. Furthermore, I will evaluate the inclusion of advocates and activists within the congressional debate, to discern if any indigenous actors and perspectives are included within the discussions, and how Congress employs white actors in the lawmaking process. My analysis concludes with the inclusion of the Yosemite Nation's petition to Congress to address the injustice of the creation of the national

park on stolen land, as well as the racism of the administration. Moreover, I include the Society of American Indians's *Quarterly Journal*, and how their literature actively counters white settlers' notions of land and land use. While the environmental movement is not directly stated within the *Journal*, the writings capture the subjugated knowledge of indigenous actors, and how Eurocentric discourses within the environmental movement attempt to eradicate indigenous perspectives and history.

V. Analysis

Yosemite National Park, 1890

John Muir's writings at the turn of the century underline the influence of Christianity within the early American environmental movement, and how it amplifies Western values. In his work, *Picturesque California*, 1888, which the Sierra Club publishes within their database, Muir advocates for the creation of Yosemite National Park through descriptions of the vivid, awe-inspiring landscapes he encounters. Muir (Sierra Club n.db) notes that,

The nights are about as dry as the days, dewless and calm, but a thousand voices proclaim the abundance of life, notwithstanding the desolating effects of the fierce drought. Birds, crickets, hylas, etc., make a pleasant stir in the darkness, and coyotes, the small despised dogs of the wilderness, looking like rusty bunches of hair, bark in chorus, filling the air with their keen, lancing notes and making it hot and peppery, as if filled with exploding firecrackers.

Muir's description of the "thousand voices" which "proclaim the abundance of life," ushers a very romantic and holy connotation to the landscape and the wilderness. As Muir continues with the simile that the coyotes' barks are like "lancing notes and making it hot and peppery, as if filled with exploding fireworks," it demonstrates how Muir portrays the wilderness with sublime and awe-inspiring word choice. Muir builds the Western, idealized, and religious perception of nature. Muir applies a Westernized lens to environmentalism, and he generates a connotation of purity and religiosity. Muir (Sierra Club n.db) continues, and he describes how through the Sequoia trees,

the sun, pouring down mellow gold, seemed to be shining only for them, and the wind gave them voice; but the gestures of their outstretched arms appeared wholly independent of the wind, and impressed one with a solemn awe that overbore all our knowledge of causes, and brought us into the condition of being newly arrived from some other world.

As Muir describes the “sun, pouring down mellow gold” and “a solemn awe that overbore all our knowledge of causes,” it generates the image of the light of God. It is as though the light through the trees holds religious importance. Muir adds that it “brought us into the condition of being newly arrived from some other world,” and this creates the sense of a godly, holy intervention within the wilderness and the landscape. As Muir utilizes such diction and religious connotations, it creates the conception that a Western notion of nature is inextricably tied to Christianity and religious importance. Muir imbues environmental discussions with religiosity, and it generates a divide between Western, Christian and non-Western, non-Christians’ conceptions of nature.

Muir constructs the discourse of an awe-inspiring, holy wilderness that effectively creates an environmental movement imbued with Christianity, and he juxtaposes this with indigenous actors present in the wilderness. As Muir writes of the beauty and the godliness of the wilderness he encounters, Muir places indigenous groups as a contrast to such landscapes. Muir (Sierra Club n.db). writes of how,

In the cool evenings, men, women, and children, smeared with resin, form circles around their campfires on the bank of some stream, and lie in easy independence, cracking nuts, and laughing and chatting as heedless of the future as bears and squirrels.

Muir assumes that the indigenous individuals are not equally human compared to white settlers, for he writes that the people were “heedless of the future as bears and squirrels.” Muir compares indigenous individuals to wild, undomesticated animals, and he mobilizes Eurocentric rhetoric to portray indigenous individuals as passive actors within the landscape, and not as sovereign, sophisticated civilizations. Muir also claims that “although as hairy as bears and as crooked as

summit pines, the strange creatures were sufficiently erect to belong to our own species” (Sierra Club n.db). Muir elevates scientifically racist components of offensively racist Eurocentric discourses that indigenous individuals are not as fully human compared to white settlers and as though indigenous individuals are dangerous to white civilization. Muir’s discussion makes possible the differentiation between white individuals’ purity and indigenous peoples’ racial subjugation. He demonstrates the duality of his assertions that indigenous nations are not pure and racial equal to white individuals, and how this contributes to indigenous tribes’ racial subjugation compared to Western civilization.

In his work, Muir underlines indigenous groups’ differentiation from white individuals. Muir emphasizes the impurity of indigenous individuals, and this constitutes the scientifically racist discourse that non-white individuals are impure and wild compared to white individuals. Muir notes “the first specimens I have seen, were mostly ugly, or altogether hideous. The dirt on their faces was fairly stratified in the hollows, and seemed so ancient and undisturbed as almost to possess a geological significance” (Sierra Club n.db). As he refers to the people as “specimens,” this degrades their humanity and personhood relative to white individuals, and it elevates notions of scientific racism Eurocentric discourse. As he calls them “ugly” and “hideous,” he contrasts this to the beauty of nature. Muir establishes a dissonance between indigenous individuals’ racial and cultural impurity compared to his pristine, pure conception of nature. As Muir utilizes racialized distinctions to generate a divide between the white settlers and the indigenous individuals in terms of racial inferiority, Muir erodes indigenous sovereignty

Muir excludes indigenous actors from the Christian conception of the wilderness to subjugate indigenous actors’ knowledge and experience to white settlers’ history. Muir’s rhetoric generates an exclusionary boundary between his Western, Christian conception of wilderness and

indigenous individuals' existence. Muir notes that "they [indigenous people] seemed to have no right place in the landscape, and I was glad to see them fading down the pass out of sight" (Sierra Club n.db). Muir emphasizes that indigenous people do not fit his Western, idealized perception of the landscape that is pure, pristine, and Edenic. Muir includes how, "old familiar robins are here to sing us welcome, and azure daisies beaming with sympathy, enabling us to feel something of Nature's love even here" (Sierra Club n.db). Muir directly contrasts the indigenous individuals' existence in the wilderness to the rest of the landscape. He continues that the indigenous individuals are "pictures of thoughtless contentment, their wild, animal eyes glowering at you as you pass, their black shocks of hair perchance bedecked with red castillejas" (Sierra Club n.db). This removes the humanity of indigenous individuals, and it compares indigenous individuals to wild, savage, dangerous individuals. The word choice "glowering" highlights the connotations of danger, and he further constructs an offensively racist discourse. Muir utilizes such offensively racist discourse to generate an exclusionary boundary between indigenous individuals and the Western, Christian perception of nature which erodes indigenous sovereignty.

The creation of Yosemite National Park amplifies the importance of Christian, Western perspectives within the environmental movement. According to the Congressional Record of September 30, 1890, under the bill that created Yosemite National Park, the land

shall be under the exclusive control of the Secretary of the Interior, whose duty it shall be, as soon as practicable, to make and public such rules and regulations as may be deemed necessary or proper for the care and management of the same...regulations shall provide for the preservation from injury of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders within said reservation and their retention in their natural condition.¹

As the government sought to maintain "natural curiosities, or wonders" in their "natural condition," this seeks to preserve the land in its Edenic state, as though it was free from the

¹ *Yosemite National Park*, H.R 8350, 51st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 21, pt. 11: 10752.

contamination of industrialization. The use of “curiosities” and “wonders” emphasizes the idealization of nature, and its connections to a type of godly and surreal element. Furthermore, the phrase “natural conditions” assumes that it is unnatural for individuals to utilize the land for timber or minerals. Accordingly, it claims that settlers encountered a virgin landscape before the creation of the United States, and that sophisticated, indigenous societies did not engage with the land prior. This builds upon the offensively racist discourse that diminishes indigenous societies’ development, and which seeks to eradicate and erasure indigenous histories and culture. The government articulates Eurocentric discourse which erodes indigenous nations’ sovereignty over the land, for Congress appeals to Western and Christian notions of the environment.

The use of religiously imbued language within the Congressional record showcases the influence of John Muir’s descriptions of awe-inspiring landscapes which appeal to Christian conceptions of nature. This highlights the dominance of the discourse in policymaking In the Congressional Record, according to

“the Committee on Public Lands... the valley is described by the thousands who have seen it as truly ‘magnificent’...The wonders and beauties to be found within the region described in the boundaries are so well known and so highly appreciated by the multitudes of tourists who have visited it that further description is unnecessary. The preservation by the Government in all its original beauty of a region like this seems to the committee to be a duty to the present and to future generations.”²

The terms “magnificent” and “wonders” elucidate the connections to the Anglo-Saxon, Christian ideals embedded within legislation related to the national parks, as these words have a religious connotation of nearly impossible beauty. Furthermore, Congress notes it must maintain the land in its “original beauty,” as though before the arrival of white settlers there was a barren, pristine wilderness.³ This erases indigenous existence and sovereignty over the land before the settlers. The Congressional record employs an offensive race discourse within the debates of

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Yosemite, and it effectively erases and ignores indigenous agency, sovereignty, and existence within the landscape before the arrival of white settlers. Lastly, the inclusion of the need to preserve the land for “present and future generations” of American tourists shows how Congress sought to protect the land for the use and enjoyment of white settlers. The Congressional record underlines the Eurocentric, offensively racist discourses which supplant indigenous knowledge, history, and perspectives in the formation of federal policy on national parks. The government uses Western, Eurocentric perspectives to generate federal environmental policies.

Mesa Verde, 1901 to 1906

Throughout his work, Muir emphasizes the Edenic qualities of the wilderness, and he utilizes this rhetorical tool to remove indigenous actors’ sovereignty from the landscapes. He believed that indigenous nations did not have agency, experience, or knowledge in the land; rather, he depicted indigenous individuals as wild, undomesticated, and without agency. In his work, *The Wild Parks and the Forest Reservations of the West*, 1901, John Muir discusses the need to preserve Mesa Verde, in Colorado. In his work, Muir describes the indigenous people he encountered in the West, and he advanced the Eurocentric notion that indigenous individuals would disappear from existence. Muir notes, “Not very long ago this was the richest of all the red man's hunting-grounds hereabout...a picturesque cavalcade of Sioux savages, passed through these famous hills in 1846” (Sierra Club n.da). Muir’s use of the “savage” for indigenous individuals is a scientifically racist and offensively racist trope that non-white individuals are inherently less civilized than white individuals on account of their race. Muir mobilizes the term “savages,” alongside “picturesque” and “richest” to describe the landscape, and it highlights how Muir depicts indigenous people as wild, undomestic individuals, and he places indigenous actors in conflict with the pristine, Edenic landscape. Muir generates a civilizational bound, inherent to

race, between the pure landscape and the dangerous individuals. This builds into an offensively Eurocentric discourse that delegitimizes and effectively erases indigenous sovereignty and history within the landscape.

Muir asserts the notion that people of color are racially inferior. He extends this to perpetuate the offensively racist Eurocentric discourse that indigenous groups and individuals are unfit for the Western, Christian conceptions of the wilderness, and that their history and knowledge are unfit for Western society. Muir notes that, “the Indians are dead now... arrows, bullets, scalping-knives, need no longer be feared; and all the wilderness is peacefully open” (Sierra, n.da). As Muir says that “the Indians are dead now,” so the wilderness is “peacefully open,” Muir generates a dissonance between indigenous existence within the wilderness, and the Christian, Western perceptions of nature that is pure and peaceful. His offensively racist argument distinguishes between white actors’ and Western pure, holy conceptions of nature, and how indigenous individuals counter this perception. Muir assumes indigenous individuals, culture, and knowledge is extinct, and that this is beneficial for the white settlers. His Eurocentric, offensively racist discourse seeks to eradicate indigenous actors from the landscape. Muir articulates the discourse that indigenous people’s existence on their land, and their connection to their homelands, is illegitimate.

Muir underlines the offensively racist discourse that indigenous knowledge and existence is extinct, and that this can enable a realization of his Christian, Western notion of land, and to preserve the land without human interference. Muir writes, “Indians, most of them are dead or civilized into useless innocence” (Sierra Club n.da). As Muir claims that indigenous people were “civilized into useless innocence,” it showcases how Muir perceives assimilationist policies as an effective tool to pacify indigenous people. Moreover, Muir applauds federal Indian policies’

erasing of indigenous culture and knowledge which elevates his offensively racist discourse. Muir asserts that indigenous people could only exist as subordinate to white settlers, and it strips indigenous sovereignty of their ancestral homelands and sophisticated civilizations. Muir diminishes indigenous agency and sovereignty, and he celebrates the notion that indigenous individuals' culture, knowledge, and experiences are extinct. Muir constructs an offensively racist discourse that aims to erode and diminish indigenous sovereignty and agency.

In 1901, Congress started to debate the creation of a national park in Mesa Verde. Congress discusses how a portion of the desired land was within the Southern Ute nation's reservation.⁴ According to the March 1, 1901, Congressional Record, the Secretary reads the amendment to H.R. 14018, that,

to lease them for a substantial price-something like \$300 a year-the Indians consenting, the few acres that contain these dwellings, to be set apart to this association, which proposes to police them and to protect them.⁵

Congress articulates that it must "police them [dwellings]" and "protect them," and this assumes that under the jurisdiction of the reservation, the land was not properly preserved. While Congress outlines the damage to the dwellings from looters and tourists, it articulates that the government should have jurisdiction over the land instead of providing proper aid to the reservation to enable indigenous actors and leaders to preserve the land.⁶ The Record continues that the government sought to claim Pueblo ruins in the desired landscape from the Utes, for "the right to use and occupy said tract of land for the purpose of preserving and controlling said ruins and remains and protecting them from depredation."⁷ Congress extinguishes indigenous sovereignty, for it does not acknowledge the ancestral importance of the ruins, nor does it respect

⁴ *Sundry Civil Appropriation Bill*, H.R. 14018, 56th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 34 pt. 4: 3294.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

the boundaries of the reservation. The record reflects the dominance of white settler values in preservation, and how the government must have jurisdiction over the land to ensure its proper use. Congress ignores that indigenous actors created sophisticated civilizations before settlers' arrival, and the capacities and sovereignty of indigenous actors to preserve and conserve resources.

Alongside the start of the debate to create Mesa Verde National Park, new president Theodore Roosevelt increased his calls for environmentalism. In his 1902 State of the Union Address, President Theodore Roosevelt reiterated that white settlers' must create environmental policies, and the government must intrinsically separate environmental issues from the notion of indigenous land rights. Roosevelt (American History, 2012) declares,

Legislation should be provided for the protection of the game, and the wild creatures generally, on the forest reserves. The senseless slaughter of game, which can by judicious protection be permanently preserved on our national reserves for the people as a whole, should be stopped at once. It is, for instance, a serious count against our national good sense to permit the present practice of butchering off such a stately and beautiful creature as the elk for its antlers or tusks.

Roosevelt articulates that the resources and the wildlife are imperative for the advancement and the appreciation of Americans, for he writes that the wilderness must be "preserved on our national reserves for the people as a whole." While Roosevelt highlights more sustainable use of resources and greater protection of the wilderness, he frames it as a means to achieve greater prosperity and progress for the U.S.. Roosevelt discusses how the animals are "stately and beautiful," and that the "senseless slaughter" of the animals would be "against our national good sense." Roosevelt constructs the Eurocentric discourse that the United States must generate a national effort towards sustainable development of American society to advance the country and to enable more progression and growth. However, Roosevelt seeks to protect natural resources for white settlers, as he generates racial civilizational divisions within his address.

Roosevelt underscores in his State of the Union Address that white settlers are the main beneficiaries of the environmental effort, for he argues that white actors are the most civilized and developed. While Roosevelt argues that the conservation of parks and natural resources is “for the people as a whole,” he makes a clear distinction on which individuals are accepted within American society. Roosevelt (American History, 2012) notes within the speech that,

Every effort should be made to develop the Indian along the lines of natural aptitude, and to encourage the existing native industries peculiar to certain tribes, such as the various kinds of basket weaving, canoe building, smith work, and blanket work. Above all, the Indian boys and girls should be given confident command of colloquial English, and should ordinarily be prepared for a vigorous struggle with the conditions under which their people live, rather than for immediate absorption into some more highly developed community.

Roosevelt establishes that natural resources are for all Americans and that white individuals exist within a “highly developed community,” while indigenous individuals are in a “vigorous struggle.” Roosevelt frames development through a paternalistic lens which emphasizes the involvement of the U.S. government to guide indigenous groups. Roosevelt also includes scientifically racist arguments that undermine the potential of indigenous actors to fully reach the capabilities of white settlers, as he notes that indigenous individuals should advance “along the lines of natural aptitude.” Roosevelt suggests employment such as “basket weaving, canoe building, smith work,” which showcases how the government advocates for indigenous people to work in low-wage trades for they do not recognize indigenous individuals as capable of equal development to white individuals. Roosevelt asserts a paternalistic lens of development, yet the policies he suggests limits indigenous individuals’ development, and it illuminates scientifically racist beliefs that erode indigenous agency on racial grounds. Roosevelt advances Eurocentric discourses which actively subjugate indigenous actors, and that erode individual agency and sovereignty.

Roosevelt perpetuates the scientifically racist distinctions between white individuals and indigenous individuals, and the Christian, Western notions of the environment and development.

He underlines the dominance of Western civilizations and knowledge in the environment.

Roosevelt utilizes religious rhetoric to emphasize the beauty of natural landmarks in the United States, yet he takes for granted the dominance of white settlers' conceptions of natural resources.

In 1903, Roosevelt delivered a speech in Flagstaff Arizona on behalf of Grand Canyon National Park, and his arguments parallel Congress's debates on the establishment of Mesa Verde.

Roosevelt (American Rhetoric 2021) says that he was there,

to see the Grand Canyon of Arizona, because in that canyon Arizona has a natural wonder, which, so far as I know, is in kind absolutely unparalleled throughout the rest of the world. I could not choose words that would convey or that could convey to any outsider what that canyon is. I want to ask you to do one thing in connection with it in your own interest and in the interest of the country: to keep this great wonder of nature as it is now.

Roosevelt's word choice highlights a religious connotation he applies to the Grand Canyon, as Roosevelt describes how it is "a natural wonder," and that it "is in kind absolutely unparalleled throughout the rest of the world." Roosevelt employs a Christian connotation as he perceives the landmarks as otherworldly and nearly divine. As Roosevelt says that he "could not choose words that would convey or that could convey" the beauty of the canyon he creates a religiously, awe-inspiring effect of the Grand Canyon. Roosevelt takes for granted a Christian, Western idealization of nature, and he elevates Western knowledge and ideals to attempt to erase and bury indigenous experiences and history in the landscape.

Roosevelt mobilizes Eurocentric discourses which erode the existence of indigenous actors in the natural landscape he reveres. The scientifically racist discourse shows the rigid, static civilization bounds Roosevelt employs to assert that civilization and humans' interaction with the environment is only productive in a white settler framework. As Roosevelt (American Rhetoric 2021) continues that "man cannot improve on it [wilderness]; not a bit. The ages have

been at work on it and man can only mar it,” he claims that white settlers and American society should not attempt to industrialize the land. Yet, Muir describes an Edenic, virgin perception of the landscapes, and he ignores that indigenous individuals developed civilizations there. As Muir argues “the ages have been at work on it,” it generates the notion that sophisticated societies did not exist in the landscape before white settlers, and that the wilderness reflects a pristine, untouched landscape. Through religious rhetoric, Roosevelt effectively diminishes the existence and knowledge of indigenous groups. He elevates a Western perception of land, productivity, and nature which eradicates indigenous experiences from the dominant discourse on environmentalism.

Once Roosevelt establishes clear civilization bounds and the dominance of Eurocentric discourses in his rhetoric, he addresses indigenous individuals directly. At Flagstaff, Roosevelt (American Rhetoric 2021) says,

I want to say a word of welcome to the Indians here. In my regiment I had a good many Indians. They were good enough to fight and to die, and they are good enough to have me treat them exactly as square as any white man. There are a good many problems in connection with the Indians. You have got to save them from corruption, save them from brutality, and I regret to say that at times we have to save them from the unregulated Eastern philanthropist, because in everything we have to remember that although perhaps the worst quality in which to approach any question is hardness of heart, I do not know that it does so much damage as selfishness of head.

Roosevelt presents indigenous people as an issue that the white settlers must address. As he notes “you have got to save them from corruption, save them from brutality,” it implies that white settlers assume a degree of ‘responsibility’ for the development of indigenous groups, and a paternalistic perception of development. Roosevelt presents a discussion of the influences of the “unregulated Eastern philanthropist.” Alongside a Western, Christian perception of environmentalism and nature, Roosevelt underscores how the government must ‘save’ indigenous people from themselves and Asian “influences.” Muir establishes a civilization divide

rooted in race between Asian and white actors. Roosevelt merges paternalistic and offensively racist Eurocentric discourses. He highlights that non-white races require white guidance and that the knowledge and culture of non-white civilizations present an inherent danger to white, Western civilizations. Thus, through Roosevelt's Christian, Western notion of nature and civilizational progression, he erodes indigenous history, knowledge, and sovereignty, and he presents indigenous and Asian actors as dangerous and threatening to Western civilization. Roosevelt mobilized Eurocentric discourses which demonstrate how the Western, Christian arguments embedded within the environmental movement.

Hetch Hetchy

In 1908, Congress and naturalists debated the environmental and economic costs and benefits of legislation to dam Hetch Hetchy, a waterway in Yosemite National Park. As Congress debated whether to dam Hetch Hetchy in Yosemite Valley, John Muir produced texts that explicitly advocate for its protection and preservation. In a letter to President Roosevelt in 1907, Muir called on Roosevelt to not support the damming of Hetch Hetchy. Muir (Online Archive of California. n.d.) appeals to Christian notions of nature and its purity, and he writes how

The first forest reserve was in Eden and though its boundaries were drawn by the Lord, and angels set to guard it, even that most moderate reservation was attacked. I pray therefore that the people of California be granted time to be heard before this reservoir question is decided.

As Muir parallels the Garden of Eden to the landscape of the Hetch Hetchy Valley, this showcases the prominence of Western, Christian ideologies in Muir's work, and how he takes these values for granted. The Western discourse perceives wilderness as virgin, pure, and untouched by human influence. Muir's Christian rhetoric erases indigenous knowledge and sovereignty over land, as well as their historic use and existence within the land. This severs

indigenous people from the land which erodes indigenous agency and sovereignty. As Muir parallels the manipulation of the environment as equivalent to the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, he disregards and silences the Yosemite nations' use of the land before white settlers, and it elevates the presence of white, Western conceptions of nature. It establishes the notion that a civilized and sophisticated society did not exist before the arrival of white settlers, and this disregards how indigenous tribes engaged with nature without industrialization. As Muir utilizes appeals to white, Western society, he amplifies a Eurocentric discourse that parallels industrialization and productivity to civilization.

As Muir appeals to the religious duty to protect Hetch Hetchy, he emphasizes its religious, Christian importance, and he generates an exclusionary boundary between indigenous and white actors. To advocate for the protection of Hetch Hetchy, Muir consulted the Sierra Club, the environmental preservation organization Muir formed in 1892. In 1908, Muir addressed the Sierra Club to inspire action to prevent the damming of Hetch Hetchy. He describes the land with religious importance, and he compares the landscape to Christian allusions. Muir (1908, 1) notes,

It is impossible to overestimate the value of wild mountains and mountain temples as places for people to grow in, recreation grounds for soul and body. They are the greatest of our natural resources, God's best gifts, but none, however high and holy, is beyond reach of the spoiler.

As he writes that the landscapes are “mountain temples,” “God’s best gifts,” and “high and holy,” it elucidates how Muir applies a Christian understanding to the land, and Muir perceives the importance of the landscapes through a lens of Western, Christian values. This generates a boundary between indigenous actors' existence within the wilderness, and white settlers' notions of nature. Muir (1908, 4) continues that,

the Lord's garden in Eden, and the first forest reservation, including only one tree, was spoiled. And so to some extent have all our reservations and parks. Ever since the establishment of the Yosemite National Park by act of Congress, October 8, 1890, constant strife has been going on around its borders and I suppose this will go on as part of the universal battle between right and wrong, however its boundaries may be shorn or its wild beauty destroyed.

Muir alludes to Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, and he asserts that the land is virgin before the influences of the white settlers. Muir appeals to an offensively racist Eurocentric discourse that extinguishes the existence of indigenous actors and sophisticated society within the landscape before the arrival of white settlers. Muir did not include indigenous individuals' existence; rather, Muir perceives indigenous individuals' presence as a counter to the purity and beauty of Yosemite and thus as a threat to Western civilization (Sierra Club n.db). Through the appeals to a virgin, Eden wilderness, Muir constructs the discourse that indigenous people did not hold sovereignty over the land prior. Muir advances the Eurocentric, offensive racist discourse that eradicates indigenous knowledge, and it generates exclusionary bounds between the West and non-Western actors which effectively subjugates indigenous actors.

Within the debates around Hetch Hetchy, Roosevelt made a speech in 1908 that underlines the importance of conservation and preservation works, and he further highlights the boundaries between indigenous actors and white actors for land use and development. In Roosevelt's speech, "Conservation as a National Duty," in 1908, Roosevelt claimed that indigenous people did not productively utilize natural resources. Roosevelt captures Muir's emphasis on virgin and Edenic landscapes, which erodes indigenous civilizations' development and sophistication, for Roosevelt's argued that civilization and progress only existed in a white settler framework. This linkage extinguishes indigenous land sovereignty, and it drives the subjugation of indigenous actors. Roosevelt (Voice of Democracy n.d.) discusses how,

“Savages, and very primitive peoples generally, concern themselves only with superficial natural resources; with those which they obtain from the actual surface of the ground. As peoples become a little less primitive, their industries, although in a rude manner, are extended to resources below the surface; then, with what we call civilization and the extension of knowledge, more resources come into use, industries are multiplied, and foresight begins to become a necessary and prominent factor in life. Crops are cultivated; animals are domesticated; and metals are mastered.”

Roosevelt elevates the offensively racist Eurocentric discourse that indigenous actors did not have as sophisticated a society as white settlers, and that indigenous societies pose a threat or a hurdle to proper development. The discourse invalidates indigenous sovereignty, knowledge, and history, for Roosevelt argues that civilization only occurs after development from a “primitive” or “savage” state. Roosevelt (Voice of Democracy n.d.) continues that,

indeed, the growth of this Nation by leaps and bounds makes one of the most striking and important chapters in the history of the world. Its growth has been due to the rapid development, and alas that it should be said! to the rapid destruction, of our natural resources. Nature has supplied to us in the United States, and still supplies to us, more kinds of resources in a more lavish degree than has ever been the case at any other time or with any other people.

Roosevelt ascribes importance to the ideal of progression, and how he believes that Western, white individuals reflect a high level of progress and productivity. While Roosevelt pointedly connects the industrialization and modernization of America to the degradation of natural resources, he continues to elevate Westernized notions of civilization and development which effectively exclude indigenous actors. Roosevelt diminishes indigenous actors’ sovereignty, and he eradicates indigenous knowledge and history within environmental debates.

Congress debated the issue of Hetch Hetchy from 1908 to 1913, and the record reflects the exclusionary, Eurocentric rhetoric that Muir and Roosevelt amplify (Hetch Hetchy Environmental Debates, 2017). The Congressional Record from August 30, 1913, includes a letter, which lists John Muir as a part of the Society for the Preservation of National Parks, to protect Hetch Hetchy from damming.⁸ John Muir, and the Society, note,

⁸ United States Congress, *Congressional Record*, 63rd Cong., 1st sess., Vol. 50 pt. 4: 3974.

Ever since the establishment of the Yosemite National Park by act of Congress – October 8, 1890 – constant strife has been going on around its boundaries and is likely to go on as part of the universal battle between good and evil, however much its boundaries may be broken or wild beauty destroyed.⁹

As the organization's letter reaches Congress, and it is an exhibit for evidence within the Congressional debate, it underlines the growing influences of John Muir within the Progressive Era, and the dominance of a Eurocentric, Christian discourse in environmentalism. Muir claims that the debate around Hetch Hetchy is “part of the universal battle between good and evil,” and this reflects the Christian, religious connotations of the budding environmental movement. As Muir frames his argument as “good and evil,” it demonstrates how he prescribes a moral imperative to environmental advocacy and preservation. His romantic, religious, and Edenic notions of the wilderness shift towards a foundational recognition that white settlers have a religious duty to protect and preserve the wilderness.

The Eurocentric discourse that Muir elevates gained traction with the public, alongside its appearance in Congress. The Congressional Record from December 5, 1913, includes an excerpt from an article from the New York Times which cites John Muir, who says,

why the city of San Francisco, with plenty of collateral sources of water supply, should present an emergency measure to the special session of Congress whereby it may invade Yosemite National Park is one of those Dundrearian things that no fellow can find out. The Hetch Hetchy Valley is described by John Muir as a “wonderfully exact counterpart of the great Yosemite” Why should its inspiring cliffs and waterfalls, its groves and flowery, park-like floor, be spoiled by the grabbers of water and power?¹⁰

The piece reflects Muir's romanticism of nature, as he claims, “why should its inspiring cliffs and waterfalls, its groves and flowery, park-like floor, be spoiled by the grabbers of water and power?” The article furthers Muir's argument that Hetch Hetchy is a fight between “good and evil” as the article notes that the conservationists, those that sought to dam Hetch Hetchy, are “grabbers of water and power.”¹¹ As Muir's writing becomes more influential within the public,

⁹ United States Congress, *Congressional Record*, 63rd Cong., 1st sess., Vol. 50 pt. 4: 3975.

¹⁰ United States Congress. *Congressional Record*. 63rd Cong., 2nd sess., Vol. 51, pt. 1: 266.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 266.

and in Congress, it perpetuates the notion that there is a moral and religious imperative to fight to maintain Hetch Hetchy. Similarly, in a letter to Congress, a woman named Ella Fowler wrote,

I trust that it seems as sacrilegious to you as it does to me to grant to the city of San Francisco for reservoir purposes the beautiful Hetch Hetchy Valley ; if so, you will by argument and vote oppose the bill on December 6. I urge you to do this and thus save the people – the people of Arizona, the people of the whole country-this beautiful valley, which should be to them a joy and inspiration. Yours, sincerely, (Mrs. B. A.) ELLA Q. FOWLER.¹²

As Fowler says that to dam Hetch Hetchy would be “sacrilegious,” and that Congressmen must oppose the bill to “save the people... the people of the whole country, this beautiful valley,” she accentuates a Western, Christian perception of nature and the environmental movement. She notes the moral and religious imperative to preserve the landscape, and her letter highlights the dominance of a Eurocentric framework present in the Congressional debate and the popular environmental movement. Thus, indigenous histories and perspectives were absent within the debate and throughout the dominant discourse. Instead, there was a Christian connotation attached to the environment. Environmental actors mobilized Muir’s rhetoric to push for environmental, and preservationist issues, and the Eurocentric discourse dominated the environmental discussions.

While Congress debated the issue of Hetch Hetchy, it rested on whether to conserve or preserve the valley, and the environmentalists framed their arguments on how the land can be most useful to white settlers. As Muir, the *New York Times*, and Fowler reflect, they sought to preserve the land for the enjoyment and benefit of individuals who admire the landscape. Yet, the implementation of Christian, Western arguments effectively erodes indigenous actors’ perspectives on the issues. Furthermore, the offensively racist discourses destabilize indigenous sovereignty within the landscape. Environmental actors’ rhetoric subsumes and eradicates indigenous knowledge, experiences, and prior sovereignty to the land.

¹² Ibid, 235.

Indigenous Responses and Activism

Throughout the environmental movement, indigenous actors advocated for the recognition of indigenous history and sovereignty over the protected land. The Yosemite Nation, alongside the Mono and the Piute Nations, wrote a petition in about 1891 (which a non-native actor may have written on behalf of the nations) to Congress and the President to criticize the administration of Yosemite National Park, and to assert indigenous sovereignty (Castillo 1978, 273). The Nations note that they were “inhabitants of that valley and said territory when it was so unjustifiably conquered and taken from our fathers by the whites” (Castillo 1978, 273). The indigenous tribes claim their sovereignty and ancestral connection to the land, and that it was unjustifiably removed from indigenous nations. The nations challenged the discourse within the American government and amongst naturalists that white settlers held invariable claims to the land in the West and that an Edenic, virgin landscape existed before white settlers. Furthermore, the nations highlight that they are “silently the objects of curiosity or contemptuous pity to the throngs of strangers who yearly gather in this our own land and heritage.” The petitioners expose the white settlers’ attempts to subjugate and dehumanize indigenous individuals. The nations ironically undermine the discourse that indigenous people are wild, untamed, and sub-human individuals, for they demonstrate how the *white settlers* engaged in an inhuman fixture and fetishization of Native Americans. The Yosemite attempted to resist the establishment of the National Park, the white settlers’ use of indigenous land, and to uphold their sovereignty, humanity, and equality to white actors.

Within the petition, the nations claim that indigenous land existed as their sovereign territories before settlers colonized North America. The nations capture how, as a result of colonization, the creation of the park and the privatization of the land “must shortly result in the

total exclusion of the remaining remnants of our tribes from this our beloved valley, which has been ours from time beyond our faintest traditions, and which we still claim” (Castillo 1978, 273). Indigenous groups amplified the unjust conquest of indigenous land and the strong cultural and ancestral significance of the land to indigenous people. The Yosemite Nation showcases indigenous nations’ sovereignty over the land. The nations discuss how,

We hope in justice that you, the Great White Chief, and you of the Great White Council of this Nation, at Washington, may hear with wide open ears, and grant our prayer; also, in case that you declare justly and favorably for us in our great need, suffering under this condition of great wrong and poverty, we desire to be heard, and have a voice in the Council which shall appoint the men who are to receive the indemnity money for use, as we do not wish to part with our last remnant of territory for merely the enrichment of a few adventurous white men (Castillo 1978, 276).

The nations did not want the land to be a protected park for “a few adventurous white men.” Instead, they emphasize the sovereignty of indigenous actors, and how this trumps the land’s use as a park for white individuals’ pleasure. Rather, the nations highlight how indigenous people survived within the land, and it holds immense and valuable cultural and traditional importance. The petition directly counters the dominant discourse that indigenous actors’ knowledge, experiences, and sovereignty should be eradicated and diminished in environmentalism and land use.

In the Progressive Era, indigenous activism furthered the assertions of indigenous sovereignty and intrinsic value. In 1913, the Society of American Indians’ started the publication of *The Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians*, and this became the main publication of the early twentieth century for indigenous thinkers. The first volume includes works on the removal and reservation systems. While a fault of this analysis is that the journal does not include direct discussions of indigenous actors on environmentalism, it underscores the subjugated discourse of land rights and indigenous sovereignty. In the work, the Society (1913, 368) writes,

The various Indian reservations of the United States were all originally established for one purpose, namely, to keep the Indians away from the white people and the white people away from the Indians. On the part of the white people, it was urged that they should not be allowed to go on an Indian reservation because the Indians were treacherous, murderous and far from being friendly in disposition.

The Society notes that the reservations aimed to “keep the Indians away from the white people and the white people away from the Indians” which emphasizes the Eurocentric discourse that indigenous individuals are racially inferior to white individuals. The Society underlines the scientifically racist discourses that, developmentally, indigenous actors are more dangerous or violent. As a result, Eurocentric discourses attempt to segregate indigenous actors from white actors because of perceived racial differentiations. The Society of American Indians accentuates how the white settlers directly aimed to eradicate indigenous knowledge, culture, and history through racialized claims of indigenous inferiority. The Society challenged the Eurocentric discourse that subjugates indigenous actors and seeks to degrade indigenous actors’ humanity and sovereignty.

The attempts to undermine indigenous sovereignty and agency on the bounds of racial inferiority reflect the Eurocentric discourse to legitimize the federal policies to protect the wilderness and to subjugate indigenous knowledge and experiences. Racialized rhetoric creates civilization bounds rooted in racial differences. As the Society discusses how white settlers poise indigenous individuals as “treacherous, murderous and far from being friendly in disposition” this description aligns with John Muir’s accounts of indigenous individuals in *Picturesque California*. Muir (Sierra Club n.da) portrays indigenous actors as violent, cunning, and animalistic, and these qualities erode the humanity of indigenous individuals; this generates a divide between indigenous actors and the pristine wilderness, and white civilization. Moreover, the amplification of white, Christian notions of the environment further erodes indigenous agency and sovereignty over the land, and this showcases white settlers’ deployment of

offensively racist, Eurocentric discourse. White settlers curated exclusionary bounds of which actors could reach their level of development rooted in racial arguments, which destabilize indigenous agency and sovereignty.

Indigenous groups and nations responded to discussions of land use and racial and civilization subjugation, and they underlined the exclusionary, civilizational boundaries white settlers mobilized to subjugate indigenous actors. In 1913, the Society (1913, 104) describes how “the fundamental principle of Americanism since its earliest beginning has been to produce a uniform civilization. The base of that civilization, better termed ethnic culture, was and is English.” Therefore, the United States government does not attempt to ‘civilize’ indigenous nations for the improvement of indigenous societies, but to subjugate indigenous actors within Western society. Thus, indigenous actors could not achieve citizenship or participation in the U.S. until they assimilated to the same values. The Society (1913, 104) uses the example of immigrants from Finland, and they discuss how

This means a complete entering into the social fabric of the people. It means becoming a part of it. There can be no Finnish colony and no community of Finlanders arrayed in the dress of Finland. This would make the Finlander coming here a curiosity. He would not succeed. He would retrogress and his last estate became worse than his first... Later, as he became acculturated, he might return to a consideration of the ways of his fathers and seek to commemorate them, but purely as a matter of racial pride or patriotic interest, and not as something to be revived and make again an active culture to be lived and followed.

The Society demonstrates how American society actively sought to subjugate and coercively assimilate non-Western European actors, and to eradicate non-English values and norms, such as cultural dress. Communities that do not align with these values cannot exist; therefore, the Society establishes how the existence of sovereign, indigenous communities cannot exist within this framework. The Society demonstrates how Muir’s and Roosevelt’s rhetoric that establishes the need to ‘civilize’ and remove indigenous individuals from their homelands seeks to eradicate

indigenous knowledge and experiences. Therefore, Muir and Roosevelt create an exclusionary boundary between white and indigenous individuals.

In the second volume of *The Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians*, the Editorial Comment emphasizes how the U.S. rests on the siege of inhabited land and the violence against indigenous actors to curate a white, Christian society that excluded indigenous culture, knowledge, and history (Society of American Indians 1914, 13). This underscores how white settlers sought to diminish indigenous sovereignty, and how white actors mobilized dominant, Eurocentric discourses to legitimize violence against indigenous actors and to eradicate indigenous culture. The Society notes that (1914, 13),

we have a great continent, comprising the Western Hemisphere. It was inhabited by a race not known to Europeans or Asiatics (except perhaps in a vague traditional way to certain individuals). These inhabitants claimed to own, by right of possession and habitation, all the land so occupied and possessed by them. These native peoples were not all alike in all respects. There were hundreds of languages, and thousands of dialects. Many tribes knew nothing of each other. Many tribes regarded other tribes as enemies, and sought by every means to exterminate these foes and to conquer their territories.

This passage counters the dominant discourse that white settlers started civilization on the North American continent. Indigenous societies had distinct, differentiated, and complex communities. As the Society writes, “there were hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects: many tribes knew nothing of each other,” this illuminates how white settlers did not generate the first civilization in North America, and that indigenous nations reflected *different* civilizations. Thus, the passage challenges the dominant discourse that takes for granted the notion of a white, Christian, and Western American state, and the inferiority of indigenous actors. It unearths the subjugated knowledge and narrative that demonstrates indigenous sovereignty and civilizational development absent of white actors.

As the Society of American Indians discusses the arrival of white settlers in North America, they underline the different perceptions of land use between white settlers and the

indigenous nations that existed prior, and the different conceptions of development. The Society (1914, 14) argues,

As to the right of occupancy many tribes believed that ‘the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof,’ and that it might not be sold or given away, any more than the air or the heavens. Man only acquired the right to occupy. Most tribes believed that their ancestral domain was nominally theirs by prior right of occupation, though another might occupy it later.

This captures how indigenous nations and tribes did not believe in the legal ownership or commercial selling of land. Rather, they held greater ancestral and national use of land, yet there is not the vested importance of commercialization and profit associated with land as Western settlers believed and valued. This underlines how the Eurocentric notions of property, land use, and ownership effectively subjugate indigenous norms. The Society (1914, 15) continues that,

The European had learned that a small tract of land properly developed might support a large population. So here in America the European found his great room for expanding. Here was room for an overflowing population. The native American Indians stood in the way; he did not seem to need so much land. They were called demons, a cursed race, savages and ‘barriers to civilization,’ and as such were exterminated by thousands whenever possible.

The Society captures Muir’s and Roosevelt’s discourse which delegitimizes indigenous nations’ sovereignty of their land. Notably, the inclusion of how white settlers, and naturalists, claim that indigenous actors “did not seem to need so much land” emphasizes the dissonance between the white settlers’ perception of land that focuses on profit-driven ownership and legal holdings of land, and indigenous nations’ recognition of land vested in ancestral ties. The notion that “American Indians stood in the way” and that they were “‘barriers to civilization,’” which Muir and Roosevelt both mobilize within their arguments, captures the dominance of offensively racist discourse. Indigenous actors directly highlight the injustices and racism of the Eurocentric offensively racist discourse which erodes indigenous agency and their intrinsic cultural importance. It generates a hierarchical understanding of civilizations and progress, and it degrades the notion that indigenous actors legitimately held sovereignty over their land.

While the Yosemite Nation's petition and the Society of American Indians's work amplify subjugated discourses on environmentalism, land use, and sovereignty, there is a clear difficulty to access indigenous actors' works. While a limit of this study is that it cannot include more texts of subjugated actors and knowledge, as a result of a lack of resources and accessibility, it reveals how Eurocentric notions of environmental history also influence the historic archive. As white settlers' ideas, knowledge, and experiences are more highly valued in American society, the access to indigenous actors' writings and work is more difficult to access. Thus, future research must center on indigenous and subjugated actors and knowledge within the analysis. Furthermore, future research should seek to make greater connections to the gendered notions of Western, Christian discourse, and that may further include discourses of women and women of color.

Conclusions and Implications

Despite limitations to accessing the historical indigenous records within this study, within the late-twentieth and twenty-first-century movements erupted to assert indigenous agency and sovereignty. Notably, the creation of the environmental justice movement in the 1970s ushered in the discussion of how pollutants and environmental degradation disproportionately impact people of color. In 2020, as the United States faced an explosion of activism related to racial injustices, the Sierra Club which John Muir founded, released a statement on environmental justice. Michael Brune, President of the Sierra Club (2020), reckoned with the implications of the whiteness of the early environmental movement, and he notes,

The whiteness and privilege of our early membership fed into a very dangerous idea -- one that's still circulating today. It's the idea that exploring, enjoying, and protecting the outdoors can be separated from human affairs. Such willful ignorance is what allows some people to shut their eyes to the reality that the wild places we love are also the ancestral homelands of Native peoples, forced off their lands in the decades or centuries before they became national parks. It allows them to overlook, too, the fact that only people insulated from systemic racism and brutality can afford to focus solely on preserving wilderness.

This statement directly confronts the Eurocentric discourse which Muir's work fervently upheld to illegitimate and subjugate indigenous actors from the landscapes. Brune (2020) counters and challenges the existing, Eurocentric discourse in environmentalism which displaces and diminishes traditional and indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, Brune (2020) acknowledges the history and the injustices which stripped indigenous nations of land rights. However, to generate policy changes, the discourse must extend past the recognition of unjust histories and toward legislative and leadership reforms.

The appointment and election of indigenous actors are paramount to the advancement of indigenous histories and perspectives in environmentalism. Activist Jacqueline Keeler (2021), Diné/Ihanktonwan Dakota, describes how the National Park Service appointed its first indigenous director Chuck Sams, Cayuse and Walla Walla, which comes after the appointment of Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, Laguna Pueblo. Keeler (2021) underlines how the infusion of indigenous knowledge and perspectives can enhance environmental efforts within existing national parks. Keeler (2021) highlights that the National Parks Service faces a lack of funding and right-wing arguments to decrease federal jurisdiction of the land, and how this makes action difficult. While a possible solution is to increase indigenous sovereignty over lands through public land trusts, which would create tribally run national parks, this faces bureaucratic difficulties and right-wing opposition (Keeler 2021).

To respond to potential difficulties in policy creation and implementation, other activists note the potential to create indigenous jurisdiction over the Department of the Interior. David Truer (2021), Ojibwe, discusses how the Department of the Interior should restore the national parks to the ownership of indigenous tribes. Truer (2021) notes that indigenous individuals would have jurisdiction over the land and maintain it for all American and Native Americans to

visit and enjoy. Truer (2021) also considers the potential for the maintenance of ecological and environmental regulations, as well as financial support from the federal government to help indigenous tribes sustain the park. While Keeler (2021) claims that this plan faces harsh opposition and would be difficult to entirely instill, Keeler's (2021) and Truer's (2021) arguments emphasize and capture the overarching importance and imperative to restore indigenous agency and sovereignty over the land, and to infuse indigenous knowledge and history into the environmental movement.

A Western, Christian Eurocentric discourse founded the American environmental movement. Yet, as more Western actors and organizations, such as the Sierra Club, seek to amplify indigenous voices and perspectives, they attempt to restore and unearth subjugated knowledge and perspectives. They challenge a discourse that structures our perceptions of the wilderness and *includes* indigenous history in environmental discourse. The Progressive Era environmental movement sought to eradicate and extinguish indigenous agency and sovereignty. It excluded indigenous actors from a turning point in American history in which actors elevated environmental concerns and sustainability. It is imperative to examine actors like John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt, who hold unabated popularity in environmentalism, conservation, and preservation, to unearth subjugated knowledge that can empower and uplift marginalized actors. Traditional, indigenous knowledge is imperative to the environmental movement, and future research must further amplify indigenous leadership, activism, and issues within the environmental movement.

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