

**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the National Park Service:
Narratives, Counter-narratives and the Importance of Moving
Beyond Demographics**

by

Yonit Yogev

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Environmental Studies
The Evergreen State College
June, 2017

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This Thesis for the Master of Environmental Studies Degree

by

Yonit Yogev

has been approved for

The Evergreen State College

by

Kathleen M. Saul, Ph.D.
Member of the Faculty

June 12, 2017

Abstract

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the National Park Service: Narratives, Counter-narratives and the Importance of Moving Beyond Demographics

Yonit Yogev

The National Park Service (NPS) has known for decades that its visitors and staff fail to represent the full range of the diversity of Americans. While the NPS has begun to address diversity, equity, inclusion and relevance, progress is painfully slow. Previous work led to the realization that structural racism is the reason why movement in this regard is lagging. Lack of equity and inclusion in the NPS (and by extension other public lands and environmental organizations) not only puts the future of public lands at risk due to changing demographics, but may also be viewed as environmental injustice. Until recently, the NPS has had limited success in engendering true collaboration with communities of color (COC). For this qualitative research project, I conducted in-depth, unstructured interviews using an interview guide or narrative story-telling with forty participants from the NPS, partner agencies, and people from COC, using Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT). Participants offered feedback about every aspect of the study at all stages of research and writing. The results revealed the critical importance of genuine collaboration and partnerships with COC, the need for fundamental changes in hiring practices and diversity ‘training,’ the significance of and need for structured role modeling and mentorships, among several others, along with guidance for ways to overcome multiple barriers. The recommendations and stories revealed by this research will provide the NPS with additional innovative ways to develop and implement policies and programs that meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population.

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Acknowledgements

Any thesis or work of this scope can only come together with input and help from many people. It takes a village... This one is no exception. First and foremost, I am forever grateful to my partner of over 30 years, Leon, for his loving support and patience.

Kathleen Saul offered so much of her time and energy, advice and encouragement it is impossible to put into words how grateful I am. She truly went above and beyond the call of duty.

All the MES faculty and staff have been rocks and inspirations. I've learned so much and the program as a whole was exceptional. Special thanks to Kevin Francis, Jean MacGregor and Erin Martin--you have all been wonderful mentors and role models.

Stretching my studies into three years meant being part of two cohorts. I'm so thankful for my first cohort--we were a uniquely supportive group, and I will always have fond memories of our class discussions and seminars. My second cohort gracefully took in a lot of us who spilled over, and were always helpful and insightful.

Special, heart-felt thanks to Kennedy Krossen, whose warmth, friendship, and technical genius, helped make this thesis possible. Many thanks to Beth Cumberland for her support, friendship, and amazing editing skills.

Special gratitude goes to my peer review group, Sadie Gilliom, Emily Passarelli, and Liliana Caughman for your ongoing support and skillful feedback.

So many friends and family offered ongoing encouragement, support, guidance and inspiration--thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I have a particularly special place in my heart for the forty participants, many of whom offered ongoing feedback and guidance. They, more than anyone, helped direct and guide the work, and the essence of the work comes from their lived experience, their willingness to share, and the work they all have been doing for many years to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in federal agencies, the NPS, and all public lands and outdoor spaces. My deepest appreciation and gratitude.

Section I

Introduction and Background, Methodology and Positionality

**Diversity, equity and inclusion in the National Park Service:
Narratives, counter-narratives, and the importance of moving beyond
demographics**

“...our national parks in all their particularity and peculiarity show us as much about ourselves as the landscapes they honor and protect. They can be seen as holograms of an America born of shadow and light; dimensional; full of contradictions and complexities. Our dreams, our generousities, our cruelties and crimes are absorbed into these parks like water.” Terry Tempest Williams, The Hour of Land

Introduction

Back in 1962, just prior to passage of the Civil Rights Act, the National Park Service (NPS) recruited Robert Stanton, a young black college student, into seasonal work at Grand Teton National Park. Stuart Udall was the Secretary of the Interior. Years later, Stanton became the first black superintendent of a national park since the NPS was created. Then, in 1996, President Bill Clinton appointed Robert Stanton as the first black director of the NPS. When I spoke with Director Stanton in 2016, he repeatedly emphasized the far-sightedness of a few key people who led the NPS towards what it now calls ‘Relevancy, Diversity and Inclusion’ (RDI). Stanton relayed this against the backdrop of his personal story growing up in the Jim Crow South. As he explained it, his family, like all black families in that era, could not just jump into the car and drive anywhere to explore their country as they wished. They faced the embarrassment, humiliation, and outrage of being refused service at hotels and restaurants. They also routinely

faced open hostility and the very real threat of violence when they dared venture any distance from home.

Several decades have passed, and the NPS finds itself at a crossroads in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion, not unlike the one at which the greater American society finds itself. It is, however, important to understand the history, both past and recent, that led from that crossroads to this one. This thesis takes a magnifying glass to the recent past--examining closely the era which moved from Jim Crow and legalized segregation, through the Civil Rights era, the backlash against those gains, and through to today. The NPS, the environmental movement, and American society as a whole, have struggled to come to terms with the consequences of that history. I focus particularly on how that history relates to outdoor spaces, to who is represented in the outdoors and the implications of both for creating a truly inclusive, equitable society.

The notion of the conservation of nature and wilderness in its most pristine came of age at a time when U.S. business interests were at a height of extractive frenzy. The ecological degradation that resulted led a group of concerned citizens to realize that these awe-inspiring places could not be taken for granted. That was in the mid-19th century. Those involved in struggling to create the national parks claimed that the parks embodied the very essence of democracy; they worked to set aside these areas for all citizens to enjoy for all time (Duncan and Burns, 2010). However, many researchers and historians contend that an elitist ideology was inherent in the creation of the national parks, since from the first days of their existence only the wealthy could afford to visit them (Weber and Sultana, 2013),

and in many cases, indigenous peoples were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands in order to create the protected spaces. In the intervening years, the demographics of the United States have changed; based on census data, experts predict that by 2040 whites will no longer make up a numerical majority of U.S. citizens. Still, the reality today, as in the 19th century, is that visitors to the parks, as well as staff, are disproportionately white, something that has remained nearly constant despite NPS attempts to increase the diversity of its visitors and its workforce.

President Clinton signed the “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations,” Executive Order #12898, in 1994, requiring all federal agencies to examine their visitor profiles and ensure they were doing all they could to prevent discrimination and barriers to access (Floyd and Johnson, 2002; Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann, 2011). In 2000, the NPS hired research consultants to create and conduct the Comprehensive Surveys of the American Public. Their survey of both park visitors and non-visitors revealed that the vast majority of visitors to national parks (about 93%) were white, middle and upper-middle class, older adults. People of color were significantly under-represented relative to their proportions within the U.S. population (Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann, 2011). The Park Service set about trying to change that, but a repeat survey conducted in 2008-09 showed that nothing much had changed (Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann, 2011). This fact led to my initial research question: *Why have the efforts made by the NPS to increase the diversity of its visitors not yielded significant changes over the last two decades?* However, after initial

interviews with people from communities of color (COC) and park service employees, as well as a relatively comprehensive review of the literature, the answer to this question began to become clear. Essentially, structural racism^{*} lies at the heart of the problem. Furthermore, the NPS's history of lack of effective communication and collaboration with COC at the most basic levels--in terms of park creation (COC or specific stakeholders not included or consulted), hiring policies and public programming (often shown to be inherently discriminatory)--further complicates and deepens the current situation.

Despite instituting multiple programs and policies, progress towards diversity, equity and inclusion is painfully slow. Because structural racism and embedded institutional culture are found at the core of the stagnation, as explained in more detail in Section II, Parts A and B, merely initiating new programs and policies is not sufficient. Real and lasting change requires a multi-pronged, multi-level approach. This understanding led to my current research question:

What multi-level approaches do people of color and national park staff or partners recommend to successfully increase diversity, equity and inclusion in the park system, and what specific changes do they think need to occur in order for structural racism to be fully addressed?

Related sub-questions include:

^{*}Structural or institutionalized racism is defined as “the embeddedness of racially discriminatory practices in the institutions, laws, and agreed upon values and practices of a society (<http://understandingrace.org/resources/glossary.html>, n.d.). This will be discussed in much more detail in the chapter on structural racism later in the thesis.

--What pragmatic solutions are already being implemented, at the national and/or local level that can be expanded upon, what is being done that does not work, and what new ideas or approaches should the NPS explore?

--What stories do people of color (POC) have to tell about their relationship with the outdoors in general and national parks in particular? Why are those stories so vital for the NPS to hear? How do their stories differ from those told by white middle/upper class people?

--What stories should the NPS be telling its visitors about the culture and history of POC and other Americans whose stories have historically been suppressed, that would help it gain relevancy in the coming decades?

--How can the NPS, its partners and COC collaborate more effectively and equitably so as to move forward regarding diversity, equity and inclusion in the NPS, and how can that progress be measured?

The following questions will also be addressed. Although not directly part of the primary research question, they are relevant to the theoretical framework of this thesis. They also must be explored in order to see the bigger picture of how the history, narratives and counter-narratives affect equity and inclusion in the NPS.

--What changes have taken place in NPS policies, programming, park creation (and more) in the last twenty years since Robert Stanton was the first (and only) black Director of the NPS?

--What parallels or intersections can be illuminated between cultural norms within the park service and the greater American culture in which it functions and serves?

--What parallels are useful to investigate between the lack of diversity in the environmental movement as a whole, and the inability of the NPS, despite its attempts, to become a more equitable agency and serve a more diverse population?

As demographics change, without the inclusion of POC, the current system of parks/protected lands may no longer be relevant to the majority of the increasingly diverse public (Anon., personal communication, 2017; A. Peterman, personal communication, April, 2016; Rowland, 2016). National parks need vigilant, ongoing protection, as made apparent by recent articles describing groups in Congress looking to privatize and exploit all public lands (Rowland, 2016). Similarly, a 2016 takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon by right-wing vigilantes underscores the point that without a strong base of citizens working to conserve and protect public lands, the parks are vulnerable to the political and business interests that seek to open them to unbridled resource extraction. In addition, the exquisite natural beauty these places protect provides important inspiration for artists, as well as human mental and physical health and well-being. As long as large portions of the American public do not know about or have access to the parks, the NPS fails to live up to its mission (see Appendix A), and worse yet, entire groups of people experience racial and ethnic discrimination as a result of unequal access (O'Brien and Njambi, 2012; Weber

and Sultana, 2013). Thus diversity, equity and inclusion in the NPS (and other public lands) is not just about demographics, rather it also becomes a matter of environmental justice.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) (in which participants take an active part in the research process, and which is the methodology/epistemological approach I use for this thesis), using in-depth, unstructured interviews and narrative storytelling, introduces a level of collaboration and inclusion into this study that is not commonly found in the related literature on national parks. These powerful stories and the ideas that emerge may help the NPS to become more equitable and deepen the agency's understanding of what is important to COC and why. As a result, the NPS can learn more about what changes they must make in order to create a truly equitable agency. Using an inherently collaborative approach to the research also should encourage the NPS to undertake the very collaboration that appears to be lacking in many of their endeavors. Moreover, adding to the qualitative repertoire in this field of study will hopefully encourage more researchers to continue in this vein. Viewing equity, diversity and inclusion in the NPS (and outdoor spaces in general) using this unique prism will allow us to grasp the complexity while ultimately focusing our attention on what needs to happen in order to change the status quo.

This research is a story of stories. Prepare for a journey on a route of complex ideas and narratives which take many twists and turns, as interesting stories often do. Ultimately, these stories culminate in solid, pragmatic ideas for solutions to the specific research questions. The journey begins by casting light

on the importance of language, and on Participatory Action Research methodology (PAR) in general, and specifically how it was used in this study. An important side trip takes the reader through the essentials of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the theoretical framework for this research. The journey then continues with an exploration of the previous academic literature about equity and inclusion in outdoor spaces, as well as research on the importance of exposure to the outdoors to basic health and well-being. In addition, I will pause for a look at the evolution of so-called ‘diversity trainings,’ their short-comings and what makes them successful. Environmental justice, too, is an important station to visit because of the fundamental connections between COC and their experience of the environment, as well as to the future of the environmental movement. Similarly, structural racism and implicit bias are essential stops on the journey, as these concepts are key to defining how we look at equity and inclusion in outdoor spaces, as well as to the delicate work of crafting workable solutions to past stumbling blocks. Finally, the journey will arrive at its temporary destination, a point from which we can look back at the entire map of the route, see and understand why we traveled this way, where it leads and what it demands of all of us in the future. The stories, the narratives and counter-narratives that directed the travels compel us forward, amidst tragedy, pain and hope--but the journey is never quite complete. Our society and the many narratives comprising it will continue to metamorphose. This story of stories will not really ever be complete, but we will get closer to equity and justice when we can truly hear all the stories

contained within our society, and when those begin more fully to translate into real change in organizations such as the NPS.

Background and Literature Review

A Brief Word About Language

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to define some of the terminology used in this thesis, for ease of understanding, especially regarding terms like ‘diversity,’ ‘equity,’ ‘relevancy,’ and others. Currently, organizations and communities use different terminology. The NPS uses these terms together, as in their office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion (RDI). Other organizations are beginning to move away from the term ‘Diversity,’ often replacing it with ‘Equity.’ These terms as well as their definitions are in flux, and according to Carolyn Finney, professor and author, they always have been. I may use some of the terms interchangeably throughout this thesis, partly because in the world of diversity training and environmental organizations, there is no consensus about language.

Below are a few definitions and explanations of words and terms or phrases used frequently in this thesis:

~Relevancy: According to the NPS, relevancy has been achieved when all Americans are able to establish a personal connection to the National Park Service parks and programs, and find meaning and value in the mission of the National Park Service (<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/index.htm>).

~Diversity: Diversity represents the practice of actively incorporating people of different backgrounds, perspectives, thoughts and beliefs throughout the organization to ensure that NPS is advantaged by the best thinking possible. Diversity represents the wide range of visible and invisible differences and similarities that make each of us unique (<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/index.htm>).

~Inclusion: Inclusion, in the NPS, refers to the practice of intentionally building a culture that is flexible, values diverse ideas, and embraces the meaningful participation of all (<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/index.htm>).

~**Racism:** “Commonly misunderstood, ‘racism’ means any type of bias or prejudgment based on a person’s race. Acts of racism can range from blatant hate crimes to institutional policies that allow employment discrimination, and from individual language through the use of slurs or microaggressions to a school’s selection of Eurocentric textbooks. Related to these manifestations of racism is the way these practices are embedded in a system that maintains the racial status quo” (source provided by Jenny Mulholland-Beahrs, personal communication, 2016).

~**Institutional Racism:** A system of procedures/patterns in education, housing businesses, employment, professional associations, religion, media, etc., from neighborhood zoning rules separating black and white communities to the development of isolated public housing projects; to federal subsidies for suburban development and neighborhood racial covenants excluding housing access to African Americans; to explicit real estate, insurance, and banking practices, whose effect is to perpetuate and maintain the power, influence and well-being of one group over another. It originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society; and thus receives far less public condemnation than does individual racism. Researchers have found that much of the wealth and economic inequality gaps existent today among African Americans, Latinos, and Whites can be traced back to segregationist, economic and social practices” (source provided by Jenny Mulholland-Beahrs, personal communication, 2016).

~**Privilege:** “Learning about and identifying privilege is a process that can include denial, especially if a person feels that they were marginalized due to economic hardship, grew up in an abusive family, or experienced other difficult circumstances. Privilege highlights the difference between individual struggle and systemic inequalities based on things like skin color or gender. Examples of White privilege are if your skin color does not work against you in terms of how people perceive your financial responsibility, style of dress, public speaking skills, or job performance, and do not assume that you got where you are professionally because of your race (or because of affirmative action programs)” (source provided by Jenny Mulholland-Beahrs, personal communication, 2016).

See Appendix B for a complete glossary of terms from different sources.

I will discuss language and its effects on diversity, equity and inclusion in more detail later in this thesis.

The next chapter elucidates the way Participatory Action Research (PAR) works and why it is an appropriate fit for this research. PAR enables the often unheard voices and personal narratives which bring this story to life, to come to the fore, further bringing this topic from the pages of academic journals and popular press into the every-day reality of people's lived experiences. Because PAR includes concepts that are central to this thesis, presenting it early on will help set the context.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Qualitative research brings the human element of a subject to the fore.

The central theme of this thesis is the relationship of people, specifically POC, with the NPS, and with the outdoors in general. Because these relationships are complex and nuanced, it is of utmost importance to speak directly with people in order to gain insight into the complexity. This thesis research addresses issues of racism “and how they are manifested through people’s unequal access to and control over resources or their positions within inequitable social relationships” (Kendon, in Hay, 2010, p. 269). Moreover, it tries to balance the critical examination of social structures with an in-depth look at people’s lived experiences within those (often unjust) structures (Winchester and Rofe, in Hay, 2010). This critical approach lends itself to Participatory Action Research (PAR) and vice versa.

Floyd, Santucci, Byrne and Wolch, O’Brien, Weber and Sultana, Taylor and many other researchers actively study environmental justice in a national park context. Much of the early research used quantitative methodologies, but Weber and Sultana, and Floyd and Johnson, specifically mentioned the need for the use of qualitative research in this field in order to capture more information about personal experiences through interviews, focus groups, narrative storytelling and more (Floyd and Johnson, 2002; Weber and Sultana, 2013). Following the recommendations of these researchers, this thesis project utilized in-depth, unstructured interviews, and narrative- and counter-storytelling, grounded in Participatory Action Research (PAR) as its primary methodology and

epistemological approach, with Critical Race Theory (CRT) as its primary theoretical framework.

Environmental justice issues lend themselves to a deeply democratic approach—that is, to a researcher working in collaboration with participants to create research and social change that will ultimately benefit the participants. This approach is the very essence of PAR (Johnson, 2017; Kindon in Hay, 2010; Koirala-Azad and Fuentes, 2009-10; Stoudt, Fox, and Fine, 2012). PAR embodies four essential aspects that define and differentiate it from other epistemologies/methodologies. These aspects are

- 1) A community basis,
- 2) A goal of changing a societal injustice,
- 3) An inherently democratic, dynamic, and iterative process, and
- 4) A challenge to the ‘old’ ways of doing research and a question of the assumption of objectivity.

While the four aspects are interrelated and do overlap, they should be examined one by one. 1) The community basis of PAR. In her textbook *Community-based Qualitative Research: Approaches for education and the social sciences*, Laura Ruth Johnson describes Community-based Qualitative Research (CBQR) as part of the “interpretive family of approaches...[whose] intent is not just to reveal or uncover multiple and divergent community perspectives but also to produce some solutions and responses that are meaningful to the community” (Johnson, 2017, p.3). Community usually refers to a marginalized group--the participants often live in the same community or neighborhood, and have a common goal of

changing an injustice in their collective lives. For this research, I have defined community broadly to include stakeholders from communities of color (COC), National Park Service (NPS) staff, as well as staff from partner organizations/agencies. Some of the participants from the NPS and partner organizations also belong to COC. They do not all live in the same area or regions. In fact, I interviewed people from all over the United States. However, they do belong to a larger community of people who work for the NPS or other outdoor/natural resource agencies or organizations who have some stake in increasing COC access to nature than they currently have. The participants in this thesis research bring differing perspectives on the importance of diversifying the NPS and other outdoor spaces and why the process appears to be moving very slowly.

Because of the natural partnerships that evolve in PAR studies between academics and community members, PAR researchers have begun to expand and increase the collaborations between their particular universities and communities, especially marginalized ones. This development comes out of the realization on all sides that these partnerships have the potential to be very powerful in terms of the societal changes they can bring about (Johnson, 2017). In addition, this development aligns with the importance accorded in PAR to the transformation for the participants, as they find their voice and become empowered to take part in social change. Such transformation often requires alliances that help participants learn about doing research, develop community-building techniques and take

steps to bring about change (Kindon, in Hay, 2010; Johnson, 2017; Stoudt, Fox, and Fine, 2012).

2) PAR is oriented to the goal of changing societal injustices. Since communities marginalized by the dominant narrative and society often participate in PAR, it aims to give voice to those whose needs go unheard, and to address the injustices occurring, either in the local community, or in this case, in a federal agency. In PAR, unlike other qualitative methodologies, the goal is not only to describe and analyze a social reality, but also to help change it (Johnson, 2017; Kindon, in Hay, 2010, p. 260; Kobayashi, 1994; Stoudt, Fox, and Fine, 2012). The change occurs “through the active involvement of research participants in the focus and direction of the research itself” (Kindon, in Hay, 2010, p. 260). For Johnson (2017), two of the key elements of CBQR are its critical and transformative nature. Community-based research challenges the status quo. According to Johnson, CBQR aims “to use findings to enact changes and make improvements in programs and policies.” While PAR cannot always claim to make major changes, it often leads to smaller changes which build on themselves and radiate outward, “through the commitment and diligence of a community of like-minded and committed people” (Koirala-Azad and Fuentes, 2009-10, p. 2). (I will discuss this aspect of PAR in greater detail in the section on Critical Race Theory (CRT).

3) PAR is an inherently democratic, dynamic, and iterative process.

Johnson elaborates on this point, stating that

what particularly sets PAR apart from other forms of research...is that research purpose statements, hypotheses, and questions are not designed a priori, or before entering a research setting. Rather, PAR researchers work with community organizations and members to identify salient and germane issues and topics, and they collaboratively design and implement the research study (Johnson, 2017, p.4).

As Koirala-Azad and Fuentes so eloquently express, “it starts with the notion that given the proper tools, the people most affected by a problem are not only capable of better understanding their realities, but are also the best equipped to address their struggles” (Koirala-Azad and Fuentes, 2009-10, p.1). With collaboration at its core, the “viewpoints and contributions of all members are valued and sought through formal and informal means to inform the design and implementation of the project” (Johnson, 2017, p.25). Likewise, researchers routinely consult the community members, and consider them partners equal in status to all members of the research team. Moreover, “opportunities for discussion and dialogue are provided throughout the project” (Johnson, 2017, p. 25).

As mentioned above, working within the constraints that presented themselves during this thesis project, the ultimate design and direction of the project resulted from feedback from participants, who had opportunities to offer feedback at critical junctures along the way, especially in the initial stages, and later, in how their particular interview content was presented. In general, I adhered to the underlying principles, kept in touch with participants, and requested feedback as often as was reasonable to expect from such a project.

4) PAR challenges the ‘old’ ways of doing research and questions the assumption of objectivity. This statement actually encompasses several complex, nuanced concepts and philosophies. First, most qualitative researchers in general, and PAR researchers in particular, adopt an epistemological perspective which rejects the concept of ‘pure objectivity’ in any research endeavor. These researchers (and I include myself among them) challenge the idea that human beings are able to fully set aside their backgrounds and values when conducting research. For Kobayashi (1994, p.76), “no involvement with research subjects/objects is value neutral.” Secondly, “PAR actively challenges traditional concepts of objectivity by democratizing the ‘right to research’ (Appadurai, 2006, as cited in Stoudt, Fox, and Fine, 2012, p. 180). Here, the democratizing aspect of PAR discussed earlier, and the challenge it poses to standard academia, merge and converge. For Stoudt, Fox, and Fine, “PAR offers a scientific counter-story; a radical imagination of a public science, conducted by and for the people most intimately affected by inequity” (Stoudt, Fox, and Fine, 2012, p. 181). Often in research circles, there has been a ‘quantitative vs qualitative’ divide; the two approaches are sometimes seen in a dualistic framework. That is, research is either qualitative or quantitative--subjective or objective. Qualitative research has come into its own in the last few decades, and many view this dualism as a ‘false dichotomy’ (Winchester and Rofe, in Hay, 2010). Qualitative researchers problematize this as a representation of quantitative methods as “focused, objective, generalizable, and by implication, value-free” (Winchester and Rofe, in Hay, 2010, p. 16), while qualitative methods are looked down upon as “soft and

subjective, an anecdotal supplement, somehow inferior to ‘real’ science” (Winchester and Rofe, in Hay, 2010, p. 16). This view misrepresents “quantitative methods as objective and value-free; increasingly, however, this assumption about the nature of science has been questioned...[since] our choice of what we study and how we study it reflects our values and beliefs” (Winchester and Rofe, in Hay, 2010, p. 16). Both qualitative methods and mixed methods are becoming more common and accepted in academia, as the depth of what qualitative methods can bring out about a subject becomes clearer to researchers across disciplines.

Researchers sometimes question another aspect of PAR and other action research methodologies--the concept of praxis and its place in research. According to Paulo Freire, the father of action research, praxis refers to “a combination of reflection and action upon the world ‘in order to transform it’” (Freire, as cited in Johnson, 2017, p. 21). The concept of praxis “requires scholars not just identify or describe social problems but also become actively involved in challenging existing conditions and ‘speaking back’ to inequities and injustice” (Johnson, 2017, p. 21). Praxis is, in essence, the “merging of theory and practice” (Johnson, 2017, p. 21). Following this line of reasoning, this thesis research also encompasses a praxis approach, investigating the historical context and personal stories associated with the NPS, and the final document has been written in an attempt to help boost the current momentum towards increasing equity.

Another essential aspect of qualitative research, and especially action research is the concept of reflexivity. Reflexivity involves “reflecting on one’s background and positionality and how it figures into research” (Johnson, 2017, p.42). Positionality (situating oneself and one’s own background and biases in the context of the research) constitutes a key concept in qualitative research. Since qualitative researchers generally reject ‘pure objectivity’ as unrealistic and impossible to achieve, they tend to avoid writing in the third person as well. Alternatively, “they opt for locating their knowledge-defining objectivity as something to be found not through distance, impartiality, and universality but through contextuality, partiality, and positionality” (Mansvelt and Berg, in Hay, 2010, p.339). In other words, instead of focusing on an objectivity that may be impossible to achieve, they highlight context and values as part and parcel of the process of knowledge-building. Qualitative researchers accept that their values cannot be separated (and some argue they should not be separated) from, or extricated out of, their research. They must continually be aware of where they come from, how they think, and what they value, and also routinely scrutinize themselves throughout the research process. Also referred to as ‘critical reflexivity,’ the constant revisiting of their own background and values, especially when working with marginalized or vulnerable communities, is also considered to be a vital ethical component of qualitative research (Dowling, in Hay, 2010). Within that critical reflexivity, or as part of it, “it is imperative to discuss why [they] selected a particular research topic (context) and [their] initial ideas about the topic (partiality)” (Waite, in Hay, 2010, p. 225).

Another definition of reflexivity comes from Kim England (1994, as referenced by Dowling in Hay, 2010, p. 31), as “a process of constant, self-conscious scrutiny of the self as researcher and of the research process.” Because of the nature of action research in particular, and the communities with whom they tend to work, qualitative researchers need to be exquisitely sensitive to the power dynamics in their relationships with community members. PAR researchers involve the participants in as many aspects of the research as possible, in part, to offset the power relations that cannot be ignored, between academics and the communities with whom they work. They must constantly ask themselves difficult questions in order to avoid the pitfalls of uneven power relations. What are their motivations in studying this? Do they want to help this community? Where do their own values and needs fit in, and how can they best honor the community’s needs and values. What are the community’s goals (as opposed to their own)? How does their own privileged background influence the sorts of questions they ask in interviews, and how does it influence their approach to the topic? By constantly staying on top of their own biases and positionality, action researchers can avoid the tendency to push their own values onto the community-members with whom they are working.

My Positionality Statement and Reflections

This thesis showcases the stories of a variety of people—people of color, NPS staff, and people working for outdoor agencies--many of whom partner with the NPS. Their stories, thoughts and ideas about diversity, equity, and inclusion

in national parks and other outdoor spaces form the centerpiece of this document. However, qualitative research in general, and Participatory Action Research (PAR) in particular, is grounded in an epistemological approach which admits that there is no way for any human to be so distanced from a subject as to be fully objective. In other words, those for whom the premises of PAR make sense, think that there is no human way to study any subject without our own values and biases coloring our thinking and approach. Under this premise, I must reveal my own ‘positionality’ as part of the process of ‘situating’ the research. Participants and readers have a right to know what led to the choice of subject matter, the factors which led me to want to study it and what influenced the researching and writing of this thesis. Moreover, the introspection needed to reach that level of self-awareness is particularly necessary in a study of equity, justice and inclusion, and for which I interviewed many POC, especially since I do not identify as a POC.

This process has taken me on a personal, emotional and intellectual journey beyond my expectations. While I recognized early in this process that race and racism were a big part of the picture, I did not fathom how personal this investigation would become, how deeply I would be affected by the stories shared by the participants, the books and articles I read and the films I saw. The process of introspection into my own white privilege has accompanied the work, as indeed it should. In a sense, my premise is that any empathetic person would respond in a similar way--pain, shock perhaps, but much more importantly, a resolve to fight tooth and nail against racism in its many forms and faces. But

alas, our implicit biases and defenses often get in the way of recognizing how deeply embedded hidden racism actually is. None of us is immune--all the more reason to try to bring it out into the open. We can only fight what we can see.

Language is extremely powerful and plays an integral role in research, writing and understanding our subject. It affects our very thoughts and ideas. We have seen that language is inseparable from how we view and engage with the environment as a whole. The meanings of the terms I use in this thesis change often over time. The terms themselves also change. Some may have already changed and I may be unaware. In addition, if hidden assumptions have crept into this work, I apologize if they offend anyone. At times I may seem to lump all POC into a single category, assume marginalization, generalize what is not necessarily generalizable. Please note that this is either difficult to avoid in the scope of this thesis, or unintentional. As it is, I delve much more deeply into race and racism, language, and other topics than some readers may think necessary. However, these areas are integral to gaining a deeper understanding of the inherent complexities of this subject and will help the reader understand the background and context surrounding the subject of structural racism.

One cannot be a white person writing critically about race and racism without continually grappling with difficult questions of identity--it is dicey and at times, deeply uncomfortable territory. Of course, this is also why it is so difficult for predominantly white agencies to make progress on issues of inclusion, diversity, and equity. Some of my own grappling occurred while listening to the National Public Radio (NPR) program '*Code Switch*' (dedicated to

broadcasts about race, ethnicity, and culture, NPR.org), during discussions with friends, from reading, or while watching films. I recently attended a workshop, and in speaking with a fellow-attendee afterwards, realized what had been a ‘sticking point’ for me all along. I realized I had been trying to distance myself from my whiteness. I would say to myself, ‘I’m Jewish and my family has not been in the United States for very long, therefore I am somehow less answerable to the historical burdens of whites regarding racism.’ Or, ‘I am targeted by white supremacists just as blacks are.’ Or, ‘I believe deeply in equality and social justice, have worked for it all my life, so how can I carry the same historical burdens as other whites.’ In short, I had been running away from the psychological weight of complicity in a racist, classist system. All the above is true. However, I realize that does not and should not excuse me from acknowledging that I have benefited from structural racism throughout my life. That is an uncomfortable, deeply disturbing acknowledgement. However, I also realize how important it is not to get stuck there! Guilt is not constructive. What is constructive is acknowledging and moving forward. I need to use the discomfort as an impetus to figure out how to be the best ally of POC and COC that I can be.

A recent ‘*Code Switch*’ episode featured “three women of color and one ‘woke’ white man” talking about allyship. One of the women remarked, ‘no thanks, I don’t need your allyship.’ The others tended to be more open to allyship, saying that it is about building community and bridges, but emphasizing the need for allies to know when to step aside and get out of the way. As several

participants in this thesis research have said, ‘know when to move over and let leaders of color lead, and ask them how you can best be an ally in that specific situation--don’t assume anything. This has been a tough lesson and involves some contradictions and tensions that must be simultaneously held. I see myself as an ally. At the same time, I realize that not every POC wants an ally. The tension or contradiction arises when I, as a white person, take on a project of this type and subject matter. On the one hand, I am ‘daring’ to ‘help’ amplify voices because I am white. It is a delicate dance, one fraught with difficult emotions on all sides. On the other hand, am I not ‘getting in the way’ by doing just that?

When I began this research, I really struggled with that question--is it even my place to take on researching POC and the NPS? I checked in with several people who became participants in the study--asked myself again and again, and asked them--do I have the right to be doing this research--looking into what POC have to say about why the NPS has not progressed in its quest to be diverse and equitable. This process, in fact, exemplifies the critical reflexivity I wrote about earlier, and why it is so crucial. While I felt they encouraged me to continue, they also reminded me that POC have been working on the subject for decades. At the same time, some of them felt that as a white person I have a role to play in the process of amplifying counter-narratives and pressing the NPS to be better--if for no other reason than that these messages, because of implicit bias and defensiveness, are sometimes heard better from other whites. Therein lies the contradiction. It is clear that decolonizing implicit bias and dismantling structural racism is an ongoing, life-long process.

Using PAR offers what I see as the best of democracy in science, while also taking the step of imbuing science with some degree of activism. PAR is effective when a social issue requires change. Its modus operandi is to involve and collaborate with participants, rather than ‘study them’ or study a topic from a purely academic standpoint. PAR is all about collaboration with the people most closely involved with and living a situation. The ultimate goal is social change. By using PAR and studying embedded racism in an agency with whose mission I identify, I hope as an ally, to activate and motivate change, by helping in whatever way I can, to amplify voices and stories not always otherwise heeded or heard, despite being told time and time again.

This Research

As explained previously, PAR is a dynamic, iterative process. The feedback from participants triggers changes in all aspects of the research—from the very research question itself to wording to interview questions to the entire approach to and direction of the study. This thesis work was no exception, and in fact I found these very aspects of PAR most exciting and stimulating. Indeed, as I proceeded with the literature review and interviews, and received feedback from the participants, I continued to make changes and tweaks to interview guideline questions. Their feedback helped carve the direction I have ultimately taken. The initial interviews of the summer of 2016 became, in essence, the preliminary stage of PAR, during which the researcher typically initiates contact with the stakeholders and begins the process of learning, assessing the situation, scoping

out the issues and working out the best direction to move forward (Kinson, in Hay, 2010, p.263).

During the preliminary stage of the research, I interviewed four stakeholders about diversity and inclusion in national parks, including a program manager at Mount Rainier National Park, three members of COCs, including one who works in the NPS as an Urban Fellow (an NPS program designed to help connect COC with parks and urban green spaces). Over the course of the entire study, I conducted forty in-depth interviews, some of which included the use of narrative and counter-storytelling. In-depth, unstructured interviews allowed for the maximum input from the participants regarding what is most relevant for them (Dunn, in Hay, 2010, p. 103). Because the interviews sometimes became a conversation, my own critical reflexivity became particularly vital; as in any conversation one person's comments most certainly affect the responses of the other and vice versa. I devised an interview guide (see Appendix C), rather than a list of specific questions, and used the guide as appropriate for the unfolding conversation (Dunn, in Hay, 2010). The guide also helped probe for stakeholder input on the interview questions themselves, the goals and direction of the research on the whole, and the best ways to go about studying the subject of diversity, equity and inclusion in the NPS. Allowing narrative stories to unfold with minimum input from the interviewer (me) encouraged greater depth of thought and the creative process; ideas flowed more naturally.

I audio-recorded the interviews, and began by trying to transcribe them using Dragon software. However, the transcription software proved inadequate

for my needs. Instead I utilized the technique of ‘repeated listening,’ writing down ideas, statements and recurring themes while listening to the interviews, and continually reviewing them as I identified themes and sub-themes.

I chose not to use formal coding software, deciding, rather, to do this myself, by hand. This process of immersing myself in the content of the interviews allowed me to see which themes seemed most prominent, helped me see the connections between themes, while also allowing the voices in the stories to direct the interpretations and coding, rather than me, or a non-human entity, deciding unilaterally. The material from the participants, therefore, as well as their feedback on drafts, has been the main driver of this thesis and gave it direction. The related academic work, public media discourse, and theoretical framework provided the backbone and skeleton, into which the participants breathed life.

*“...there’s this unwillingness to engage our own history...I’ve met Euro-Americans who’ve said things in print like, ok, yeh, slavery, we understand, but that was a hundred years ago, come on, get over it. They...don’t realize how it sounds...The trauma can be passed on from generation to generation, **and they’re not thinking about that because they’ve never experienced that kind of trauma.** And the thousands of little cuts, ‘death of a thousand cuts,’ ...race and gender bias and sexism, all those things, it’s death by a thousand cuts. **A little sleight here, a little sleight there, a little cut here, a little cut there, and over a lifetime, you’re hemorrhaging.**” (Anonymous, personal communication, 2017)*

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Explanations of the epistemological approach in the methods section of a qualitative study help situate the research for the readers, and assist them in understanding why the researcher chose the particular topic and methodology, and the theoretical framework or grounding. This thesis research is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT). When I came to understand that race and racism seem to be at the heart of the NPS struggles to achieve equity and inclusion, I felt the need to find a theoretical framework that would help explain this phenomenon. As the section on Participatory Action Research (PAR) suggests, CRT and PAR complement each other. They both come out of radical, critical epistemologies which deconstruct the societal structures that create and perpetuate inequality, and the social relations and governmental policies that support continued inequality and injustice. Both CRT and PAR look deeply at context and the history of how current situations evolved as they did. In this age of immediate gratification, sound bites, quick links, and short attention spans, academic and social critique require care, intellectual rigor, and intentionality. They often inhabit the realm of delicate, sensitive realities (people’s lives and lived experience as marginalized within a dominant culture and narrative), and

must navigate increasingly polarized world views. In light of all these things, it is more important than ever to hear the voices of marginalized people, in a way that empowers all of us to see and understand the roots of inequity and change the structures that reinforce it.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) appeared in academia in the 1970's. Specifically, it came out of legal scholarship, upon the realization that "the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960's had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.4). It began as a small group of scholars and activists and, as the ideas gained traction, more joined in the discussion and the group convened formally for the first time in 1989 (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). 'Crits,' as they now call themselves, form a large professional and academic community spanning many disciplines and attracting increasing numbers of adherents.

Five basic tenets underlie CRT. The first is that "racism is ordinary, not aberrational--...[it is] the common, every-day experience of most people of color in this country" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, pp.7-8). Because of this ordinary nature, "it is difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, pp.7-8).

The second tenet explicates that "our system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group[;]... 'interest convergence' or material determinism, adds a further dimension" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, pp.7-8). In other words, civil

rights gains for communities of color (COC) would not happen if the gains were not in the interest of whites at the particular moment in time. Derrick Bell, one of the initial CRT scholars and considered the father of CRT, “argued that civil rights advances for blacks always seemed to coincide with changing economic conditions and the self-interest of elite whites” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.22). He used the example of *Brown v. Board of Education* in a classic article published in the *Harvard Law Review* to elucidate his theory of interest convergence. Since this decision is generally considered a “crown jewel of U.S. Supreme Court jurisprudence,” Bell “invited his readers to ask themselves why the American legal system suddenly, in 1954, opened up as it did” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.22). After all, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had been litigating for years for school desegregation, with little to no success. Bell further argued that World War II and the return of veterans of color prompted the decision (and the sudden change in direction by the Court). Having just fought side by side with whites, veterans of color did not complacently return to previous conditions of segregation at home. Moreover, the Cold War made it imperative for the U.S. to appear socially progressive in order to attract “uncommitted emerging nations, most of which were black, brown, or Asian,” away from the spread of communism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.23). Thus for a brief period, the interests of blacks and whites converged.

A third tenet of CRT is that race is essentially a social construction. It

holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations...[which] correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, pp.8-9).

Similarly, certain genetic traits “have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior”

(Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, pp.8-9).

Another aspect of CRT concerns the racialization of different minority populations by the dominant one “at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labor market” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, pp.8-9). Delgado and Stefancic provide the example of the Japanese, at one time considered to be industrious, hard workers and, at another time (World War II), considered suspect and interned in concentration camps (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, pp.8-9). Also important to CRT theorists are the concepts of “intersectionality and anti-essentialism” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.10)--the idea that no one person “has a single, easily stated, unitary identity” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.10). For example, intersectionality refers to something like a white woman who may also identify as Jewish, and/or working class, and an African American man who may also be gay. “Everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.10). Anti-essentialism refers to people not being the spokespeople for their identified group, but often people who do not belong to that group expect that person to somehow represent the entire group, or worse, in their own mind, that person represents that identified group. These add to the already complex web of social and racial relations.

A fourth tenet of CRT (and one particularly important in this research) is the

voice-of-color thesis [which] holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.10).

Thus, people of color, given their experiences with racism, are naturally the ones who can best express it.

The “legal storytelling” movement urges black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.10).

Counter-storytelling has spread beyond the legal world into all areas of human experience, and has a very powerful role in creating change. Many participants in the research for this thesis shared their stories and counter-narratives, and since they are often quite different from the narratives of the dominant Euro-American narratives, can play a vital role in opening up the NPS to change.

A final theme within CRT is that “revisionist history re-examines America’s historical record, replacing comforting majoritarian* interpretations of events with ones that square more accurately with minorities’ experiences” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 24). While in my experience revisionism has often been used to describe the white settlers’ version of American history, or

* view that majority culture and attitudes should hold sway (Delgado and Stefancic, 2010).

even denial of the Holocaust, the term has been taken ‘back’ and used by marginalized groups, as described above. This one example of the changing nature of language characterizes my experience throughout the research for this thesis. Similarly, CRT scholars use the term

white supremacy...in a particular way that differs from its usual understanding in mainstream writing: whereas the term commonly refers to individuals and groups who engage in the crudest, most obvious acts of race hatred (such as extreme nationalists and Neo-Nazis), in CRT the more important, hidden, and pervasive form of White supremacy lies in the operation of forces that saturate the everyday mundane actions and policies which shape the world in the interests of White people (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010, p.342).

CRT’s inherently critical and historical analyses, especially in its principle tenets described above, help us dig deeper into why, in an era in which we had a black president,

history continues into the present... [including] infant death rates among minorities nearly double those of whites, school dropout rates among blacks and Latinos worse than those in practically any industrialized country, and a gap between whites and nonwhites in income, assets, educational attainment, and life expectancy as great as it was thirty years ago, if not worse (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 47).

Furthermore, CRT examines the difference in the narratives of people in the dominant culture relative to those from COCs. This difference in experience, and the difficulty most people in the dominant culture have in truly understanding the experience of nonwhites is one of the reasons narrative story-telling and counter-narratives are so fundamental to CRT. It is also one of the reasons I chose to

focus many of the interviews for this research on people's stories--their counter-narratives.

Narrative storytelling and Counter-storytelling

As mentioned previously, CRT emerged from legal scholarship and, while many of its core ideas are rooted in the legal world, these ideas are clearly relevant in other disciplines as well. CRT scholars focus on legal storytelling because dominant groups naturally have difficulty truly understanding what POC experience and endure. Narrative storytelling and narrative analysis have been useful academic methodologies for a long time. CRT's legal storytelling helps open "a window onto ignored or alternative realities" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.45). People from different backgrounds and "of different races have radically different experiences as they go through life" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.47). Narrative theory teaches that "we each occupy a normative universe or "nomos"...from which we are not easily dislodged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.47). According to the authors,

[t]he hope is that well-told stories describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers to bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others. Engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.47-48).

An example from one of the participants in this study frames it this way:

...we need to create avenues to let leaders of color lead, and then follow them and trust their lived experience -- as folks who have been marginalized, and historically marginalized for many, many,

many years -- to have a perspective of understanding of what needs to be done for justice and equity! POC know what that feels like and have more than a little...experience on ways to come up with solutions....(L. Allala, personal communication, January, 2017).

We are socialized, that is, brought up into and within the dominant narratives embedded in our culture and society by family, school teachers, and the media, to understand the world, our history, and our place in it in a very specific way. Our own perspective is usually invisible to us, since we are in the midst of it. A personal example can perhaps shed more light on this. I was brought up to be very open-minded, and have always prided myself on this. However, I discovered first-hand just how embedded my way of being in the world is when I spent a year and a half backpacking around south and southeast Asia. There, I discovered, people see and understand the world in a fundamentally different way, and I would come up against this on a daily basis in interactions with local people and in attempting to understand these new and foreign (to me) cultures. Sometimes these differences interfered with basic communication, even when we were ostensibly speaking the same language.

Counter-stories and counter-narratives are a powerful way to penetrate our preconceptions and engender empathy and openness to difference. Additionally, they give voice to people whose experiences are often discounted or silenced. They remind us of “our common humanity” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.50). Because personal stories can be so potent, I asked many of the participants in this study to tell me their stories. You will find them woven throughout the larger story-line of this thesis. These narratives offer so much insight into POC’s lived

experiences, and have the potential to break open communication where it has been stymied for so long. For this thesis, people have shared their stories about being a person of color in a dominant white culture, and in outdoor spaces that are typically perceived as white. They also have sometimes contrasting perspectives (from the dominant narrative) on what we can do to change the way we all approach inclusivity and equity in the park system and other public lands (and by extension, the rest of American society).

Nature and Health

An underlying premise for this thesis is that nature and exposure to the outdoors provide positive, necessary, and important benefits for human physical and mental health. To some degree, those brought up in the Western tradition assume access to nature is a right that belongs to every individual. In this chapter I will briefly examine the literature, found mostly in the emerging field of eco-psychology, which explores the human connection to nature.

Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, two academic psychologists at the University of Michigan, are the giants in this field; in 1989 they published their landmark book *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*. They had long been interested in the psychological mechanisms behind the intuitive awareness that nature seems to be good for humans. The book was the culmination of 20 years of intensive research and provided the first grounded theoretical framework for attempting to understand this relationship. Three major areas of inquiry developed from this period of research:

- 1) Is it real? Is the effect of nature on people as powerful as it intuitively seems to be?
- 2) How does it work? What lies behind the power of environments that not only attract and are appreciated by people but are apparently able to restore hassled individuals to healthy and effective functioning?
- 3) Are some natural patterns better than others? Is there a way to design, to manage, to interpret natural environments so as to enhance these beneficial influences (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989, p. ix)?

During and following those two decades of research a variety of ways of thinking about the human connection with nature emerged, some of which are

briefly outlined below. Researchers have created a fairly coherent framework, and in the last two to three decades, hundreds, if not thousands, of studies have been conducted to examine the different kinds of positive effects of nature on human well-being (Bieling, et al, 2014; Bowler, et al, 2010; Cervinka, Roderer, & Hefler, 2011; Mayer, et al, 2009; Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2011; Ryan, et al, 2010; Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2009; Zhang, Howell, & Iyer, 2014).

Some of the research has focused on the positive effects of nature exposure to people with depression and anxiety, as well as for those with more serious mental illnesses (Berman, et al, 2012; Gonzalez, et al, 2011; Kim, et al, 2009). Connection to nature among a variety of individuals, healthy and unhealthy, has been positively associated with well-being, empathy, decrease in stress levels, decreases in depression and anxiety levels, increased relaxation, increased vitality, increased physical activity and general happiness (Bieling, et al, 2014; Bowler, et al, 2010; Cervinka, et al, 2011; Gill, 2014; Howell, Passmore & Buro, 2013; Mayer, et al, 2009; Nisbet, et al, 2011; Rudd, Vohs, & Aaker, 2012; Ryan, et al, 2010; Weinstein, et al, 2009; Zhang, Howell, & Iyer, 2014). The Japanese Ministry of Health supports and subsidizes Shinrin-yoku, or ‘forest-bathing.’ Shinrin-yoku involves immersion in a forest atmosphere. This may include passively sitting and watching the forest or walking around in it. Many studies point to improved vitality, feeling refreshed, soothed and lively after exposure to forest environments, with concomitant decreases in negative emotions or feelings such as stress or discomfort, hostility, and depression, especially in comparison to the feelings expressed after similar exposure to urban environments

(Morita, et al, 2007; Takayama, et al, 2014; Tsunetsugu, et al, 2011). Much of the current research explores the mechanisms underlying that positive connection (in line with the Kaplans' third area of inquiry), often with the intent of creating evidenced-based programs, such as therapeutic horticulture, care farming, healing gardens, green exercise, wilderness therapy, animal-assisted interventions, and even psychotherapy in green settings (Gonzalez, et al, 2011; Haubenhofner, et al, 2010; Kim, et al, 2009). For the purpose of this thesis, it is enough to know about the close connection between nature and well-being.

Connectedness to Nature and the Future of Conservation

“Education, if it means anything, should not take people away from the land, but instill in them even more respect for it, because educated people are in a position to understand what is being lost. The future of the planet concerns all of us, and all of us should do what we can to protect it.” Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Laureate

Lieflander (2013) and O'Brien & Morris (2014) investigated the longer-term effects of connectedness to nature in youth, and whether a connection in younger people had any effect on the likelihood they would become conservators of nature or engage in sustainable lifestyle habits in their adult lives. In fact, children are most likely to carry their feeling of connectedness with nature into adulthood when they have had positive experiences with nature before the age of eleven (Lieflander, et al, 2013; O'Brien & Morris, 2014). Based on this type of data, President Barak Obama initiated the 'Every Kid in a Park' program, enabling all fourth graders and their families to receive a year-long free pass into any NPS site during the 2015-2016 school year. (The program has since been

extended to the 2016-2017 school year with support from partners like the National Parks Foundation. The participating agencies have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to continue the program through the 2020-2021 school year (C. Beall, personal communication, January, 2017)). This body of research also provides theoretical support for the many hundreds of programs run by non-profits, which often partner with the NPS, whose focus is reaching underserved youth, and helping expose them to the outdoors. Some may claim that youth can connect to the outdoors in any green space. This is certainly true, however, the iconic, particularly unique scenery found in wild land national parks has the ability to inspire in such a deep and powerful way, that it is difficult to dispute the desire to equalize access to this unparalleled beauty for people who may not have easy access to it, or even know it exists.

Research has also shown that people tend to adopt sustainable behaviors when they feel a strong connection to the place in which they reside (Hensley, in Pinar, ed., 2011). Hensley states, “when we develop a holistic understanding of our place, we feel as if we play an integral role in our specific eco-system” (Hensley, in Pinar, 2011, p. 142). Likewise, after reviewing the literature on the subject, Tim Gill finds “good evidence of a link between time spent in natural settings as a child, and positive views about nature as an adult,” (Gill, 2014, p.17) as well as the opposite--that is, “a lack of regular positive experiences in nature is associated with the development of fear, discomfort and dislike of the environment” (Gill, 2014, pp. 17-18). This line of research is supported by a major theme that emerged from the interviews conducted for this study.

Participants repeatedly mentioned the importance of their own childhood experiences in the outdoors. Almost every participant mentioned an event or trip or experience with a place that either mesmerized them or connected them with ancestors. These experiences, often repeated or sustained, were transformative for them and led them to careers in outdoor spaces or environmental organizations. In many cases, the connections with nature related to their own 'place,' family, or alternatively, to a special role model or mentor. Sometimes the experiences involved tending their own garden, other times, a trip to visit spectacular scenery. Some participants were involved in a class or program that connected them with nurturing, supportive, encouraging mentors and also with the outdoors, sports, or scientific experiences. Participants often mentioned that these experiences led them to their choice of career in the outdoors and/or with youth and connecting underserved youth with the outdoors and with their communities (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016-2017).

As research into people's responses to outdoor experiences expanded, the field of Environmental Education (EE) as a discipline evolved to embrace the concept of place-based education. Place-based education is

the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. (Sobel, 2004, p.7).

In *Teaching about place: Learning from the land*, the editors note that developing a sense of place, which involves so much more than just the outdoors, also includes community involvement with the students, the relationships, interconnections, and interconnectedness between students, community, their local environment, and each other. All of these are crucial to helping children develop a lifelong love for the whole ‘gestalt’ of place and community, which engenders a connection to outdoor spaces, which in turn leads to a desire to protect and conserve (Christensen & Crimmel, eds., 2008). One participant in the research for this thesis, an environmental educator, adds that place-based EE is about more than just the environment. He believes strongly that place-based EE programs benefit youth as much by teaching and developing their leadership skills as by exposing them to outdoor spaces. In a place-based approach, then, the ‘environment’ encompasses the youth and all aspects of their (emphasis mine) place as community-members within it (Anon., personal communication, 2016). Other participants also supported the idea that leadership development should be an integral component of EE, especially with underserved youth, and that connecting youth with their communities (their place) ultimately connects them with a larger sense of community and environment. While this thesis emphasizes the importance of access to green space and nature, especially as it has been conserved in national parks, the NPS leadership is realizing that reaching youth in their own communities, and helping them develop and connect with their sense of place is often a first step and possibly serves as a springboard to later appreciation of nature and national parks.

An additional advantage of place-based EE programs, especially in a rapidly changing world, is that they teach and support critical thinking skills in an interactive way. One veteran environmental educator describes it this way:

The world and the nation are increasingly diverse and globalized, harder...therefore to not...work for interconnection and interdependence. A piece of that that's crucial is to teach our grad students, and then have them teach our elementary students...scientific skills that are crucial for science...[but also help them]...move through the world and find answers to their own questions. Teaching the skills that lead to critical thinking, teaching the skills that are about communication and cooperation and making sure that we're teaching in a way that's authentic, that builds those connections and that allows students to speak about things with evidence in their conclusions... (Ray Cramer, personal communication, 2016).

This large body of research showing the strong association between childhood exposure to nature and overall health (with a bonus of pro-environmental behavior in adulthood) also helps support the assertion that in the absence of equal access to nature (and National Parks) and all its benefits, underserved populations are at a distinct disadvantage as compared with people (and especially youth) who have greater access to natural places. For youth and adults of color, many of whom grow up in inner-city spaces and attend schools that do not have the resources to send them to outdoor education programs or even teach environmental education at all, this lack of equal access to nature and green spaces constitutes environmental injustice. Later in the thesis, I will discuss environmental justice (EJ) in more detail, and why the concept is central to this study.

Situating this study

What exactly are the issues intertwined with this complex topic of diversity in national parks? This stop on the journey is an examination of academic research. Much of the literature began to appear in the 1990's, with authors looking at 'constraints' to park visitorship, and publication increasing after a 1999 seminal paper by Dr. Myron Floyd entitled "Race, Ethnicity and Use of the National Park System." In this paper, Floyd reviewed the social science literature on constraints to park use by people of color (POC), and delineated four theoretical perspectives related to race, ethnicity and park use. These four include, "the marginality hypothesis, subcultural hypothesis, assimilation theory, and the discrimination hypothesis" (Floyd, 1999, p.1). This work from the leisure theory field explored these initial theoretical frameworks and helped further define the issues. Initially, the approach looked at the demographics of park use. Studies and surveys pointed to whites as disproportionately represented among park users relative to their numbers in the population as a whole, and also highlighted that African Americans were least represented among park users (Yogev, 2015). The research also raised the issue that POC tend to have different preferences for outdoor activities than whites (Byrne & Wolch, 2009; Floyd, 1999; Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Grossman, 2010; Weber & Sultana; 2013; Weeks, 2014, as cited in Yogev, 2015). The dominant white environmental, conservation paradigm builds the assumption that everyone would want the same things in outdoor activities (Grossman, 2010, as cited in Yogev, 2015). However, POC show clear preferences for activities such as picnics, or shorter walks and tend to prefer to do these in large extended family groups (Byrne & Wolch, 2009; Floyd,

1999; Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Grossman, 2010; Weber & Sultana, 2013; Weeks, 2014, as cited in Yogev, 2015). The dominant narrative of outdoor activities has guided environmental activism (as well as park use) from its earliest days, it guides media coverage of the outdoors in general (Grossman, 2010), the design of parks (especially urban parks) (Byrne & Wolch, 2009; Weber & Sultana, 2013, as cited in Yogev, 2015), and is at the very heart of the beginnings of the national parks, with their emphasis on the wonders and solitude of wilderness, camping, hiking, and wildlife viewing (Duncan & Burns, 2010, as cited in Yogev, 2015).

Back in 1999, Floyd called for the NPS to take advantage of the increasing diversity of the U.S. population in order to “build new alliances within communities of color, and incorporate themes that reflect the diversity of cultures represented in the population” (Floyd, 1999, p.19). He called for more documentation of the “types and range of discrimination and their impact on national park use” (Floyd, 1999, p.19), as well as evaluation of racial and ethnic perceptions of national parks.

Researchers began to heed Floyd’s initial call for more qualitative research. In the 2000’s, several academic articles such as those written by Byrne and Wolch, 2009; Byrne, Wolch and Zhang, 2009; O’Brien, and O’Brien and Njambi, 2012; and Weber and Sultana, 2013, led the critical inquiry with a lens focused on discrimination theory and critical geography. For example, Byrne and Wolch, in their 2009 paper entitled “Nature, race, and parks: past research and future directions for geographic research,” examined the elitist roots of parks and how their structures have historically been discriminatory and exclusionary. They

revealed that leisure scholars conducted a lot of the initial research, pointed out that leisure theory approaches differed significantly from those of geographers, and called for a conceptual model which would incorporate both approaches. They “offer[ed] a model that seeks to explain park use as reliant on, but more than just a function of an individual’s socio-demographic characteristics” (Byrne and Wolch, 2009).

After Floyd’s 1999 paper--which seemed to examine the topic from a leisure scholar perspective--Floyd moved towards a geographical research perspective, and as early as 2002, began to write about environmental justice in outdoor recreation (Floyd and Johnson, 2002). A decade later, environmental justice pervades the academic literature, as exemplified by O’Brien and Njambi’s 2012 critical review of Duncan and Burns’ ‘The National Parks: Americas Best Idea,’ the book and PBS series on the National Parks which first aired in 2009, and was aired again, in 2016, as part of the NPS Centennial celebration. While they credit Duncan and Burns for their amazing work, they also find that the American (read “white”) ethos of ‘keeping things positive’ as well as the general aversion many whites have to broaching emotionally charged subjects like race, prevented Duncan and Burns from delving into greater detail about the problems and issues of racism that plague the whole history of the park service, and the legacy of tensions and difficulties that history left behind (O’Brien and Njambi, 2012). As one of the participants in the research for this study put it, the tendency for whites to avoid talking about race hearkens back to the white culture’s sensibilities about professionalism and perfectionism--to ideas about what is okay

to say or not, and what is okay to share or not. Ultimately this way of thinking and acting restricts what and how we share, it creates gulfs between people instead of allowing for more fluid and authentic connections (Allala, personal communication, 2017).

Floyd is not alone in his call for more qualitative research on this topic, as mentioned earlier. Floyd (2002) and Weber and Sultana (2013) point out that qualitative research can bring out “much more information about people’s personal experiences” that “could be obtained through...interviews, focus groups, narrative research and more” (Floyd, 2002, Weber and Sultana, 2013, as cited in Yogev, 2015). The quantitative research and the studies focused on demographics defined the initial problems and began to explore the boundaries of the subject of POC in the outdoors, and specifically in national parks. However, to really understand the perceptions of people from COC, we must hear their stories and experiences first-hand. With a few exceptions, most researchers have only recently begun to conduct interviews with people from COC and with park staff. Interviews add a necessary and heretofore missing element to the understanding of why people may or may not visit wild land (or other) national parks. Interviews also add to the understanding of perceptions of COC about the lack of diversity and inclusion as well as what they think needs to happen in order for solutions to be found or for changes to occur. Moreover, their stories add an element of the lived experience--barriers faced on an every-day basis, which whites do not experience, and therefore may not even think about.

A movement already exists within the NPS to open more urban parks centered around historical and cultural themes, which may speak more directly to COC (approximately 10 of the 22 or so historic places, parks or monuments established or re-designated over the last 10 years) (NPS.gov., updated 4/16). While these parks do not focus on natural beauty per se, they may provide a cultural connection to the NPS, and a gateway into the system of public lands. Some of the studies, however, point to residual resistance to change in upper levels of management in the NPS (Dudley Hamilton Associates, 2010; Makopondo, 2006; Santucci, et al, 2014). In “Visitor Services Staff Perception of Strategies to Encourage Diversity at Two Urban National Parks,” Santucci et al. (2014) used interviews to uncover themes that could be vital to guiding the NPS’s future path. The first theme--youth engagement beyond threshold experiences--deals with the fact that while many programs exist to bring school kids (largely from COC) to the parks from underserved areas, they often come for just one visit. There is no mechanism or program in place to continue exposing these children to national parks and to continue nurturing their potential love for these places. They come to the park once; interpreters and educators have that one lone opportunity to try to capture their attention and truly, deeply engage them. The EE literature emphasizes (see above), and many seasoned environmental educators and park staff with whom I spoke concurred, that in order for exposure to outdoor spaces to really have an impact on youth, there must be repeated exposure over time, in addition to role models and mentors (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017).

The second theme--NPS traditions and organizational structure-- highlights what one interviewee referred to as “the old traditionals” (Santucci, et al., 2014, p. 21). Respondents spoke about people within the system in decision-making roles who continued to cling to the old ideas of what the national park service ‘is about’ (which connects to what geographers have called the ‘elitist’ history of the park service), and who were not willing to compromise in this approach. Specifically, they hang on to the ideas that national parks should be remote, wild land spaces, and that visitors will come to see those spaces--rather than newer models which touch on cultural, social and historical ‘themes,’ and more urban-based parks that can be more accessible to more people. The implication for access to POC is that wild land parks are the ‘ideal’ of a national park, thus precluding access and relevancy for large portions of the modern U.S. population.

The elitist history of the park, as well as the ‘old’ way of thinking about national parks, arose during my interviews as well. Two college-age participants in the Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program (DDCSP)* both expressed that learning about the colonial roots of the park system, and especially the forcible removal of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands in order to create some of the national parks, had a huge influence on their ability to just enjoy the natural beauty. So intense was this knowledge for them, that it affected their very

*”The Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program at the University of Washington is a multi-summer, undergraduate experiential learning experience that explores conservation across climate, water, food and ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest. By connecting conservation to cultural identity, biodiversity and environmental justice DDCSP@UW supports emerging leaders as they develop understandings, skills and perspectives needed to shift the conservation conversation” (<http://uwconservationscholars.org/about/>).

relationship with nature and the high ideal they had had of national parks (L. Ayad, personal communication, 2016; A. Bhatia, personal communication, 2016). I heard from other participants that some superintendents who still adhere to this approach and are not willing to compromise much, are actually limiting the accessibility of the parks to COC by emphasizing protection over access, and by not permitting changes or programs that could increase access for these communities (Anon., personal communication, 2016; Anon., personal communication, 2016). If the emphasis in a remote park is exclusively on protection, and the decision-makers are not able or willing to strike a balance between protection and accessibility, in the end, fewer people will be able to or will want to come and enjoy the benefits of what that wilderness has to offer, especially POC or other underserved communities.

The third theme to emerge from the interviews in Santucci, et al., was the idea that the NPS ‘talks the talk’ but fails to ‘walk the walk.’ The NPS has created many programs or partnerships with other organizations and agencies, and claims increasing diversity as a major priority. However, people interviewed by Santucci, et al. felt that the national office did not follow through with the funding or staff support to carry them out. Many managers within the park service end up spending most of their time attempting to secure ‘soft’ funding (grants which require yearly paperwork and no guarantee of repeat funding, versus funding which is regular and more or less guaranteed from one year to the next) for diversity programs and initiatives, even though the NPS states it is an imperative to have them (Santucci, et al, 2014). Many of the participants in this study, both

within the park service and without, felt strongly that if relevancy, diversity and inclusion (RDI) were indeed so critical, then funding for these programs and initiatives needed to be part of the base NPS budget, rather than coming from a variety of different types of sources which often can and do ‘dry up.’

Additionally, the relationships established between park staff and the community in successful RDI programs disappear when those programs are discontinued.

Participants in interviews conducted for this thesis strongly support ideas raised in the Santucci et al. work. One educator, Matt Holmes, of Groundwork Richmond, who worked for the NPS earlier in his career, as well as another NPS participant, both stated that there were more hiring authorities (see below) in the 1970’s and 80’s, which were scrapped because of the backlash against affirmative action (Anon., personal communication, 2016; Holmes, personal communication, 2016). A direct hiring authority, or DHA

is an appointing (hiring) authority that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) can give to Federal agencies for filling vacancies when a critical hiring need or severe shortage of candidates exists.

A DHA enables an agency to hire, after public notice is given, any qualified applicant without regard to various typical, complex restrictions. A DHA expedites hiring by eliminating competitive rating and ranking, veterans' preference, and other procedures (<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/direct-hire-authority/#url=Fact-Sheet>, n.d.).

Kevin Bacher, Mount Rainier National Park’s Volunteer and Outreach Program manager stated that if the NPS could spring into action for meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and the hiring of returning veterans, it

should be able to do the same for overcoming the barriers that POC face when trying to apply for jobs in the NPS. He explained that the NPS made many changes, including basic changes to the hiring process itself, established mentoring systems and others programs to assist veterans with their resumes--serious help and support for veterans. “This was great,” he said, but “we need to get equally serious about doing the same things for hiring POC in the federal government” (K. Bacher, personal communication, May, 2016). Moreover, Bacher explained he received a clear message from supervisors that in his case,

the volunteer program is where the emphasis is at the moment, and we try to keep the outreach program moving forward and progressing as much as we can, but we just don’t have the resources or the support of making it a priority enough to move the needle as much as we would like to (K. Bacher, May, 2016, personal communication).

I will elaborate on this theme in more detail in later sections.

Another significant theme to emerge in the recent literature is the need to include COC in the processes of creating new parks and in interpretive programming from the outset. Weber and Sultana, in their other 2013 work entitled “The Civil Rights Movement and the Future of the National Park System in a Racially Diverse America,” look at the history of the NPS especially with regard to the African-American community. They emphasize the persistence of segregation practices in the 1950’s and ‘60’s, particularly in the rules and policies used to establish new park sites. These rules ultimately limit what kinds of buildings or historic sites can become park sites, and also often dictate aspects of location (Weber & Sultana, 2013). The implication, of course, is that these

guidelines should be changed in order to remove some of the key barriers to the establishment of additional urban, culturally relevant, and/or easily accessible parks.

Makopondo (2006) traced an actual attempt by the NPS to be inclusive in the establishment of a new park, and why it stumbled in the process. As Makopondo reviewed the history of the partnership between the agencies involved and the COC they hoped to include, it became clear that the NPS had not given enough forethought to the range of stakeholders that should have been invited to the table, or to the process of choosing them. The creation of every new National Park and establishment of the purpose for, goals of, and activities offered by that particular park literally require an act of Congress. Even after the NPS and the stakeholders discovered the problems with the creation of this particular park, they were unable to amend it without additional Congressional action. The interviewees from Makopondo's research repeatedly emphasized the need for inclusion of ALL possible stakeholders from the very beginning of the process (Makopondo, 2006). This theme was so prevalent in the interviews conducted for the research for this thesis as well, and is such a fundamental aspect of environmental justice (EJ) and the progress towards equity and inclusion in the environmental movement as a whole, that it underlies this entire thesis.

Constraints: Digging Deeper

Much of the current academic literature speaks of constraints to park or national park use, and explores the reasons for these constraints. As demonstrated above, the majority of research in this field comes from leisure scholars on the one hand and critical geographers on the other. Based on my reading of the field, the following picture emerges. Leisure scholars tend to focus on the demographic aspects of constraints, and often do so utilizing quantitative methodologies. Simplified, the demographic lens focuses on the numbers and statistics regarding the reasons that POC visit National Parks (NPs) (and other parks) in numbers far lower than their proportions in the broader American population. They cite distance (from home to wild land parks) and lack of transportation, lack of disposable income, and lack of cultural or family traditions of visiting NPs. The demographic lens also focuses on the future of the conservation movement as the reason lack of visitation among POC in NPs is so important. While significant, some authors such as Byrne and Wolch (2009), O'Brien and Njambi (2012), and Weber and Sultana (2013) claim this view of park visitation is also particularly white. A participant in this thesis research mentioned that the demographics have been important to POC for a long time, but that it only received widespread attention when the white-dominated environmental movement suddenly became aware of the changing U.S. demographics and the implications for the future and very survival of protected areas (Anon., 2016, personal communication).

Building on the initial work by leisure scholars, critical geographers looked at many of the same constraints, but began to dig deeper, focusing on the social, political, cultural and historical roots of the demographic 'problem.'

Geographers tend to use qualitative or mixed methodologies, and looked into ways in which environmental justice intersects with park use or non-use. Critical perspectives recognize the importance of the practical and demographic issues, but go beyond them--searching and looking deeply into the institutional, systemic and structural roots of why POC are not represented equitably in the NPS and other environmental organizations and agencies, and how that might be changed. The lack of transportation or disposable income may be the starting point of the inquiries, but they may end by examining the role of neoliberal policies, structural racism and historical legacies of racism which lie at the root of the social, cultural and economic pieces of the puzzle.

When searching for cultural reasons for a lower level of park visitation among POC, critical geographers and others with a critical perspective, do not look only at a lack of family tradition. They probe more deeply and shed light, for example, on the history of lack of park availability, or lynching and violence towards blacks in the Jim Crow south. This unspeakably painful segment of relatively recent history left in its wake collective trauma and, often, the fear of dark, wooded places among many blacks, a fear that is passed down through families and communities. O'Brien (2012), in his study of state parks in the period of Jim Crow in the deep South, discussed the attempt by the state park system and, to a lesser degree the national parks, to prove the 'separate but equal' doctrine, and some states built parks that were "negro only." It was clear from O'Brien's analysis that there was a staggering difference in the size, quality and number of the 'Negro' parks, and they were often set in lands that were otherwise

useless. Moreover, there were so few state parks available to African Americans in the pre-Brown v Board of Education South that “most African Americans would need to travel considerable distances to locate one that would welcome them, and many would need to leave their states to find access” (O’Brien, 2012, p. 174). Once Jim Crow was lifted after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, and states could no longer legally justify segregation, there was often outright hostility on the part of the state governments and the white citizens to integrating the parks. In fact, the hostility ran so deep and unmitigated that some states, such as Virginia, made the decision to close parks rather than integrate them. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) played a crucial role in legally contesting park segregation throughout the era. This legacy of extreme discrimination in public lands and the fear left in its wake left its mark on African Americans today, and may play a major part in why many tend not to visit wild land parks (O’Brien, 2012, as cited in Yogeve, 2015).

Other critical research was done in relation to urban parks, but is relevant to national parks all the same. Byrne and Wolch (2009) relate that the idea of parks originated with the aristocracy, passed down through history and on display in the intricately landscaped estates of European gentry. Moreover, history tells of the peasantry being kept out of urban green spaces, and then an eventual opening of public parks, but only because the planners felt it was a way to ‘civilize’ the lower classes (Byrne and Wolch, 2009, as cited in Yogeve, 2015). Public parks were not democratic places, and in fact, black and Irish neighborhoods were eradicated to make space for Central Park in New York City

(Byrne and Wolch, as cited in Yogeve, 2015). This contrasts with Duncan's eloquent language about the national parks being created for ALL Americans, even though their very location made that impossible. As mentioned previously, the distant location rather than more urban setting may be one reason why some POC may not be drawn to visit wild land parks, but may actually feel some antipathy towards them, or as we will see, consider them as 'white space' (Yogeve, 2015). In addition, while location was an issue for some POC, there are many POC who do live in close proximity to wild land national parks, so for them, distance is clearly not the issue. Those situations highlight the parks' lack of welcoming of those communities, manifested in lack of programming or interpretive exhibits that are culturally relevant and inclusive, or that include other languages.

In tackling the quandary of uneven park use by different population groups, Byrne and Wolch (2009) used a model which incorporated four elements: 1) the socio-demographic characteristics of park users and non-users; 2) the political ecology and amenities of the park itself; 3) historical and cultural landscapes of park provision (for example, discriminatory land-use practices, the philosophy of park design or of development), and; 4) individual perceptions of park space (Byrne and Wolch, 2009, as cited in Yogeve, 2015). All of these elements tend to produce spatially uneven development of park resources and access, most typically and often to the detriment of COC, thus disproportionately affecting their health and well-being. That is, where and how parks are developed influences the people who will be most likely to use them. These forces, in turn,

affect perceptions of parks and thus their use by different groups. An additional part of that picture takes into account the impression of the potential user of a sense of safety and belonging, and is further affected by the presence or absence of park security, rangers, law enforcement, etc. (Byrne and Wolch, 2009, as cited in Yogeve, 2015). This approach “recognizes overarching historical and cultural context of park provision, history of racial prejudice that has been central to park-making project,” a history which is reflected in inequitable patterns of park provision (Byrne and Wolch, 2009, as cited in Yogeve, 2015). In sum, the “racial politics of park development reflects ideologies of land use, histories of property development, planning philosophy, and the spatial expression of racial discrimination” (Byrne and Wolch, 2009, as cited in Yogeve, 2015). Again, while these researchers focused on urban parks, one can easily see how these forces were at work in slightly different ways in the creation of the national park system. Paying attention to them may offer direction to the NPS as it actively works on remedying past oversights.

Critical approaches also focus on how the roots of racism in the NPS history left a legacy that manifests in the very structure of hiring practices and policies which perpetuate the disproportionate number of whites not only in the overall workforce, but especially in higher levels of management. Moreover, the NPS has been influenced by the greater American society’s structural racism, as well as its social and political trends. In the early 1960’s through the 80s, the NPS followed the wave of civil rights actions, and instituted changes of policy as a result of that movement and its social gains. For example, President Kennedy,

his Secretary of the Interior and the NPS director, initiated ‘affirmative action’ practices in the NPS, including, but not limited to, active recruitment of rangers from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Robert Stanton, whose story opened this thesis, and one of the trailblazers who benefited from the president’s foresight, proved the efficacy of such policies. In a similar intersection of the greater cultural trends with NPS policy, many programs lost funding and priority in the 80’s with the backlash against the civil rights gains of that decade. That reaction to ‘affirmative action’ by many whites (as manifested by the discontinuance of or cutting back on these types of programs) continues to have a negative impact on recruitment and retention of POC into the NPS. At least two participants in this thesis study stated that the NPS today has fewer POC in its ranks than it had between the 1960’s and 1980’s. In other words, the NPS still feels the long-term effects of the policy changes from that backlash.

Retention of POC in the NPS is yet another theme only revealed through a deeper investigation. One participant in a position of authority feels recruitment of POC is now more successful and representative of populations of color in American society. As a result of structural racism in the system and implicit bias within the white majority of employees, however, there are few if any mechanisms in place to help newly-hired POC feel comfortable, welcome, and safe. These new hires may come from a very different culture of recreation and it is not unusual for them to feel racially, ethnically, or culturally isolated in a majority white department. The result is that POC leave the NPS in much larger

numbers proportionally to their white counterparts, who, surrounded by people like them, do not feel similarly isolated (Anon., personal communication, 2017).

Yet another theme that critical approaches have brought to light relates to how cultural differences may affect park use amongst some POC. Looking beyond differences in how people recreate, they relate how the very foundations of Western, European thought influence our actions and perceptions of nature and wilderness, and human's place in the world. Biblical and/or Western and Enlightenment ideas of 'man conquers nature,' 'man as separate from nature,' imbue the deepest parts of our cultural psyches. Culture, according to 19th century anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor, is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired...as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871, in Boyle and Andrews, 1989, p.11). Culture is universal, but "in any given society is always specific and distinctive, encompassing all the knowledge, beliefs, customs, and skills acquired by members of the society" (Boyle and Andrews, 1989, p.12). The 'man conquers nature' idea, a cultural construct, dominated every aspect of the settling of this country. This conquest mentality led to the genocide of millions of indigenous people and the destruction of many cultures. It also led to the destruction of natural habitats, as well as to the extinction of numerous endemic species. The result of this all-out assault on indigenous peoples, cultures and landscapes led a few far-sighted individuals to realize the need to protect and conserve what was left of America's spectacular natural wonders. (These people, unfortunately, did not pay the same attention to the devastated people and cultures

as they did to the landscape.) But this separation between man and nature, and the need to protect nature from man's ravaging remains deeply embedded in many elements of Western culture. The underlying ideology of conquest also implicitly supports the perpetuation of violence against humans and against nature itself.

Some non-Western cultures, particularly indigenous ones, see humans as part of nature, not as separate from it (Anon., personal communication, 2016; Grossman and Parker, eds., 2012; L. Allala, personal communication, 2016). This fundamental difference means that those cultures teach harmony with nature. They utilize natural resources, but their belief system, in most cases, leads to careful conservation so that future generations will also benefit from them (Grossman and Parker, eds., 2012). Thus they often do not fully understand the need to 'protect' nature 'from' humans. For them, this is an utterly foreign concept (Anon., personal communication, 2016). Subsequently, it can lead to misunderstandings and even conflict in a national park setting, where protection of 'the resource' from humans butts up against recreational approaches, habits, and assumptions about public space which may lead some POC to naturally want to recreate 'on' a protected resource such as a wildflower meadow (Anon., personal communication, 2016). The identification of "human society and the natural environment as mutually exclusive is one of the conception challenges standing between the mainstream environmental and eco-justice movements" (Anguiano, et al., 2012). The next section attends to some of these differences.

Environmental Justice

*“The Environmental Justice (EJ) movement has basically redefined what environmentalism is all about...the environment is everything: where we live, work, play, go to school, as well as the physical and natural world...we can't separate the physical environment from the cultural environment.” Robert Bullard, Sociologist, Author, *Dumping in Dixie*, 1990.*

The environmental justice (EJ) or eco-justice movement “grew out of the civil rights movement, laying [its] foundations in the 1980’s by bringing attention to the unequal distribution of environmental hazards across society, based on race and class” (Anguiano, et al., 2012). Two community struggles in particular precipitated the modern EJ movement in the United States. In 1978, the upwelling of toxic chemicals into residential yards and cellars in Love Canal, NY led to high rates of illness and increased rates of birth defects and miscarriages. The town had been built on top of a known toxic dumpsite. A group of mostly working class women from the neighborhood fought state officials for years, resulting in a government buy-out of their properties and relocation of the families. It also resulted in the 1980 establishment of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), better known as ‘Superfund’ (https://www.geneseo.edu/history/love_canal_history, n.d.). In Warren County, North Carolina in 1983, local residents protested the creation of a landfill of PCB-contaminated soil. Warren County was 75% black, and one of the poorest counties in North Carolina. The protests drew attention from the Civil Rights movement, and brought national recognition to a previously unrecognized form of injustice--environmental injustice

(https://sites.duke.edu/docst110s_01_s2011_sb211/what-is-environmental-justice/history, n.d.).

Struggles like these continued to spread throughout the nation. However, the mainstream environmental movement, which was mostly middle class and white, had a difficult time connecting with these mostly non-white, often working class movements. Structural racism and implicit bias was responsible for this and manifested as ‘big environment’ stepping in and taking over the leadership of such movements. As has often been the case, the white leadership of the larger environmental movements did not recognize the leadership as legitimate, nor did they see the connections between social justice and the environment.

Dorceta Taylor, a prominent researcher of diversity and equity in outdoor spaces and in the greater environmental movement, studies, among other areas, the clear parallels of institutionalized racism and lack of diversity and inclusion in the entire environmental movement, its organizations and agencies. Taylor points out that actually POC have been fighting environmental injustices for centuries, but because the terminology they use may be different from ‘mainstream--read ‘white’--environmentalism,’ black instances of EJ activism by POC through history have often been ignored (Taylor, www.thecrisismagazine.org, n.d.). As we will see, there is a tight connection between EJ and the lack of equity in the larger environmental movement.

The time-line below shows important events in the EJ movement in the United States, and offers the reader a thumbnail sketch of its beginnings.

~**1978**: The discovery of toxins bubbling up into people's yards and cellars in Love Canal, NY, causing unusually high incidences of odd illnesses and high rates of birth defects and miscarriage were discovered. The resistance of local women over a period of years eventually led to it becoming the first Super Fund site in the country.

~**1980**: EPA's Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), also known as the Super Fund Act.

~**1983**: A toxic soil landfill created in Warren County, North Carolina, a poor, majority African American, county, led to community resistance and drew attention to the concept of environmental injustice.

~**1987**: *Toxic Waste and Race in the U.S.*, a study which revealed the extent to which toxic dumping was intentionally being relegated to communities of color or low-income neighborhoods.

~**1990**: Letter to the Group of 10, a letter written by people and organizations of color involved in EJ issues to the 'Big Green' Environmental organizations (largely white), calling them out on their lack of interest in EJ issues and lack of ability to see the connections between 'the environment' and the issues POC were dealing with.

~**1991**: First National POC Environmental Leadership Summit.

~**1992**: Environmental Justice Act, which established a program to assure nondiscriminatory compliance with all environmental, health and safety laws and to assure equal protection of the public health

Taylor synopsised the "factors that account for the surge in minority environmental activism" as follows (Taylor, 1992):

~The discovery of toxics in many minority communities

~The publication of research linking race, class, and disproportionate exposures to toxins

~The revelation that minority communities were targeted for the siting of hazardous environmental facilities

~The revelation that minorities were more likely to suffer from life-threatening environmental health problems than whites

~A response to NIMBYism, which said, “not in my backyard” without asking whose backyard the problem ended up in

~The organization of conferences and workshops on the issue of environmental and social justice

~A redefinition of what issues were considered “environmental”

~The linkage of civil rights issues with environmental issues

~The emergence of committed activists and leaders (Taylor, 1992, p.23).

The emerging EJ movement “linked civil rights with environmental rights and re-introduced civil rights campaign strategies into environmental campaigns”

(Taylor, 1992, p.24). For these communities, environmental issues were survival issues. The failure of mainstream (white) environmentalism to recognize and make those connections led to a separation, and not surprisingly, to tension, with which the mainstream movement has only recently begun to seriously grapple.

When Taylor wrote her article in 1992, she predicted that

[u]nless the traditional and well-established sectors make radical changes to their agenda, their attitudes towards minorities, their coverage and support of issues affecting minority communities, their hiring policies, their analysis of how and which communities are impacted by environmental hazards, then few minorities will find these organizations attractive enough to join (Taylor, 1992, p.25).

Taylor has followed up her initial work over subsequent years, tracking the changes, slow in coming, to equity and inclusivity in environmental organizations and government agencies. Her words were prescient, and much of what the greater environmental world struggles with today, 35 years later, and why it is still such a struggle, are revealed throughout this thesis--in the

discussions of racism and CRT, in the results of Taylor and others' studies, and perhaps most powerfully, in the stories and experiences shared by participants of color and staff-members of partner organizations and agencies in my interviews with them.

Floyd and Johnson, in *Coming to Terms with Environmental Justice in Outdoor Recreation: A Conceptual Discussion with Research Implications* (2002), take the reader through the stages of the modern environmental movement, noting a shift that occurred in the “dominant environmental protection paradigm” toward one that seeks to protect not only endangered species and wilderness but also vulnerable and endangered human communities, particularly the poor and people of color. They add that for EJ to go beyond the surface it must place vulnerable people in decision-making positions (Floyd and Johnson, 2002). Opening and incorporating this wider view of protection is critical to helping the park service learn how best to include diverse groups of local citizens in crucial park decisions such as determining placement and themes of future national parks and monuments. These ideas can also serve to point the NPS in the direction of practical solutions that will support greater use of existing parks by COC.

Environmental Justice and Unequal Access to Green Space

In the pages that follow I explore an expanded view of EJ as it applies to access to nature, and, more specifically, national parks. Whether it be due to red-

lining* or other similar racist practices, POC as well as low-income families tend to live in areas in which schools receive less funding and fewer resources than schools in wealthier white neighborhoods. Their communities tend to have fewer green spaces and where there are parks, funding to maintain them may be lacking and they may not be safe spaces (Byrne, Wolch, & Zhang, 2009). Thus the people who live in these neglected areas are indeed ‘dumped’ on in a metaphorical way. I argue that the lack of exposure to green space, the lack of exposure to programs like outdoor classrooms and environmental education, place-based learning, etc. in these neighborhoods is every bit as toxic and opportunity-stunting as physical toxic dumps. Consequently, there is an amplified effect of physical as well as social and cultural toxicity due to the lack of options and resources available for the residents. In that sense, I feel comfortable using the term EJ (and perhaps even more so, Representational or Participatory Justice (RJ or PJ) when describing the lack of exposure to clean, safe, inspiring green spaces that so many POC experience.

The demand by affected communities for representation in the decision-making processes from which they were traditionally excluded, has always been at the root of EJ. Likewise, POC have been demanding their rightful place at the table when it comes to decisions about national parks and programming as well. Suffice it to say that the history of EJ and of civil rights in American society follow a trajectory which the NPS closely follows. The park service does not

*the inherently racist real estate practices, still predominant in many U.S. cities well into the 1970’s, which prevented blacks and other minorities from buying homes in white neighborhoods. Some legal covenants also prevented whites from selling their homes to blacks.

exist in a vacuum, nor do the environmental and EJ movements. Leaders of mainstream environmental organizations are waking up and beginning to recognize the deep connections between environmental justice and social justice issues. There is tremendous strength in the growing alliances between and among these organizations. How they grapple with embedded racism internally has the potential to force the conversation into the greater citizenry (and vice versa), thus there is hope not only for these organizations and the NPS, but for our entire society.

In sum, the academic literature from several related areas, as well as participants' experiences, fully support looking at demographics, but also looking well beyond them, to get at the deeper histories and contexts behind uneven park usage and lack of POC in the NPS workforce.

At this point, it is important to shed some more light on the NPS itself, its structure, its funding, and what actions have been taken to improve diversity, equity and inclusion over the years. This information helps to shed light on the reality within the service, and also on some of the intersections between policies and events in the NPS and how they have been influenced by the events and societal movements of the same era.

They are a treasure house of nature's superlatives--84 million acres of some of the most stunning landscapes anyone has ever seen...but they are more than a collection of rocks and trees and inspirational scenes from nature. They embody something less tangible yet equally enduring--an idea, born in the United States nearly a century after its creation, as uniquely American as the Declaration of Independence and just as radical. National parks, the writer and historian Wallace Stegner once said, are "the best idea we've ever had." Dayton Duncan, The National Parks

On June 30, 1864, not long after the Civil War's most deadly battle...President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Land Grant into law, protecting for the first time--for all time--land secured for the future. Yosemite Valley...[and] the Mariposa Grove...were written into law as America's inaugural nature preserve ceded to the state of California, later to be expanded and established as a national park in 1890...These magnificent lands were alive in Lincoln's imagination and he believed they might offer a unifying peace for a divided nation...

*The irony was this: Fourteen years prior to the signing of the Yosemite Land Grant, another war had been fought here--the Mariposa Indian War, from 1850 to 1851...**

As we mark the centennial of the National Park Service, my question is this: What is the relevance of our national parks in the twenty-first century--and how might these public commons bring us back home to a united state of humility? Terry Tempest Williams, from The Hour of Land

The NPS: Lead-up to the Centennial Year and Beyond

This section provides an overview of the NPS for those readers less familiar with its structure, function, and scope, as well as attempts to address diversity and equity within the NPS over the years. The NPS employs

* "The story of the naming of the Yosemite Valley by the white soldiers charged with emptying it of its native inhabitants is perhaps most poignant and shocking. They thought Yosemite was what the local indigenous people were calling it. They only found out later that the Valley was called the Ahwahnee, the people living in it were the Ahwahneechees, and Yosemite, in the native language "refers to people who should be feared. It means "they are killers"" (Duncan, 2010).

approximately 22,000 permanent, about 20,000 temporary and seasonal employees, and oversees the operation of (currently) 417 separate units--not just national parks. About 440,000 volunteers support the paid workforce by donating approximately eight million hours annually (the equivalent of about 4,000 full-time employees). The various types of NPS units include: national parks, monuments, preserves, historic sites, cultural sites, historical parks, memorials, battlefields, cemeteries, recreation areas, seashores, lakeshores, rivers, parkways, trails, heritage areas, and affiliated areas, plus other designations. The NPS is a bureau of the Department of Interior. Its director is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The budget for the entire National Park System in 2016 was approximately \$3 billion. (For comparison's sake the entire budget for the Department of Interior for FY 2016 was \$13.2 billion (<https://edit.doi.gov/budget/appropriations/2016/highlights>). The NPS budget comprises approximately 0.??% of the entire federal budget. Visitor spending in the areas surrounding the units supports "more than 295,000 mostly local jobs and contributes about \$32 billion to the U.S. economy (www.nps.gov/overview, updated Jan., 2017). These facts, however, belie the complexities--social, cultural, political--which emerge when one scratches the surface.

When I began volunteering at Mount Rainier National Park in 2014, I noticed how mostly whites seemed to be visiting the park. As I began doing research into the topic of the NPS and racism, it did not take long before I realized how exceedingly complex and multi-layered this topic is. I discovered, though, that the NPS had begun work planning its 2016 NPS Centennial celebration by

2008. At that point the NPS commissioned the Second Century Coalition, made up of NPS staff and outside advisors from a variety of organizations, to work on the NPS Centennial. They took on the critical task of viewing the NPS Centennial from the widest lens possible to chart a path forward for the next 100 years.

The NPS, for its part, was aware and working in a variety of ways to attempt to remedy the persistent lack of progress towards equity and inclusion. I soon discovered that an overwhelmingly white workforce (not only visitors) also challenged the NPS. I learned, too, that the NPS has to deal with a long history of racism, colonialism and the painful legacy of forcibly displacing indigenous peoples from their lands in order to create the parks. Did racism play on the minds of Park Service officials when they began work on the NPS Centennial? Certainly it did for some of the major players in the Centennial events planning. ‘Demographics,’ however, remained the most common narrative coming out of the plans and outlook. The 2008-2009 survey I alluded to in the Introduction, its results showing nothing had changed since the 2000 survey, together with the immense opportunity for change afforded by the NPS Centennial, prodded the NPS into action in a much more vigorous way than had previously occurred. A new narrative, though, is slowly evolving, as the interviews for this thesis revealed.

The timeline that follows outlines some of what the NPS has done, as it relates to the ongoing attempts to meet the needs of ALL Americans. The information comes from the NPS website and from study participants who fill

varying roles in the NPS's process of addressing what they have come to call 'Relevancy, Diversity and Inclusion' (RDI). It is by no means a comprehensive list, rather is exemplary of the types of actions and activities that took place during that time period.

Prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Act, in **1961**, newly-elected President Kennedy appointed Stuart Udall, a well-known conservationist, as Secretary of the Interior. President Johnson later appointed George Hartzog as Director of the NPS. These far-sighted men began to actively recruit young black college students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) into the NPS as rangers. This practice continued to a greater or lesser degree until the 1980's, when the nation-wide backlash against 'affirmative action' began to be felt in federal hiring practices and cutbacks to programs.

~1970: Robert Stanton selected as the first black National Park Superintendent.

~1972: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Gateway National Recreation Area established to bring the 'Parks to the People'

~1975: Lorraine Mintzmyer selected as the first woman National Park Superintendent

~1994: Executive Order #12898, called the "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice (EJ) in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," signed by President Bill Clinton.

~1996: Robert Stanton appointed as the first (and so far only) black Director of the NPS by President Bill Clinton.

~2000: The NPS commissioned the first NPS Comprehensive Survey of the American Public to obtain opinion data.

~2001: Fran P. Mainella selected as the first woman Director of the NPS by President George W. Bush. Her successor was also a woman, Mary A. Bomar.

~2008-2009: The NPS commissioned a repeat survey. This one, reported on in detail in 2011 by Taylor, Grandjean, and Gramann, informed the NPS that

nothing had changed since the last survey in 2000, which sent the service back to the drawing board regarding actions they would need to take in order to reach a more diverse audience.

~**2008**: The Second Century Commission is formed in order to answer the question, “How are national parks relevant in the 21st century?” (C. Finney, personal communication, 2017). The Commission had one year to explore this question, by dividing into committees which researched different aspects of the question as it related to the mission of the NPS. The committees then reported back with their findings and recommendations.

~**2009**: The NPS Advisory Board added members from the Second Century Commission in order to continue working on the commission’s suggestions. That work continues to this day (C. Finney, personal communication, 2017).

~**2011**: President Barak Obama introduced Executive Order (EO) 13583. It established a coordinated government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce...using three pillars of workforce diversity, workplace inclusion and sustainability (Taylor, Green 2.0, <http://www.diversegreen.org/the-challenge>, n.d.).

~**2011**: Director’s Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement--A call to all National Park Service employees and partners to commit to actions that advance the Service toward a shared vision for 2016 and our second century. This was launched on August 25, the 95th birthday of the Service. Updates to *A Call to Action* are published each year to reflect accomplishments and new actions (<https://www.nps.gov/calltoaction>, last updated 8/24/12).

~**2011**: The NPS Conservation Study Institute and the University of Vermont in partnership with several units and offices of the NPS, release *Beyond Outreach Handbook: A guide to designing effective programs to engage diverse communities*. The ‘Context’ section of the guide credits Jon Jarvis (Director, NPS, 2008-2016) with identifying “relevancy as one of the four priority areas for the NPS to address” (Beyond Outreach Handbook, 2011, p.1).

~**2012**: Cesar E. Chavez National Monument created by Pres. Barak Obama

~**2013**: The establishment of the Office of RDI represents a sea change in the top levels of NPS leadership.

The mission of the Office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion (RDI) is to champion for an organizational culture that is increasingly inclusive and participatory, which values the diverse ideas, experience and background of every individual, and empowers an innovative, flexible and resilient NPS to engage the opportunities and challenges of the future. The Office of RDI works collaboratively with NPS stakeholders to embed these best

practices into the organization and provide the support needed to ensure their implementation (www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/index.htm, n.d.).

The Office of RDI includes Employee Resource Groups, which are groups and networks designed to support LGBTQ, African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Hawaiian Native, and Latino NPS employees. It also includes the Innovative Leadership Network (ILN) whose purpose is to enhance

the culture of the National Park Service by fostering creativity, leadership development, communication, idea sharing, innovative action, and the empowerment of NPS employees at all levels. By fostering innovation and empowerment we will help transform agency culture and make the National Park Service a model of a modern, 21st century agency (www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/ergs.htm, n.d.).

~**2015**: Allies for Inclusion facilitated dialogue technique training program initiated. Trainings are offered to NPS employees, and Allies for Inclusion dialogues are now integrated into many NPS trainings (not just those directly involving ‘diversity training.’)

~**2016**: President Barak Obama designated the Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument.

~**2016: August 25**, exactly 100 year prior, President Woodrow Wilson signed into law the Organic Act, creating a new bureau under the Department of Interior to administer the 35 existing parks and monuments, and any future sites that would be established (<https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/history.htm>, n.d.).

~**2017: January 12**, President Barak Obama announced the Freedom Riders National Monument (it has not yet been completed).

~**2017: January**, President Barak Obama, in one of his last actions as president, issues the Memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies-- Subject: Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Our National Parks, National Forests, and Other Public Lands and Waters. This memorandum was the result of many months of hard work and promotion by an ad-hoc group called the ‘Next 100 Coalition’ whose members came from a wide variety of organizations advocating for federal-level policy changes that would encourage POC to apply for positions in federal public land agencies.

Towards the end of his tenure as director of the NPS, Jon Jarvis wrote the following.

America has changed dramatically since the birth of the National Park Service in 1916. The agency’s roots lie in the parks’ majestic, often isolated natural wonders and in places that exemplify our cultural heritage, but our reach now

extends to places difficult to imagine 100 years ago — urban centers, rural landscapes, deep oceans, and night skies.

In our second century, we recommit to our core mission, providing exemplary stewardship and public enjoyment of the very special places in our care. We will also continue to support communities through community assistance programs and to create jobs, strengthen local economies, and support ecosystem services. We will use the collective power of the parks, our historic preservation programs, and community assistance programs to protect, preserve, and share the places that tell the American story in the next century (<https://www.nps.gov/search/?affiliate=nps&query=list+of+all+park+system+units>, n.d.).

As shown in the above timeline, it was not for lack of trying, especially in the last few years, that the NPS has not succeeded in moving more significantly and quickly towards being a truly equitable and just agency. The many and complex barriers to that progress (as well as pragmatic solutions) will be covered in detail throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Intersections Between American Society and NPS Events

Events that occur in mainstream American society have direct bearing on an agency such as the NPS. Structural racism in the greater society cannot help but be reflected in any agency working within that society. Likewise, the events that take place in society have had a direct effect on the NPS, and on some level help steer it, even though the results may have taken years to manifest, as outlined below.

The Civil Rights movement in the 1960's and 1970's caused many Americans to take a close and new look at race, the place of women in society,

gay rights, as well as the United States' role in militarism around the world. For some Americans, this process of introspection was painful and threatening. Others, welcomed the exposure, which, while painful, brought the hope of positive change. In that era, the National Park System included very few park units that told the stories of POC or women. Civil War and other southern units' interpretive programs routinely and purposely left slavery out of their interpretations of the era, despite many of those sites having housed slaves or had other critical roles in the story of slavery. Very little public awareness existed about the Japanese internment during World War II, or Chinese immigrants who labored in many sectors building critical infrastructure. No units represented the story of women's suffrage or of the history of gay rights. No units told stories about Latin/x history in the United States. Stories of indigenous culture and the wholesale genocide of America's native peoples remained largely hidden from white view. And this, from an agency meant to tell America's story!

For a very long time, the ethos within the NPS was that these stories were too painful, that their visitors wanted to see only the prettier parts of history. That ethos, however, is part and parcel of white supremacist* culture--avoiding the difficult or embarrassing stories of past history. The Civil Rights movement shook up that ethos, and forced most Americans to face the undemocratic, deeply

* White supremacy here is used in the way many COC have reclaimed it--according to Elizabeth Martinez, "White Supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege."
<http://understandingrace.org/resources/glossary.html>, n.d.

biased side of its history and its present. That shake-up eventually manifested in changes within the NPS. As mentioned above, many far-sighted individuals made concrete changes in hiring practices which opened the doors of the NPS workforce to POC. However, it took quite a bit longer for the stories and histories of the wide range of people who make up this diverse nation, to be told openly. In the research for this thesis, one participant told the story of the owners of a Civil War era house explicitly preventing National Park staff from telling about its entire history. Slaves had been kept in the house, yet staff could not make any mention of slaves or slavery (Anon., personal communication, 2016). Slowly, parks and urban units more along the lines of museums began to come into being. It is that perspective where we begin to see the intersection between current events, past history and new NPS units.

The Golden Gate Conservancy, the National Park Service along with other conservancy groups and Congressman Phillip Burton, established the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) in 1972. Years of activism and collaboration went into its ultimate designation by Pres. Nixon. GGNRA differs from other parks because of its proximity to a large urban center, as well as its boundaries, spanning three counties plus the old prison at Alcatraz. It was one of the first park established in a movement of the NPS to bring the ‘Parks to the People.’ At the time, Alcatraz had been occupied by local tribes (1969-1971). The rapid growth of the San Francisco Bay Area prompted increased awareness of the need to protect the local environment as well as to “have open space available to local urban populations” (www.nps.gov/goga/index.htm, nd). One participant

in interviews for this thesis expressed the opinion that the Civil Rights movement had spurred the establishment of the GGNRA (Anon., personal communication, 2017). The participant felt the establishment of the Gateway National Recreation Area (NRA) in New York had also been a result of the changes within American society and culture. Designated in the same year as GGNRA, Gateway, on the opposite coast, would serve a large urban population, over a similarly large geographic area, bringing a national park to people who would otherwise be unlikely to be able to reach, or to want to access a remote, wild land national park. Santa Monica Mountains NRA, established in 1978, serves the Los Angeles area. Like the other NRAs described above, it offers programs and has formed partnerships which continue to strive to expose youth and adults alike to natural spaces. Like the others, it connects the Civil Rights era and bringing ‘Parks to the People.’

Because race and racism lie at the heart of the deeply complex and nuanced subject of racism in outdoor spaces, in addition to the academic literature and actual history, the societal responses to NPS actions or inaction in light of diversity, equity and inclusion play a central role in this story. The academic literature and the theories and models developed in research provide important frameworks for thinking about the topic, as well as for elucidating potential solutions. However, because the NPS mission is to serve ALL Americans, the general societal response to NPS actions or inaction carries particular significance. Popular media coverage of the NPS and diversity, equity and inclusion provide an additional lens through which to observe the general

populace's thoughts and feelings. As we have seen, what happens in the greater society has direct repercussions on the NPS, and as it turns out, the abundance of popular press coverage on this topic reached a climax in the year or so leading up to the 2016 Centennial celebration.

Popular Press Coverage

In the lead-up to the 2016 NPS Centennial, the media focused a lot of attention on the need and the urgency to increase diversity and inclusion in the NPS and other public lands. Moreover, race and racial inequities were receiving a lot of press in general, especially following a series of highly publicized shootings of unarmed blacks by white police. As explained in earlier sections, increasing diversity and inclusion becomes nuanced and multi-layered since institutionalized racism is embedded not only in the NPS but also in the American culture and society within which it functions, and whom it serves. The previous research provides perspective and situates the current research academically and historically. However, since the problem of structural racism runs through every aspect of our society, the popular press coverage adds another perspective to the picture, as it often reflects and also defines what the American people, and particularly POC, have to say and want to do, about equity and inclusion in national parks.

Popular press coverage on diversity in national parks was already prevalent at the start of this study in 2015. Suddenly equity and diversity appeared in books, in the *New York Times*, on National Public Radio (NPR), and other similar media. Critics of the NPS's lack of progress around equity and inclusion found a receptive audience in many quarters, and the pressure on the NPS became palpable. Not only were COC calling for the NPS to clean up its act, but the pressure also began to come from a variety of environmental organizations, which were also working internally on becoming more inclusive.

The recent book by Carolyn Finney, *Black faces, white spaces: Reimagining the relationship of African Americans to the great outdoors* (2014) speaks to the deep and lasting effects of institutionalized racism on blacks' relationship with the outdoors. Throughout the book--an academic, but also intensely personal amalgam of stories and analysis--Finney emphasizes the inestimable role the predominantly white media portrayal of history plays in shaping the dominant narrative of society's ideas of who belongs where in outdoor spaces. The lack of black faces in outdoor magazine photos, their absence in television commercials about the environment, and the limited scope of black roles in literature and film--all serve to inform both blacks and whites about their place in the environmental movement and in outdoor spaces. Of course, the media are not the only ones guilty of a skewed presentation of POC or of their place in history. Finney contends that

by excluding the African American environmental experience (implicitly or explicitly), corporate, academic, and environmental institutions legitimate the invisibility of the African American in the Great Outdoors and in all spaces that inform, shape, and control the way we know and interact with the environment in the United States. (Finney, 2014, p.5)

Finney's words and analysis directly connect to why the NPS must actively work on inclusion and equity, reminding us that "[o]ur efforts to engender respect and inspire active participation in the care and management of our forests and parks means embracing the cultural experiences and environmental values of all segments of American society" (Finney, 2014, p.9). The idea of the inclusion of all American histories, cultures and values is an

important departure from the typical focus on demographics alone and hints at the deeper layers and nuance inherent in this struggle. It is not enough to increase the numbers of POC visiting or working in national parks. It is not enough to create a few parks that represent ‘diverse’ aspects of our collective history. Rather, the NPS must be honest with itself and the American populace, acknowledge that the dominant white narrative (culturally and historically) does not represent the experiences of a huge percentage of Americans, and consult with COC about how it can best change the old narrative which is still prevalent in many national parks.

Finney’s work, moreover, highlights the importance of hearing African American “perspectives, visions, and understandings of their collective and individual relationship to the environment uncensored by accepted dominant narratives, definitions and representations of who they are” (Finney, 2014, p.11). The power of their voices, individually and collectively, and what they revealed about the effects of modern history on many of their relationships with the outdoors, made it abundantly clear to me the unique potency of personal narratives. They hold the power to touch, move and change in a way that dry exclamations of need cannot. An organization like the NPS, given its size and complexity, is unlikely to respond to letters to the editor, or academic articles. As previously mentioned, the academic work in the field has been alive and well for a couple of decades at least. Federal policy is contingent on the party in power at any given time. However, as long as people within an agency are open to hearing these counter-narratives, the stories we do not necessarily hear in our history

books, there is hope that powerful stories like those in Finney's book, and those gathered for this thesis, will have the power to change even monolithic agencies.

Audrey Peterman, another vocal critic on the lack of progress within the NPS expressed sentiments similar to those expressed by Finney. She and her husband Frank 'discovered' the national parks on a cross-country road trip they took when they retired; they now devote almost all of their energy and time to introducing POC to the national parks, and to finding ways to pressure the NPS into quicker action. Peterman, in addition to many other roles, sits on the board of directors of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). NPCA's mission includes "protecting and preserving our national parks for present and future generations, raising our voices and rallying support for America's favorite places, [and] connecting people with the rich history, culture, and natural world we share" (npca.org, nd). Protecting the parks sometimes means fighting the park system itself when the NPS makes a decision deemed not in the NPS's best interest by the NPCA. An example might be opening a certain park area to resource extraction, or, opening the way for corporate sponsorship of park areas, but not doing enough to become a welcoming space for POC.

Peterman, in her blog in the Huffington Post, critiqued Jon Jarvis (Director of the NPS for all eight years of President Barak Obama's time in office). She also lauded Rep. Raul Grijalva and Rep. Alcee Hastings who

consider the imbalance in who uses the park[s] so important that they have coalesced 34 of their colleagues to ask Park Service Director Jon Jarvis to explain how he is providing information and an invitation to those Americans who are unaware of the national

parks, and those who feel they may not be welcome (Peterman, A., www.huffingtonpost.com, April 18, 2016).

Next, she announced a meeting of “a coalition of diverse leaders from conservation, civil rights, environmental justice and community organizations” (Peterman, A., www.huffingtonpost.com, April 29, 2016) with members of Congress on Capitol Hill regarding the Next 100 Coalition’s submission of and request for policy recommendations from President Obama in the form of a presidential proclamation that would announce “a new, inclusive vision of conservation for the next 100 years” (Peterman, A., www.huffingtonpost.com, April 29, 2016). The coalition, she wrote, recognized that the Mission of the NPS cannot be fulfilled “in the current system where the fastest growing demographic groups are unaware of public lands” (Peterman, A., www.huffingtonpost.com, April 29, 2016). The coalition started a petition on *change.org* in order to demonstrate widespread support for this type of action. The President later granted the Next 100 Coalition’s request and issued a Memorandum shortly before leaving office on January 12, 2017 (see previous section NPS timeline). The subject of the memorandum was, “*Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in our National Parks, National Forests, and Other Public Lands and Waters*” (Presidential Memorandum, see the Resources page for a link to the full text).

Peterman’s blog messages, and her leadership and push-back on the NPS monolith regarding the lack of progress towards equity and inclusion, are echoed by others in the popular media, and by many of the participants in this thesis research. “You really have to understand where your racism show up,” says Su

Thieda from EarthCorps. Lylliana Allala, another environmental activist, agreed, as did multiple POC who work for the NPS (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017). To move the needle on equity and inclusion in this agency takes concerted effort from within, as well as outspoken and repeated reminders from without. One or the other alone would not be sufficient.

Peterman remains outspoken but hopeful. Recent blog headlines include, “Needed: A National Conversation on the Future of our Parks,” “Fears That ‘Diverse & Qualified are Mutually Exclusive’ Paralyze Change in the Park Service,” “Vital Questions Must Be Answered on Eve of Park Service Centennial,” “National Parks in the Battle for Soul of America,” and “What the Hummingbirds Say About The Future of Our National Parks.” In this latter blog she appeals to her

fellow Americans, [that] it’s time to pick up the gauntlet on behalf of our country, our ancestors, our legacy, and our descendants yet to come. It’s time to connect deeply with our National Park System to see the lessons of struggle, of perseverance, of deep belief in the value of our country and the possibilities of our fellowmen that are sheltered in these places of our history (Peterman, A. www.huffingtonpost.com, November 16, 2016).

In her blog about ‘fears that paralyze’ the park service, Peterman draws attention to a comprehensive assessment completed in 2012, which was performed to help the service “determine how prepared it is to achieve its vision of a racially diverse and inclusive workforce” (Peterman, A. www.huffingtonpost.com, August 9, 2016). The assessment found the NPS to be at “Stage 2 (Awareness) on the six-stage Diversity Continuum” (Peterman, A. www.huffingtonpost.com, August 9,

2016). Peterman found workforce diversity to be a key component in the NPS's struggle to "remain relevant to the changing demographics and interests of the American public" (Peterman, A. www.huffingtonpost.com, August 9, 2016). Interviews conducted for this thesis also brought out hiring practices as one of the strongest themes. Hiring practices continue to be one of the trickiest barriers the NPS faces in its attempts to improve equity and inclusion in its own ranks. As I covered in more detail in a later section of this thesis, federal policy determines NPS hiring practices are determined by, and cannot be changed just for one or several agencies. Still, many of the participants felt that without major changes to these practices, no significant changes in workforce diversity will be possible (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016-2017).

The Center for American Progress (CAP) has also taken stock of the NPS and its lack of progress on equity and inclusion. Peterman brings attention in one of her blogs to some of their work highlighting a group of Republican Congressmen who have created an 'anti-parks caucus' (Peterman, A. www.huffingtonpost.com, April 13, 2016). The author of the investigation on this caucus, Jenny Rowland, serves as the Research and Advocacy Associate for the Public Lands Project at CAP, "a progressive think tank dedicated to improving the lives of Americans through ideas and action" (<https://www.facebook.com/americanprogress>, nd). Her piece, *The Rise to Power of the Congressional Anti-parks Caucus* (Rowland, <https://www.americanprogress.org>, April 11, 2016), a 19-page expose, sheds light on the increasingly powerful caucus of 20 Republican congresspeople. Between

January 2013 and March 2016, these legislators collectively introduced at least “44 bills or amendments that attempted to remove or undercut protections for parks and public lands” (Rowland, <https://www.americanprogress.org>, April 11, 2016). Despite overwhelming support among Americans for public lands remaining public, they push for a hardline agenda which would privatize these lands for nonpublic use (Rowland, <https://www.americanprogress.org>, April, 11, 2016). A few months after this report, Rowland penned another piece entitled *Parks for All*. In both articles she highlighted a recent poll (January, 2016) by “Hart Research Associates for the Center for American Progress [which] found that 77 percent of Americans believe that the United States benefits a great deal or fair amount from national parks” (Rowland, <https://www.americanprogress.org>, August 22, 2016), results she finds remarkable given that only “19 percent of Americans say they trust the government” (Rowland, <https://www.americanprogress.org>, August 22, 2016). Rowland contends, like many participants in this study, that between the challenges to parks and public lands from Congress, and the rapidly changing demographics of the country, it is more important than ever

to develop and advance a forward-thinking and inclusive centennial policy agenda for the nation’s public lands. The viability and relevance of America’s national parks depend on the ability to connect more Americans to their public lands. Land management agencies have not kept pace in reflecting America’s diverse population or in engaging new generations to visit and explore the historic, cultural, and environmental resources available through public lands (Rowland, <https://www.americanprogress.org>, August 22, 2016).

In writing about viability and relevance and connecting Americans to their public lands, Rowland cogently spotlighted where the ‘demographic’ and ‘EJ’ arguments come together. The NPS calls this ‘relevancy.’ The demographic argument in and of itself is a strong reason to push for equity and inclusion in the NPS. One successful strategy the Park Service has utilized is to either create parks that have cultural or historical meaning for communities that might not otherwise come to a remote national park, thereby addressing the EJ argument. Another strategy focuses on programming with which these same populations can directly relate. The academic literature supports these ideas (Makopondo, 2006; Weber and Sultana, 2013), and they found voice among participants in this study as well. Examples include relating existing programming to the history or culture of POC in the region, and may even invite local communities to participate in creating and presenting the programming.

Glenn Nelson provides another vocal and prolific voice in the popular media regarding the importance and urgency of diversifying our national parks. In his opinion piece entitled, *Why are our parks so white?*, Nelson expresses the very same question I asked when I began volunteering at Mount Rainier National Park. Challenges such as these come to the NPS, for the most part, from regular users of national parks, with deep connections and affinity to these protected natural wonders, who want them to continue into perpetuity. Glenn, too, falls into this group of user-critics.

Nelson, in his opinion piece, quotes several Seattle blacks who live in the shadow of Mount Rainier but never thought of visiting. A survey of non-park

users conducted in 2008-2009 found the major reason for non-use was lack of knowledge about the park, period (Taylor, Grandjean, & Gramman, 2011).

Others cited safety and also an assumed lack of comfortable surroundings. In Nelson's words, "[w]e need to demolish the notion that the national parks and the rest of nature are an exclusive club where minorities are unwelcome" (Nelson, www.nytimes.com, July 12, 2015).

Nelson also serves as a contributing editor for *High Country News*, an independent media outlet that "covers the issues that define the American West" (*High Country News*). He focuses on the relationship between people of color and Western public lands. Nelson routinely explores that relationship and pushes the envelope, telling the stories, including his own, so that white people can get some inkling of how it feels to constantly be seen and treated as 'other.' In one article he told about his first foray into the world of kayaking on an outing with Latino Outdoors, a growing national grassroots group that works to connect Latinos of all ages with the outdoors. His description of the experience spoke volumes:

Gliding along Seattle's Lake Union...he could not help but think how [their] multicultural, multigenerational group, when replicated throughout the country, helps write a new story about the people who interact with the natural world. Reveling in each other's company, [they] created a safe space for each other, and for other people of color to join or emulate. And [they] interrupted the prevailing negative narratives pounded into [their] cultures by [their] own country -- African-American slavery, Japanese-American internment, Chinese-American forced coolie labor, Latino migrant work, Native American exile from their lands (Nelson, www.hcn.org, April 8, 2016).

Nelson's work echoes Finney's research about the role of media in both creating and reflecting a specific narrative, that of white people in the outdoors, which serves to paint that picture both for whites and for POC. Whites often do not see people other than those like them in the media portrayals, and so unconsciously come to assume they are not there. And for their part, POC do not see people who look like them, and assume they are not welcome--that it is not 'their space.'

In a scathing critique of the NPS during the same month, Nelson wrote about his travels to several national parks and his interviews with many POC involved in trying to push the parks towards a more equitable future (from both within and without), as well as with groups of NPS superintendents. In his words, his

main takeaway...is that our lands are fraught with well-meaning people, sincere about their desire to diversify the outdoors, but unable to move the needle much. I heard from young activists of color who lamented about their inability to be heard, and listened to members of what you might call "the establishment" complain about their inability to conceive effective outreach efforts....We're at the quarter pole of the National Park Service centennial and those people of color even aware that it's going on....are waiting for the big diversity reveal. I happen to think...that the NPS is going to spend its 100th year talking a good talk but squandering a huge opportunity. The agency did not effectively target or reach communities of color with its "massive" centennial marketing efforts, nor does it have a viable strategy for diversifying a workforce that continues to grow more and more white each year. As a result, the Park Service is not engaged enough with the nonwhite communities it needs to understand and court for its own long-term sustainability" (Nelson, G. www.hcn.org, April 8, 2016).

In the short time since penning those words, however, change had begun to occur in the top ranks of the NPS, and there are now many signs of accelerated

movement service-wide, despite the checkered past. I was told by an anonymous participant that a strategic plan for RDI from the national office should be publicized in Spring, 2017. The challenge then, will be to find a way to push that out into 417 park system units in a way that allows flexibility in implementation and adaptation for each of their unique places and circumstances. I will discuss this in more detail later in the thesis. Many of the people I interviewed are doing the actual hard work on a daily basis to move the NPS forward in their quest to improve equity and diversity, and their commitment and determination offer great hope for the NPS's future.

Although I focused on a few specific media outlets and activist/writers in this section, many other activist/writers are becoming more visible. Some have authored books, articles or blogs. Others never receive widespread attention, but dedicate their lives to work with young POC, helping develop their community leadership skills, and who introduce young people to the wonders of wild land spaces as well as the health-giving properties of just being in green space, even in urban centers. Some activist/writers blog about being a person of color in the usually-white space of outdoor activities such as mountain-biking, climbing, hiking, skiing, diving and more. The more these messages filter out to a wider readership, the more the old narratives of wilderness as white space will shift and change. Similarly, the more these programs for youth develop and grow, the more young people will grow into protectors and conservators, no longer seeing themselves as 'other' in the outdoors. As I have been told by many participants in interviews for this research, the more POC see themselves represented in these

spaces, both as visitors and as staff, the more welcome and at ease they are likely to feel.

Section II

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the NPS

Barriers and Solutions

“We think in language. We think in words. Language is the landscape of thought.” George Carlin

The Importance of Language

Words sometimes mean different things to different people. Meanings change over time, with changing circumstances and historical events. In the two years since beginning this work, what was routinely referred to then as ‘Diversity and Inclusion’ has begun to shift (another reason for my own interchangeable usage). As a couple of the participants said laughingly, in a few decades we will look back at these words and laugh or cringe. As academics and activists explore these topics, new dimensions of their meanings are revealed and deconstructed.

Examples of shifting language come both from this research and from simply looking back at history. When I was growing up in the 1960s and 70s, blacks were blacks. In the 1950’s, the term was Negroes. In the 1980s it changed to African Americans. When I began researching this subject in 2015, it came to my attention that African American was once again shifting to black. I also came to find that the word ‘minority’ was no longer routinely used--now we refer to people of color and communities of color. Culture, identity and terms of self-reference shift over time, as they should--nothing is static.

I checked in with some of the participants in this study, as I struggled with appropriate terminology. Lylianna Allala, an activist and environmentalist, and one of the organizers of the Seattle chapter of Environmental Professionals of Color (EPOC), helped me understand why some of these terms have become loaded. I asked her about the term ‘diversity.’ She replied,

Conversations have started with things like affirmative action, ‘cultural competency’...**what we’re really getting at are racial justice, racial equity, anti-racism, anti-oppression**--using these terms and going beyond ‘diversity and inclusion.’ These are still words from the oppressor. WE should be more inclusive. Or WE need to be diverse. To me it’s luke warm and it keeps white people comfortable....using those terms and words and throwing them around without any responsibility. But when you start talking about things like anti-racism, white people get scared, which is good. Part of it is really making the space for POC to step into their own leadership voice. I’ve been hearing the terms, “meet people where they are” and to some degree I get it, I understand and I’m with them. But when I continue to hear that phrase, and it’s usually from white people saying we need to meet people where they are, when my lived experience actually dictates another measure. So, you’re asking me to downplay my leadership and experience to meet you where you are so you’re comfortable. Well, that invalidates me (L. Allala, personal communication, January, 2017).

Another participant, Adrienne Hampton, a young environmentalist and emerging leader, reminded me how much language can matter--and can be understood by others in ways we might not have intended. When speaking with her about my initial title for this thesis, which included the phrase ‘diversity issues,’ she commented that “it’s about people’s lived experience; I am not an issue” (A. Hampton, personal communication, May, 2016)! By characterizing the thesis as dealing with diversity issues or problems, I might be giving others the impression that POC or COC are the problem, she suggested, when in reality, it is white organizations that have the problems in the first place (A. Hampton, personal communication, May, 2016). Another activist leader said that activists are moving away from the word ‘diversity.’ She explained adding ‘equity’ and ‘justice’ helps us recognize “that it is not just about getting people of color in the room--rather it’s about changing the way we do our work” (J. Koski, personal

communication, January, 2017). She continued by explaining that everyday work culture must change in order for an organization to change.

This brings us to a fundamental aspect of the ‘work’ around diversity and inclusion, that is, diversity programs and trainings. Most organizations and agencies rely heavily on such programs to increase numbers of POC in their ranks, and to help pave the way for POC’s acceptance into white-dominated office spaces by ‘helping’ employees learn about differences and accept difference as a positive thing. The following section delves into diversity trainings and some of the current literature and practice around their use.

“Diversity and inclusion work is not swift: it is an iterative process of awareness building, information gathering, analysis, vision development, planning, and action. There is no magic shortcut.” (Center for Diversity and the Environment, <http://cdeinspires.org/building-the-foundation-exploring-diversity-equity-inclusion>, 2017)

Diversity Trainings: Right ways and wrong ways, Part I

Over the years, there have been many differing and changing approaches to diversity training in organizations. I asked Carolyn Finney, author of *Black faces, white spaces: Reimagining the relationship of African Americans to the great outdoors*, what she thought about diversity trainings. About twenty years ago, as a graduate student in nursing, I had become fascinated with the ideas and sub-discipline which were at that time called ‘cross- or trans-cultural nursing.’ The professor of the course also organized the diversity trainings for incoming Bachelor of Nursing students, and asked some of us to help facilitate the trainings. My memories of the exact details are fuzzy, although I do remember there were tense moments for some of the students. With these in my head, I checked in with Dr. Finney to get a reading on the current state of these trainings, since I was once again studying ‘diversity and inclusion,’ albeit in a different context. She recommended an article in the most recent edition of the *Harvard Business Review (HBR)*. She laughed and said it was the first time she had bought the Review, but the title caught her eye in the airport. In large, rainbow colored letters across the bottom of the cover was the word ‘DIVERSITY,’ with a picture of several non-descript birds on a line, and a disproportionately large, multi-colored parrot right in the middle of them.

Finney had read the article on her cross-country flight. This particular article focused on diversity in large businesses and corporations, and in the table of contents, appeared alongside articles with titles like ‘The case for capitation’ and ‘How to pay for health care.’ The article, entitled, *On Building a Diverse Organization*, was divided into three parts: *Why diversity programs fail: And what works better*; *Designing a bias-free organization: It’s easier to change your processes than your people*; and *We just can’t handle diversity: A research roundup*.

While the larger goals and reasons for increasing diversity in the business sector may not be the same as those of environmental organizations, at least some of the content has the potential to translate to other types of agencies and organizations. The first article’s authors contend that the main reason diversity programs fail is because companies insist on continuing to use the same techniques from the 1960’s which have long since been proven ineffective. They “police managers’ thoughts and actions” (Dobbin & Kalev, in *HBR*, 2016, p.54) in the attempt to reduce bias, a tactic which has been shown can actually activate it instead. These attempts to “outlaw bias” go against what the authors state is known about motivating people to change. Moreover, people forget within a few days what they learned in diversity ‘trainings’ (Dobbin & Kalev, in *HBR*, 2016, p.54). Another fault with the traditional approach to these trainings is that many of them use negative messaging, which rarely results in positive responses. Lastly, the trainings are often mandatory, further increasing the chances of ‘backlash’ against the trainings as well as their messages and goals. Other

traditional ‘tools of the trade’--hiring tests, performance ratings, and grievance procedures--all tend to result in rebellion, according to the authors’ research into attempts to control workplace behavior.

Dobbin and Kalev share what does work. Effective programs “engage people in working for diversity, increase their contact with women and minorities, and tap into their desire to look good to others” (Dobbin & Kalev, in *HBR*, 2016, p.55) (they refer to this as social accountability). The first principle, engagement, is based on the psychological concept of dissonance. When people are prompted “to act in ways that support a particular view, their opinions shift toward that view” (Dobbin & Kalev, in *HBR*, 2016, p.57) in order to relieve any existing dissonance if they previously held a different view.

Another strategy for engaging managers is mentoring. This apparently also helps “chip away at their biases” (Dobbin & Kalev, in *HBR*, 2016, p.57). Mentors and role-models have a rather obvious effect on everyone involved. Those doing the mentoring feel invested in their protégés, and the mentees learn the ins and outs of what is needed to succeed from their successful teachers. Everyone wins. More importantly, the statistics show it works. As will be discussed in more detail later, mentors and role models have a huge place in an agency such as the NPS. Multiple participants shared how crucial mentors and role models were to their own personal growth, and how critically important mentors and role models are for the youth with whom they work (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017).

The second principle is contact. The evidence for this came initially from World War II, when blacks were eventually included in previously all-white companies. A sociologist found that “whites whose companies had been joined by black platoons showed dramatically lower racial animus and greater willingness to work alongside blacks than those whose companies remained segregated” (Dobbin & Kalev, in *HBR*, 2016, p.58). Apparently working toward a common goal “as equals” had the effect of removing bias, which so many years of regular contact did not (Dobbin & Kalev, in *HBR*, 2016, p.58). Dobbin and Kalev further maintain that self-managed teams are another successful strategy in increasing contact between racial and ethnic groups, with the expected decrease in bias.

Finally, social accountability, the third principle, “plays on our need to look good in the eyes of those around us” (Dobbin & Kalev, in *HBR*, 2016, p.58). A strategy they claim works well are corporate diversity task forces. Accountability theory apparently states that you will act differently if/when you know you are being observed. Once again, statistics from companies that use these tactics show they pay off.

The next article in the HBR is an interview with Iris Bohnet, author and professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Her recent book *What Works*, speaks to de-biasing organizations instead of individuals. Bohnet believes organizations should check the research about what programs actually work to increase diversity, before investing a lot of time and money in them. This point is especially relevant to the NPS, given its funding

limitations. “Marketers,” she says, “have been running A/B tests for a long time, measuring what works and what doesn’t. HR departments should be doing the same” (Morse, in *HBR*, 2016, p.64).

The NPS immediately comes to mind for other reasons as well. One of the strongest and most prevalent themes to come out of the interviews for this study was the barrier that the current NPS hiring practices and processes create for POC.

Hiring practices in the NPS: A prime barrier

When I asked participants about barriers to POC visiting in national parks, it became clear very quickly that a prime barrier is that POC consider them to be ‘white spaces.’ When POC do not see people who look like them among other visitors or especially as role models in the workforce, it makes them uncomfortable in those spaces. This theme came up repeatedly in interviews, and it is prevalent in the literature as well (Byrne & Wolch, 2009; Weber & Sultana, 2013; multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017). Kieron Slaughter, an Urban Fellow with NPS in Richmond, California, put it succinctly: “The workforce needs to reflect the community it serves and speak the languages that are spoken locally. It creates a comfort zone and it makes it easier to make cultural connections between visitors and employees” (K. Slaughter, personal communication, May, 2016).

Barriers in NPS’s hiring process was a prevalent theme in interviews with participants from all stakeholder groups. The theme also encompasses multiple

dimensions within it. The primary sub-themes under hiring practices are recruitment and retention. Enfolded within that are the following:

- 1) Barriers connected with being a bureaucratic federal agency,
- 2) History of varying hiring practices, and the importance of courageous leaders (past and present) taking necessary steps to create major change,
- 3) Human Resources (HR) knowledge that is not widely known among hiring managers, especially regarding direct hiring authorities (DHAs) or other strategies,
- 4) Barriers within COC due to lack of knowledge and access to information about the extremely complicated application procedure (through the USAJOBS site), as well as cultural barriers embedded within the application questions or what applicants are required to say about themselves, and lastly
- 5) Mentoring and support versus isolation once POC are working in a majority-white workplace.

The first barrier, the fact that the NPS falls within federal government infrastructure, is one of the biggest problems. It is problematic because changing that process in any way would literally require an act of Congress, as do many of the actions the NPS might hope to take. That is law--it is encoded into the NPS's very existence. Moreover, being part of the government brings with it the history of white privilege, male dominance, and bureaucracy, and an institutionally inherent resistance to change. Participants in this research, as well as others, have mentioned, as an example of embedded agency culture, the ease with which family-members of NPS employees are able to get into the system.

Another problem, which results from the size of, and restrictions within, the NPS has been mentioned by multiple participants for this research. They point out that the main entry into NPS employment is through internships and seasonal work. Many POC may not be in a financial position to be able to afford seasonal employment, or the routine moves around the country that keeping one's seasonal status may require. Moreover, people often wait many years for a permanent position to open up, and must continue with limited seasonal employment in order to be eligible for these highly competitive positions (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017)

Next, we can look at the history of different hiring practices over the past several decades, and the importance of courageous leadership, both then and now. In terms of the historical context of hiring, several participants mentioned how critical it was that President Kennedy, and his appointment as Secretary of the Interior, Stuart Udall, shared a vision of a more equitable nation--and this was **prior** to the 1964 Civil Rights Act (CRA). Later, President Johnson appointee George Hartzog, Jr. as Director of the NPS, added another voice for change. Former Director of the NPS (1996-2000) Robert Stanton, who participated in this study, repeatedly mentioned the impact of courageous visionaries, as did a few other participants. Without these far-sighted individuals in powerful places, Director Stanton, a visionary leader himself, might not have found his place in the NPS. As stated earlier, under these leaders, programs such as recruitment from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) began, and in fact continued into the 1980's when a backlash against so-called affirmative action

severely curtailed the process. Director Stanton explained that in the early 70's, the astute Hartzog noticed there were no black Superintendents in the entire NPS, and recruited him as the first black Superintendent since Charles Young led Sequoia Park in 1903, prior to the park service's official existence. It "takes courageous leadership at top levels," he continued, "superintendent, regional director, director, and certainly Secretary to monitor what is taking place and make some strategic actions to get the kind of work force representation that we're striving for" (R. Stanton, personal communication, June, 2016).

Another aspect of courageous leadership and far-sightedness related to recruitment involves long-range, strategic planning

to develop that kind of interest on the part of prospective candidates coming into the work force by engaging young people in conservation programs as far back as junior high or beyond that in terms of education programs" (R. Stanton, personal communication, June, 2016).

Similarly, Kevin Bacher, Volunteer and Outreach Program Manager at Mount Rainier National Park, said,

what's really going to make the difference is people at the top of leadership choosing to make this a priority and choosing to commit the resources to it. And saying from the top down, this is going to be a priority...if it (outreach), was really the priority that we say it is we would hire someone to do it full-time (K. Bacher, personal communication, May, 2016).

This would involve difficult choices, since given the budgetary limitations,

Bacher thinks it is a zero sum game: allocating resources to RDI means taking

them from somewhere else. People interviewed for this thesis from all three stakeholder groups came to similar conclusions.

A sub-theme among NPS employees I interviewed underscored Bacher's point--most people working in outreach to under-represented communities are doing so as part of their job, and they often feel it is less valued by higher levels of management. Lylianna Allala, when asked about hiring process barriers from her perspective, says it is up to the leadership to make "a commitment to analyze and put resources towards that critical analysis of what is working and what is exclusive, and what is not working. And really commit to changing that. And being bold in it, too" (L. Allala, personal communication, January, 2017). Dorceta Taylor's recent exhaustive report, *The state of diversity in environmental organizations: Mainstream NGOs, foundations, and government agencies*, further exposed the lack of progress in hiring diverse workforces (Taylor, 2015, Green 2.0, <http://www.diversegreen.org/the-challenge>).

In recent times, while Director Jon Jarvis came under harsh criticism by some for not doing enough to open doors to COC, others credit him with being responsible for once again opening the way for significant change in that regard. Audrey Peterman shared her experience of being the only POC in the room when she heard Jarvis tell the audience that the NPS would love for POC to come, but that they just were not coming. She bristles when she hears this sort of falsehood, as there is overwhelming evidence that many in COC simply do not know about the park service. They need the NPS to invite them in, and not expect that they will just come--especially given the history of racism and exclusion in parks and

other significant barriers. While many people I interviewed feel the agency has been simply paying lip service to diversity and inclusion, and the lack of movement on this for so long would support that, more recent changes happening at the top levels of the service actually may be making a difference. There appears to be cause for optimism.

Carolyn Finney, who was on the Second Century Commission and who remains on the NPS Advisory Board to this day, thinks Director Jarvis was responsible for doing just that--opening the door to discussions about diversity in a way that had not been done for many years. An employee in the NPS's RDI office feels that without Jarvis' leadership, the office would not exist. With the office in place, the last conceptual barriers in the highest levels of the park service, a glass ceiling of sorts, have finally been broken open. The RDI office employee spoke to the importance of "having somebody at the national level who does this every day" (Anon., personal communication, 2017), especially with support in the highest ranks. The existence of the office elevates the work of many passionate employees who have been working hard on RDI for years, and gives their work a voice. Of the big changes happening at the leadership level, another veteran park employee said that it is "just the beginning set of changes that are needed to make wholesale change to how we as a government organization operate, and who is represented in what we do and why we do it---visitation, work force, voices at the table" (Anon., personal communication, 2016). This employee also stated that these bigger, substantive changes have just started happening in the last couple of years.

The third barrier in the hiring practices and processes of the NPS results from its organizational complexity. HR managers must know about direct hiring authorities (DHAs), defined in a previous section. However, the hiring officials in the individual park units lack this information or may be unaware of the numerous other ways they can steer worthy interns into the pipeline that would lead them to permanent positions, including re-writing standard position descriptions (Anon., personal communication, 2016). One participant is working towards making this kind of knowledge available to hiring managers in her region. Others involved in hiring should also be aware of these types of policies, since they too may impact overall hiring practices. These hiring authorities and other similar policies are particularly important because of the constraints on many POC mentioned earlier, around not being able to afford seasonal work or internships. While most young professionals are in the same situation, like with so many of these institutional barriers, they affect POC disproportionately.

A fourth barrier to access to the NPS jobs by POC relates to potential lack of familiarity with a complex application process as well as cultural barriers inherent within it. Several participants pointed to the USAJOBS website itself. It is extremely complicated and not at all accessible--to anyone, let alone someone who may not have their own computer and who may not have experience applying for government jobs. Applying for an NPS position is very time-consuming, and it is set up in such a way that if you do not know ahead of time exactly what the 'right' answers should be, you will essentially be eliminated in the first round. The process is simply intimidating. Moreover, Slaughter, the

Urban Fellow, points out that the application process ought to be updated and mobile-accessible. He contends that anyone should be able to complete an application on their phone while they are riding the bus, like they can for so many other types of jobs. In other words, the complexity inserts a huge element of inherent bias. While young whites attempting to enter the National Park System may encounter similar barriers, these barriers disproportionately affect POC.

Additionally, and somewhat more hidden, is the fact that many of the position descriptions (PDs) as well as the expected answers to the questionnaires are culturally skewed. One participant presented the example of questions that require people to speak highly of themselves--applicants must tout or even slightly exaggerate their abilities and accomplishments. The questionnaires set up for each position description offer choices, and the applicant's choice must exactly match their resume. If an applicant tends toward modesty, they may choose a lower level of expertise and automatically be eliminated. Such personal aggrandizement is anathema in most indigenous cultures. Native youth are taught to look up to elders and only elders have the right to say those sorts of things about themselves (Anon., personal communication, 2016). Women, too, are generally socialized not to praise themselves or put themselves above others, the result being that these types of requirements have the potential to skew in favor of white men.

Another example of inherent bias in hiring came from a white female ranger who was involved in a community-based NPS program. The team, mostly white females, wrote the PD for an internship, for which they hoped to recruit

young adults of color. They noticed that they seemed to only receive applications from white women. They quickly realized that the group writing the PD were all white women! There was inherent bias in how they wrote the PD simply because of who they were. They realized if they wanted to recruit people from COC, they needed input from POC into the writing of the PD. The NPS, along with other organizations, needs to heed these women's advice at the organizational level, if they wish to see the change they give lip service to wanting. Taylor's report, mentioned previously, researched 191 environmental non-profits, 74 government agencies and 28 leading environmental grant making foundations. The findings indicated alienation and "unconscious bias" as "factors hampering recruitment and retention of talented people of color" (Taylor, Green 2.0, <http://www.diversegreen.org/the-challenge>, n.d).

The fifth barrier, which relates to both recruitment and retention, but even more strongly to retention, is mentoring and support versus isolation. In terms of recruitment, mentoring to assist in the application process is critical. Some interview participants spoke about the need for classes and direct instruction about how to apply for NPS (or other public land agency) jobs, through community centers, emphasizing that these opportunities must take place in the communities where POC live, so that they are as accessible and well publicized as possible. Whereas some programs already offer job application assistance in informal as well as formal ways, it is not nearly as common or prevalent as it needs to be.

When mentoring relates to hiring processes and also to retention, however, it came up particularly strongly in relation to the retention of POC once they actually make it in the door. In this context, the NPS participant at the RDI office thinks POC and whites may be hired in proportionate numbers by the NPS, but POC leave in much higher percentages than their white counterparts. Why?

Without exception, the POC with whom I spoke felt isolated in their varying environmental roles, both inside and outside the NPS (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017). The Environmental movement has a long way to go towards achieving equity and justice in membership as well as in the ranks of leadership. (This was discussed in the chapter on EJ, as other movements face similar challenges, including acknowledgement of the connectedness between the movements.) Allala offers an example from her own experience:

It was really stark for me when I started to have more experience and be at decision-making tables. Many times I was the only woman, and definitely the only woman of color. I would notice the dynamics when I would offer a bit of information -- about who was paying attention, who wasn't, who was being dismissive, and [I] could acutely feel some 'otherness' (L. Allala, personal communication, January, 2017).

Another aspect of isolation for POC in an environmental world dominated by whites and white culture is the need for support and community, and feeling ostracized when that is lacking. One of the reasons many POC take issue with whites using the term diversity so freely is that people in white-dominated organizations often think that bringing in a few people who don't look like them

is enough. However, if an organization brings in a few POC but the culture has not changed, those few people will feel isolated and alone unless they are directly supported and mentored, and unless the effort has been directed at wholesale culture change. Just diversifying the workforce, by itself, is not enough.

A veteran park ranger who is black recounted that for a while he thought he was the only black ranger in the country. He simply rarely saw “another African American in uniform” (Anon., personal communication, 2017). He continued,

and my peers who are mostly European American have no idea what that’s like. For most European American rangers, they’re just used to seeing other European American rangers, but if you’re African American, it’s a bizarre experience. It still happens today. You can still go weeks or months without seeing anyone that looks like you except when you look in the mirror (Anon., personal communication, 2017).

This ranger and other rangers of color shared multiple stories of encountering outright racism in the course of their daily work, and often of experiencing micro-aggressions on a daily basis. They described these experiences as tremendously isolating, painful. If there is no one in your department that looks like you, and you have no one to share those difficult experiences with, why, really, would you want to continue putting up with that?

EPOC, the organization Allala worked with for several years, specifically builds “support systems so we can feel like we’re thriving and not just surviving. And I hear from a lot of folks that the chapter has created a community in a way that they haven’t found elsewhere” (L. Allala, personal communication, January,

2017). Even with EPOC in the picture, POC, or anyone coming from marginalized communities, will benefit from support that validates who they are and their place in the organization. Support is all the more vital and fundamental to the success of those coming in from less advantaged circumstances.

Diversity Trainings: Right ways and wrong ways, Part II

In the HBR article, Bohnet reminded us that it is simply extremely difficult to change people and their biases. She elucidated the concept of implicit bias. Implicit bias, also called ‘implicit social cognition’ by academics, is “thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control” (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/aboutus.html>, n.d.). Another definition of implicit bias or unconscious bias, comes from a group doing similar work at UC Berkeley: “unconscious prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Also called implicit bias. *Can occur even when the person consciously thinks that prejudice is wrong*” (emphasis mine) (<http://unconsciousbiasproject.org/raise-awareness>, n.d.). Bohnet expresses that it is “depressing that even those of us who are committed to equality and promoting diversity fall prey to these biases” (Morse, in *HBR*, 2016, p.65).

Bohnet also points out that companies and organizations need to think about how recruitment approaches “can skew who even applies” (Morse, in *HBR*, 2016, p.65). Job descriptions may deter indigenous applicants from applying and the application process at NPS essentially eliminates many groups from the beginning. Bohnet recommends checking to see if hiring practices inherently favor one gender over another as well. “A big part,” she states, “is, simply, continued awareness building--not just of the problem but also of the solutions available to organizations” (Morse, in *HBR*, 2016, p.67).

As mentioned, one of the ‘cohorts’ or stakeholder groups interviewed for this thesis research was employees working with partner organizations (that is, they partner in some way with the NPS), or other, similar environmental non-profits or organizations. Many of these organizations are already examining their own hiring practices, as well as actively attempting to right old wrongs and become more equitable and inclusive in their basic organizational culture. As such, some of them have quite a lot of experience with this work, and shared a slightly different perspective and approach to it.

Most of the participants from this group spoke of the process of introducing in-depth, routine work on diversity, equity and inclusion as needing to start off slowly. This work often met with resistance and discomfort. A theme that often came up in these interviews was the *necessity of getting comfortable with being uncomfortable*. POC described the whole concept of comfort and the need to be comfortable as part of white culture. Talking about implicit bias and white privilege, for instance, can be very uncomfortable. The challenge arises in accepting the vulnerability that comes with facing our own biases, and especially sharing such delicate and intimate aspects of our lives and lived experience with our colleagues, black, brown and white.

Perhaps the single strongest and most prevalent message from the pioneers in this new era of equity and justice work is that diversity ‘training’ and equity and inclusion work cannot be a one-time workshop. It requires an ongoing process that involves work with a skilled facilitator, attending lectures and workshops, reading books and articles, and ongoing discussions---and more

discussions, and of course living and experiencing. Su Theida, the deputy director at EarthCorps, a local Seattle-based ecological restoration organization, put it this way:

When you're looking at diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), you're really looking at changing the culture of the organization and that the learning is going to take a decade or two or three...first we have to understand what the biases are, then we have to un-learn them (S. Theida, personal communication, October, 2016).

We are “trying to learn new behaviors, new ways of going about business...all within the paradigm that the rest of society isn't changing quite as fast” (S. Theida, personal communication, 2016).

Paola Flores, a young woman of color working as a fellow at NPS, provided some deeper insight into why all of us must become aware of our own biases as a first step to equity and inclusivity. In her words:

First we have to change ourselves as individuals...If you want to do something and you really care about it, it's really important for you to educate yourself on it first. Especially because these populations that we want to reach out to, have normally always been the ones that have had to do the teaching and explaining and that's a huge burden on communities and just individuals themselves. So, I think that as a service and as an agency just educating ourselves on the issues first is really important. In order for the agency as a whole to change, the individuals within it have to make those internal shifts (P. Flores, personal communication, November, 2016).

Flores touched here on the basics of anti-essentialism--as referred to briefly in the section on CRT. POC cannot be (but often are) expected to speak for or represent

their entire race or ethnic group to white people who are simply ignorant--either by chance or by choice. This approach ignores natural variation within any 'group.' It allows the dominant group to freely make assumptions about 'minority' groups, and single out any person who identifies as part of that minority group to explain to the dominant group, general information about others. This theme came up repeatedly in interviews with POC, and is the source of a tremendous amount of frustration, anger, and often rage, in COC.

This section has highlighted two different approaches to diversity training. One approach examined the organization and pointed out ways to organizational change. The other focused on individuals within organizations, and argued that the organization as a whole cannot change until and unless the individuals within it change. Both are necessary, and time needs to be spent on both simultaneously. Each organization will need to work out their own approach, but it seems clear that both individuals and organizations need to change and the change in each one deeply affects the other.

Make It 'Actionable'

How can this be put into action? Generally, organizations begin with a strategic plan. While this is a necessary and important start, many interview participants emphasized that while many organizations create a plan, they get stuck at the implementation phase. Some participants expressed frustration with organizations 'stopping at diversity.' They create the plan, check it off the list, pat themselves on the back, and proceed with business as usual. As one NPS

employee of color expressed, there is a need for major structural change--doing it piecemeal is not enough (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

Local environmental leader Jessica Koski provided one example of an organization putting its money where its mouth is. It funds ongoing training, and ensures the conversation and learning process continue afterwards (J. Koski, personal communication, January, 2017). The NPS has been accused of not putting its money where its mouth is (Santucci, et al, 2014). However, the tide is turning, especially with the establishment of the RDI office, and I have been told there will be a strategic plan for RDI in the NPS soon.

Participant in this thesis research shared examples of what their organizations have done or are doing. For example, part of the process of creating the strategic plan actually has to be getting employees on board. There are a variety of ways to accomplish that, and each organization or department needs to experiment with what works best in its particular environment. According to multiple participants, once the strategic plan has been outlined, the key to success is recognizing the nature of equity and inclusion work as part of an ongoing process, with a goal of changing the organizational culture (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017). Additionally, there must be organizational support from the top, as well as at least some degree of willingness to participate from employees. Next, training must be embedded into the routine and daily operations of the organization. Brown bag lunches were mentioned as one way of keeping the conversation going between workshops. Another practice is having staff read and then discuss an article during daily meetings. Most organizations

bring in trained facilitators, although some larger ones have begun to train their own employees.

As mentioned earlier, the NPS now utilizes ‘facilitated dialogue’ in their Allies For Inclusion program. A trained facilitator opens up a safe space and facilitates group work on DEI, often in the context of workshops or trainings about something else entirely. This dialogue then begins to be integrated into every aspect of the organization’s work. Some organizations also send out information about outside lectures or workshops to their employees who can then attend them (preferably on work time). Employers may also send recommended reading for employees to complete on their own. The participants in the research for this thesis say that these trainings or workshops are absolutely, uncompromisingly imperative, and should happen multiple times per year.

Kevin Bacher, of Mount Rainier National Park, shared his own transformative experience from his participation in a facilitated dialogue about DEI as part of an advanced volunteer program training. The presentation and

especially talking about the roots of racism in America...really changed my perspective. And I consider myself a pretty progressive and inclusive sort of person...but there were things that he said that...I said, whoa, this just doesn’t sound right to me...but over the course of the day that we spent talking about this, my perspective was completely changed (K. Bacher, personal communication, May, 2016).

His example speaks to the potential power of facilitated dialogue in helping participants understand different perspectives of history. Bacher’s story also

underlines the importance of facing the ‘uncomfortableness’ of grappling with our unconscious selves in a supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere.

Another educator interviewed for this thesis emphasized that the approach to diversity training is crucial. People can get very defensive and scared. When they are in that mode, they may shut down and the work goes nowhere. Another organizational leader working directly on diversity and inclusion stated that she used to be of the mindset that an organization cannot move forward until white people understand their privilege and the concept of structural racism. In the meantime, she has found that that framework has more of a tendency to cause defensiveness and shut people down. She stated she has learned more patience, compassion and forgiveness, and finds that the work on implicit bias has been a powerful evolution away from the harshness of the ‘in-your-face’ approach. She thinks it may be enough to get people to a place of being open and curious and willing to listen. She continues to think about how to best foster success, and said, “if we could train ourselves out of this, we would have trained ourselves out of this a long time ago” (Anon., personal communication, 2017).

There will always be different ways of approaching organizational change, and many factors go into those decisions. Two organizations with programs that appear to be succeeding do squarely face structural racism. Their work and their approach could potentially be seen as models for how to implement diversity trainings and change institutional culture in a sensitive and effective manner. One is EarthCorps, mentioned earlier in this section. The other (requesting anonymity) has a strategic plan to become a “multi-cultural

organization that reflects the communities that we work in, one that is working to dismantle structural racism. So it is really streamlined into all of the work that we do” (J. Koski, personal communication, January, 2017). Her department’s employees, for example, read an article called *The Common Elements of Oppression*. They read it a bit at a time, and then discussed how elements of oppression show up in their own work. Koski, who heads a large program in this organization, continued, “so this isn’t something you do once a year. It’s always thinking about it in our work...it brings out how we, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, think our way of doing things is the best way, and that there are other ways that are equally valid” (J. Koski, personal communication, January, 2017). At the same time, Koski says, “we want to be careful that we don’t come across as patting ourselves on our back when we’ve got a LONG way to go” (J. Koski, personal communication, January, 2017).

The work they are doing dovetails with Lylianna Allala’s sentiment that part of white supremacist culture has become embedded in ways of doing things, in what is considered ‘professional’ and the whole concept of professionalism and perfectionism, for example, and in the distance between people that results. Because these ways of being are part of the American culture, they are invisible to us until we begin to examine them in the context of safe space and openness to difference.

Change is scary for some people. As the proportion of whites in the United States population decreases, many of them cling to an idealized past that never existed. Lylianna Allala says, “folks who have never had to give up

privilege are that much more scared, because the unknown is scary. But as a POC, you're constantly having to change and transform" (L. Allala, personal communication, January, 2017). She explains that POC and marginalized peoples have to be hyper-vigilant to the dominant cultural norms around them. They have learned those skills out of necessity, but actually, with open communication, white people can learn from their experience and flexibility.

At EarthCorps, the approach also involves looking at systematic oppressions, particularly racism. Theida, EarthCorps' deputy director, believes racism is the

primary 'ism' to look at. You have to pick one. There's so much to learn and there's something about getting good at one, that then helps you frame the rest of them. Racism is a particularly strong thread. The 'isms' are woven together and you're trying to unravel them. You're trying to pull the thread out, so that the fabric loosens. Many people think that racism is a pretty key one, and if we can really work on this one, the rest will crumble (S. Theida, personal communication, October, 2016).

While the 'isms' continue to confound individuals and organizations across the board, those who are actively working on it every day are optimistic. Jenny Mulholland-Beahrs, founder and director of the California Outdoor Engagement Coalition, finds it heartening that so many people are talking about DEI now, and the intersections between race and EJ and social justice. She emphasized that defining the terms, defining what it means to be an ally, getting comfortable with the uncomfortable are all extremely important for keeping the conversations going, and keeping up the momentum for significant, real change--both in outdoor

spaces and in society (J. Mulholland-Beahrs, personal communication, November, 2016). Koski concluded our interview saying,

as we're remaking our society in light of climate, do we want to recreate structural racism? Or seize this as an opportunity to do things differently. I think that vision for creating a better world and really values-driven activism is much more inspiring than trying to scare people (J. Koski, personal communication, January, 2017).

Su Theida ended our interview by sharing her dream:

...I actually have this great hope that the environment can be the context for us unraveling racism faster. Because we share this, because we share the earth in common, we know we have to figure this out (S. Theida, personal communication, October, 2016).

Structural Racism

Racism and structural racism are endemic to our society; the fact that they are deeply embedded in American culture and history and in virtually every system of our society is often invisible to whites, as the section on CRT brought to light. The American Anthropological Association defines racism as:

the use of race to establish and justify a social hierarchy and system of power that privileges, preferences or advances certain individuals or groups of people usually at the expense of others. (<http://understandingrace.org/resources/glossary.html>, n.d.).

As described in previous chapters, implicit bias--unconscious feelings and ideas experienced by even the most liberal and open-minded of people--can create a situation in which non-racists sometimes inadvertently maintain and perpetuate racist policies and exclusionary culture. Racism on an individual basis is a destructive, hurtful societal phenomenon. The problem is that racism is not just an occasional or individual experience. A major source of the continuation of racism is its institutionalized nature--it is melded in and integrated into every aspect of every societal structure. Structural or insitutionalized racism is defined as “the embeddedness of racially discriminatory practices in the institutions, laws, and agreed upon values and practices of a society

(<http://understandingrace.org/resources/glossary.html>, n.d.). When one belongs to the dominant culture, they may not be motivated to think about the way they do things or how those ways can adversely affect people who are not from the dominant culture. It is simply the way things are done. Perspective about how the dominant culture ‘otherizes’ people often must come from those who are

‘otherized.’ Sometimes only people not part of the dominant culture are able to point out how and why the structures of a society--the educational system, the political system, the legal system--leave many people out, cause great harm, stunt opportunity and growth potential, and maintain the status quo, creating self-fulfilling prophecies and deeply oppressive circumstances for people from ostracized communities.

Perhaps the best and most powerful illustration of structural racism comes from the recent film by Ava DuVernay, called *13th*. The film takes us back to the end of the Civil War and the passage of the 13th Amendment to the constitution, which made slavery unconstitutional. The one exception was if someone was deemed a criminal. This created a loophole, the use of which began right away and has continued through today. The film goes on to build the historical case for how that criminalization of blacks, especially black men went on to become mythologized. The wildly popular, essentially white nationalist film *The Birth of a Nation* portrayed blacks as animal-like rapists and the KKK as heroes. Between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War II, thousands of black men were mobbed and lynched. And when it became unacceptable to be so blatant and public, there was a shift to using the legal system to encode permanent second-class status for blacks.

And so it has continued. Each period of recent history using the loophole in its own way--protestors during the Civil Rights movement shown in the press as ‘disruptors of the peace,’ drug wars and ‘super-predators’ dominating the media, the federal crime bill and welfare reform disproportionately adversely

affecting COC, and most recently, mass incarceration, all of which have portrayed mostly black men as criminals--a narrative which has stayed with white American culture, and has become embedded in our unconscious minds. Moreover, the discriminatory practices and biases used primarily against blacks in previous times, is now also being used against immigrants. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of people in U.S. prisons rose from 357,292 to 1,179,200. Fully 98% of prosecutors around the U.S. are white, and the carceral system essentially did away with parole. Blacks are about 12–13% of the American population, but they make up 40% of the incarcerated population. Latinos are about 16% of the American population and make up 19% of the incarcerated population (as of 2010, Wikipedia--see their source below).*

The film lays out in stark relief, the clear progression from slavery, through convict leasing, on through Jim Crow segregation and the creation of legal permanent second class status--on to mass incarcerations, stripping blacks of the hard-won rights gained in the Civil Rights movement. There is a thread connecting these eras--the presumption of guilt and less-than-human that follows black and brown people wherever they are. This has been inculcated into the way whites have told the story--a one-sided, blatantly racist story--with precious little opening for hearing the black story. The myths the dominant culture has internalized have been slowly, invisibly (for whites) fed to us throughout history.

This is structural racism.

* [Breaking Down Mass Incarceration in the 2010 Census: State-by-State Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity](#). Briefing by Leah Sakala. May 28, 2014. [Prison Policy Initiative](#). Figures calculated with [US Census](#) 2010 SF-1 table P42 and the PCT20 table series (from Wikipedia).



Many whites equate racists with Nazis, fascists, white nationalists and other blatant, hateful people and ideologies. They may simply not be aware of how racism is camouflaged. Coming to that realization can be painful and can unfold in a variety of ways. Some claim that society will not be able to move forward in the fight against racism until we all face these unpleasant facts. There are also differences in how best to approach anti-racism. What seems clear is that until we come to understand and address implicit bias and the structure that allows it to persist, and how liberals and conservatives and middle-of-the-road folks alike, carry these biases and help perpetuate them, it will be very difficult to overcome structural racism.

Since the basis for this thesis is that structural racism lies at the heart of the NPS's challenges with equity and inclusion, it is important to 'talk' about racism, and delve more deeply into how it affects individuals and communities of color. My argument has been that structural racism is the reason the NPS has not generally been successful in forging collaborations and alliances with COC for so many years, despite knowing it needed to take steps to do just that. I also contend that hearing the stories of POC, their direct experiences with racism that are invisible to so many others, can be the most powerful tool to overcoming that racism. For so many reasons, often rooted in structural racism, their stories and histories are often sidelined, erased, or changed. As an ally, one of the things I can do is help open some of their narratives into the NPS consciousness. By hearing, listening, and opening up to their experiences, we can begin to bridge the

distance between us, and begin to take the steps necessary to righting old wrongs, and change the systems of oppression of which we may not have been aware.

To begin to understand the NPS's challenges, it was imperative for me to invite people from different COC to participate in this research. In most cases people were introduced to me by snowball sampling. In some cases, I found them through social media. Every single one of their stories challenged me to better understand what it is like to be a person of color in a white-dominated world. I asked some of them to tell me the stories of their lives, or how they came to be involved in the outdoors. I asked most participants why they think the NPS has struggled with equity and inclusion, and what the NPS might do to change the current situation. In every story, laced with pain, and often with the exhaustion of constantly fighting or being made invisible, I found hope, willingness to persevere, and openness to my attempts to understand and cross barriers.

Racism: Day in, Day out

Whites commonly believe that POC do not visit national parks because it is not part of their culture in the same way such visits may be for some whites. White people often reminisce about going on family road trips around the country, or camping every summer as a child. Those fortunate enough to have had those kinds of experiences probably never thought at the time why there were not more families of color taking similar road trips. Some of the stories included in this section give us some inkling as to why. On growing up during the Jim Crow era, one participant told me about a book written by Victor Hugo Green, *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, (commonly referred to simply as ‘The Green Book,’ published between 1936 and 1966), and about why such a book was necessary:

It was sometimes a very dangerous thing for an African American family to drive across the country. You’d go to a hotel with a vacancy sign and say I saw your sign and I need a room, [and they’d say] ‘oh, I’m sorry, we just got a call, so we’re full’...with no explanation. ‘But your sign says that you have space.’ ‘Well we just forgot to flip it, but we’re full.’ And that’s embarrassing and it’s humiliating...the tone and energy of the proprietor is just, you need to leave (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

I heard similar stories from at least three participants who lived through this time and distinctly remembered their parents’ humiliation, and their own growing sense of ‘not belonging’ and not being safe. The participant continues--

Green’s book focused on the entire U.S., and all the highways and roadways that existed at the time. And wherever you were going you could find a boarding house that was run by an African American, or someone’s farm, and you could stay there, and people would plot out their trip based on this book, if they had to

travel cross-country and there was no choice. This was America's own apartheid. So, African Americans weren't really taking road trips for fun. The areas that might cater to African Americans were islands. The ocean itself was hostile to their presence. Even into the 70's there were towns known as sundown towns. There were towns near to where I lived...Basically, if you were of African descent, your presence was not wanted in that town after sundown. And if you were there, who knows what could happen (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

I can attest, having grown up during that same time period and gone on road trips with my family, that it simply never occurred to me why I was not seeing POC. And mine was a family relatively attuned to racism, and actively working against it. Furthermore:

in that atmosphere, I would say that African Americans occupied that exact opposite space of commercials in the 60's after World War II -- 'see the USA in your Chevrolet!'...It's like freedom -- the building of the interstate highway system under Eisenhower. Americans were getting on the roads. That's when the national park visitation really started to jump. The literal dark side of that story is who was NOT doing all of those things. It was just easier and safer just to stay in your community. So the internalized perception was that those places, 'America's Best Idea' were not for you. And because there isn't that cultural history, that's why it's been so difficult to jumpstart a new tradition...no one goes on vacation to a place that fills them with fear and anxiety." (Anon., personal communication, 2016)

A black ranger told the following story: he was walking in the shadows next to a rock wall and a woman nearby could not tell he was not white, and she said,

Excuse me, ranger, ranger, and I stepped out into the sun, and she looked at me and her head went back a bit, and she said, oh, maybe you don't know. And I said maybe I don't know what? How can I help you? And she said, well, we've been seeing all these animals here, and we've been in an argument. We don't know, are they

deer or are they elk. And I said, well ma'am, actually elk are members of the deer family. And they thanked me, but [there was] nothing like, sorry about that comment at the beginning of the conversation (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

This example highlights implicit bias and how it leads to 'micro-aggressions.'

While not outright racism in the sense that many people think of it (name-calling or physical intimidation), the woman in the story had an unconscious bias that because this ranger was black, (even though he was a ranger!) he would not know the difference between an elk and a deer. Micro-aggressions are all the more hurtful because they come from a place of absolute blindness to the bias and the hurt that bias inflicts.

Outright racism also appears in the outdoors. Here are two stories:

There are places where we are not welcome. And park staff can't do nothing about it. That's what happened to this black family a year and a half ago. They went camping up in the 'Gold Country' about 80 miles north of Oakland, in a place where they've always camped. This is a family that was totally experienced camping. And in the middle of the night, someone in an adjacent camp, was screaming racial epithets at them and chasing them with a shovel.

And another:

...but if people are not welcome by the local community...and that happened to me here in Oakland where we had a 'play in nature' event and I was working with this group that brings in together all these 'found in nature' materials. (This was the kind of thing we did as kids in nature, but now there has to be some sort of brought-in structure to create those spaces)...They were partnered with Outdoor Afro, again a well-meaning attempt to engage diverse audiences, they provided the transportation, and had done all the engagement that could be done, and got these

young kids and families up to this area up near the Oakland hills...very organized. And there was a woman who came by, a neighbor, and she was like, 'what the heck is going on here? You have all these invasive species here.' And she kept going on and on about 'invasive species.' Missing the fact that the kids were having this tactile, beautiful moment, with their families, in nature...but she kept going on and on about invasive species. And honey, she was not just talking about the plants (Anon., personal communication, November, 2016).

Regarding the barriers against POC visiting U.S. national parks, one participant explained,

...a national park here is different than how a national park is back at home. If I even got exposed to national parks. Or, the activities that they're doing, that's not something that I would automatically do, or that I have the resources to do. We don't just say, cool, this weekend let's go climb El Capitan. Like, no. You kidding me?! That's where we get into some of the stuff about like what if a bear eats me, what if I fall, or, that looks dumb, because that sense of those types of activities that resonate with what we're used to, are very different. And then connecting all of that is this idea that for a variety of historical and current social issues, you are seen as other, and there's a narrative that you might be less. So it's like, this is not a place for you. So it's a feeling of unwelcome. It, you know, it just permeates. It can really set some people to feel like, well, why even try if I'm not even going to feel like I'm wanted there (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

These stories highlight the lived experiences, the real-life examples of not feeling welcome in national parks or other outdoor settings. My sense is that staff in the NPS have heard that POC feel unwelcome, but they do not always quite grasp why. Staff may personally welcome everyone. Hearing first-hand stories like these, then, has the potential to change the way many people in the NPS approach welcoming POC in--why the NPS should take first steps to welcome

POC, rather than continue waiting for them to come, assuming that will just happen on its own.

The effects of growing up as a POC in a white-dominated country follow people into adulthood:

...the impact of being often one of very few POC let alone Asian-American in our schools, was really hard on us...I experienced a lot of racial inferiority early on and very much immediately learned that I...that to be different was not desirable and therefore tried to minimize any aspect of that as much as possible. And it wasn't really until college that I realized how that was really more of a mind-set that I was socialized into and not a personal characteristic of who I am (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

One participant shared the story of having been involved in a program for inner-city high school students, which ultimately turned out to be key to his success. The program, along with the relationships with the mentors and role models who ran it, changed the course of his life, led to his interest in science and exposed him to the idea that he could actually earn a living working in the outdoors. These role models and mentors stayed in contact with him, and eventually aligned him with a student hiring authority in the NPS that led to his permanent career with the service. The participant told the story of feeling comfortable and at home in one particular park, surrounded by an inclusive professional community, but getting a real taste of implicit bias when he took a position in a different state. Largely because of overt hostility against a community with which he identifies, he often did not feel comfortable sharing his personal story with co-workers and other colleagues. When he chose to do so, it

sometimes resulted in a disappointing and painful change in the relationship with some colleagues. He told me that suddenly in their eyes, something shifted. Rather than being the biologist he is and had been, some saw him as having received some sort of special dispensation because of his background and how he had been introduced to employment in the NPS. The participant felt that co-workers viewed him as having been an 'at risk youth' who had been hired, not for his merits, but because of his background (Anon., personal communication, 2016)

Another participant spoke to how structural racism had direct effects on the staff (many of whom are from COC) of a partner organization closely connected with the NPS.

The Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) is on my mind a lot. What is our role as an organization? The (partner organization) has been really silent about it. That's been difficult for me. I want to really believe in the place I work with. I also want to believe I'm not crazy in seeing an intersection. Wanting to make parks for all, and not acknowledging that there are some deadly serious injustices and inequity going on in our city, in our country. To feel like this organization, this park is playing neutral is painful for me. I am super privileged in that I have outlets in my work. And that the director of our center has not hesitated to let us engage in however we want to engage...increasingly it's felt like a big weight--the silence of the organization (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

The participant goes on to describe the summer when, during one week, two black men were shot by white police officers:

And then that Friday was the Orlando shooting. All in the span of two weeks or something like that. And from the park service and the partner organization, they issued a statement about solidarity, very focused on Orlando. And it rubbed me really wrong. In the sense that -- the silence, the neutrality, and then something happens

in Orlando and the statement...Every organization, every town is feeling the weight of this racial discussion, police brutality...I feel like we took a stand on what happened in Orlando because no one's going to argue with it. And we won't take a stand if there's an inkling of opposition...(Anon., personal communication, 2016).

This participant shared the experience of writing these sentiments to their boss, expressing the importance of taking a stand “because there's an opposite side. That's what taking a stand means. It's supposed to be hard. It's supposed to be courageous. And if it's not, then you're not taking a stand, you're just -- I don't know what you're doing” (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

The participant then shared a sentiment prevalent among the POC interviewed for this study -- that of needing to behave in a way that would make whites comfortable (Angulo, Anon., Gomez, Martin; personal communication, 2016). In addition, the participants described the need to behave in a way that would reflect well on their group in the eyes of whites. POC refer to this change in behavior as a ‘code switch;’ it connects to the concept of anti-essentialism. POC often feel uncomfortable being their true selves in the company of whites; they do not act as they would when interacting with others from their same racial or ethnic group. Another participant described becoming aware of his own code switch and being surprised by the realization that he spoke differently with different people.

For POC, as they shared with me on numerous occasions, the code-switching can be exhausting. Many described the constant need to put on an act, to explain themselves to whites, and then be on the receiving end of constant

sleights such as those the ranger experienced. These sleights take place on a daily basis, and have the ultimate psychologically devastating effect of invalidating POC and their experiences. One participant, Carter McBride, retired from a career as a successful corporate businessman, has become a passionate outdoor enthusiast and advocate for POC in the outdoors. He spoke about his being invited into a large outdoor experience organization to help them improve their own ‘diversity,’ and said,

it can be exhausting. Yes they want the information, yes they need the information, but they don’t want to hear it from me...as a person of color...I’m tired, because after 30 years (of being in the business world) it’s been a situation of sitting in a meeting and bringing in an idea that may have possibly not been brought up before, and it being hushed. But then ten minutes later, someone else would bring it up and [they’d all] say ‘what a great idea’ (C. McBride, personal communication, September, 2016).

Racism and implicit bias are prevalent in the every-day lives of POC, and yet so often invisible to whites. The implications for what it will take to change that culture are daunting. But change it must. The necessary shifts, both in the NPS, and in the larger society, can only happen with an intentional, multi-level, multi-pronged approach. Without that, it is, as one participant was earlier quoted as saying, only “piecemeal. And that is not enough.”

Barriers--Participant Perspectives

What's in a Title?

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the National Park Service: Narratives, Counter-narratives and the Importance of Moving Beyond Demographics

This journey and the stories that accompany it sometimes took the reader on unanticipated but related side trips. I felt it important, therefore, to recap the core points; unpacking the title naturally lends itself to a brief summary. Structural racism lies at the heart of this research into diversity, equity and inclusion in the NPS. Racism is embedded within all arenas of our society, in environmental organizations, and of course, in the environmental movement as a whole. It underlies everything in this thesis. The narratives refer to the typical, 'dominant-culture' narratives which typically leave out the stories and histories of POC, and marginalized and minority communities. Those stories and histories, according to CRT and other critical perspectives, are therefore called 'counter-narratives,' because they voice the often-untold thoughts, feelings and memories of COC that whites may not learn or hear about otherwise.

We can view the topic through a lens of demographic trends in the United States and the implications for the future of public lands--showing us one set of reasons why it is important for the NPS and other environmental organizations and agencies to improve their record on equity, diversity and inclusion. I contend there is another, equally important, lens with which to view diversity, equity and inclusion in the NPS which requires moving beyond just focusing on the

demographics. That is, unequal access to public lands and to outdoor spaces in general, constitutes environmental **in**justice. Using this lens, the frameworks of critical race theory and critical geography help to contextualize the current situation and at the same time move us forward to pragmatic, useful solutions. The counter-narratives brought out in this thesis provide the personal stories of POC with the explicit intention of using the power of their words and lived experiences, as well as their suggestions and recommendations, to help bring about substantial change within the NPS.

To remind the reader, I interviewed 40 participants from three stakeholder groups: NPS employees, people from COC with a stake in outdoor spaces, and staff from partner or general environmental organizations and agencies. Since I used PAR methodology, the participants were more than just interviewees--they also offered feedback, ideas and direction for the study as a whole at every stage.

The mind map below illustrates the major themes and counter-narratives that emerged from the interviews, as well as how they connect and intersect. The following section discusses the barriers, while the subsequent section reveals the participants' recommendations and solutions--sometimes, but not always--directly related to the specific barriers.



Figure 1. Mind-map of interview results

Barriers to progress in moving forward with diversity, equity and inclusion in the NPS are listed in the table below. The pages listed beside them are where the reader will find the detailed discussion.

Barriers	Details	Further Discussions
1. Structural Racism	At the heart of it all (see section on structural racism)	Pg. 123
2. ‘Cultural’ and economic	Often the first thing people think of, but it is so much deeper and more complex	Pg. 140
3. Lack of funding	A key barrier, especially for the NPS	Pg. 142
4. Hiring practices	<p>Recruitment and retention:</p> <p>~Managers do not always know about options for direct hiring and other ways to help interns of color work through an impossibly complex system</p> <p>~No or few role models/appropriate mentors (not a welcoming place)</p> <p>~Effects of backlash against ‘special’ recruiting programs--they still happen but are under the radar and not made prominent due to fear of more backlash</p> <p>~USAJOBS, application process too complex, not user-friendly</p>	Pg. 102
5. Lack of support from leadership at the top	A past barrier; there are indications this is changing in the NPS, but slowly	Pg. 143

Table 1. Major Barriers

Barriers

Many barriers have impeded the NPS goal of diversifying and creating a more equitable and relevant organization. Several of these have been discussed previously in this thesis, others will be examined below.

'Cultural' or Economic Barriers

Structural racism lies at the root of these obstacles. Barriers to national park visitation among POC, such as distance from remote parks or economic barriers, have been covered in detail in the academic literature in the past (Benson, et al, 2013; Byrne and Wolch, 2009; Cronan, Shinew, & Stodolska, 2008; Finney, 2014; Floyd, 1999; Grossman, 2010; Johnson, et al, 1997; Ostergren, Solop, & Hagen, 2005; Shinew, Floyd, & Parry, 2004; Weber and Sultana, 2013b). Several participants also mentioned that financial limitations played some role in their families not visiting national parks when they were younger (G. Angulo, personal communication, May, 2016; Anon., personal communication, 2016; P. Flores, personal communication, November, 2016).

Another 'cultural' barrier to visitation by POC to NPS sites, especially the more remote ones, is that POC often recreate in ways different from 'dominant' or white culture recreation habits. The NPS is at least nominally aware of the role different recreational preferences can play in hindering national park relevancy for all communities of Americans. Something as simple as restructuring picnic areas for larger parties has taken place or been proposed in some parks, with the results that COC now routinely use areas they did not visit in the past (C. Beall,

personal communication, 2016; R. King, personal communication, January, 2017). However, for the more remote wilderness parks, this particular barrier remains fixed in the very geography of the parks as well as in their history. The national parks, after all, were created by whites for wealthy whites, without much regard to the way other groups might relate to, view, or interact with nature.

What some people characterize as ‘cultural’ barriers often connects to the history of violence against POC. That history can lead many blacks, especially, to avoid certain kinds of outdoor spaces, such as remote wooded areas. I have already discussed that many POC feel unwelcome in national parks, and that those spaces are understood to be ‘white space.’ Dr. Finney’s work, and that of many other authors and academics, delves deeply into the historical context for these strong and lasting sentiments (Finney, 2014). Interviews with many POC for this study backed up the importance of the historical context in a very real and cogent way.

Lack of Funding

I have also already discussed the lack of funding in the NPS, and how central this is to NPS functioning in general. In addition, I have covered how it takes on particular significance regarding RDI, and how it is too easy for the NPS to use lack of funding as an excuse to NOT take the steps necessary for progress in this regard. There are, however, other aspects of funding issues. Funding shortfalls have forced the NPS to look to outside organizations for help

implementing essential aspects of their mission (R. King, personal communication, January, 2017).

The lack of funding also creates situations that participants for this research discussed with deep frustration and pain--the lack of ability to implement programs and activities the NPS itself calls essential. People work overtime, or they find innovative ways of presenting their work so that it 'fits' projects that do receive funding. Environmental educators and park educators alike lament that society (and ostensibly the park service) does not value their work enough that it receives the needed financial support (Anon., personal communication, 2016; Anon., personal communication, 2016). One could argue that the lack of funding forces park personnel to be more efficient and careful with their spending. Unfortunately, this argument does not explain or help the myriad children of color who never get the opportunity to experience the wild outdoors or youth leadership programs because these programs fell to the chopping block without their communities' input. Ultimately, rather than creating fiscal responsibility, forcing outreach staff to 'pretend' their programs belong to some other, better-funded program simply results in short-changing outreach staff as well as the potential recipients of their programs. It further forces the NPS to outsource programming that would otherwise come from them, to outside organizations which may or may not implement ideal programs, and which would then take place potentially without NPS oversight or involvement (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

Not Enough Support from the Highest Levels of Leadership

Participants in this thesis research also spoke the lack of institutional support for fundamental change at the highest levels in the NPS. I already noted Audrey Peterman's experience with former Director Jon Jarvis and the 'old' story that although the NPS welcomes POC, they do not want to come. I also mentioned that other participants who work with high-level officials actually feel that Director Jarvis was instrumental in beginning to break down the barriers in the top levels of the NPS. During his administration, there was indeed an increase in the number of new park units being established in urban areas (www.nps.gov), with historical or cultural themes that may be more likely to resonate with some POC than the less accessible wilderness parks.

The participant in the RDI office stated that the support from the uppermost levels of leadership is "hugely important and a big change" (Anon., personal communication, 2017). The challenge ahead will be to ensure that every employee in the entire Park Service understands that they now have a place to call with concerns about equity, relevancy, or other concerns of that nature (<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/index.htm>). I asked how much the RDI office's work actually filters down to the individual park or site level. The participant was not sure how to answer that--clearly this is still a huge challenge, as yet unresolved. However, the fact that RDI is on the NPS radar is indeed a new and hopeful sign. On the other hand, the participant also informed me that while the highest levels of national leadership now support work on diversity, equity and inclusion, and service-wide culture change, the RDI office has a "tiny staff" (three

full-time employees and one part-time) with a “huge undertaking” (Anon., personal communication, 2017). This is undeniably reminiscent of all the other ‘tiny staffs’ at park units throughout the country attempting to implement outreach to COC around the NPS. Since the office was only established in 2014, it is too early to tell just how much support the employees working in outreach, or others around the Park Service, actually receive from the RDI office.

This same participant mentioned an interesting additional barrier to systemic change towards a more equitable NPS. Unlike in the non-profit world, the NPS, as a government agency, has an extremely professionally diverse composition.

You have anthropologists and firefighters, maintenance workers and ticket takers and accountants. In government you can really have very different reasons for coming to the work. How do you honor all of those folks? You can’t use one strategy. [It requires] a lot of re-thinking how we have messaged ourselves, how we train, how we communicate, how we hold people accountable. It’s a total overhaul (Anon., personal communication, 2017).

Relevancy

Relevancy, or what has been the lack thereof, refers to the intersection of the demographic and the environmental justice approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion. Lack of relevancy to large segments of the population has been a huge barrier for the NPS, and potentially holds the key to the turn-around they currently pursue. The RDI website states that

[r]elevancy is achieved when all Americans are able to establish a personal connection to the National Park Service parks and programs and find meaning and value in the mission of the National Park Service (<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/index.htm>).

(See Appendix A for the NPS mission statement.)

Becoming more relevant, and most importantly, more relevant to an increasingly diverse population, entails outreach efforts of the kind this thesis highlights. In order to be meaningful and accomplish its goal, relevancy must encompass more than just outreach programs. In fact, the NPS requires, as stated in my initial research question, multi-level approaches in order to succeed. This will require a fundamental change in direction, in approach, in funding priorities--as the participant stated, "it's a total overhaul." Some of that overhaul began in 2008 with the planning for the Centennial, and the 'next 100 years.' The concept of 'bringing the parks to the people' has gained traction, with the realization that there are some segments of the population that may never actually make it to a wilderness park, but can still be inspired by outdoor spaces closer to home. Regarding accessibility and relevancy, Kieron Slaughter, the Urban Fellow in the Bay Area, indicated the NPS should not necessarily promote the wild land parks

as the pinnacle of somebody's park experience. He continued, "an open space experience does not necessarily have to be completely removed from society" (K. Slaughter, personal communication, May, 2016). Moreover, Slaughter clarified an additional key barrier in the form of the NPS messaging to visitors. He suggested adding a research sub-question regarding whether the

National Park Service [is] telling the stories that are relevant to African Americans. It should be highlighted that it's not just a relationship with the outdoors that isn't being realized, but stories of national significance that the NPS should be telling. For example, the Black Panther Party was founded 50 years ago this month, it had chapters in almost every state and chapters around the country and world that shaped the Civil Rights movement. Where can people interested in the Panthers see and experience this story? Currently, there is no National recognition. With so many hip hop and R&B artist being the descendants of Panthers and their music and culture shaped by it (2Pac, Beyonce, Public Enemy, etc...). Wouldn't it be relevant to tell those stories also? That's one example of how the NPS can be more relevant to people of color, and millennials by making connections that they can identify with and providing an easy entry into the world of the other NPS sites (K. Slaughter, personal communication, February, 2017).

Another participant asked, "even an introduction to a national park--how do we change it so that it's deeply rooted into their own lives? It's easier if a park focuses on cultural or historical resources--it's more difficult with wilderness" (Anon., personal communication, 2016). Flores, the young NPS doing a fellowship, expressed a similar sentiment: "urban parks can be so much more accessible for kids of color" (P. Flores, personal communication, November, 2016). Bacher also concurred, and commended the NPS for the recent addition of several parks which represent a "broad diversity of American culture, and not just

the wilderness recreation and wilderness ecosystems part of it, but also preserving the stories of all the communities that make up America” (K. Bacher, personal communication, May, 2016). He supported the idea of wilderness parks working together with urban parks. For him the urban park experience for COC, in addition to their inherent value, could also be a first step in introducing urban communities to green spaces, and “maybe as a next step, those folks come to a more remote park” (K. Bacher, personal communication, May, 2016).

To take the concept of relevancy further, though, the NPS must continue to move in the direction of engaging communities in those communities. Charles Beall, the superintendent of the Seattle National Parks located in Seattle, said they need to ask the question, “how can the NPS add value to people’s lives” (C. Beall, personal communication, January, 2017). The previous one hundred year’s approach--come to us, camp, hike, learn about an historic event or person--is not so relevant to a large portion of the urban population. He brought up a recent meeting with a community development association to illustrate the point.

Their questions are not, ‘when do the trails open at [the nearby national park,]’ or ‘what are the hours of your visitor center.’ But it’s...you know, we just finished this strategic plan about how to improve our community and #1 on the list is we want more opportunities for physical activity--we don’t have enough green space here...Anything the park service can do to help there? Oh yeah! Absolutely (C. Beall, personal communication, January, 2017)!

Along those same lines, the community development leaders told them,

We've got this office in this historic building and they need to do some renovations, earthquake retrofitting and so what's the historic tax credit process all about? Oh yeah, the NPS oversees this historic tax credit, let me put you in touch with this person, that person. And these are meaningful things that this community and their groups are dealing with, so how can the NPS help meet those needs (C. Beall, personal communication, January, 2017)?

“This museum or that historic site certainly appeals to a certain audience,” Beall continued,

but the park service has so much more to offer...getting to that relevancy--how can we be helpful and how can the community (whoever it is in that community) say, oh the park service helped us with our application to start tax credit, or it connected us with this biologist that came and helped us figure out why our honey bees are dying....or it connected us with this grant opportunity....that's the value, the relevancy! **It's allowing the community to set what's important and meaningful and helping them be successful** (C. Beall, personal communication, January, 2017). (emphasis mine)

Relevancy means engaging with communities, offering to collaborate, allowing the community members to determine what they need and how the NPS can help them. Relevancy is connecting with youth and young adults, creating the space for them to lead and determine what is useful and meaningful in their communities. The NPS will likely metamorphose in the coming century, and may possibly move away from the remote wild land national park as the 'ideal' park. Those wild land parks will still be an integral part of the NPS, but it may be that a certain segment of the population never comes to those parks. If the NPS can offer those people other options that are more relevant for them by creating genuine partnerships, collaborating in the deepest, truest sense, they will continue

to succeed in fulfilling their mission, and demonstrate the adaptability that change necessitates for relevance into the future.

From Barriers to Solutions

The table below lists solutions, as recommended by the participants, and which are strongly supported by the literature as well (Makopondo, 2006; multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017; Santucci, et al, 2014).

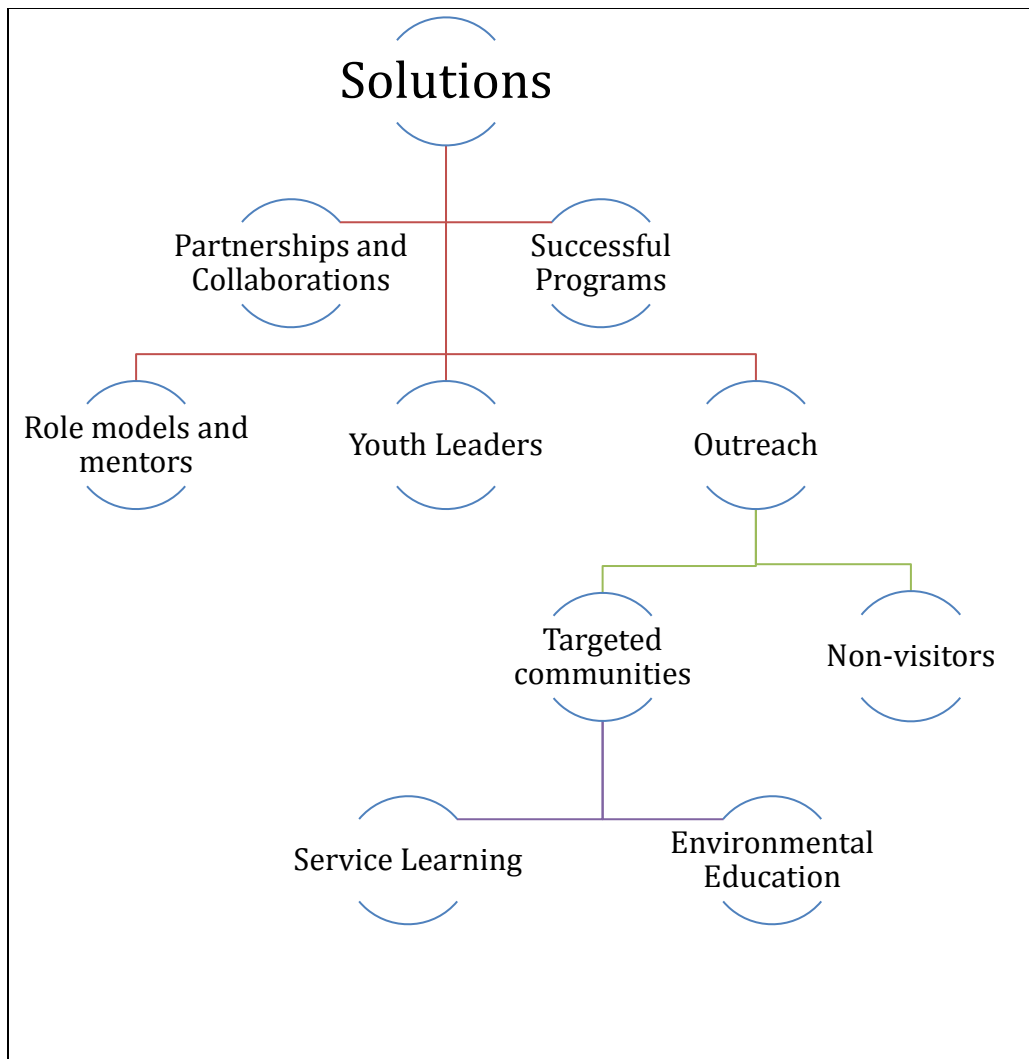


Table 2. Solutions

The participants in this thesis research, and the academic literature, all recommend several strategies for successfully overcoming the barriers the NPS faces in becoming a fully equitable, inclusive agency. The NPS has commissioned a number of surveys and comprehensive studies--they have heard many of these messages before. However, because of the barriers listed above, action and progress has been painfully slow. The cogency of the messages and solutions from the surveys and academic literature is reinforced and accentuated by the stories and recommendations of those interviewed for this thesis, which come directly from their lived experience. Moreover, the NPS may have received the results of a survey here, or a study or article there--diffuse information with unclear goals or applications. This thesis research powerfully brings together the academic research, the popular press response, and most importantly, the stories and lived experience of many people intimately connected with the NPS. Therefore, this thesis includes and reflects a powerful collection from a wide array of important and interested stakeholders, providing a one-two punch of information that hopefully can serve to propel the ideas and solutions to front and center and become the priority for the NPS.

Partnerships and Collaborations

The most common strategy proposed by participants is to continue to forge strong partnerships and collaborations with partner organizations and COC. Many individuals in the NPS already do this, working hard, often off the clock. If the NPS truly wants to 'walk its talk,' they need to provide the necessary

resources and support for these collaborations, and find ways to spread them throughout the Service.

One participant, in a position to encourage colleagues in the field working on this, believes strongly in supporting them by sharing the successful programs with others, and by helping them connect with each other (Anon., personal communication, 2016). This theme came up more often than any other, in terms of barriers (past mistakes or lack of collaboration) and as a solution (how the NPS can support these collaborations and partnerships). The NPS naturally began looking for more partnerships when the budgetary problems reached a critical point. They realized that without help from other organizations, they would not be able to come close to fulfilling their mission. The NPS forged partnerships with foundations or other groups, which helped the NPS raise money, since, as a federal agency, they cannot legally fund-raise.

While partnerships remain vital, interview participants spoke of a new type of partnership involving close collaboration that the NPS needs to urgently adopt, service-wide. This collaboration entails coming in and asking what the community needs, being open to doing things differently, and listening. The participants in this study said it in multiple ways, again and again:

“You have to keep showing up!”

“There’s a need for on-going collaboration with COC.”

“They (NPS) need to reach out to COC, hear what they want and need, rather than coming up with something and then asking the COC to sign on.”

“We need to reach out and have serious dialogue with under-represented communities about barriers and what the NPS can do to overcome them.”

“The direction we need to go is building relationships with underserved communities, ask what we are doing in that direction and what is keeping us from doing more. We need to do a lot of listening!”

“You have to have long-term, sustained relationships.”

“It’s about building genuine relationships.”

The literature supports this, people in partner organizations express that they cannot emphasize it strongly enough, and people from within the NPS involved in these sorts of collaborations preach it, and often feel the message has been falling on deaf ears: collaboration is key, and requires relationship-building, listening, and opening to new ideas (Makopondo, 2006; multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017; Santucci, et al, 2014). The irony, as one participant sees it, is that building and strengthening partnerships and true collaborations can help mitigate some of the barriers, especially regarding COC participation in decision-making processes, but it also requires time and money, and so can, ironically, also be a barrier (Anon., personal communication, 2016). Over time the NPS has learned that partnerships help immensely when the partner organization has the freedom to do things that the NPS cannot, such as fundraise or hire community outreach staff or educators with minimal constraints (Anon., personal communication, 2016; C. Beall, personal communication, 2017). These types of collaborations sometimes require doing things very differently and

creatively, as multiple participants expressed. Essentially, the NPS needs to re-examine how it functions, relax and be open to new and different ways of being ‘parks for all people.’

Programs That Work

Examples of existing successful programs and/or

partnerships/collaborations follow. Each example highlights a different type of organization or program, or aspect of what is required for success in a program or collaboration.

Program or NPS unit	What they are	Who is involved	Why they are successful
Golden Gate NRA	National recreation area located in the heart of San Francisco and the Bay Area	NPS, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, NatureBridge, Fort Mason Center, and more	Strong collaborations with multiple partners, reaching large numbers of people who might not otherwise have access to national parks
Seattle Area Nat'l Park Sites	Four nat'l park units in one: Seattle Klondike Goldrush, Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific Experience, Bainbridge Is. Japanese American Exclusion Memorial, and REI Info. Ctr.	NPS, multiple local community groups and local youth, UW, Islandwood and others	Creative new ways of inclusive collaboration offering support and assistance in the community, starting new programs which address what the community wants and needs
SCA	National org. which aims to build next gen conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship	One of the oldest NPS partners (since 1957)	Long experience working with youth in underserved areas and long-standing relationship with the NPS. Nat'l leaders in the service-learning arena
The Crissy Center	An urban environmental center offering numerous programs to local underrepresented youth	NPS, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Presidio Trust	Attention to leadership and community as well as nature and ecological restoration
California Outdoor Engagement Coalition	Coalition with aim of connecting underrepresented youth with the outdoors	UC Berkeley, Ca State Parks, Avarna, Ca Academy of Sciences, Latino Outdoors, Groundwork Richmond, among many others	Use collective impact model, bring together cross-sector partners to create long-term systems change
Greening Youth Foundation	Environmental stewardship organization working with underserved youth and young adults	Multiple private sector businesses, multiple federal agencies, HBCUs, and many others	Provide internships with multiple agencies and org's, work with Urban Youth Corps, Youth Conservation Corps, and Public school initiatives--well-known and well-trusted among environ. stewardship orgs.

Table 3. Examples of successful partnerships and collaborations



LA Troca, NPS, Santa Monica Mountains NRA, <https://www.nps.gov/samo/index.htm>
Bringing 'Parks to the people'

1. **The Golden Gate National Recreation Area:** As discussed on page 78, the Golden Gate National Recreational Area works on collaboration and partnering with community organizations and introducing youth and families of color to outdoor spaces. It continues to be a model for what the NPS can be.
2. **The Seattle Area National Park Sites:** This NPS unit, comprised of four sites, has recently taken collaboration with and within the community to new levels, using creative approaches that are still not commonly found in the NPS. The work being done here exemplifies everything the literature and participants of color have identified as absolutely essential for success in engaging youth and families, and could therefore serve as a model for other NPS units.

3. **The Student Conservation Association (SCA):** Their long years of work with the NPS and other public land agencies have taught the SCA how to work within communities, as well as how to partner successfully with the NPS. They are actively working internally on their own anti-racism, and the NPS has come to rely heavily on the SCA to help bridge the gaps, especially between wild land parks and youth of color, by providing multiple types of opportunities and programs which bring youth into wild land parks for service-learning experiences. They also have urban programs.

4. **The Crissy Center:** The numerous, ambitious, successful programs for youth at this center are emblematic of what can and should be replicated in cities around the U.S. Their emphasis on developing youth leaders at the same time that they work on environmental stewardship helps others see the connections between what is important and relevant to youth and their communities, and other social and environmental problems.

5. **The California Outdoor Engagement Coalition:** This robust, newish coalition, based at the UC Berkeley campus, collaborates with a wide variety of partners, actively working on anti-racism, directly addressing the environmental injustice of the exclusion of youth of color from outdoor experiences. The coalition makes connections between COC and agencies, helping to create a web of opportunities and collaboration seldom seen in other regions.

6. **Greening Youth Foundation:** Based in Atlanta, the Greening Youth Foundation works with numerous partners to develop stewardship in youth and young adults of color. The NPS's partnership with them can be seen

as something to emulate with other similar organizations around the country.

Why the Programs Work

Many, many programs and partnerships currently exist in the NPS. Not every program would work in every park unit or circumstance. However, even the successes have not been shared widely or encouraged throughout the park system. People in the NPS strive to help promulgate these programs and partnerships, as well as what makes what works successful, under the premise that different regions might try to adapt them to their particular areas and circumstances.

Strong partnerships and collaborations remain the most critical things about what makes programs successful. Ideas about what is required to make those partnerships and collaborations strong and successful follows. These ideas came directly from participants in this thesis study.

~ Giving partnerships and collaborations with COC top priority, including base funding from the NPS.

~ Working directly in urban communities, with community leaders.

~ Being open. Asking what the community needs and how the NPS can help. Listening more than talking, stepping aside and allowing the community leaders to take the lead (this is crucial for relevancy!). Avoiding the traditional modus operandi, which has been to formulate the idea first and then ask a community if it wants to participate. Numerous interview participants shared stories about

outsiders thinking the community wanted or needed something, and when they went in and actually asked, finding out that community members wanted or needed something completely different.

~ Participating in community events and meetings, showing authentic interest in the communities and what is important to them.

~ Being willing to be vulnerable, admit past mistakes or wrong-doing, show up, make mistakes and learn from them and be willing to try again.

These ideas provide a framework for how the NPS can collaborate with COC in ways that are mutually beneficial. The recommendations have the potential to open doors to more collaborative opportunities and also to engender the increased relevancy the NPS needs and actively pursues.

Diversity Training

As mentioned previously in this thesis, diversity training must be instituted carefully, using the best known practices, based on research and the experience of organizations whose strategies have already proven successful. As Iris Bohnet stated, “for beliefs to change, people’s experiences have to change first” (Morse, in *HBR*, 2016, p.67). The NPS has chosen to train its own employees in a program called Allies for Inclusion, using facilitated dialogue, a technique that opens the space for safe conversations. One of the participants in interviews for this thesis has been trained and leads facilitated dialogues routinely throughout one of the NPS regions, not elucidated in order to protect the

participant's identity. This participant feels the Allies for Inclusion program has been succeeding (Anon., personal communication, 2017). As mentioned in the earlier section of this thesis on diversity trainings, in order for them to really make a difference, the NPS needs to integrate these trainings fully into routine operations, and would do well to follow the recommendations from organizations such as EarthCorps, which have had success with newer approaches. According to the participants from partner organizations who have already begun this process, there is absolutely no way to avoid integrating the newer approaches. The NPS must overcome the challenges, and muster the will to initiate long-term programs in a routine manner, throughout the Park Service. Without these, the necessary culture change will continue to elude them.

Hiring Practices, Recruitment and Retention

As indicated previously, the NPS, as a federal agency, cannot institute its own policies regarding hiring practices. As mentioned earlier, a federal policy change would literally necessitate an act of Congress. The NPS, however, has flexibility in several areas. The following bullet points outline the ideas that came directly from the interviews with participants for this thesis:

~ Make hiring officials aware of creative ways to work within inflexible systems, for example, that they can tailor position descriptions to advantage POC with whom managers have positive experience, such as interns or seasonal employees.

~ Add hiring authorities, again to advantage potential employees of color who might otherwise not have equal access to NPS employment for reasons already highlighted earlier.

~ Increase recruitment in HBCUs and from community centers.

~ Involve POC in the writing of job announcements and position descriptions so that they are less biased.

~ Collaborate with COC in partnerships with the NPS.

Additional Ideas

Many interview participants had further ideas about potential programs, partnerships or approaches the NPS could implement to move towards being a more equitable and inclusive agency. Some of the programs may already exist in *some* parks, but sharing these ideas is a first step to inspiring other park units to adapt them. The ideas showcase simple ways in which the NPS can improve its outreach work, requiring only a shift in attitude or strategy:

~ An ambassador program that partners NPS staff with underserved high schoolers (similar to Groundwork Richmond).

~ Partnerships with universities (there are the beginnings of this type of partnership happening in the Seattle area as well as in the Bay area).

~ Stronger connections between national parks and the local parks and recreation departments (especially to expose youth to the opportunities of moving from work in a community center to work in a public land agency).

~ Importance of including families (not just youth) in NPS or partner programs. When families are on-board and involved, the youth are more likely to succeed.

~ NPS presence/information about the variety of opportunities in high school counseling and in schools in general: “You don’t have to be a ranger to work for

the NPS.” And “you don’t have to be white to work as a ranger or anywhere in the NPS” (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017).

Role Models and Mentors

“If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.” Rachel Carson

The NPS should not underestimate the importance of role models and mentors, especially for new employees of color. The importance of role models and mentors was an extremely prevalent theme throughout the interviews with participants. Virtually all interview participants mentioned this idea, in relation to how important their own role models and mentors were for their personal and professional development, or in terms of how crucial it is to have role models and mentors readily available for new employees, and in youth and young adult programming. Some national park units have a system in place that pairs every new employee with a veteran staff member. In other units no system exists, and a new employee may be assigned a mentor once the new person is ‘on-boarded,’ on a case-by-case basis (R. King, personal communication, January, 2017). For POC newly employed with the NPS, having a mentor assigned or a system whereby the employee can choose a mentor can be the difference between their staying on and succeeding, or not. The participant from the RDI office mentioned attrition as a huge problem for new POC coming to work for the NPS. The dominant white culture in the NPS into which a new employee of color enters, can leave that

employee burdened with constantly needing to explain and ‘represent’ their group, and not having the support of others from a similar culture or background, consequently leaves them in a vulnerable and potentially lonely place. Iris Bohnet agreed, suggesting that “being surrounded by role models who look like you can affect what you think is possible for people like you” (Morse, in *HBR*, 2016, p.67).

One participant in this thesis research described a situation that came about from a lack of mentoring. A group of interns from HBCUs were sent to a park unit in the far north of the country. They had no jackets, no gear, and had been sent into an area and a climate with which they were wholly unfamiliar. They did not know where to go to buy the gear, did not necessarily have the money, and were sent to an area where they were the only POC. Something as basic as cold weather gear or where to buy hair supplies (for African Americans) had not been considered. Similar scenes may be played out in many parts of the country.

Many participants, white and non-white alike, mentioned the importance of having a mentor when they were younger. When those relationships continued over periods of years, they were all the more powerful in terms of encouraging, supporting, and guiding the young person along as they grew into their own leadership roles and discovered what they were capable of. These relationships were deeply significant and memorable. The experience of being mentored also had the effect not only of modeling mentoring, but also of engendering in the

participants the desire to do the same and eventually become that mentor for others.

Youth Leaders

Another solution mentioned for the NPS related to youth and developing youth leaders. The participants in this thesis research who are educators, felt particularly strongly that in programs that work with youth of color, exposure to nature should not be the sole focus of these programs. In fact, it may be secondary to developing their leadership skills. First of all, for the NPS to be relevant into the future, much of its work, and especially with POC, needs to be directed towards the youth of today. Secondly, for youth to be engaged, the content of the program needs to be relevant to them. Furthermore, relevancy should be decided with them. In the words of an educator of color working with youth of color, people need to put

energy and resource[s]...to engaging young people of color. When speaking to NPS conservation staff, they will often site exposure to public lands and nature as the key. For example, going on a camping trip, visiting Yosemite, will unlock a world young people will fall in love with and protect. I think this is a deeply false narrative that doesn't...explore the problems with the cultural norms of NPS and how it positions young people...How young people are viewed and treated will have the largest impact on whether the park service will be heading in the right directions to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion. Their voices and their leadership should be transforming the park service to be reflective of their values, hopes, dreams, and the cultural and natural resources they want to protect (Anon., personal communication, 2017).

This educator continued,

they have to care about themselves and their community before they can care about a national park 100 miles away. A lot of people miss that message--think they should be doing more restoration work or more focused on climate change. It goes to this idea of relevancy. If it's a true relationship between a park and young people, we should be as open to a conversation that young people want to have, as we expect them to be open to a conversation we want to have. That's what youth development is--giving them a voice (Anon., personal communication, 2016).

This participant felt strongly that the first priority of this NPS partner program and programs like it needed to be “supporting these young people in being their strongest self” (Anon., personal communication, 2016). Developing their leadership skills and confidence was crucial. The youth would still get the exposure to nature, but these educators all believed that the way to best accomplish connecting youth with nature would be to tend to their personal development and leadership skills. The youth might not become park rangers when they grow up, but they would have a greater sense of responsibility to community and awareness of the importance of community in the big picture of the environment and ecology. If they were not first engaged with and in their own communities, these educators asked, how would they become stewards of the greater environment? Another point brought up by several participants is the importance of both the NPS and partner programs recruiting diverse staff to work with youth, and looking at whether the organization is working on breaking down its own racial and ethnic barriers and creating a welcoming and safe space (multiple participants, personal communication, 2016, 2017).

Outreach

Most outreach, especially to youth, but also to families, involves service-learning programs or environmental education (EE). NPS outreach staff have been burdened with so many other tasks that they often must put outreach at the bottom of their priorities. In some cases, they are so passionate about the importance of outreach, especially to underserved communities, that they put in unpaid overtime to make sure the programs happen, or they must find ‘unofficial’ ways of finding funding to keep these critical programs running.

Participants in this thesis research emphasized passionately and repeatedly that for outreach to be effective, relationship-building must take place in the communities where the targeted communities live, with consistent staff who work on long-term relationship-building with, and in, communities. The building and maintenance of these relationships over the long term are utterly crucial to successfully engaging youth. The outreach should ideally come from staff who look like the targeted communities and speak their language. The organizations, whether the NPS or partner agencies, must be actively working on their own equity and inclusion, and must be willing to ask the communities and the youth what is relevant to them.

There is another type of outreach, in addition to outreach to COC and/or youth of color. There is often overlap, but not always. The survey commissioned by the NPS in 2000 also went out to non-visitors. One of the answers the survey elicited was that people do not come to national parks because

they do not know what national parks are, what to do in them, or how to reach them. Some participants also expressed that the typical media that the NPS uses to reach people, are not reaching COC. Solutions to this issue included public service announcements, more consistent ranger presence in schools and community centers, and more information in different languages in media that will reach COC, about national parks that include the basics. Many interviewees said they spoke to people in COC who simply assumed you had to sleep outdoors when visiting a national park, and they did not wish to be exposed to the elements. They had no idea there were lodges and hotels both in and near the wild land national parks.

Another issue that arose is that people often do not know the difference between a national park and a national forest or other public lands. The NPS, when working on relevancy into the future, needs to work creatively not only to change the messaging about what a national park site is, but also needs to expand the message to include basic information about where the parks are, how to access them, what types of activities the parks offer, and why they are valuable. This shift from the ‘old way of doing things,’ the ‘let them come to us’ attitude, to a newer, more work-intensive way of inviting and welcoming people in, is absolutely essential to becoming relevant to more Americans. All of the solutions suggested by participants point to continuing and expanding on work the NPS is already beginning to do. It will also require, however, work on reprioritizing, and a huge amount of internal work--in other words, a multi-pronged, multi-level approach, including the solid, pragmatic, achievable ideas, as well as a way to

encourage and evaluate all 417 national park units, while at the same time allowing them the flexibility to do the work in the way their particular communities need it to be done.

Barriers	Solutions
1. Structural Racism	At the heart of it all (see section on structural racism)
2. ‘Cultural’ (different ways of recreating) and economic	Changing culture from w/i COC, ie Latino Outdoors, Outdoor Afro Increase presence of POC in media about outdoors Accommodate w/larger picnic areas, signs and interpretive and education materials in different languages, etc.
3. Lack of funding	Pressure on Congress Convince top leadership of importance of RDI to future of NPS → requires change of budgetary priorities
4. Hiring practices	Teach hiring officials about direct hiring authorities Increase awareness of implicit bias in PDs and include POC in writing them Increase mentoring programs Offer classes in COC that help youth learn hiring process, increase exposure of park rangers in schools Improve accessibility of USAJOBS website
5. Lack of inclusive collaboration	Include COC in decision-making at all levels of operations Approach COC, ask what they need and how NPS can help Target youth of color, increase leadership development programs

Table 4. Barriers and Solutions

Conclusion

Workable solutions--bringing it all together

This thesis has been a story of stories. It captured testimony of historical challenges the NPS has faced in its quest to fulfill its mission--to be accessible in providing recreation and preservation, as well as reflecting and interpreting the stories of all Americans to all Americans. It has explored two primary questions: 1) What multi-level approaches do the three stakeholder groups recommend the NPS take in order to successfully increase diversity, equity and inclusion in the park system? And 2) What specific changes do they think need to occur in order for structural racism to be fully addressed? Finding answers to these questions took the reader through academic and popular press coverage that revealed a citizenry demanding the NPS 'walk its talk.' It explored why national parks are often viewed by POC as 'white space,' and the history of violence and outright racism in the outdoors that are a large part of what led to that sentiment, still prevalent today. It also revealed that another aspect of structural racism, implicit bias, is insidious and often invisible, and has been a primary barrier to NPS success in its attempts to become more diverse, equitable and inclusive. Even so, the cornerstone of the thesis has been the stories, personal accounts of being on the receiving end of racism, and stories of the lived experiences of POC in the outdoors. The stories speak volumes, and they, much more than numbers and graphs, have the potential to change perspectives and policies alike.

One of the strengths of this research comes from the inclusion of the interviewees/stakeholders as active participants in the entire research project, from determining the direction to analysis of the results. Forty participants' stories and recommendations revealed powerful themes. These counter-narratives weaved a tapestry of moving stories of struggle and empowerment together with creative ideas for change. It is only when we begin to understand our own implicit bias that we can begin to chip away at the insidious way racism works within our society. Personal stories are the most powerful way to break through these biases, and open the way to consequential change.

While I would have liked to have cast the net wider in terms of racial and ethnic groups included in the research, the scope of this study limited me to focusing mostly on black and Latino communities, whose numbers are the most disproportionate in terms of visitors to national parks. Ideally, future research can expand on the basic thesis--and continue to encourage the NPS in its quest to reach a wider community by enlarging the scope, as well as observing changes over time. Momentum is growing within the NPS towards positive culture change, and the pressure both from within and without the Service is crucial to keeping it going. Action Research has an important role to play in amplifying the voices and monitoring the changes, in order to help reflect back to the NPS how well it is doing its job of serving the public.

Many workable, 'actionable' solutions came out of the interviews, with clear support from both the academic literature and popular media. The academic literature on the subject of why outdoor spaces remain so white began with a

demographic perspective on the importance of including COC as visitors and in the workforce of national parks. Through time, academics began to view this through an environmental justice lens. Critical Race Theory (CRT) served as the theoretical framework for this thesis, offering the perspective on how and why racism remains entrenched and institutionalized in our society, and shedding light on why this is the case in an agency like the NPS as well (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The more recent qualitative research began to look to people in the NPS for answers and ideas (Makopondo, 2006; Santucci, et al, 2014).

This story of stories has resulted in a clear idea of the barriers the NPS has faced, and gives direct and specific, as well as general, ideas, suggestions and proposals for how to move beyond the barriers. The NPS is gaining awareness of the internal work they must do (and have begun to tackle), but this research makes clear that the other solutions must be tackled simultaneously, because the internal work of dealing with implicit bias must be ongoing and become routine. They cannot only deal with the internal work and not continue taking the multiple other steps necessary to Relevancy, Diversity and Inclusion. On that count, the NPS has indeed begun to take this seriously at the highest levels of leadership by establishing the RDI office, and the Allies for Inclusion facilitated dialogue program. These important first steps are just a beginning. Many participants expressed that if RDI is truly the priority the NPS says it is, then they must support the process with resources and staff, and they must commit to continuity of purpose and implementation.

The NPS can increase its relevancy by taking stock of and scaling up the programs it already has, creating benchmarks to strive for, while still allowing individual units to work with their local communities in a way that makes the most sense locally. At least some funding for outreach and partnerships ought to come from base funding, rather than relying on inconsistent grants. Moreover, collaborations with COC must be approached with the intention to listen to what communities want and need, and then offer what the NPS can do to assist. A primary and constant message from participants and from the academic literature is that true and successful collaboration (and relevancy) means asking communities what they need, and allowing them to take the lead. Hiring practices will certainly need to be reviewed and adjusted in order to become equitable. Outreach to underrepresented youth and families must take a holistic approach, engaging and training youth leaders in such a way that their leadership skills incorporate concepts of community and environment as deeply and inextricably connected, vital aspects of future conservation. Lastly, outreach to non-visitors should incorporate more connection to COC in their space, and would do well to include a more creative array of tools and strategies.

The changing demographics in the U.S. present an immediate threat to the NPS and other public lands, if they do not learn the necessary lessons outlined by participants in this research. However, moving beyond the demographic view and widening the lens to include equity and justice provides a more complete picture, and is fundamental and imperative to the future of the NPS. Representing the American stories is part and parcel of the NPS mission. Listening directly to

those stories, hearing and representing them in a just and equitable way, are the only ways to ensure ongoing relevance, environmental and community stewardship, and the future of the National Park Service.

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Resources

~President Obama's 2017 Memorandum <http://next100coalition.org/obama-memo/>

~California Outdoor Engagement Coalition
<https://parksnext100.berkeley.edu/who-we-are>

~Groundwork Richmond <http://www.groundworkrichmond.org/>

~Greening Youth Foundation <https://www.gyfoundation.org/>

~Student Conservation Association <https://www.thesca.org/>

~White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh (from Working Paper 189).

~ Addressing Bias in STEM with Bystander Intervention. Created by Bears That Care, Unconscious Bias Project, and Expanding Potential. University of California, Berkeley (2016).

Facilitated Dialogue--Allies for Inclusion. Learn More (for NPS employees)
If you would like to learn more about Allies for Inclusion or would like more information on becoming a facilitator or hosting a dialogue at your park, program, or office please contact us by email: NPS_Allies@nps.gov or phone: 202-354-6981.

Green 2.0 <http://www.diversegreen.org/>

Appendix A

NPS Mission

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

(<https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm>, n.d.).

Appendix B

Glossary

Affirmative action: first established by the Federal government in 1965, this legal mandate consists of special actions in recruitment, hiring, and other areas designed to eliminate the effects of past discrimination.

Discrimination: policies and practices that harm and disadvantage a group and its members.

Ethnicity: an idea similar to race that groups people according to common origin or background. The term usually refers to social, cultural, religious, linguistic and other affiliations although, like race, it is sometimes linked to perceived biological markers. Ethnicity is often characterized by cultural features, such as dress, language, religion, and social organization.

Majoritarianism: view that majority culture and attitudes should hold sway.

Micro-aggression: stunning small encounter with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority race.

Institutional racism: the embeddedness of racially discriminatory practices in the institutions, laws, and agreed upon values and practices of a society.

Race: a recent idea created by western Europeans following exploration across the world to account for differences among people and justify colonization, conquest, enslavement, and social hierarchy among humans. The term is used to refer to groupings of people according to common origin or background and associated with perceived biological markers. Among humans there are no races except the human race. In biology, the term has limited use, usually associated with organisms or populations that are able to interbreed. Ideas about race are culturally and socially transmitted and form the basis of racism, racial classification and often complex racial identities.

Racialization: the process by which individuals and groups of people are viewed through a racial lens, through a culturally invented racial framework. Racialization is often referred to as racialism.

Racism: the use of race to establish and justify a social hierarchy and system of power that privileges, preferences or advances certain individuals or groups of

people usually at the expense of others. Racism is perpetuated through both interpersonal and institutional practices.

Reflexivity or Critical reflexivity: “a process of constant, self-conscious scrutiny of the self as researcher and of the research process.” (Kim England (1994) as referenced by Dowling in Hay, 2010, p. 31).

Stakeholders: those who have a vested interest in a particular community or concern, such as personnel and participants in key organizations and programs, and are critical to understanding the issue and how it impacts various groups (Johnson, 2017, p. 176).

Stereotype: the process of attributing particular traits, characteristics, behaviors or values to an entire group or category of people, who are, as a consequence, monolithically represented; includes the process of negative stereotyping.

White privilege: A consequence of racism in the United States that has systematically, persistently, and extensively given advantages to so-called white populations, principally of European origin, at the expense of other populations.

White supremacy: is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

Sources:

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<http://understandingrace.org/resources/glossary.html>, n.d.

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Appendix C

Interview Guide

Please tell me about your experiences in the National Park System (and/or the outdoors in general) as a visitor and/or employee?

What are your thoughts about why people of color visit national parks in numbers so much lower than their proportion of the population?

In your opinion what keeps people of color from visiting national parks?

What can the park system do differently?

What can happen differently within communities of color?

What programs have been working, and why?

What programs have not worked, and why?

How successful do you think communication is between the local national parks and local communities of color?

Who else in the community would you recommend I speak with?

At what point did this particular National Park realize the importance of reaching out to communities of color and what programs have been initiated as a result?

What have been some of the obstacles to them succeeding?

What programs have succeeded and how is that measured?

Is there one or more persons designated by the national or local office to work specifically on outreach to underserved communities?

What are specific or general barriers you see to achieving a more diverse visitor and employee base at this (or other) park?

What other questions should I be asking to get at the essence of what is happening around diversity and inclusion in the park service?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix D

Personal Background as part of the Positionality Statement

My own story began in South Florida, where I was born just a few years after the integration of beaches, movie theaters and water fountains. The signs had only just come down that read “No Blacks, Jews or dogs allowed!” My family’s roots are in Eastern Europe and Russia. Two of my four grandparents were born and raised ‘in the old country’ and their heavily-accented English accompanied me through my childhood. My upbringing was typical of the middle-class Jewish families I knew; we were much more culturally than religiously identified. While my family was not wealthy, we lacked for nothing, went on vacations, summer camp, music lessons—all the trimmings of a comfortable childhood. My father and grandfather put money away for college, which in retrospect was perhaps one of the greatest gifts and privileges of all.

What was a bit different about my childhood was that my parents were civil rights activists; discussions about current events took place regularly around the dinner table and the evening news. The images of the era’s civil rights struggles and the Vietnam war are permanently embedded in my memory. The rallies and marches of the anti-war and civil rights protestors were all there in living color, dogs, fire hoses, tear gas and all, every evening, and these thoroughly shaped and influenced my thinking, approach and philosophy. I led a relatively insulated, protected childhood, but we were not immune to anti-Semitism, which is never very far from the surface. Our synagogue walls were occasionally

painted with swastikas. During the 1973 oil crisis, I recall seeing bumper stickers that read, “Burn Jews, not oil.” What are now referred to as micro-aggressions happen to Jews too. As an identified Jew, I was (and am) a minority, and despite my privilege, I never felt completely at home in my own country. While privileged by class and skin-color, I can intimately understand what it is to feel an ‘other’ in one’s home.

In my parents’ days of activism, blacks and Jews worked hard together for school integration and for the basic civil rights of all. Those alliances are increasingly delicate and fraught as referenced in an essay by Dr. Cornel West (Adams, et al., eds, 2000, p. 177). But then, as now, we are all fighting injustice and inequality, from our different backgrounds, but with the shared goal of a just and equitable society. I am fully aware of and think often about my own class and race privilege in American society. Americans are peculiarly uncomfortable talking about race, ethnicity, class and privilege, and I believe this remains one of the biggest obstacles to breaking down the barriers of racism in our society. My background has created in me a burning desire to right injustices, to fight for justice for all. That has more recently melded with my deep and abiding love for and affinity to the natural world, from which I gather my strength and inspiration. Together, these passions led me to environmental and representational justice and PAR.

Barriers	Solutions
1. Structural Racism	At the heart of it all (see section on structural racism)
2. ‘Cultural’ (different ways of recreating) and economic	<p>Changing culture from w/i COC, ie Latino Outdoors, Outdoor Afro</p> <p>Increase presence of POC in media about outdoors</p> <p>Accommodate w/larger picnic areas, signs and interpretive and education materials in different languages, etc.</p>
3. Lack of funding	<p>Pressure on Congress</p> <p>Convince top leadership of importance of RDI to future of NPS → requires change of budgetary priorities</p>
4. Hiring practices	<p>Teach hiring officials about direct hiring authorities</p> <p>Increase awareness of implicit bias in PDs and include POC in writing them</p> <p>Increase mentoring programs</p> <p>Offer classes in COC that help youth learn hiring process, increase exposure of park rangers in schools</p> <p>Improve accessibility of USAJOBS website</p>
5. Lack of inclusive collaboration	<p>Include COC in decision-making at all levels of operations</p> <p>Approach COC, ask what they need and how NPS can help</p> <p>Target youth of color, increase leadership development programs</p>