Park managers and interpretive rangers can no longer attend a conference or turn the pages of a magazine, without being reminded of the “changing face” of America. But what do these buzzwords really mean? Will the faces actually change here in the Intermountain Region and, if so, how will such a shift impact the national parks? This Briefing is the first of three prepared for the NPS Intermountain Region (IMR) with the other two relating to building business cases for workforce diversity and relevance for a new vision and hope for tomorrow.

Of the many noteworthy population trends teased out of the most recent U.S. Census, four stand out as critically important to the future of parks in the Intermountain Region. The first trend is the sun setting of the baby boomer generation. As this important group shrinks, parks will be forced to embrace new demographics. The second trend is a diversification of the nation in terms of race and ethnicity. The third is a sharp rise in the Latino populations, both nationally and regionally (most prominently in the South and in the West). The fourth and final major trend is the projected growth of youth, primarily among racial and ethnic “minorities.” Each of these trends is discussed in more detail in this briefing.

1. An aging population. One of the most often talked about demographic trends is the aging of the baby boomers. According to Census 2000, by 2030, the youngest of the baby boomer generation will have officially passed into the 65 and older age bracket, representing one in five, or 20% of U.S. residents. By 2050, the 65 and older population is expected to double from 2008 levels while the 85 and older population is expected to triple. Most of these seniors would be non-Hispanic whites.

This trend has two important implications for parks in the IMR. First, those parks that employ significant numbers of aging baby boomers must quickly get serious about succession planning and launching a new era of staff recruiting. It’s worth mentioning that recruiting strategies that worked well for the current park demographic cannot simply transfer to new populations with the same expectations of success. A distinctly different approach will have to be formulated.

Second, though many of these aging baby boomers have been friends of the national parks for decades, their visitation patterns are likely to change. Previously active park users are likely to adopt more risk-averse behavior in their senior years, preferring “safer,” more sedentary, or more “convenient” activities in parks.2 By age 75, the typical senior suffers from an average of three chronic health conditions requiring medication;3 as a result, seniors’ use of parks drops off around this age.4 For both of these reasons, parks must appreciate and prepare for the generations of post-baby boomer park users who are increasingly non-white.

2. America is ‘browning.’ In the coming decades, every single racial and ethnic group in the US is expected to increase in both numbers and percentages, fueled in large part by immigration. “Minority” groups, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, will become the nation’s majority by 2042. Worth noting is that racial and ethnic “minorities” already represent the majority in two IMR states: Texas and New Mexico.1

With every minority population on the rise, the era of the white majority across the country is coming to a close. While the non-Hispanic white population is expected to make a slight increase in numbers by 2050, it is projected they will experience negative population growth throughout much of the 2030s and 2040s. As a percentage of the total U.S. population, non-Hispanic whites are projected to shrink from

(1) Demographics, Target Populations & Community Engagement Strategies, Briefing #1 of 3
66% (in 2008) to 46% (in 2050).\textsuperscript{1} At the same time, Native populations are expected to grow by approximately 25% (from 1.6 to 2% of the U.S. population). Asian Americans are expected to nearly triple in size/number (growing from 5 to 9% across the total population). And, African American populations are expected to increase modestly (from 14 to 15%). The most dramatic growth, however, is already being documented in the Hispanic population, which is expected to triple in numbers before 2050 and therefore grow from 15% to 30% of the total U.S. population.\textsuperscript{1}

The inexorable diversification of the nation plays out in the neighborhoods of the Intermountain Region, specifically. While Native Tribes represent a relatively small percentage of the overall population, they play a noteworthy role in the cultural flavor of four IMR states: New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arizona, and Montana.\textsuperscript{5} African Americans, historically the nation’s largest minority group, populate urban areas in considerable numbers in both Texas and Oklahoma.\textsuperscript{5} Most notable in the Intermountain Region, however, are the Hispanics, who represent increasingly large, and in some cases “majority,” populations in New Mexico, Arizona, Texas and Colorado.\textsuperscript{5} Even those IMR states who are projected to remain relatively white are likely to see their park visitation diversify considerably. Throughout the Intermountain Region, these new and different faces are soon to become the everyday faces of tomorrow.

3. Hispanics/Latinos\textsuperscript{6} are America’s fastest growing racial/ethnic group. Hispanics are already the largest “minority” in every western state, except for Alaska, Hawaii, and Montana.\textsuperscript{7} With a foreign-born population that is growing at nearly three times the rate of the overall U.S. population, one in five Americans will be an immigrant in 2050 (up from one in eight in 2005).\textsuperscript{8} As a result of both immigration and high birth rates overall, the Hispanic population is projected to grow by nearly 68 million people by 2050. By mid 21\textsuperscript{st}-century, nearly one in three U.S. residents is likely to be Hispanic.\textsuperscript{1}

As noted above, the Latino population is extremely significant to the Intermountain Region. New Mexico, home to both recent Mexican and Central American immigrants as well as descendants of Spanish colonists, has the highest percentage of people of Latino ancestry (44%) of any state. Colorado has the eighth greatest Latino population in the nation, at 19.7% of their population. Arizona, which is 29.2% Latino, is projected to become a majority-minority state by 2035, fueled in large part by its increasing Hispanic population. Over one-third of the Texas population is Latino. Life in the Intermountain Region has already been, and will continue to be, dramatically influenced by this growing population. Are the national parks ready? Do employees of the NPS care?

4. The next set of generations will arrive already diversified. In coming decades, the youngest age brackets will increasingly reflect the diversity of the nation. According to the U.S. Census\textsuperscript{1} the population of children is expected to grow from 44% minority today to 62 percent minority tomorrow (by 2050). Thirty-nine percent of children are projected to be Hispanic (up from 22%), while only 38% are projected to be non-Hispanic whites (down from 56%). By 2023, “minorities” will comprise more than half of all children. Further, by 2050, one in three children will be an immigrant or have immigrant parents.\textsuperscript{8} As today’s youth start to inherit leadership positions in the middle of the century, the U.S. population will be more than 50% people of color. Without a doubt, parks that aim to preserve resources and stories for future generations will have to quickly learn to speak the language of youth, and understand the culture, of these generations.

This trend holds special significance for the Intermountain Region because of the relationship between immigration and higher birth rates. Areas, such as the IMR, that have or are projected to have the most immigrants are also projected to have the most youth. Currently, four of the ten “youngest” states in the nation today are in the IMR: Texas, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah.\textsuperscript{2}

Just as in any group, there exists significant heterogeneity in the “Latino” community. Key distinctions between sub-groups are signaled by terms such as ‘Hispanic,’ ‘Chicano’ and ‘Latino.’ Remarkable regional differences exist, most notably in New Mexico. It will be crucial that parks in the IMR customize their efforts to the specific stories, attitudes, and preferences of the sub-populations with whom they hope to partner.
As a result, parks in the Intermountain Region should make every attempt to engage young people of color in ways that will allow them to experience and value the national parks. This is especially vital given the IMR will have a surge of younger people in the region.

**Attracting New and Diverse Visitors to National Parks**

Based on these four essential demographic trends, it is clear that a new day is dawning for national parks in the Intermountain Region. Indisputably, much of the parks’ success in coming years will depend on their ability to diversify and prove their relevancy to these new populations. While a few ‘late-adopters’ will continue to balk at the idea of drawing more visitors to already overcrowded parks, this Briefing argues that without the allegiance of these new communities, parks are likely to find themselves dramatically under-utilized and even in danger of potential obsolescence (criticized for being “behind-the-times”). A failure to boldly embrace the opportunities presented by 21st Century demographics is likely to mean the end of the era of broad public support for national parks.

Given the aforementioned demographic trends, it’s vital that parks in the Intermountain Region turn immediately to re-formulating their communications and community engagement strategies in order to start connecting with new populations. Are you ready? Do you care? If not, why not? If so, what is your plan?

**The importance of defining market segments**

Any organization, whether government, business or nonprofit, that wants to stay ahead of the demographic curve will have to play by the new rules of market segmentation and customization. This means that a broad-based and singular “outreach strategy,” destined for “one size fits all,” is increasingly obsolete. Based on current visitor demographics for national parks, we know that past outreach strategies showed relatively homogenous returns. Instead, the “one size fits all” must be strategically divided into target sub-populations and tailored to the needs of specific groups. This practice has come into play with the onset of the ‘consumer chasm,’ an increasing separation between the preferences and experiences of different demographic groups.

Of course, parks will not realistically be able to “prioritize” every last sub-group. Once individual parks know who they’re seeking to engage, they will have to reformulate their communications and community engagement strategies according to the values, needs, and desires of these sub-groups. This work will demand both clarity and precision. It should be no surprise that strategies previously used for the baby boomers are unlikely to resonate with today’s diverse youth. Similarly, strategies that resonate with parents are unlikely to resonate with teens; and strategies that resonate with Chicanos in border towns are unlikely to resonate with Latinos in mountain communities. Individual parks must immediately begin (or continue) to identify their specific target populations.

**Community Engagement Strategies for the NPS Intermountain Region**

A plethora of best practices exists in community engagement and this Briefing represents only a sample. Park managers and rangers must explore a variety of strategies, be ready and willing to make mistakes in the process of learning, and accept the possibility of initial failure with an open, but determined mind. Without perseverance and patience, parks will be unsuccessful in engaging communities of interest.

The following sections describe how IMR parks might redesign their communications and engagement strategies to stay relevant in the 21st Century. First, strategies that focus on park-specific readiness are addressed. Second, general community-based engagement strategies, applicable for underserved and/or communities of color, are described. Finally, strategies specific to three major populations (Hispanics/Latinos, African Americans, and youth) are discussed. These strategies, in
conjunction with research specific to local communities of interest, must inform an individual park’s community engagement approach.

**Assessing park readiness.**
IMR parks must first examine their motives, commitment and capacity for community engagement before initiating contact with community members. As stated by Angela Park, a highly respected Diversity Consultant, “Mainstream groups need to have a parallel process of doing internal work on diversity at the same time that they’re conducting outreach and trying to serve more diverse constituencies. Doing external programming without internal diversity work makes little sense.”

The IMR Relevance and Diversity Executive Steering Committee may represent the beginnings of such a strategy incorporating an a type of “inside/outside” approach that continues to be imperative.

The NPS must understand that community engagement is not a goal in itself; rather, it’s a strategy that can help parks achieve mission-related goals.

1. Parks must assess the readiness and commitment of all key players for this type of work. Of course, those “at the top” will be critical to success.
2. Park leadership must ensure that community activities are adequately resourced in both personnel time and funding, where necessary.
3. As parks build (or continue to build) relationships with communities, they must demonstrate the utmost humility and sensitivity to the fact that many diverse communities have been mistreated by mainstream groups or government bodies in the past. The communities being discussed here are usually not the communities that border parks, but instead represent urban centers, concentrations of previously underserved Americans, or Indian Reservations.

4. Parks must agree to a long-term, ‘stay-the-course’ attitude in their community engagement efforts and initiatives.

As parks ready themselves for this important work, they may wish to establish a diverse, internal task force (or other type of employee group) to monitor and guide their community engagement.

**How can administrative and other staff assist?**
A variety of administrative tasks should be prioritized in advance of, or during, the initial phases of community engagement. Examples include:

- Translating brochures, website content, and key program materials.
- Printing park signs and maps in community-relevant languages.
- Drafting community-relevant interpretive themes and messages with input from communities of interest.
- Updating all marketing materials to include photographs of visitors and staff that reflect diverse communities.

Early completion of these tasks gives park staff a stronger footing upon which to stand during the community engagement process.

**Define communities of interest.**
First, parks must identify specific groups or communities of interest. Communities of interest are communities that the parks need to engage, not necessarily those communities that border, or are already interested in parks. Though this Briefing recommends three distinct groups (Latinos, African Americans, and youth of color) for the IMR, individual units will need to further narrow in on specific neighborhoods and/ or community organizations for each key demographic.

American Indians and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders are important segments of our changing society; these populations, however, do not represent the most rapidly changing communities in the IMR, specifically.
In defining key groups, parks should think broadly and inclusively. They must go beyond nature, science, or outdoor education/recreation allies to consider important community assets such as labor organizations, civil rights groups, faith-based institutions, and human service organizations. Further, park staff must be patient if, and when, community groups do not show immediate interest in partnership.

**Weave community members/leaders into various decisions.**

Next, parks must proactively invite community contacts into park-based policy discussions and decision-making processes, wherever possible. For example, parks might choose to establish a specific community-based Park Partner Group or “Friends Building” organization to provide park leadership with regular community input and oversight. (Note that community participation in such a ‘group’ should include appropriate incentives.) Similarly, parks might consider hiring a local community member to a Community Liaison position where this individual can act as an intermediary between the park and specific communities. To earn community trust, parks must be vigilant about ensuring their community relationships are indeed worthy of community trust. Through structures such as these, parks can prepare themselves for a new era of community-responsiveness.

A helpful approach to narrowing in on a list of ideal community partners includes the following steps:

- **Draft a list of potential partner community groups or organizations.**
- **Survey these groups informally (through phone calls, listening sessions, or other effective means) to gauge their interest in park partnership.**
- **Based on findings, prioritize those groups who demonstrate an interest in, and readiness for, engaging with the park.**

**General strategies for building trusting relationships with communities**

**Making contact.** Once the short list of community contacts is established, parks should show they care by initiating the conversation with communities. One or a series of in-person ‘get-to-know-you’ meetings should be held in a location convenient and familiar to community members. In advance of these meetings, park staff should learn as much as possible about the specific group or neighborhood. Additionally, parks should carefully consider who will represent them in these early meetings; ideally, ‘messengers’ would reflect the specific community, to the greatest extent possible. During meetings, park staff must demonstrate respect, humility, and sensitivity to intergroup dynamics and do a lot of listening.
Finding common ground. In preparing both messengers and messages for community engagement, National parks must be willing to reformulate park themes and issues so they are explicitly relevant to communities of interest. A common critique of mainstream ‘green’ establishments by communities of color is the compartmentalization of nature and human communities into separate domains. There is evidence that Native Americans, Latinos and some African tribal groups do not conceptualize this separation but view nature and humans as parts of the same “whole environment.” By demonstrating an explicit human connection between park themes and the lifestyles of new user groups, parks will experience greater success with diverse audiences.

“America’s Best Idea”
Regarding ‘making contact’ and ‘finding common ground’, among these (and other strategies), NPS employees would benefit greatly by using portions of the landmark film by Ken Burns in their community engagement.

The National Parks: America’s Best Idea (Fall 2009) “is a story of people from every conceivable background – rich and poor; famous and unknown; soldiers and scientists; natives and newcomers; idealists, artists and entrepreneurs; people who were willing to devote themselves to saving some precious portion of the land they loved, and in doing so reminded their fellow citizens of the full meaning of democracy.” Additionally, the Untold Stories project (produced by Florentine Films and WETA) is “designed to bring to light stories from the national parks focusing on the role of African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans in the creation and protection of individual parks and to engage new and traditionally underserved audiences in the educational richness of the national parks” (More information: http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks).

Sample strategies for success. Past successes in finding authentic common ground are instructive. One park-related campaign that won wide support from African American non-traditional constituencies was the passage of the National Underground Railroad Network Act of 1998. African Americans recognized the relevance of this park-related initiative to their communities and successfully rallied on its behalf. In a similar way, it has been suggested that a green ballot measure in California successfully gained the support of Latino voters by coupling forest and mountain issues in one part of the state with urban park issues in another part of the state. In addition to heritage interests and urban parks, other issues that are likely to resonate with diverse communities include public health and safety (including clean water, clean air and addressing neighborhood violence), employment, and greening of urban centers. In order to endear themselves to new constituencies, parks must strive to find authentic common ground.

After sharing each party’s priority issues or desired activities, representatives of both groups should strive to select one or a few common priorities. Keep in mind that smaller, more achievable projects in the beginning enable “quick wins” that build trust and provide further momentum for the partnership process. In due time, partners should agree on broad goals, specific steps, reasonable timelines, and mutual accountability measures for each activity. It’s absolutely essential that each project offers a “win” for both parties!

Being a presence in communities. A successful community engagement approach involves a genuine park presence in the community. Hand-picked park staff should schedule periodic “field trips” to the community, ideally in tandem with community contacts. Additionally, park staff should attend and participate in the meetings and festivals of community, church, and school groups. To increase their visibility, parks may consider submitting brief articles to local organizational or community newsletters; for example, tidbits and updates in the park, upcoming events, where to go and what to do. Parks can also distribute park map and guides, along with letters of invitation from the park Superintendent to a variety of community businesses and service providers, including Doctor’s offices, beauty parlors, and as inserts in community newspapers.

In addition to using existing relationships with community
groups, park staff might visit barber shops, beauty parlors, ethnic restaurants and other markets to spread the NPS message and invite community members to the parks.

Through a variety of pathways, parks should repeatedly and authentically “show up” for communities.

**Partnership activities in joint locations.** Another strategy for building trust between the community and the park is to design specific activities that could take place in both locations. For example, a ‘training exchange’ is an excellent variation on the free training concept where each group offers its expertise to the other. For example, community leaders might learn from the park how to conduct water quality testing in their community while park law enforcement rangers might receive training from community leaders in how to communicate effectively and peaceably with members of their culture. In such a way, relationships based on equity and mutual respect are encouraged and ultimately realized.

**Staying the course.** Over time, parks must remain vigilant about ‘staying the course’ with communities and contacts. This means checking in frequently about shared work and discussing future opportunities. A park may even consider assigning the responsibility of relationship management with various community groups to a handful of qualified park staff. This ensures more personalized and higher quality contact, especially when clear accountability is articulated in the written work plans of both the park and individual staff members. Keep in mind, park Superintendents can declare at least one day per year as a “Fee Free Day”. Is this happening and how are you promoting it? Building relationships are core to the park’s community engagement strategy and must be carefully stewarded.

**Customizing & incentivizing the park experience.** A solid engagement strategy will include explicit invitations to families and community groups to visit the parks. Similar to community presence, parks can also distribute park map and guides, along with letters of invitation from the park Superintendent to a variety of community businesses and service providers, including doctor’s offices, beauty parlors/barber shops, and as inserts in community newspapers. Ideally, both parties may turn toward collaboratively planning customized visits for new users. Program staff might initially offer free park tours in which community members are picked up in their community by a park vehicle and welcomed by a carefully chosen interpretive ranger who remains with them for the duration of the day.

Lunch, as well as any necessary gear, would be provided by the park and programs would be tailored to community interests. A ‘come-back-again-soon’ packet would also be gifted to community members including, among other items, free park passes, park maps, and program information. Any variety of discounts, such as free or low-cost days, dollar days, coupons, or free souvenirs from visitor centers, provide additional incentives to encourage return visits.

Through a carefully crafted and personalized approach to park activities, community groups will be more likely to recognize parks as accessible and valued resources, worthy of their time and support. This is simply good business.

**Expanding the news lens through ethnic media.** Parks, and possibly more likely park partners, must prioritize communications through new and diverse outlets, including the most widely used ethnic and youth media. The New America Media (NAM) will be a valuable resource for parks: [http://news.newamericamedia.org](http://news.newamericamedia.org). NAM is the first and largest national collaboration of ethnic news organizations, connecting over 50 million ethnic adults through over 3000 ethnic media. NAM also works closely with youth culture through diverse youth media channels. Through the New American Media, National parks can learn about and access diverse avenues of communication.

In addition to NAM, other ethnic media outlets are likely to prove useful. Latino mass media, for example, is centered around major Latino population centers including IMR cities Denver, Tucson, Albuquerque, Phoenix, and Dallas. Popular Latino TV channels include Univision, Entravision, Telemundo and HBO Latino. At least one Latino radio station is likely to exist in every major U.S. city. The Zona Latina, [www.zonalatina.com](http://www.zonalatina.com), lists...
Hundreds of Latino newspapers and magazines across the nation. Cost-effective press releases should address common Latino constraints to park visitation while emphasizing Latino connections to parks. With these general resources in mind, individual parks must further concentrate their media strategies according to the demographics in their area and communities of interest.

**Specific Strategies for Various Racial/Ethnic Groups**

This Briefing has discussed a variety of general strategies that have proven effective in engaging underserved and/or people of color across the nation. Additional strategies that hold great promise for specific demographic groups are provided in this section. First, general characteristics of the broad racial groups are discussed. It should be noted that although individuals within any group demonstrate natural variability, ethnic groups, when taken as a whole, can be described based on some shared characteristics. Second, examples of specific strategies, based on the aforementioned characteristics, are recommended.

| • Latinos often associate in large, multigenerational family units. |
| • Education, income and buying power of Latinos are all on the rise. |
| • Latinos tend to be greatly influenced by their church and heed the advice of both religious and community leaders. |
| • Latinos are utilizing the Internet in record numbers. |
| • As a group, Latinos have less leisure time than most other ethnic groups, yet their portion of leisure time during any 24 hour period is rapidly expanding. |
| • Radio is viewed as a particularly strong source of information. |
| • Latinos rate clean water and clean air as their top environmental issues of concern. |

Endnote sources: 7, 19-21

### Outdoor Travel Patterns and Preferences

| • Family vacations are popular among Latinos. |
| • Latinos are primarily motivated to participate in outdoor recreation because it offers rest, relaxation, fun, and proximity to water. |
| • In more developed parks, Latinos prefer shaded areas with developed sites, including amenities such as flush toilets, larger sized picnic tables, BBQs, and water faucets. |
| • It is not uncommon for Latinos to picnic in groups of 15 or more and spend all day in the park. During such picnics, women often cook foods from scratch and families eat multiple meals over the course of the day. |
| • For Latinos, a visit to the park may be less focused on recreation and more on personal growth and family bonding. |

Endnote sources: 19, 22, 23

### Hispanics/Latinos

**Characteristics.** The key to tailoring engagement strategies to Latino communities is to understand some of their most fundamental cultural characteristics.

**Strategies.**

IMR parks must take into account the aforementioned cultural characteristics and preferences. Parks should first work to earn the trust of local church or community leaders and then partner with church groups or community organizations to sponsor park outings.

Word of mouth is an effective communication pathway for Latinos. Free days to nearby parks should be publicized, with emphasis on safe, family-friendly park features such as spacious picnic areas. Brochures and website content should be translated into Spanish and Spanish language advertising (TV, radio, and print) should be employed.

Spanish language radio is an essential aspect of Latino communication. This includes Internet radio and online news providing online news radio, talk, information programs, events, and music programs featuring content in the desired native language. For example, “Spanish Language Online Radios” provides more than 600 Spanish language online radios categorized by country and includes online streams (http://www.e-spanyol.hu/en/radio.php)
Activities should be family-friendly, offering access for strollers, ease for seniors/older adults, and excitement for children at a variety of age levels. “Gateway” activities, such as camping, fishing, hiking or biking, require less time and less gear and may be more appealing to new users and more accessible to family units.20

Once in parks, Latinos may be less familiar with information kiosks or visitor centers and may prefer more direct, interpersonal communication methods.23

For example, parks might train “eco-teams” (e.g., cross-cultural groups of youth) to walk the sites, delivering environmental messages to visitors. Similarly, a park might dispatch a bilingual employee in an informational van or other available park vehicle to tour the park’s picnic areas, welcoming visitors and providing information (e.g., Reinstate “Bienvenidos” at ROMO9). These and other sample strategies are more likely to resonate in Latino communities.

**African Americans/Blacks**

*Characteristics.* Successful engagement of African American communities will depend, in part, on a park’s understanding of African American/Black cultural norms. Note: How individuals identify within this group is unique to their cultural upbringing. “Black” will be mostly (but not exclusively) used for purposes of this Briefing unless cited otherwise by a specific source.

- Black families are larger than the average American family.
- The majority of Black families with children are headed by single moms, who typically work full-time.
- Blacks tend to be committed church goers and their congregations play an unprecedented role of influence in their lives.
- Blacks participate in association-based social activities, such as church groups, clubs, voluntary organizations more often than do whites.
- Health issues are of increasing concern to Blacks, who remain at high risk of severe health problems.

- African American buying power, fueled by large gains in middle and upper income segments, grew 170% between 1990 and 2007.
- African Americans are currently the largest ethnic minority group online. The Internet is a key source of information for the African American audience, although word of mouth is cited as the most popular source. Radio and direct mail are not viewed as strong sources of information.

Endnote sources: 24-29

**Outdoor Travel Patterns and Preferences**

- With increasing leisure time, African Americans enjoy travel but do so less than the average American.
- African Americans travel domestically, primarily by car, and primarily with relatives. They are most likely to travel in groups, which gives them a sense of security while making travels more enjoyable.
- African Americans may be unaware of the landmarks or destinations in their local area.
- Blacks prefer fitness related activities; in contrast, whites prefer wildland activities.

Endnote sources: 24, 30-31
In one study, Blacks prioritized their greatest interests among a list of 26 vacation experiences. Of vital significance to National Parks, especially those in warmer climates, African Americans ranked the following experiences at the top: Outdoor recreation activities, visits to historic sites and parks, warm climate, inexpensive meals, and visits to museums and galleries. The same study found that African Americans feel very strongly that learning more about their heritage allows them to develop a stronger ethnic identity and expressed a preference to visit Black historical sites.

In addition, African American attitudes about the environment are shaped in large part by a common history of slavery, segregation and racism. Lingering effects, such as fear, exclusion, little sense of ownership, and lack of awareness, play into ongoing environmental experiences. Using memory to evoke the past appears to be an important vehicle for engaging African American communities in environmental preservation and conservation.

| • Today’s youth represent the most racially/ethnically diverse generations in our nation’s history. |
| • Today’s youth are also hyper-sensitive to marketing schemes and experts have advised, “talking with youth, not to youth.” |
| • With their increasing purchasing power and relatively high discretionary income, youth represent a major consumer group in the US. |
| • Sports also continues to be a popular pass time for youth and hip-hop culture remains a mega influence in both urban and suburban areas. |
| • Today’s youth also tend to be more globally and environmentally aware and more open-minded than many of their predecessors. |

Strategies. In addition to the general strategies mentioned previously, additional strategies tailored to African American cultural norms or preferences are likely to be more successful. Park educational programming must be friendly to African American families. In familiar company, new park users are more inclined to feel extra support as they venture into unknown territory. Parks must also connect with Black churches, channeling communications through inserts in church bulletins, via church announcements, or presented to smaller sub-groups within the congregation. Similarly, Black-owned and other minority-owned businesses and radio stations may be additional promising avenues for communication, as well as African American beauty parlors, barber shops, and laundromats. Another community of interest would be to engage single, African American women with children; these single moms are a prime audience and can be engaged through local school systems as well. Canvassing a neighborhood with flyers that reflect African Americans both visually and textually can also be effective. Again, winning strategies must reflect the local patterns and preferences of specific Black communities.

The Youth Culture Characteristics. Any attempts to engage youth culture, known as Generations X, Y, and now Z (“millenials”), must similarly reflect the preferences of these groups.

In a 2000 study of the factors limiting minority youth participation in interpretive programs, African American, Latino and Caucasian youth ranked “athletics/sports/games” as their most preferred “outdoor activity.” African Americans added “dancing/listening to music” while Hispanic youth added “partying” and “dancing/listening to music.” In the same study, all three youth sub-groups ranked “wildlife” as their most preferred “interpretive theme.”
In an attempt to attract more Latino youth, the Boy Scouts of America have launched a new membership resource that combines the excitement of soccer and professional sports with the life skills offered through traditional scouting activities. For more information about this innovative hybrid program: http://www.soccerandscouting.org

When asked what prevented them from participating in nature center activities, African American youth cited fear of natural elements and “boring/unappealing,” while Latinos cited “lack of knowledge/awareness” and “too far/lack of transportation.”

Hispanic/Latino youth represent a rapidly growing percentage of all American youth. They are expected to grow from 18% today to an estimated 23% by 2020. One study reported that bilingual Hispanic youth tend to recognize English as the dominant language and as such, visit mostly English-language websites. They are also able to influence the purchasing decisions of less acculturated parents. Hispanic youth get their information from school, TV, radio, and the Internet, but less so from church or direct mail. Amongst outdoor recreational activities, Hispanic youth currently participate in camping, biking, trail running and hiking. They are most interested in camping, biking and snowboarding and least interested in cross country skiing, fishing, birding, and snowshoeing.

African American youth are setting the trends for youth culture across demographic groups. More than one-third of African American kids have single moms who work. Further, African American kids hold significant influence over single mom’s attitudes about what to buy.

**Strategies.** Parks have long recognized the importance of engaging new constituents from a young age. Individual youth activities must be woven into a unified, long-term sequence that tracks youth from first contact to eventual park employment. This youth development track should start with activities that are based both in parks and communities of interest, progress into internship and mentoring programs, and culminate in valuable employment opportunities. Targeted youth development activities might include: Sponsored outings with community-based programs (such as afterschool programs, Boys & Girls Clubs, etc.) or diverse-serving weekend or summer camps. Additionally, ethnic minority rangers might staff a booth at urban and diverse-serving career fairs, modeling the fact that parks provide viable career paths for culturally diverse youth.

“If [mainstream groups] want to attract our youngsters,” says Charles Thomas, Executive Director of Outward Bound Adventures, “the workshops and recruitment drives have to be in our communities.” Parks might also engage youth in sharing their opinions with or joining their local Community Park Partner Group or “Friends Building” organization.

To reach Latino youth in particular, parks should focus their communications in English on schools and the Internet. As noted in the same best practices document, family-friendly “gateway” activities (not to be confused with park “Gateway” communities) that require a smaller time commitment and are not expensive may be the easiest points of entry. Examples include camping, biking, hiking and trail running.

**Closing Thoughts**

The 21st Century represents a new frontier for the United States, as suggested by demographic trends including the aging white population, the general “browning of America”, the explosion of Latinos, and the increasing prevalence of youth of color. In order to remain relevant to shifting populations and continue their tradition as valued legacy sites for the nation-at-large, National parks must apply themselves authentically and aggressively to a new era of intentional relationship-building and community engagement.

An array of community engagement strategies, both within park units as well as in communities of interest, have been discussed in the context of equity and mutual respect. Finally, the characteristics, values, and experiences of three core demographic groups were briefly discussed, in concert with specific examples of community engagement strategies appropriate to these groups (with potential use across cultures). With these tools in hand, the importance of engaging and befriending new potential park stakeholders cannot be overemphasized. Without the unwavering support of all strata of the new American public, the national parks risk becoming this nation’s greatest endangered species.
ENDNOTES


6 The term “Latino” is generally used throughout this briefing, except in cases where the original sources (including the U.S. Census and other government agencies) use the term “Hispanic.”


(12) Demographics, Target Populations & Community Engagement Strategies, Briefing #1 of 3
ENDNOTES (cont’d)


