

**MIND THE GAP: HOW TO PROMOTE RACIAL DIVERSITY  
AMONG NATIONAL PARK VISITORS**

---

*Emily Mott*

Introduction.....	444
I. It Is Imperative To Attain Diversity in National Park Visitors.....	449
A. Spending Time in Nature Provides Potential Health Benefits.....	451
B. The Parks Are of Historical Significance and Promote Cultural Appreciation.....	452
II. The Statistical Race Disparity and Recognizing There Is a Problem..	454
III. Analyzing the Reasons Why a Large Disparity Exists in the Racial Composition of Park Visitors.....	456
A. Cost.....	457
B. Lack of Knowledge.....	458
C. Park Concerns and Poor Service.....	459
D. Lack of Access.....	459
E. Disparate Treatment and Implicit Racial Bias .....	460
F. Admission Fees .....	461
IV. Initiatives to Promote Racial Diversity and Inclusion in the National Park System.....	462
V. Policy Changes and Local Initiatives Can Help Make National Parks More Accessible and Attractive to a More Diverse Group of Citizens. .....	464
A. Celebrity Endorsements Draw National Attention.....	464
B. Further Amelioration of Lack of Access.....	465
C. Attempt to Designate More Racially Inclusive National Monuments. .....	466
D. Implement Preferred Programs Intended to Meet the Needs of Different Racial Groups.....	467
E. Employee Re-training Regarding Diversity Initiatives and Workforce Demographic Goals.....	468
Conclusion .....	468

## INTRODUCTION

Since Glenn Nelson of the New York Times posed the question, “Why are our parks so white?” in July of 2015, individuals and mass media outlets alike began to ponder the question.<sup>1</sup> It is a fundamental query: why are people of color, majoritively African Americans and Hispanics, not visiting America’s national parks? While this issue may seem novel to some, the National Park Service (“NPS”) has been aware of the social problem for years, producing its first report based on surveys in 2000 and revisiting the issue with a comprehensive survey performed in 2008.<sup>2</sup> The results of this national survey confirmed that the majority of national park visitors, roughly seventy-eight percent are white.<sup>3</sup> Thus, although minorities make up over thirty-seven percent of the general population, they consist of only twenty-two percent of park visitors.<sup>4</sup> The large disparity between current societal demographics and park visitation forms a unique and problematic issue.<sup>5</sup> For example, NPS believes that if it does not find a way to increase the racial diversity of park visitors, national parks could become largely

---

1. Glen Nelson, *Why Are Our Parks So White*, N.Y. TIMES (July 10, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/12/opinion/sunday/diversify-our-national-parks.html> [https://perma.cc/6U78-772S]. The lack of diversity in national park visitors has likewise been explored and reported by USA Today, the Seattle Times, Scientific American, the Baltimore Sun, Al Jazeera, High Country News, the National Park Service, NBC News, Int’l Business Times, PBS, Newsweek, the Huffington Post, and several law review journals, including the Natural Resources Journal and the George Wright Forum. Please note, these sources’ attributions to the subject will later be discussed in this paper.

2. See PATRICIA A. TAYLOR ET AL., NATIONAL PARK SERVICE COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC, 2008–2009: RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM VISITORS AND NON-VISITORS 1 (2011) (detailing the statistical difference in visitation among racial groups and compiling data from interviewees as to the reasons why minorities do not visit national parks). A brief note on methodology: NPS survey was conducted by trained staff and the resulting information was obtained through phone calls to adults residing in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted in either English or Spanish as needed, and included calls to landlines and cell phones. The surveys obtained 7,618 completed results, creating a large pool from which to form relevant statistics.

3. *Id.* at 10. Note that this percentage can change according to different surveys and studies. For example, some reports allege that over ninety percent of visitors to national parks are white. See Sarah J. Morath, *A Park for Everyone: The National Park Service in Urban America* 12 (unpublished manuscript) (on file with the Vermont Journal of Environmental Law) (citing a 1999 study which determined ninety percent of national park visitors to be of Caucasian decent.). However, research performed into this subject has not produced any results showing less than seventy-eight percent white visitors.

4. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 10; Nelson, *supra* note 1.

5. Please note, this paper will largely be focusing on the lack of African American visitation in the national parks. This is because more surveys and studies have been performed regarding African Americans as opposed to other racial minority groups so far. However, information and statistics regarding other racial groups will be included when it is relevant and available.

irrelevant.<sup>6</sup> While it is impressive that the parks drew roughly 293 million visitors last year, “the vast majority were white and aging.”<sup>7</sup> If NPS does not begin to entice a younger generation of more racially diverse individuals to visit the parks, the preserved national and historical lands the government has intentionally set aside for future generations will go unappreciated and potentially underfunded.<sup>8</sup> National Park Director Jonathan Jarvis has confirmed, “If [the parks] were a business and [white, aging individuals were] our clientele, then over the long term, [the parks] would probably be out of business.”<sup>9</sup> It is the job of the American public to keep national parks running; the first order of business being the inclusivity of all races. If a successful campaign can be launched that orders racial inclusivity and minority outreach, parks will ultimately become more accessible and attractive to a wider range of citizens.<sup>10</sup> This ensures the parks’ successful continuance for future generations.<sup>11</sup>

With the passing of the last several decades, “diversity” has become a buzzword.<sup>12</sup> The United States has become increasingly diverse and will continue to change in both culture and racial composition as time progresses.<sup>13</sup> People want more diversity in colleges in order to make them more attractive to incoming students and to provide them with well-rounded

---

6. Glenn Nelson, *Without More Diversity, National Parks Could Become Irrelevant*, SEATTLE TIMES (Sept. 4, 2015, 10:25 AM), <http://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/the-whiteness-of-national-parks/> [https://perma.cc/C7G9-YKC9] (detailing the author’s perception of racial diversity in the parks and his resulting interviews of African Americans living in Seattle who choose not to visit the national parks close by).

7. *Id.*

8. *See Mount Rainier Deferred Maintenance Backlogs Identified- Part of \$11.4 Billion Backlog Across the National Park System*, NAT’L PARK SERV. (March 25, 2015), <http://www.nps.gov/mora/learn/news/maintenance-backlog-2014.htm> [https://perma.cc/NTS2-QTC8] (providing that NPS had to defer over \$11 billion in maintenance for the parks in 2014 alone); Brett Zongker, *National Parks Call on Americans to ‘Find Your Park’*, BALT. SUN (Mar. 30, 2015), <http://www.baltimoresun.com/travel/bal-national-parks-find-your-park-20150330-story.html> [https://perma.cc/935R-8PR8].

9. Zongker, *supra* note 8.

10. *See Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century: A Report of the National Park System Advisory Board*, NAT’L PARK SERV. (July 2001), <http://www.nps.gov/policy/report.htm> [https://perma.cc/C253-TNRU] (communicating the history of the parks, NPS’ commitment to preservation, and the influence citizens and their resulting diversity have on the park system).

11. *Id.*

12. *See* PENN STATE COLL. OF AGRIC. SCI., AN OVERVIEW OF DIVERSITY AWARENESS 5–6 (2001) (highlighting the importance of racial diversity and the social advancements made in the last several decades).

13. *Id.* at 6. By conservative accounts, it has been projected that minorities will make up at least half of the American population by as early as 2043. Mark Johanson, *Missing in US National Parks: Minorities*, INT’L BUS. TIMES (Sept. 9, 2013), <http://www.ibtimes.com/missing-us-national-parks-minorities-1403613> [https://perma.cc/FT96-DJX6].

experiences.<sup>14</sup> People want to see more diversity in the nation's political leaders in order to fully represent the views and opinions of all constituents.<sup>15</sup> People want more diversity in the workplace in order to accurately represent the demographics of the general population and geographic area.<sup>16</sup> But, why is racial diversity really important? Diversity has the possibility to expand one's worldliness, enhance social development, prepare individuals to work in a global society, increase knowledge, promote creative thinking, enhance self-awareness, and enrich the nation with multiple perspectives.<sup>17</sup> Without striving for diversity and racial inclusivity, America could once again become a segregated society.<sup>18</sup> Cultural acceptance is not something that comes easily to a nation of over 300 million individuals.<sup>19</sup>

The United States has long been called the melting pot of race, religion, and nationality.<sup>20</sup> However, throughout America's tumultuous past, racial diversity has not always been a priority.<sup>21</sup> For example, while white students will graduate from public high schools at a rate of 83%, only

---

14. See Jeremy S. Hyman & Lynn F. Jacobs, *Why Does Diversity Matter at College Anyway? 8 Ways Meeting and Working with Different People in College Can Help You in the Future*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP. (Aug. 12, 2009, 4:28 PM), <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/professors-guide/2009/08/12/why-does-diversity-matter-at-college-anyway> [<https://perma.cc/X9D8-4RCV>] (analyzing how promoting racial diversity in the United States' higher education system can help future generations).

15. See, e.g., RICHARD A. COUTO, *POLITICAL AND CIVIC LEADERSHIP: A REFERENCE HANDBOOK* 550 (2012) (explaining the divergence between American socio-political goals and its current racial and social problems).

16. See Katherine W. Phillips, *How Diversity Makes Us Smarter*, SCI. AM. (Oct. 1, 2014), <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/> [<https://perma.cc/7WUB-K7D6>] ("Being around people who are different from us makes us more creative, more diligent and harder-working.").

17. Hyman & Jacobs, *supra* note 14.

18. Please note, this paper is not furthering the idea that America will become racially segregated of personal accord or conscious choosing, but more as the result of subconscious choices, unwelcoming environments, and implicit racial bias. According to the Mumford study, "segregation has increased in almost every large suburban area from 1990 to 2000," with whites retreating to the suburban lifestyle and racial minority populations finding the majority of government subsidized housing in metropolitan areas. This instance of so-called "voluntary" segregation is merely one aspect of the increasingly worrisome isolation of racial groups. See *Where Race Lives- Go Deeper*, PUB. BROAD. SERV., [http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_About/002\\_04-background-03-08.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-03-08.htm) [<https://perma.cc/B8VP-XHRP>] (last visited Feb. 4, 2016).

19. See William H. Frey, *America's Getting Less White, and That Will Save It*, NEWSWEEK (Dec. 6, 2014, 9:37 AM), <http://www.newsweek.com/americas-getting-less-white-and-will-save-it-289862> [<https://perma.cc/6FY8-RQCS>] (likening the resistance to racial diversity to fear: "fear of change, fear of losing privileged status, or fear of unwanted groups in their communities").

20. See Anthony Daniel Perez & Charles Hirschman, *The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of the U.S. Population: Emerging American Identities*, 35 POP. & DEV. REV. 1, 1 (2009) (detailing the history of racial diversity and its obstacles in America).

21. See Frey, *supra* note 19 (highlighting the fact that in the years after World War II, segregation was advanced with such phrases as "invasion," "blockbusting," and "white flight").

66.1% of their African American counterparts will graduate; likewise, the median income for whites is over 55,000 dollars, whereas the median income of African Americans is a little over 32,000 dollars.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the poverty rate for whites hovers at around 9.8% compared to the 27.6% of African Americans.<sup>23</sup> These statistics show that even with the implementation of diversity initiatives regarding education planning, diversity work programs, and government assistance programs, the large racial disparity in these important fields persists, forming a large problem in American society.<sup>24</sup> The previously stated statistics are important and relevant to a national park's visitation analysis. The trend, as shown, is lesser minority participation in beneficial activities like education and higher income. This parallel to a lack of minority participation and visitation in national parks will be analyzed further in this paper. As shown through the prior statistics and the national parks' survey, there is a lack of consistency between national race demographics and minority visitation.<sup>25</sup> The diversity problem facing national parks runs deeper than race; it is arguably based on a long standing trend of marginalization, lack of access to the parks by minorities, and possibly, racial discrimination.<sup>26</sup>

---

22. Gene A. Budig, *No Simple Answers to Racial Inequality*, USA TODAY (Feb. 13, 2013), <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/02/13/racial-inequality-black-history-column/1899719/> [<https://perma.cc/S76X-4QLZ>].

23. *Id.* The rate of poverty among Hispanics is 25.3%, as compared to whites 9.8%. *Id.*

24. *But see Race and Ethnic Policy Issues*, NEWSBATCH, <http://www.newsbatch.com/race.htm> [<https://perma.cc/RDH8-RC9X>] (last updated July 2008) (elucidating the positive road to change and the attempts made to rectify past social injustice). The continuing race based problem is again illustrated through United States current incarceration statistics. Compared to national demographics, there are alarming rates of African Americans and Hispanics incarcerated. While African Americans make up roughly 13.2% of the general population, this racial group accounts for over 37% of inmates in prison. Likewise, Hispanics account for roughly 17.4% of the general population, yet make up 34% of incarcerated individuals. *State and County QuickFacts*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Dec. 2, 2015), <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html> [<https://perma.cc/S4CA-VZ3U>]; *see also* MARC MAUER & RYAN S. KING, *UNEVEN JUSTICE: STATE RATES OF INCARCERATION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY 1-4* (2007) (detailing the disproportionate rates of African Americans in the United States prison system and finding that in 2007, African Americans made up over 900,000 of the 2.2 million prison inmates); *Inmate Race*, FED. BUREAU OF PRISONS (Dec. 26, 2015), [https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics\\_inmate\\_race.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_race.jsp) [<https://perma.cc/WM8D-3VZJ>] (breaking down each racial group's percentage makeup of inmates currently incarcerated in the United States); *Criminal Justice Fact Sheet*, NAT'L ASS'N FOR THE ADVANEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE, <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet> [<https://perma.cc/PU28-YJ6K>] (last visited Feb. 7, 2016) (finding that African Americans and Hispanics make up over 58% of all prisoners in 2008, even though both groups together make up only 25% of the population).

25. *Compare* TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 10 (analyzing park visitation demographics according to race and finding minorities to be underrepresented and whites to be "overrepresented"), *and* Budig, *supra* note 22 (analyzing racial disparity in education levels and income via statistics), *with* U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *supra* note 24 (providing current race demographics for the United States).

26. *See generally* Myron F. Floyd, *Managing National Parks in a Multicultural Society: Searching for Common Ground*, 18 *MANAGING RECREATIONAL USE* 41 (2001) (detailing social science theories in an attempt to explain the history and potential cause and effect of racial disparity in national

While the previous statistics are upsetting and perhaps alarming, the United States government has taken action to promote racial diversity.<sup>27</sup> During the 20th century, laws and federal regulations were enacted to prohibit discrimination and provide equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of race.<sup>28</sup> These federal acts have been largely successful.<sup>29</sup> Highlighting the importance of diversity in the workplace, Congress passed Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, prohibiting discrimination based on race.<sup>30</sup> Any violations are to be reported to the Equal Opportunity Commission, a government entity created for the purposes of maintaining diversity and preventing discrimination in the workplace.<sup>31</sup> Similar regulations apply to diversity in the national education system and take the form of affirmative action programs.<sup>32</sup> The United States government, along with state and local participation, affirms the importance of diversity by providing opportunities to racial minorities where there once were none. While a historic view of racial diversity in action is helpful to understand the importance of the subject, this paper will focus on attempts to optimize racial diversity in national parks.

This paper seeks to address the lack of diversity among visitors of national parks through a thoughtful analysis of the subject and creative problem solving on a national and local level. Part I attempts to identify why racial diversity is crucial to NPS in particular. Part II further elucidates the problem regarding minority visitation through the use of recent statistics and national surveys. Part III details the reasons why a large disparity exists with reference to the racial diversity of park visitors, analyzing such factors as: cost, transportation, distance, racial bias, and knowledge. Part IV

---

park visitors). Please note, this paper will attempt to present and analyze all potential causes of a lack of minority visitation in part IV.

27. See Jacqueline A. Berrien, *Statement on 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (July 2, 2014), <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/history/cra50th/> [<https://perma.cc/X78T-6WFD>] (contemplating the history of anti-discrimination law and the positive impact the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has had on racial diversity).

28. See *Federal Laws Prohibiting Discrimination Questions and Answers*, U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION, <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html> [<https://perma.cc/Q6FZ-25PB>] (last visited Dec. 6, 2015) (detailing federal anti-discrimination regulations) [hereinafter EEOC].

29. See Berrien, *supra* note 27 (emphasizing the anti-discrimination law's success and its purposes of justice and equality).

30. *Id.* Title VII also prohibits discrimination against individuals based on color, religion, gender, and national origin. *Id.* This paper will focus on race.

31. EEOC, *supra* note 28.

32. See, e.g., Scott D. Gerber, *Affirmative Action and the Crisis in Higher Education*, HUFFINGTON POST (Oct. 13, 2014), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/scott-d-gerber/affirmative-action-and-th\\_b\\_5675128.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/scott-d-gerber/affirmative-action-and-th_b_5675128.html) [<https://perma.cc/C2FA-MDGZ>] (providing the historic and political context for affirmative action programs and the impact these racially motivated programs have had on the nation's higher education system).

describes new initiatives undertaken by NPS and state agencies meant to encourage park visitation by minorities and stem the racial gap. Lastly, part V seeks to set forth additional avenues for racial inclusivity, hoping to make the parks more accessible and attractive to a wider range of citizens.

#### I. IT IS IMPERATIVE TO ATTAIN DIVERSITY IN NATIONAL PARK VISITORS.

To understand one reason why racial minorities may not be visiting the National Park System, in addition to the surveyed reasons to be discussed later in this paper, one must first consider the following social experience.<sup>33</sup> Eight academics, all female, were invited to Yosemite National Park for a scholarly event.<sup>34</sup> Of the eight females, four were white or Hispanic and four were African American.<sup>35</sup> The scholars were told their entrance fee to the park was waived because they were simply visiting the research station.<sup>36</sup> Upon each white or Hispanic scholar's arrival, the individual was welcomed into the park without charge; each African American scholar gave the gate agents the same information as their counterparts.<sup>37</sup> However, instead of automatically being let into the park by the agents, all four African American individuals were required to fill out a form and were questioned extensively as to their intentions in coming to the park.<sup>38</sup> The ranger made sure to check with research center staff before allowing their admittance.<sup>39</sup> One of the African American professors was further questioned about topics unrelated to her entrance to the park, including her college degrees, her research project title, her university affiliation, and was required to give her faculty identification card to the inspecting ranger.<sup>40</sup> "The agents appeared incapable of imagining that a black woman could hold a Ph.D. and visit a research station for a scholarly event."<sup>41</sup> It is unfortunate and unacceptable that this instance of racial profiling and the resulting mistreatment of minorities in the park system occurred. While the previous report forms only one instance of racial mistreatment, this type of

---

33. See Tanya Golash-Boza et al., *Why America's National Parks Are So White*, AL JAZEERA AM. (July 23, 2015), <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/7/heres-why-americas-national-parks-are-so-white.html> [<https://perma.cc/WA2L-WC7V>] (detailing the unfortunate experience from narratives collected by the event invitees). This was not a planned and conducted social experiment, but rather, the real experience of drastic differences in treatment racial minorities encountered in the park.

34. *Id.*

35. *Id.*

36. *Id.*

37. *Id.*

38. *Id.*

39. *Id.*

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.*

conduct could operate to make racial minorities feel unwelcome, and provide one reason why national parks are predominantly white.

The conduct by employees trained by NPS in the preceding paragraph cannot be tolerated because visiting national parks is supposed to be an opportunity to learn and be involved in the history of our great nation.<sup>42</sup> Experiencing the parks and the cultural significance they hold is not something that should be limited to one group of people.<sup>43</sup> Rather, visitation should be representative of the population because national parks are meant for everyone.<sup>44</sup> As will be explicated later in this paper, the parks' history is founded upon tenets of diversity; some of the parks would not be able to exist without the efforts of African Americans and other minority groups forging the path and cultivating these wild areas.<sup>45</sup> The national parks have the ability to present a sense of unity and togetherness in nature that is not found elsewhere. A first-time African American visitor to Acadia National Park in Maine explained the experience as such: "I was so overwhelmed by the beauty, it was transformative. It was like I'd been living in a mansion, but had only seen the kitchen. Now I'd stumbled into the grand living room."<sup>46</sup> In addition to national parks being an important facet of American history, racial minorities should visit national parks more often because of the potential health benefits and the resulting cultural appreciation that is found in visitation.

---

42. Signed into law in 1916, the Organic Act established NPS "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Casey N. Cep, *Why We Should All Go to National Parks*, PAC. STANDARD (Mar. 12, 2014), <http://www.psmag.com/nature-and-technology/go-national-parks-76369> [https://perma.cc/FS3H-MYXF]; *History*, NAT'L PARK SERV., <http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/history.htm> [https://perma.cc/VU8T-FJLX] (last updated Feb. 1, 2016).

43. See NAT'L PARK SERV., *supra* note 10 (declaring the parks to be an integral function of recreation, and stating that the national parks are meant to be enjoyed "at state, regional, and local levels, [by] people of all ages, races, and backgrounds," who can then engage in the broad range of activities offered by the parks system).

44. See *id.* (stating that a national park workforce that is representative of the population will attract more representative visitors).

45. See *The National Parks: America's Best Idea: This Is America* (PBS 2009), <http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/about/this-is-america/> [https://perma.cc/2QNA-8YQA] (telling the story of the history of America's national parks and emphasizing NPS's efforts to sustain and maintain these areas with the help of diverse individuals dedicated to preservation).

46. AUDREY PETERMAN, *LEGACY ON THE LAND: A BLACK COUPLE DISCOVERS OUR NATIONAL INHERITANCE AND TELLS WHY EVERY AMERICAN SHOULD CARE* 25 (2009). To read an article further detailing Mrs. Peterman's experiences and views on racial inclusion in national parks, see Rob Lovitt, *Where Are the People of Color in National Parks*, NBC NEWS (Aug. 3, 2011), <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/44008927/ns/travel-news/t/where-are-people-color-national-parks/#.Vj7DvfmrSM8> [https://perma.cc/TET2-7M5W].

*A. Spending Time in Nature Provides Potential Health Benefits*

NPS promotes park visitation as being able to “improve people’s physical health and intellectual vigor,” enabling individuals to experience self-renewal.<sup>47</sup> After all, Thoreau must have had a reason for intentionally getting lost in the woods during his periods of self-discovery and reflection.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the togetherness and historical significance promoted by NPS, the sociological impact of the enjoyment of outdoor space as a cultural experience has been proven.<sup>49</sup> John Muir, one of the national parks’ first advocates, described the visitation experience as such: “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.”<sup>50</sup> Muir was later proven correct in his assessment, as evidence suggests that there are physical and mental benefits to spending time in outdoor natural environments, such as the parks.<sup>51</sup> For instance, exposure to natural environments has been “associated with lower levels of stress and reduced symptomology for depression and anxiety.”<sup>52</sup> Additionally, a Stanford research study performed in 2015 comparing the mental health benefits of an urban environment versus a natural one confirms these positive effects, noting natural outdoor activity decreases an individual’s likelihood of depression and lessens anxiety.<sup>53</sup> Empirical research also shows that

---

47. NAT’L PARK SERV., *supra* note 10.

48. “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” HENRY DAVID THOREAU, *WALDEN: OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS* 68 (1854).

49. After a three year study performed on English secondary school students, it was found that the students who learned via an outdoor education [learning primarily outdoors], demonstrated such visible benefits as “increased self-confidence, decision-making skills, and collaboration.” There is a direct correlation between one’s experience in outdoor spaces and one’s psychological well-being, both socially and emotionally. Emilia Fagerstam, *Space and Place: Perspective on Outdoor Teaching and Learning*, 167 DEPT. LINKÖPING STUD. IN BEHAV. SCI. 8 (2012).

50. *Quotations from John Muir*, SIERRA CLUB, [http://vault.sierraclub.org/john\\_muir\\_exhibit/writings/favorite\\_quotations.aspx](http://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/favorite_quotations.aspx) [<https://perma.cc/982N-DCUV>] (last visited Jan. 25, 2016).

51. David G. Pearson & Tony Craig, *The Great Outdoors? Exploring the Mental Health Benefits of Natural Environments*, 5 FRONT PSYCHOL. 1 (2014).

52. *Id.* at 1.

53. See Rob Jordan, *Stanford Researchers Find Mental Health Prescription: Nature* (June 30, 2015), <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2015/june/hiking-mental-health-063015.html> [<https://perma.cc/F9LR-K83U>] (delineating nature’s effect on individuals and the potential benefits to spending time outdoors); Gregory N. Bratman et al., *Nature Experience Reduces Rumination and Subgenual Prefrontal Cortex Activation*, 112 PROCEEDINGS OF THE NAT’L ACAD. SCI. 8567, 8569 (July 2015) (detailing the connection between increased mental benefits and spending time in nature versus the lack of benefits associated with metropolitan and urban areas).

interactions with nature “can improve cognition for children with attention deficits.”<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately, these studies also point out that with increased urbanization many individuals are spending less time in and near to natural environments, such as national parks.<sup>55</sup> Extrapolating from these confirmed theories, racial minorities who lack access to the parks and outdoor spaces or those who lack a desire to visit the parks,<sup>56</sup> bear potential health disadvantages.<sup>57</sup> This is exacerbated by the fact that minority populations are largely located in urban environments; roughly seventy percent of African Americans and Hispanics live in urban areas, metropolitan cities, or the inner-ring suburbs.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, these groups are more likely not to have access to parks and suffer from the aforementioned urban environment side effects.<sup>59</sup> In conclusion, national parks are an important resource for all individuals to connect with nature and gain the mental and physical benefits that accompany visitation.<sup>60</sup>

*B. The Parks Are of Historical Significance and Promote Cultural Appreciation.*

When asked why he chose to visit the Grand Canyon with his family, Mr. Griffin, an African American father, replied, “We have to be here. Otherwise, we’re cut out of an opportunity to learn about and be part of our history and our country.”<sup>61</sup> The national parks are an amazing glimpse into the past, a vision of what the world used to be and an honest look at history. However, one needs a connection to history in order to feel involved. If minority groups feel their role in history is not being represented fully or accurately, there is the potential for a resulting lack of cultural attachment;

---

54. Pearson & Craig, *supra* note 51, at 1.

55. *Id.* at 3.

56. See TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 18 (concluding that there is a higher lack of desire to visit national parks among racial minorities due to a multitude of reasons, to be set out below).

57. See Jordan, *supra* note 53 (detailing further that increased urbanization is causally linked with increased rates of mental illness).

58. PUB. BROAD. SERV., *supra* note 18.

59. See Pearson & Craig, *supra* note 51, at 3 (stating urbanization has “potentially very serious implications for health if exposure to natural environments is causal to short-term recovery from stress or mental fatigue, and to overall long-term improvements in health and well-being”).

60. See *id.* (recommending an increase in “accessibility to well-maintained greenspace and instigating behavior change programs that encourage greater interaction with nature could deliver substantial short and long-term benefits to mental health”).

61. James Mills, *In Search of Diversity in Our National Parks*, HIGH COUNTRY NEWS (July 22, 2011), <http://www.hcn.org/articles/in-search-of-diversity-in-our-national-parks> [https://perma.cc/VX2Z-2MRU].

in turn, minority groups may not feel the need or desire to visit the parks.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, NPS notes that successful park programming is low “if participants do not feel as though their history and culture are part of the park’s interpretive story.”<sup>63</sup> An inclusive interpretation of history is advanced by NPS, emphasizing America’s diversity and the role these diverse communities have had on the relevant parks.<sup>64</sup> Emphasizing national parks’ diverse histories and cultural backgrounds is done by NPS in an attempt to modernize the parks, making them more attractive for a younger and more racially diverse generation.<sup>65</sup>

Like the rest of the nation, NPS celebrates African American history month.<sup>66</sup> Yet, as will be shown, some believe the African American connection to history in the parks is not well marketed, understood, or announced.<sup>67</sup> Robert Stanton, the first and only African American Director of NPS, realized the racial divergence present in park visitation and undertook to establish the African American Experience Fund (“AAEF”).<sup>68</sup> AAEF raises funds to increase awareness of the parks, gather support, and emphasize the connection minority groups have to the parks.<sup>69</sup> Previously, these connections went largely unrealized, but now NPS’s website specifically advances African American history and spotlights parks with racial historical significance.<sup>70</sup>

Some popular national park units affirming the important contributions of racial minorities to this great nation include the Buffalo Soldiers

---

62. REBECCA McCOWN & DANIEL LAVEN, EVALUATION RESEARCH TO SUPPORT NATIONAL PARK SERVICE 21ST CENTURY RELEVANCY INITIATIVES (Sept. 2008), <http://www.nps.gov/civic/resources/Narrative.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/27JV-VNHW>] (attempting to further park programming sustainability via individual’s sense of cultural attachment and each park’s interpretation of history).

63. *Id.* at 7.

64. *Id.*

65. *Id.* at 2.

66. *See African American Heritage*, NAT’L PARK SERV., <http://www.nps.gov/history/aahistory/> [<https://perma.cc/K29Z-T97E>] (last visited Dec. 6, 2015) (highlighting African American history in the parks system and providing reference for further information).

67. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 12 (finding racial minorities more often feel as though they lack knowledge of national parks, thus influencing minority’s decisions to visit).

68. *Q & A With Former National Park Service Director Robert Stanton*, NAT’L PARK FOUND., <http://www.nationalparks.org/connect/blog/former-national-park-service-director-robert-g-stanton> [<https://perma.cc/9ZQ4-GAGK>] (last visited Nov. 3, 2015).

69. *Id.*

70. *See National Register of Historic Places Program: African American History Month 2015*, NAT’L PARK SERV., <http://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/afam/> [<https://perma.cc/S3EQ-RWFL>] (last visited Dec. 5, 2015) (listing and describing important places in African American history).

National Monument and the African American Civil War Memorial.<sup>71</sup> Further, there are currently thirty-six national park units with an African-American heritage theme and connection.<sup>72</sup> These sites should be highlighted in an attempt to underscore the connection racial minorities have to the history of the parks and the aforementioned memorials. Former Director Stanton believes this outreach, community engagement, and sense of inclusion will assist in making sure “all Americans are connected to the richness and diversity of the African American experience.”<sup>73</sup> Attempting to increase racial diversity in national parks’ visitors is crucially important because understanding one’s history provides a sense of consciousness and understanding as to who we are and how we came to be.

## II. THE STATISTICAL RACE DISPARITY AND RECOGNIZING THERE IS A PROBLEM

The race disproportion in national park visitors is a problem. In 2009, NPS conducted its second nationwide comprehensive survey in order to ascertain racial and ethnic groups’ visitation behaviors and opinions about the park system.<sup>74</sup> In this survey, NPS reports that the visitors for the reported time period were disproportionately white.<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, these results mirrored those of the first NPS survey conducted in 2000.<sup>76</sup> Nothing much had changed over those nine years.<sup>77</sup> According to the NPS survey, whites account for seventy-eight percent of the nation’s park visitors,<sup>78</sup> with Hispanics making up nine percent, African Americans forming seven percent, and Asian Americans constituting merely three percent.<sup>79</sup> When comparing these statistics to national demographics, African Americans and Hispanics form the most underrepresented visitor groups.<sup>80</sup>

Historically, to be viewed as non-white in America has had large implications for access to society’s important institutions, including

---

71. Mark DeSantis, *Honoring African American History*, NAT’L PARK FOUND., <http://www.nationalparks.org/connect/blog/honoring-african-american-history> [https://perma.cc/MUB6-H649] (last visited Nov. 8, 2015).

72. *African American History Links*, NAT’L PARK SERV., <http://www.nps.gov/fova/learn/historyculture/african-american-history-links.htm> [https://perma.cc/FYG7-TKGL] (last visited Dec. 6, 2015).

73. *Q & A*, *supra* note 68.

74. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at v.

75. *Id.*

76. *Id.* at 9.

77. *Id.* at 17.

78. In reference to the visitation time period of 2008 to 2009.

79. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 10.

80. See U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *supra* note 24 (providing that as of 2014, whites account for 77.4% of the United States population, African Americans total 13.2%, and Hispanics form 17.4%).

government (and national parks). Research comparing whites with African Americans, Asian Americans, or Mexican Americans has shown that racial and ethnic differences exist in outdoor recreational behavior. In particular, many people of color, especially African Americans, tend to participate less frequently than whites in visiting national parks and in a range of other outdoor recreational activities.<sup>81</sup>

The racial disparity problem in park visitation is thus established through statistical evidence and affirmed by NPS's own independent research. Unfortunately, the statistical discrepancy is sometimes accompanied by the explanation that "Blacks don't do nature."<sup>82</sup> This prejudicial view forms an incorrect assumption that could not be farther from the truth. Rue Mapp, a young African American woman who embodies an adventurous spirit, founded an organization called Outdoor Afro.<sup>83</sup> The group brings together individuals of color across the country who wish to spend time outdoors and in national parks who may otherwise feel isolated in their communities.<sup>84</sup> Outdoor Afro, via the use of social media and arranged outdoor recreational activities, seeks to change the way some individuals view African Americans and the outdoors.<sup>85</sup> Mapp believes that "getting people outside and enjoying the fresh air is the first and most important step in reconnecting people of color to those bigger outdoor spaces, and in helping them realize that those places are, in fact, for everyone."<sup>86</sup>

Additionally, it is important to note that without African American involvement in nature, it is unlikely the Sequoia National Park in California would exist at all; this breathtaking park was formed by an African American Army Captain and his company, segregated from their white counterparts, and tasked with crosscutting the dense forest.<sup>87</sup> The parks exist today due to the hard work of individuals of all races. Yet, minorities have been isolated through a process of feeling unwanted, uncomfortable,

---

81. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 3.

82. See Francie Latour, *Hiking While Black: The Untold Story*, BOSTON GLOBE (June 20, 2014), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/06/20/hiking-while-black-the-untold-story-black-people-greatoutdoors/ssRvXFYogkZs2e4RX3z6JP/story.html> [https://perma.cc/W4YZ-R28T] (countering the myth that African Americans are not interested in nature).

83. Shereen Marisol Meraji, *Outdoor Afro: Busting Stereotypes that Black People Don't Hike or Camp*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (July 12, 2015, 7:48 AM), <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/07/12/421533481/outdoor-afro-busting-stereotypes-that-blacks-dont-hike-or-camp> [https://perma.cc/TW5N-29VH].

84. *Id.*

85. *Id.*

86. *Id.*

87. See Latour, *supra* note 82 (providing examples of African Americans contributions to the parks system and referencing their important role in the history of national parks).

or disconnected to the true history of the parks.<sup>88</sup> To further understand the disconnect between racial minorities and national parks, it becomes necessary to detail the reasons why many of these individuals do not visit.

### III. ANALYZING THE REASONS WHY A LARGE DISPARITY EXISTS IN THE RACIAL COMPOSITION OF PARK VISITORS.

It is easy to dismiss the problem; analyzing racial disparities and potential inequality makes people uncomfortable. The dismissal of the idea that there are any real obstacles facing minorities visiting the parks can be seen firsthand through researching the subject. Consider the comments to any of the online articles cited in this paper and one will find those who espouse the view that African Americans are not found in the parks because they are just not comfortable outdoors.<sup>89</sup> However, the previously stated contention, blaming the non-visitor, merely minimizes the issue and overshadows the real problem. While it is true many African Americans make the conscious choice not to visit the parks, the motivation behind this decision is not so clear. As an African American travel author states, “We possess an unsubstantiated belief that we just don’t belong. And so we stay away. But the barriers blocking us from nature are not real things.”<sup>90</sup> There is no fence keeping minorities out or racist segregation laws to contend with today. Yet, this subconscious feeling of not belonging lingers. NPS undertook its comprehensive survey in order to understand the multi-faceted nature of this feeling.<sup>91</sup> First, this paper will detail the most often cited obstacles to visitation, with the next section attempting to provide solutions. The obstacles most cited by racial minorities in response to why they do not visit national parks include cost, lack of knowledge, park concerns and poor service, lack of access to the parks, and disparate treatment.<sup>92</sup>

---

88. This statement will be qualified and further analyzed in the following section.

89. Debbie Schlusel, *Hilarious Racism Charge of the Day*, DEBBIE SCHLUSSEL (Aug. 17, 2009, 10:47 AM), <http://www.debbieschlusel.com/7082/hilarious-racism-charge-of-the-day-national-parks-are-racist-blacks-dont-visit-bc-soil-remind-them-of-slavery/> [https://perma.cc/4AJH-A67V].

90. Mills, *supra* note 61.

91. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at vi.

92. *Id.* at 11–13.

## A. Cost

When responding to questions regarding lack of visitation, an often cited reason for not going to national parks was the high cost.<sup>93</sup> This cost can be attributed to food, lodging, camping gear, and/or transportation.<sup>94</sup> However, cost as a concern can be somewhat ameliorated by use of day parks and parks located in more urban and metropolitan areas.<sup>95</sup> As an avid hiker and camper denotes, “a backpack, tent, and the necessary gear [could] run you at least \$1,000.”<sup>96</sup> This operates as a barrier to visitation, more often being referenced by African American and Hispanic interviewees.<sup>97</sup> According to the Outdoor Foundation report, forty percent of individuals who participate in outdoor activities have household incomes of \$75,000 or more.<sup>98</sup> However, NPS reports that negative cost reviews are given more often by individuals who have never visited the park.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, NPS maintains that once people actually go, they may find the costs are not as high as they previously believed.<sup>100</sup> If this is the case, cost should be accurately represented and promoted in order to properly inform the public via the viral marketing and advertising campaign directed towards racial minorities that has already been undertaken by NPS.<sup>101</sup> If NPS is correct in asserting that the cost of visiting national parks is not as high as minority groups perceive, then racial minority’s lack of knowledge on the subject must be addressed.

---

93. *Id.* at 13.

94. *Id.* at 11–13.

95. See FREDERIC I. SOLOP ET AL., ETHNIC AND RACIAL DIVERSITY OF NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM VISITORS AND NON-VISITORS TECHNICAL REPORT, NAT’L PARK SERV. (2003), <http://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/archive/EthnicAndRacialDiversity.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/WK5C-X5AF>] (formulating NPS’s first survey on racial demographics in park visitation and advising potential next steps and solutions).

96. Ryan Kearney, *White People Love Hiking. Minorities Don’t. Here’s Why*, NEW REPUBLIC (Sept. 6, 2013), <https://newrepublic.com/article/114621/national-parks-popular-white-people-not-minorities-why> [<https://perma.cc/4A7G-42ZX>].

97. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 11–13. This is not to say that the potential high costs of visiting parks are not felt by white individuals, but simply that they are more often cited by minorities.

98. Kearney, *supra* note 96.

99. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 11–13.

100. *Id.* at 12.

101. Kirk Johnson, *National Parks Try to Appeal to Minorities*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 5, 2013), [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/06/us/national-parks-try-to-appeal-to-minorities.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/06/us/national-parks-try-to-appeal-to-minorities.html?_r=0) [<https://perma.cc/EQ6J-R2E4>].

*B. Lack of Knowledge*

The most often cited reason for non-visitation by minority groups was that they “just don’t know that much about National Park System units.”<sup>102</sup> Lack of knowledge can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including individuals’ lack of imagery, identity, and/or familiarity with national parks.<sup>103</sup> For example, Mr. Cheatham, an African American man who grew up in the shadow of Mount Rainier, states that he has “never been, and never thought about going.”<sup>104</sup> Mr. Cheatham furthers that he cannot envision himself in a national park, even one an hour away, because “he doesn’t even know what to expect. As far as [he knows], it’s a big field of grass.”<sup>105</sup> The fact that some minority individuals live so close to national parks, yet do not know what the parks are like or what they are about is a sad representation of NPS’s prior communication and marketing efforts to minorities. NPS explicitly realizes that a lack of outreach and a shortage of information about the parks being advertised to minorities is a serious problem.<sup>106</sup> If minorities do not know much about the parks, the history, or the programs that have been implemented to include racial minorities, these individuals likely will not visit.<sup>107</sup>

For example, the Baltimore Sun recently reported that while studying public perceptions of the parks, park officials determined many individuals believe national parks are mainly located in the western United States.<sup>108</sup> This is untrue, as there are currently “408 park units covering more than 84 million acres in every state . . . .”<sup>109</sup> Additionally, there exists the false perception that one needs experience to visit the parks; visitation does not require overnight stays, sleeping in tents, or vigorous hiking. Rather, the parks are flexible as to individual need, able to simply be walked, enjoyed, and experienced.<sup>110</sup> NPS acknowledges that an individual’s lack of knowledge regarding what they could do “once inside a park is within the

---

102. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 17.

103. Johanson, *supra* note 13.

104. Nelson, *supra* note 6.

105. *Id.*

106. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 17.

107. *Id.*

108. Zongker, *supra* note 8.

109. Morath, *supra* note 3, at 6.

110. UNITS & RELATED AREAS & RELATED AREAS IN THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM, NAT’L PARK SERV., [http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/news/upload/Site\\_Designations\\_02-23-16.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/news/upload/Site_Designations_02-23-16.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/RM6N-P6TW>] (last updated Feb. 23, 2016). (noting that not all park units are alike, the national park system consists of 81 national monuments, 78 national historic sites, 59 National Parks, 18 national recreation areas, 11 battlefields, 10 national seashores, 10 national wild and scenic rivers and riverways, and 4 national parkways).

ability of the NPS to correct.”<sup>111</sup> The lack of communication regarding the location, details, and potential uses of national parks can be addressed via NPS’s media campaign directed toward garnering racial minorities’ attention and ultimately, visitation.

### *C. Park Concerns and Poor Service*

Roughly a quarter of all racial minorities surveyed by NPS found national parks to be unsafe or unpleasant.<sup>112</sup> This view was not shared by the white individuals surveyed.<sup>113</sup> One potential reason for the “unpleasant or unsafe” response may be due to racial minorities’ feeling of unwelcomeness.<sup>114</sup> Historically, this was the case. For example, Mrs. Saxton-Ross, an African American woman, remembers when her grandmother would take her to Swope Park in Kansas.<sup>115</sup> Unfortunately, Mrs. Saxton-Ross’ grandmother would only ever take her to Swope Park because it was the only park African Americans were allowed to visit.<sup>116</sup> She notes that even after desegregation occurred, her “grandmother wouldn’t take her to other parts of the park . . . for fear that something bad might happen.”<sup>117</sup> This fear that the parks may be unsafe for racial minorities still exists to some extent, as represented by the NPS survey.<sup>118</sup>

### *D. Lack of Access*

Even if NPS provides pleasant experiences in the parks and promotes the parks specifically to minorities, it will not be enough if parks cannot be accessed. About half of all non-visitors responding to NPS’s survey responded that they do not visit the parks because it takes too long to get there from their homes.<sup>119</sup> This does not take into account issues other than

---

111. Solop, *supra* note 95.

112. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 18.

113. *Id.*

114. Johnson, *supra* note 101.

115. See Meraji, *supra* note 83 (describing the uneasiness Mrs. Saxton-Ross’ grandmother felt in parks, and explaining that that uneasiness furthered the view that outdoor recreation is “white”).

116. *Id.*

117. *Id.*

118. Further, the aforementioned “unwelcome” atmosphere may be felt more sharply by Hispanic individuals who do not speak English. There can be a lack of communication or understanding between park employees and Hispanic Americans who do not speak English, possibly exacerbated by the fact that eighty percent of park service employees are white. See Jodi Peterson, *Parks For All?*, HIGH COUNTRY NEWS (May 19, 2014), <http://www.hcn.org/issues/46.8/parks-for-all> [https://perma.cc/M43A-85PB] (explaining that park ranger demographics are similar to visitation demographics, with administration personnel being roughly eight-five percent white).

119. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 18.

time, including distance and modes of transportation, although these elements also tend to contribute to the problem; as NPS stated in its 2000 survey, “Many studies cite the lack of public or personal transportation as a barrier to more frequent park use by African Americans.”<sup>120</sup>

Social scientist Myron Floyd’s paper addresses the question, “Who has access to the parks, and why?”<sup>121</sup> Floyd offers several social theories, which may be useful for comprehending the long-standing issue of access. First, the marginality hypothesis theorizes that minority groups do not participate in park visitation due to limited socioeconomic circumstances as a consequence of historical patterns of discrimination.<sup>122</sup> This theory is supported by the perceived cost of visiting the parks discussed in part A. The other important theory in a lack of access analysis is called the discrimination hypothesis, whereby it is believed that park visitation is strongly impacted by institutional discrimination, whether that discrimination is perceived or actual.<sup>123</sup>

#### *E. Disparate Treatment and Implicit Racial Bias*

“Among academics and park managers, discrimination is often cited as a barrier to greater minority participation in outdoor recreation.”<sup>124</sup> This involves the prior detailed sense of racial minorities’ feeling of unwelcomeness in the park system. To illustrate, a study of African Americans in St. Louis reported the reason they did not camp was because they felt vulnerable to “racial intimidation.”<sup>125</sup> In fact, Al Jazeera reports that “many prospective visitors worry about disparate treatment by and implicit racial bias of park staffers.”<sup>126</sup> Implicit bias in this context refers to “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.”<sup>127</sup> Therefore, not every instance of

---

120. Solop, *supra* note 95.

121. Floyd, *supra* note 26, at 41–50.

122. Please note this is a historic issue stemming from barriers in education and labor opportunities, which has since been rectified via the passing of federal legislation mentioned earlier in this paper. However, the long term effects of historical discrimination persist. *Id.* at 43.

123. Myron F. Floyd, *Race, Ethnicity and Use of the National Park System*, 1 SOC. SCI. RES. REV. 1, 4–6 (1999).

124. *Id.*

125. JAMES H. GRAMANN, U.S. ARMY CORP. OF ENGINEERS, ETHNICITY, RACE, AND OUTDOOR RECREATION: A REVIEW OF TRENDS, POLICY, AND RESEARCH 33 (1996) (citing V.K. Wallace & D.J. Witter, *Urban Nature Centers: What Do Our Constituents Want and How Can We Give It to Them?*, LEGACY 2 20–24 (1992)).

126. Golash-Boza et al., *supra* note 33.

127. *Understanding Implicit Bias*, KIRWIN INST. FOR THE STUDY OF RACE AND ETHNICITY, <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/> [<https://perma.cc/9RE5-2CH2>] (last visited Dec. 1, 2015).

perceived disparate treatment will be intentional or even the result of consciously made decisions. As social science proves, racial groups “tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own groups.”<sup>128</sup> As mentioned previously, park rangers and administrative personnel consist of eight to eight-five percent white individuals.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, it is possible park personnel could unconsciously hold implicit racial biases, lending credence to minorities’ sense of unwelcomeness in the parks. For example, a Detroit-based study found that African Americans’ low rates of visitation to national parks were influenced through negative racial interactions with white park rangers.<sup>130</sup> These negative interactions, when not stymied or resolved, can potentially lead minorities to not desire to visit national parks.<sup>131</sup>

The implicit racial bias is also understood as not being comfortable in park visitation. Cliff Spencer, a superintendent of Colorado’s Mesa Verde National Park, described the sense as one of “being an outsider,” due to the lack of other African Americans visiting the parks and working for the park system.<sup>132</sup> The social experience detailed at the beginning of this paper also shows how disparate treatment based on race, whether perceived or actual, still exists today and can serve to mar racial minorities’ perception of the parks.<sup>133</sup>

#### *F. Admission Fees*

Under the marginality hypothesis regarding socioeconomic impacts, some argue reducing the cost barrier to entry would likely increase access to parks and visitation.<sup>134</sup> This paper began operating under the assumption that park fees were a barrier to entrance. However, upon research, this paper has concluded that park entrance fees are a necessary evil; without admission fees, the parks would likely not be able to provide essential

---

128. *Id.*

129. Peterson, *supra* note 118.

130. See P.C. West, *Urban Region Parks and Black Minorities: Subculture, Marginality, and Interracial Relations in Park Use in the Detroit Metropolitan Area*, 11 LEISURE SCI. 11 (1989) (explaining the role of marginality in the “under-participation” of African Americans in national and regional parks).

131. See Nelson, *supra* note 6 (explaining that when asked about why her friends do not accompany her to national parks, the author’s African-American neighbor responded by humming the banjo riff from “Deliverance”).

132. Mills, *supra* note 61.

133. Golash-Boza et al., *supra* note 33.

134. *Barriers to the Outdoors*, OUTDOOR NATION, <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/Research.OutdoorNation.Barriers.pdf> [https://perma.cc/9GUV-B4BK] (last visited Dec. 4, 2015).

services.<sup>135</sup> Over eighty percent of the fees obtained by NPS are reinvested back into the parks for maintenance and upkeep.<sup>136</sup> Also, only around one-third of all national park units actually charge an admission fee.<sup>137</sup> While NPS is provided with congressional funding, additional monetary resources are needed to preserve the parks for future generations.<sup>138</sup> Thus, the remainder of this paper will be devoted to providing possible responses and efforts to break down the barriers to entry cited most often by racial minorities.

#### IV. INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE RACIAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

The purpose of this paper is not to criticize NPS. The contention is not that NPS is a discriminatory institution, but rather that the national parks visitation disparity should be addressed. The resolution is to clarify a longstanding racial problem in the parks system, offer potential solutions, and highlight the good work and ideas already being implemented.

A main aim of NPS is attempting to raise awareness of the parks in a younger and more diverse demographic.<sup>139</sup> The “Urban Agenda,” which was released by NPS in 2015, hopes that urban national parks can become “places where young people, many from diverse and often underserved communities, can experience close-to-home outdoor recreation and nature.”<sup>140</sup> By focusing on parks located near and in urban areas, NPS is essentially eliminating the cited barrier of lack of access. Further, NPS is attempting to eliminate some of the cost of visiting national parks by

---

135. Brian Naylor, *Just in Time for Summer: National Parks Hiking Entrance Fees*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (June 23, 2015, 8:23 PM), <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/23/416906464/just-in-time-for-summer-national-parks-hiking-entrance-fees> [https://perma.cc/4GSX-36JR] (noting that NPS is “sensitive to entry fees”).

136. NPT Staff, *Public Meeting Set to Discuss Entrance Fee Increases Proposed for Zion, Bryce Canyon, and Cedar Breaks*, NAT'L PARKS TRAVELER (Jan. 6, 2015), <http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2015/01/public-meeting-set-discuss-entrance-fee-increases-proposed-zion-bryce-canyon-and-cedar-breaks26126> [https://perma.cc/VDJ3-Y2MQ].

137. Kevin Freking, *U.S. Raises Entrance Fees for Some National Parks*, PBS NEWSHOUR: THE RUNDOWN (Apr. 1, 2015), <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/usraisesentrancefeesnationalparks/> [https://perma.cc/32R4-KK69].

138. *Id.* This is due to the fact that it is unlikely NPS will receive additional congressional funding in the near future. According to the National Parks Conservation Association, “there has been more than 7% or \$178 million reduction in the account to operate national parks and more than a 12% or \$370 million reduction in the total budget for the NPS over the last five years in today’s dollars.” *Id.*

139. REBECCA STANFIELD MCCOWN ET AL., *BEYOND OUTREACH HANDBOOK: A GUIDE TO DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS TO ENGAGE DIVERSE COMMUNITIES 1* (2011).

140. 2016 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CENTENNIAL, *URBAN AGENDA CALL TO ACTION INITIATIVE 3* (2015).

promising “all fourth grade students and their families will get free admission to national parks during the next school year.”<sup>141</sup> Hopefully, by engaging kids at a younger age and creating a sense of personal interest in the parks, NPS will be able to cultivate a broader base of younger and more diverse visitors. Regarding the NPS initiatives involving younger and diverse demographics, NPS Director Jarvis states, “We know that if we can get them here, it can be transformative.”<sup>142</sup>

Granted, NPS, as one entity, can only do so much. The agency’s budget is already lacking, operating under an \$11 billion maintenance delay due to budget challenges.<sup>143</sup> This want of adequate funding is why coordination with outside organizations on the state and local levels is crucial; collaboration with outside entities on local levels can operate to reach target populations NPS may not have been able to reach otherwise due to budget constraints.<sup>144</sup> NPS, as a government-funded entity, should cooperate with regional institutions in an attempt to engage the interest of all people of color in the parks. The Parks Service in California has already begun to implement local involvement initiatives.<sup>145</sup> For example, the Yosemite Institute has begun a program, which brings inner-city high school kids from Oakland and Stockton to the great outdoors.<sup>146</sup> The students get to go on a five-day wilderness adventure in Yosemite, with most experiencing the parks for the first time.<sup>147</sup> This program was started in the hopes that it would spark a desire in students to visit national parks more often, who would perhaps in turn tell their friends. Likewise, Hispanic families in Colorado are getting the chance to go hiking for the first time in Rocky Mountain National Park through the Camp Moreno Project.<sup>148</sup> This is how it begins; local involvement, group advocacy, weekend trips, and nonprofit programs will work to include racial minorities in the national parks, helping to stem the race disparity currently seen in visitation.

---

141. Zongker, *supra* note 8.

142. Johnson, *supra* note 101.

143. Josh Hicks, *National Park Service Delayed \$11 Billion in Maintenance Last Year Because of Budget Challenges*, WASH. POST (Mar. 25, 2015), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/federal-eye/wp/2015/03/25/national-park-service-delayed-11-billion-in-maintenance-last-year/> [https://perma.cc/TTE4-UVQB].

144. See Rebecca Stanfield McCown et al., *Engaging New and Diverse Audience in the National Parks: An Exploratory Study of Current Knowledge and Learning Needs*, 29 GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM 272, 276 (2012) (explicating local community involvement with the NPS efforts in an attempt to attain diversity of visitation. Also providing mechanisms for the engagement of diverse communities).

145. Lovitt, *supra* note 46.

146. *Id.*

147. *Id.*

148. *Id.*

V. POLICY CHANGES AND LOCAL INITIATIVES CAN HELP MAKE  
NATIONAL PARKS MORE ACCESSIBLE AND ATTRACTIVE TO A MORE  
DIVERSE GROUP OF CITIZENS.

NPS must maximize awareness of the national parks in an attempt to increase visits by racial minorities and create a welcoming atmosphere for a diverse community. NPS can increase exposure to the parks through a campaign of publicity and education using media serving different ethnic and racial communities.<sup>149</sup> This marketing and advertisement campaign has been endorsed by First Lady Michelle Obama and calls on individuals to “Find Your Park.”<sup>150</sup> The campaign furthered by NPS seeks to garner minority attention via culturally geared marketing, including local community papers, culturally diverse radio programs, multiple language publications . . . and new communication techniques, involving iPods, cell phones, and online networking sites.<sup>151</sup>

*A. Celebrity Endorsements Draw National Attention*

In 2010, Oprah Winfrey visited Yosemite National Park, televising the experience to her audience of millions, showing the public that national parks are meant for everyone, and proving an African American woman could enjoy camping with her friend.<sup>152</sup> Many individuals were surprised that Oprah would overnight camp and “rough it” due to her economic situation and celebrity status. The perception that visiting our national parks always has to include “roughing it” is simply incorrect. Many larger parks have reserved campgrounds, hotels nearby, and restaurants; there are also usually guided tours, indoor museum exhibits, and bus trips to take tourists to and from hotels.<sup>153</sup> Celebrity visits and the national exposure that follows

---

149. See Zongker, *supra* note 8 (elucidating the “Find Your Park” campaign).

150. *Id.*

151. MCCOWN & LAVEN, *supra* note 62, at 9.

152. *Oprah and Gayle Go to Yosemite*, OPRAH WINFREY SHOW, <http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/Oprah-and-Gayles-Camping-Adventure-in-Yosemite> [<https://perma.cc/6SMD-S8BW>] (last visited Nov. 6, 2015). Oprah decided to make the trip to Yosemite after receiving a letter from an African American Park Ranger, who wrote, “My entire career I have been bothered by the lack of African-Americans visiting national parks. It has bothered me when I look out and I meet people from Germany, from Spain, from Africa. And yet, I can't find an African-American from Chicago or from Boston or from Detroit. Oprah, I need your help spreading the word that the national parks really are America's best idea, and that this beauty belongs to every American, including African-Americans.” *Id.*

153. *Find A Park: Plan Your Adventure*, NAT'L PARK SERV., <http://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm> [<https://perma.cc/9S99-WB7B>] (last visited Dec. 2, 2015) (detailing multiple activity options in national parks depending on location); see also *Lodging - Grand Canyon National Park*, NAT'L PARK SERV., <http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/lodging.htm>,

have the ability to change people's perceptions. For example, Felicia Richard, a 53-year old African American school teacher, decided to visit the parks for the first time after Oprah's televised stay. She says, "I saw Oprah went to Yosemite. And if Oprah can do it, so can I."<sup>154</sup> Oprah's visit operates to draw attention to the national parks. She encourages others to visit, providing African American women with a role model, and inspires people to experience nature and the country's history. Thus, celebrity endorsements promote a heightened awareness of national parks in an attempt to increase visits and create a welcoming atmosphere for an increasingly diverse community.

The "Find Your Park" campaign is set to highlight other celebrity endorsements of the national parks system as well. In particular, Bill Nye the Science Guy, actress Bella Thorne, and singer Mary Lambert are in support of millennials' increased use of the parks.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, NPS is coordinating with corporate sponsors (such as American Express, REI, and Humana) to promote diverse usage of the parks.<sup>156</sup>

#### *B. Further Amelioration of Lack of Access*

As shown in part IV, NPS has implemented initiatives in an attempt to break down the barrier of lack of access to the parks. The "Find Your Park" campaign furthers this goal. Any individual can now go online to [findyourpark.com](http://findyourpark.com) and search the parks nearest them.<sup>157</sup> The browser will search from the user's current location and return results specific to the individual.<sup>158</sup> This feature also operates to easily inform all individuals, regardless of race, of the parks system. Thus, in effect, the advertising campaign is attempting to address minorities' prior complaint of lack of knowledge of the parks.

Another possible avenue to be undertaken on a more local level that could help with minorities' access to the parks is the provision of transportation assistance. Some national parks have already begun coordination efforts with local urban schools, providing field trips and

---

[<https://perma.cc/7QN8-2>] (last visited Dec. 3, 2015) (providing information regarding Grand Canyon hotel accommodations, tours, prices, transportation, and activities).

154. Mills, *supra* note 61.

155. Zongker, *supra* note 8.

156. *Id.* Corporate sponsors are "supporting the effort with co-branded marketing" campaigns. *Id.*

157. *Find a Park Experience*, NAT'L PARK SERV., <http://findyourpark.com/find> [<https://perma.cc/G9YF-DFBR>] (last visited Dec. 5, 2015).

158. *Id.*

student outings to the park.<sup>159</sup> For example, Saguaro National Park employs a ranger to coordinate with local schools and be in charge of student liaisons to the park.<sup>160</sup> If more parks were able to implement this kind of program, either on an employee or volunteer basis, more racially diverse inner city schools would be able to partake in the visitation of national parks.

While raising awareness is a crucially important goal, awareness will not increase visitation if lack of reasonable access is still a high barrier to entry.<sup>161</sup> To this end, parks should attempt to coordinate with “environmental groups, school districts, community-based organizations, and local governments to provide transportation assistance for those who cannot reach parks on their own.”<sup>162</sup> NPS believes this collaboration will help attain the desired success while attempting to attract and serve underrepresented minority populations.<sup>163</sup>

### *C. Attempt to Designate More Racially Inclusive National Monuments*

Less than one-fourth of all monuments in national parks emphasize people of color, women, or other traditionally underrepresented groups.<sup>164</sup> Some believe the parks tend to exhibit the American story; yet a wide range of people cannot self-identify with the typical American history lesson.<sup>165</sup> As Shelton Johnson, an African American Park Ranger, states, “If you don’t know you have cultural roots in the parks, then you’re not going to feel a sense of ownership in them.”<sup>166</sup> This lack of ownership in the parks and the resulting lack of visitation by minorities, can attempt to be resolved via the use of the Antiquities Act of 1906.<sup>167</sup> This act has been used more than 100 times by sitting Presidents to designate both national parks and

---

159. *Saguaro National Park, Arizona: Plan a Field Trip*, NAT’L PARK SERV., <http://www.nps.gov/sagu/learn/education/planfieldtrip.htm> [https://perma.cc/2HAQ-AYT3] (last visited Feb. 1, 2016) (detailing field trip accommodations and directing educators to contact an Events Coordinator).

160. *Id.*

161. TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 17.

162. *See id.* at 18 (explaining how the park system is attempting to break down barriers to entrance for racial minorities living further away from park units).

163. *Id.*

164. Nidhi Thakar et al., *Building a More Inclusive National Park System for All Americans*, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS (June 24, 2015), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/report/2015/06/24/115852/building-a-more-inclusive-national-park-system-for-all-americans/> [https://perma.cc/J6GR-LLPJ].

165. *See Lovitt, supra* note 46 (detailing how the parks system, “America’s best idea,” operates to exclude people of other races who feel as if they cannot relate).

166. *Id.*

167. For a more detailed analysis of the use of the Antiquities Act in NPS, see Morath, *supra* note 3.

monuments.<sup>168</sup> Potentially, the current or future President could use this act to nominate additional monuments meant to represent racial minority groups. Future monuments or parks should attempt to focus on the historical significance of minorities and minority contributions to society and the national park system as a whole. President Obama has already given NPS a good start by personally declaring 19 new national monuments,<sup>169</sup> some of which spotlight minority history.<sup>170</sup> Arguably, the more our national parks incorporate and value minority history, the more minorities will actually want to visit the parks.

*D. Implement Preferred Programs Intended to Meet the Needs of Different Racial Groups*

NPS should implement preferred programs intended to meet the needs of different racial groups. This solution is as simple as figuring out which outdoor activities racial minorities would like to participate in and then marketing the park as offering those activities.<sup>171</sup> An example of this type of interpretive programming would include celebrating special events including racial minorities, such as Black History Month. Usually these events would underscore the achievements of racial groups, such as events held at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site.

However, not everyone goes to the parks to look at monuments or walk around a cottage built in the 1800s. NPS should also market the physical outdoor activities available. In its research, NPS cites a recent national survey of active outdoor recreation, which found that “only 3% of African Americans and 8% of Hispanic Americans participated in hiking, an iconic national park pursuit.”<sup>172</sup> Rather, the minorities who were surveyed reported their favorite outdoor activities to be running/jogging/trail running, closely followed by road biking/mountain biking/BMX, and fishing.<sup>173</sup> Therefore, NPS should aim its current marketing and advertising campaign towards these physical outdoor activities in an attempt to increase minority park visitation.

---

168. Thakar et al., *supra* note 164.

169. Christy Goldfuss, *President Obama Designates 3 New National Monuments, Protecting Over 1 Million Acres of Public Land*, WHITE HOUSE (July 10, 2015), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/07/10/president-obama-designates-3-new-national-monuments-protecting-more-1-million-acres-> [https://perma.cc/FDK4-92NC].

170. Morath *supra* note 3, at 22–25.

171. NPS calls this idea “interpretive programming.” TAYLOR ET AL., *supra* note 2, at 17.

172. *Id.* at 18.

173. *Id.* (explaining that fifteen percent of African Americans and nineteen of Hispanics most preferred running/jogging/trail running).

*E. Employee Re-Training Regarding Diversity Initiatives and Workforce Demographic Goals*

When park concerns regarding racial profiling and safety are cited as reasons for non-visitation, employee training becomes necessary to discourage any racial bias (whether implicit or explicit). Likewise, NPS should analyze its hiring practices and determine why its work force is not statistically representative of minorities. It has been recommended to NPS that the agency should attempt to implement a pipeline program.<sup>174</sup> NPS believes that this pipeline program would be “a very important element for ensuring the creation of a diverse workforce.”<sup>175</sup> Directly related to this notion of a diverse workforce is community involvement, which NPS has undertaken to attain via the methods previously expounded. Already, NPS is attempting to employ more minorities in the parks in an effort to provide good role models for minority youths, who may then consider future employment with the park system.<sup>176</sup>

CONCLUSION

The new initiatives being implemented by NPS are a great start in attempting to eradicate the race disparity in national park visitation statistics. Sometimes the hardest part of change is convincing others there is a problem; this paper hopes to have elucidated the race dilemma currently facing the national parks. In summation, there are several key aspects that NPS should focus on in an attempt to increase the diversity of America’s national park visitors. In order for NPS to truly begin a campaign of acceptance and diversity, it needs to promote encouragement, information, and positive exposure by the right role models. NPS should likewise be urged to market its “Find Your Park” campaign to historically underrepresented minority groups, focusing on the closest parks to metropolitan and urban areas, as those parks have the lowest barrier to access. NPS should also attempt to lower the overall cost of park visitation by urging minorities to visit day parks or become involved in local free wilderness programs. Additionally, NPS needs to further coordinate with other environmental preservation organizations; collaboration should be attempted as a means to reach diverse and underserved populations NPS may not have been able to reach on its own. As described above, NPS has

---

174. MCCOWN & LAVEN, *supra* note 62, at 14 (evaluating methods of attaining workforce diversity).

175. *Id.*

176. Peterson, *supra* note 118.

made great strides in undertaking to implement diversity initiatives. As NPS furthers the aforementioned measures, the American public, knowing that the parks are meant to be enjoyed by everyone, waits and hopes for increased racial diversity in the visitation of national parks.