

Speaking of Justice: Exploring Ethnic Minority Perspectives of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area

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The Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), one of the most highly visited national parks in the United States, is an important cultural symbol in the San Francisco Bay Area. Traditionally absent groups are expressing a desire to enjoy the benefits associated with outdoor recreation including public lands that may be lesser known to them. Understanding how national parks are used by ethnic minorities is of increasing importance to both the public and the National Park Service. In 2006, the GGNRA commissioned a focus-group study with nearly 100 people of color living in the Bay Area to provide indicators of constraints to park use. While identifying physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of access to nature in parks, many participants expressed frustration with limited physical access, subtle racism, and general exclusion from the culture of parks as reasons why they avoid these public spaces. The results of this study corroborate over four decades of research on park constraints. This article presents results of narratives provided by those who experience constraints and their desire to participate. For national parks to become representative of the people they serve, we suggest the need to mitigate silent exclusion and move toward proactive inclusion both inside and outside the parks. Key considerations include outreach through more intentional communication strategies, multilingual signage, responding to complaints of discrimination, and more representative hiring practices.

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It seems like they want you to come out to do a stewardship project, and do cleanup for things, and some people aren't

into that. They just want to be able to go, and that's the only opportunity they have to go, but then they don't enjoy it because they're working. . . . African Americans [are] only provided the chance to go if you're going to be doing some sort of trail restoration or stewardship project.

—African American man, age 30, schoolteacher,
Marin City

Use of national parks in the United States (US) by people of color, and the ethnic and racial differences between the groups that engage in park use, continues to generate much needed attention (Byrne and Wolch, 2009; Cronan, Shinew, and Stodolska, 2008; Floyd, 1999; Taylor, 2000). Not only is the mental and physical health of minority populations associated with positive outdoor experiences in parks (Byrne and Wolch, 2009), but the absence of people of color in parks is increasingly viewed as an environmental injustice (Agyeman, 2003). Increasingly, environmental justice scholars and advocates argue that just as people of color are disproportionately exposed to environmental pollution, for example, people of color seemingly have less access to national parks and other public lands. Cronan, Shinew, and Stodolska (2008) argue that managers should move away from simplistic notions of how people of color have access to parks and urban green spaces. They propose that, for parks and trail management to have a positive impact on ethnic minorities, it is first necessary to determine and understand the different cultural preferences, expectations, and needs of the diverse users.

This article offers a view into different cultural experiences and preferences of people of color in the San Francisco Bay Area. As authors, we suggest that if encouraging more people of color to visit national parks than we have now is a viable goal, and in order to address environmental justice for minority and low-income populations in accordance

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with Executive Order 12898 of 1994, we need to create a welcoming environment for all visitors (White House, 1994). Thus, if doing so helps to create a more just and equitable visitor base than exists now, then this article contributes to the effort to bring environmental justice into the woods and onto the trails.

This article presents an analysis of secondary data from a 2006 study resulting in a technical report discussing constraints to national park visitation for ethnic minority visitors and nonvisitors to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) (Roberts, 2007). Established in 1972 by Congress, the GGNRA has grown into the largest urban national park unit in this country [US National Park Service (NPS), 2006]. Nearly 75,000 acres of park land encompass three counties—Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo (Figure 1)—receiving in excess of 20 million people annually. The GGNRA also includes world-renowned visitor destinations, such as Alcatraz Island and Muir Woods National Monument, as well as many other destinations of regional and national import, such as the Presidio, Marin Headlands, Stinson Beach, Fort Mason, Ocean Beach, Fort Funston, Sweeney Ridge, and Mori Point (NPS, 2006). One of the largest collections of historic buildings of any national park can be found within the GGNRA, along with numerous plant and animal species granted state or federal protected status. Furthermore, the park is considered an International Biosphere Reserve.

As shown in Table 1, the GGNRA is one of the top 10 most visited US national parks [National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), 2010].

Our goal is to provide personal narratives of individually identified cultural experiences that can aid the NPS in its effort to address low minority visitation (National Parks

Second Century Commission, 2010). In addition, we infuse environmental justice into discourse about national parks by providing data corroborating nearly 50 years of research on the topic of diversity and parks (e.g., Ewert, Chavez, and Magill, 1993; Floyd, 1999; Washburne, 1978). Our work adds to the conversation on knowledge of parks, representation, perceived discrimination, communication, and access by presenting chronicles from a diverse community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Sample recommendations for future research and for enhancing community engagement efforts are included.

Qualitative data collection included a review and secondary analysis of results from eight focus groups that were formed between September and December 2006. Data for our analysis were commissioned by the NPS and included 99 participants divided into eight racially homogeneous focus groups of 9–15 people. Of the 99 participants, 64.6% were women and 35.3% were men. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 69. The focus groups were convened based on a snowball effect via assistance and communication through trusted community leaders, who disseminated the request for participants and provided space for the interviews. Participants included college students, working professionals, individuals identified as unemployed, immigrants, and homemakers (e.g., “stay at home moms”).

Ethnically diverse populations in Northern California were interviewed from the same counties where the park is based: San Mateo, San Francisco, and Marin. Using the voices of participants, recorded and then transcribed, we provide a glimpse into some personal and public challenges that people of color face when considering park visitation. We examine whether institutional, physical, cultural, or other constraints create barriers and injustices relating to the diversification of park visitors. We conclude

Table 1. Top 10 most visited units of the national park system

National park unit	State(s)	Recreational visits	Acreage
1. Blue Ridge Parkway	NC, VA	14,517,118	93,390
2. Golden Gate National Recreation Area	CA	14,271,503	74,820
3. Great Smoky Mountains National Park	TN, NC	9,463,538	521,490
4. Gateway National Recreation Area	NY, NJ	8,820,757	26,607
5. Lake Mead National Recreation Area	NV, AZ	7,080,758	1,495,664
6. George Washington Memorial Parkway	MD, VA, DC	6,925,099	7,193
7. Lincoln National Memorial	DC	6,042,315	107
8. Natchez Trace Parkway	MS, AL, TN	5,910,950	51,982
9. Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area	PA, NJ	5,285,761	66,740
10. Cape Cod National Seashore	MA	4,653,706	43,569

From the National Parks Conservation Association (2010).

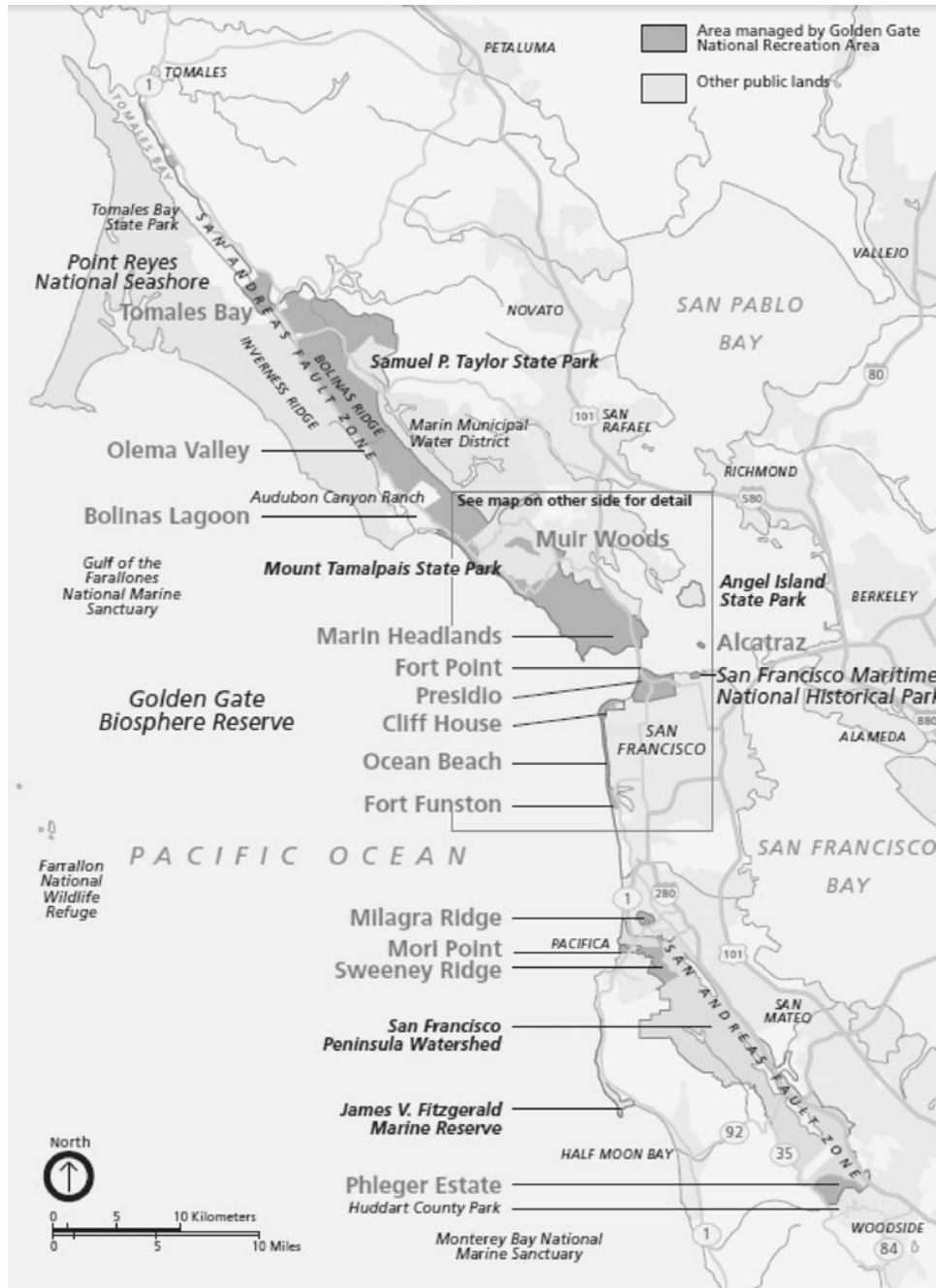


Figure 1. Map of the Bay Area National Parks. From the National Park Service (2006).

with suggestions for future research, including sample strategies to engage underrepresented groups.

Parks, People of Color, and Exclusion

While we aim to share the narratives of participants' experience related to the GGNRA, we place this within the

context of general park use by ethnic minority groups. We recognize the growing literature that reveals the unequal experiences of people of color in national parks, yet a variety of scholarly work also encompasses an assortment of park types. Specifically, we seek to understand the constraints some underrepresented minorities experience during visits to national parks and other public lands. Although both the NPS and the NPCA, for example, have established

initiatives to engage ethnic minorities in park use, advocacy, and stewardship, minority groups in our studies reveal that subtle racism contributes to feelings of exclusion in parks (NPCA, n.d., p. 17). Constraints research has been ongoing for several decades (Jackson, 2000; Philipp, 1995; Rodriguez and Roberts, 2002; Shinew, Floyd, and Parry, 2004; Washburne, 1978), yet a cursory examination of the literature on parks, race, and culture, generally, remains useful.

Concern for access and equity in parks grew out of the conservation movement that resulted in local indigenous groups being prevented from using their natural resources to preserve the game and other food sources for tourism (Sandler and Pezzullo, 2007). Native Americans actively resisted the incorporation of the land of their reservations into national parks (Keller and Turek, 1998). Today, constraints limiting access to parks across cultures encroach upon what Max-Neef, Elizalde, and Hopenhayn (1989) classify as nine fundamental human needs, such as subsistence, shelter, health, spaces for recreation, and freedom of expression (as cited in Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997). Nonetheless, the conflict over the dominant culture's view of open space and parks is pitted against the needs of both indigenous peoples and marginalized groups (Taylor, 2010). The physical and psychological health benefits of urban green space are known to bring people in closer contact with the natural environment and one another (Geddes, 1905/1979; Howard, 1902; Mumford, 1946). How, then, does this contribute to social change and increased access to other public lands?

Speaking Out: Justice and the Environment

In her work relating to urban environments, inequality, and social change, Taylor (2009) creates a link between parks and public health, as well as to what she calls the campaign for environmental reform through the significance of urban parks. She states that, historically, the function of urban parks has been mainly to enhance city environments by providing fresh breathing space and health benefits for people living in congested areas. She also posits that the establishment of parks has done little to allay the social ills arising out of inequality, unfairness, and the poor distribution of wealth.

Furthermore, in an earlier publication—a report investigating this issue and the activism and debate that arose from it—Taylor (2002) discusses the effects of race, class, and gender on people's environmental experiences. Racism and oppression have limited access to public resources and,

consequently, infringes on individual human rights. She states this has relevance in the debate on the link between culture and leisure (and, therefore, park access): that environmental progress as a strong social movement needs urgently to “develop a more inclusive, culturally sensitive, broad-based environmental agenda that will appeal to many people and unite many sectors of the movement” (p. 41). If park managers would keep this goal in mind at all times—to satisfy the environmental needs of the public pragmatically via the cultural context—the results would be improved race, class, and gender relations.

This phenomenon of race, class, and gender inequality is still seen today in the problems and conditions that limit certain groups when it comes to park access. Taylor (2002) states,

Cities are still trying to keep pace with the demand for adequate access to open space. . . . Increasingly, local governments are slashing park budgets and looking to the private sector to finance public parks . . . [T]his raises serious questions about access and equity. One hopes that public awareness of these trends will stimulate vigorous debates that will help provide some answers about the nature of public goods such as urban parks and the role of government in safeguarding these goods. (p. 506)

Education, awareness, and knowledge of parks are, therefore, key. This factor and the importance of parks in the context of nature and the environment were thus recognized and explored in the focus-group discussions set up for this study.

Boone et al. (2009) reaffirm this concept by investigating the formation of environmental inequity in conjunction with its root causes spurred by “historical and institutional dynamics” (p. 784). Their findings, for instance, reveal “the efforts and policies of the segregation ordinances, racial covenants, improvement associations, the Home Owners Loan Corporation, and the Parks and Recreation Board that created separate black spaces underserved with parks fueled the fire of middle-class flight and suburbanization” (p. 783). People in the city were thus left with the inherited spaces left behind as a consequence of social injustice.

Furthermore, if parks are healthful spaces with both physical and mental significance, then to measure their distribution would mean also to focus on environmental and human health benefits facilitated through park access as a crucial justice concern. Yet, Boone et al. (2009) suggest that parks should be distributed equitably according to justifiable needs. They conclude that urban parks are much more than spaces for recreation and for the ecosystem to find its

balance in heavily built and populated areas. They are also spaces where people can express themselves and feel they have a “right to the city” (p. 784) and, in case of the present study, therefore also comprehend that national parks are *their* parks. In fact, new community designs are emphasizing the value of sustainable living by incorporating park-like spaces intentionally in certain neighborhoods, although these spaces still lack an emphasis on access and social justice (Chitewere, 2010).

When examining park visitation, Sasidharan (2002) and Chavez (2001) discuss the need to understand how race and ethnicity interact with other cultural variables such as gender, age, socioeconomics, and religion to influence outdoor recreation preferences. Sasidharan, in particular, emphasizes the importance of examining inequity within broad social contexts (such as class and education). Otherwise, embracing the notion that all Americans are part *owners* of such public lands may seem inaccessible, at best.

Hence, it is clear that some middle-class and upper-middle-class ethnic minorities actually do visit national parks and other public lands, sometimes regularly (Rodriguez and Roberts, 2002; Tierney, Dahl, and Chavez, 1998; Winter, Jeong, and Godbey, 2004). For example, in their study of Southern California public lands, Tierney, Dahl, and Chavez (1998) found that significant differences among Latinos and Asians were based on education, income, and immigrant status. For instance, Asian American respondents with higher education, higher incomes (household income of \$50,000 or more), and US citizenship were significantly more likely to visit natural areas than were their counterparts of lower socioeconomic status or less education. Furthermore, based on survey research on Asian Americans in the Bay Area, Winter, Jeong, and Godbey (2004) found that outdoor recreation participation within the GGNRA varied significantly by specific ethnicity (e.g., Korean, Chinese, Filipino), and greater visitation was accounted for by income, education, gender, and language acculturation. Among the findings, they surmised the level of importance of “park attributes” varied across ethnicity by income.

More recently, Freeman and Taylor (2010) explore the efforts to save Black family farms through heritage tourism. They highlight a very active group of Blacks who do experience the national parks, as visitors, hence seeking to challenge some inferences showing such lack of visitation. However, based on our assessment of the literature and data gathered, inescapable barriers clearly still exist to visiting national parks.

Constraints to Park Access and Visitation

Solop, Hagen, and Ostergren (2003) identify several constraints to visiting national parks, including cost, transportation, lack of information, and communication. They also assert that cost-specific barriers, such as accommodations and food, as well as limited guidance to park activities, were more pronounced among Hispanic/Latino and African American visitors.

This aforementioned NPS report focused on only the largest number of respondents; hence, race data were collapsed and aggregated. For example, Asians, American Indians, and Native Hawaiians were not included in the analysis because they represented such a small sample of respondents. Solop, Hagen, and Ostergren (2003) believe “reliable generalizations to their respective sub-populations” (p. 6) would not be possible. Likewise, Roberts’s (2007) study focuses on experiences of African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and Asian American/Pacific Islanders because these are the most significantly represented groups in the San Francisco Bay Area (Lopez, 2001). If parks aim to address social justice, access to parks, and open space, why do some groups remain excluded from an analysis?

Cultural differences in park visitation do not always occur between people of different races (Philipp, 1995; Virden and Walker, 1999). For example, exploring data for which this current article is based, Roberts (2007) found “there are more differences within the Latino community (versus similarities) than any other ethnic group in the study. Attitudes and experiences relate to immigration status including where they were born, level of literacy, education, and socio-economic status” (p. iii). Thus, in implementing policy decisions related to park visitation, Latinos need to be viewed within the context of these nuances, and their culture is not to be seen as holistic but rather as consisting of different identities determined by origin and upbringing. Latino focus-group participants in the present study included individuals from El Salvador, Guatemala, Spain, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, and Mexico. All of these countries have diverse histories and traditions that shape human values and customs in different ways.

The Culture–Leisure Dynamic

The link between leisure and multicultural identity is strong, and the relationship to parks continues to be explored. Floyd (2001), for instance, notes how a specific activity is often considered inappropriate because it may be incom-

patible with a group's specific cultural identity. Leisure is an area where personal choices are applied without constraint or restriction to conform to a status quo. To ethnic minority groups, this social and cultural freedom lies within the realm of their collective identity and an interest in ensuring justice in the outcomes of activities pursued. However,

national parks may lie beyond the range of activities and settings that reinforce their collective identities. Where the marginality hypothesis might assume that different racial and ethnic groups have an equal propensity to utilize national parks, the sub-cultural hypothesis suggests different groups have *unique* but not *inherent* cultural preferences. (p. 44)

This theory can be supported by the experiences of the current focus-group participants, such as fear of unknown natural hazards and discomfort with a lack of bathroom facilities. In nearly 40% of all cases, participants were not familiar with the rustic expectations of some parks.

Parks could adapt to changing needs of our diverse population to ensure that the benefits of outdoor recreation are shared by all who contribute to it. With the subcultural hypothesis, Floyd (2001) proposes that park programs should be tailored to "meet the diverse needs of different racial and ethnic groups" (p. 45). This is often the issue because there are cultural factors (apart from the income and education factors) that seem to prevent some ethnic minorities from visiting parks. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (2004) state that "it is also crucial to think about possible cultural and class biases associated with wilderness" (p. 612). Hence, discrimination and ill treatment experienced by people of color indisputably discourage them from frequenting parks (Feagin, 1991).

When Roberts and Rodriguez (2008) conducted a mixed-method study of ethnic minority visitors and non-visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park (Colorado), six primary constraints were identified: (1) judgment of exclusionary culture where education and interpretation programs were considered lacking in cultural relevance and one dominant cultural expectation of visitors, (2) historical context of exclusion, (3) discomfort and concerns for personal safety, (4) limited knowledge of park expectations (e.g., rules, policies) and awareness of opportunities, (5) perceived experiences of discrimination by visitors of color, and (6) lack of socialization to national parks and outdoor recreation activities. Their analysis also resulted in other constraint dimensions, such as a homogeneous White workforce, costs and transportation issues, and lack of marketing toward ethnic minorities.

As a geographic area to investigate questions of ethnicity, culture, and national parks, the San Francisco Bay Area provides an ideal, culturally rich place to continue the conversation about the complex nature of diversifying our parks. This area is surrounded by spectacular national, state, and local parks and several Bay Area groups monitor park use and provide data on visitation.

The Bay Area Open Space Council (2004), consisting of a collaborative of about 60 organizations actively involved in the stewardship and protection of parks, trails, and agricultural lands, has been instrumental in identifying factors related to park use, including (1) the higher the education and income levels, the more intense the rate of park use; (2) people under age 65 visit parks less; (3) families with more offspring are more likely to visit parks (64% of households with three or more children, compared to 46% of all households); (4) home owners are likely to use parks slightly more than renters; (5) the amount of time residing in an area is irrelevant and does not impact rates of park use; and (6) self-professed liberals are more likely than self-professed conservatives to use parks.

By examining the results of ethnically homogeneous focus groups regarding use and nonuse of the GGNRA, we attempt to present culturally specific claims, as well as perceived problems, related to racial discrimination. We are also aware of the potential for unfair generalizations that presenting narratives might provide. Hence, allowing the voices of the focus-group participants to be the fulcrum of data, we seek to offer new perspectives on this important topic.

Methodological Approach

To examine how people of color experience the GGNRA, we analyzed data obtained from eight focus groups commissioned by the NPS (Roberts, 2007). Three Bay Area counties (Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo) made up the research group. A snowball sampling technique, through contact with community leaders, was effective in identifying 99 racially diverse focus-group participants. The study focused on three Bay Area racial groups: Latino/Hispanic, non-White (21.9%), African American/Black (6.9%), and Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander (22.6%). These percentages are based on the US Census Bureau "Quick Facts" (2008) about California, as well as on the Association of Bay Area Governments (2008), indicating these are the top three most racially diverse groups in the tri-county area and include one million self-identified biracial or multi-

racial individuals (12.8%). Table 2 lists a breakdown of focus-group participants for the present study.

Examples of self-ascribed ethnic identities among study participants include Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Spanish, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Costa Rican, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Mien, Japanese, Black, Black American, Afro-American, African American, and some merely noted “Latino/Latina” with no country of origin indicated.

A delimitation of the study was that Native Americans (0.5%) were excluded from this GGNRA study. The NPS, as already stated, preferred to focus on the most populous racial groups in the Bay Area as determined by data provided by the Association of Bay Area Governments (2008). A translator was present for four of the eight focus groups for Latinos and Asians, as requested. Each 1½- to 2-hour session was audio-taped, with handwritten notes taken as a backup. Although most interviews were conducted in English; a Spanish- or Cantonese-language translator also assisted by transcribing the respective non-English tapes.

The introduction to each focus-group interview consisted of an explanation of the NPS and the GGNRA park units. Maps and brochures were distributed. A detailed explanation of the purpose of the study was also discussed. A series of 13 semi-structured questions set the foundation for each focus group. In addition to length of residence in the Bay Area and general recreational activity interest questions, sample questions regarding the study goals are listed in Table 3.

Questions also revolved around whether participants in the focus groups had any concerns or fears about going to national parks or other public lands, their level of comfort or discomfort, and their feelings or perceptions of discrimination during park visits. A key closing question was “What could the National Park Service do to make these parks better serve you and the residents of your community?”

Table 2. Racial breakdown of participants

Race	Female	Male	Total
African American/Black	18	23	41
Asian American/Pacific Islanders	18	6	24
Hispanic/Latino(a)	28	6	34
Total	64	35	99

Results were analyzed using content analysis by organizing and coding the data (Creswell, 2003). Similarities between groups were then established and emergent themes sought. Furthermore, the narratives from each racial group were examined to identify similarities and differences to determine within-group commonalities and variations. Data were coded using descriptive terms derived from the responses. Interviews were coded by patterns, themes, and categories as part of the movement from data description to conceptual clarification. The subcultural hypothesis, supported by a large body of literature as previously described, is one framework that helped illustrate the relationship of constraints to GGNRA park visitation.

Results and Findings

By evaluating the expressed constraints to visiting the GGNRA through the experiences of different cultural groups, we aim to infuse the voices of people of color into the conversation about park visitation. While the present study provides valuable insights, we recognize that much work still needs to be done to fully address diversity, or the absence of diverse visitors, in some national parks. Our data not only support the current literature, but the results also offer some insight into experiences and desires among people of color in the Bay Area.

As one of the five largest urban national parks in the country, the GGNRA is often indistinguishable from those designated as city, county, or state parks. That is, some references during the focus-group discussions provided indicators of park use and constraints, independent of the type of park and its overall management structure. The large map provided during each focus-group process afforded participants a visual of the specific GGNRA units and offered a reminder, or new public land information, for those uncertain of their visitation in order to respond to interview questions appropriately. For instance, several participants in the Half Moon Bay (San Mateo County) and San Francisco focus groups reported not knowing the names of the parks they visit, whereas others were unaware that the GGNRA existed in San Mateo County at all.

Although the focus groups were divided by race, we present the findings together to avoid unfair generalizations regarding any racial or ethnic group. Our goal is not to provide generalizations about how one ethnic group’s use of the park compares with another’s. The focus groups were race specific; they did not represent the entire experience of all people from that racial or ethnic group. Al-

Table 3. Sample interview questions

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- 1) Have you ever been to any of the parks that are part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA, managed by the National Park Service)?
 - 2) If yes, which areas have you been to/visited, what do you usually do there, who do you go with, and what do you like/dislike about these areas?
 - 3) If no, why don't you go to these areas [e.g., can you give reason(s) why you have never been to any of the GGNRA parks]?
 - 4) What would encourage you, and others you know, to go to one of the sites/park areas in the GGNRA?
 - 5) If you have visited, do you think people who work in these parks represent the racial/ethnic makeup of people who live in your community or the San Francisco Bay Area and does it matter or not?
 - 6) How could the GGNRA communicate differently to provide you with more information about the parks, facilities, activities, etc? And what messages are important to you as a visitor or potential visitor in future?
 - 7) Do residents in your community have access to transportation they need to get to or to use these parks?
-

though consistent questions were asked, the flexible nature of focus groups meant that some topics were discussed longer than others and were not necessarily a reflection of a race-based experience. The broad themes generated included barriers associated with basic knowledge of parks, representation of park management, lack of communication, perceived or real discrimination (e.g., nonverbal cues), and accessibility issues. As the final technical report completed for the NPS in the original study compares participants both within and between racial groups, interested readers are encouraged to contact the authors for a copy of the report associated with this article.

Park Narratives

I have lived here in this area around 10 years, and thank God I can transport myself from one place to another, but I believe that one of the problems for people is transportation, so the reason some of us don't go to these parks is because of transportation; there isn't, for example, a bus that goes into the park, specifically, and many people do not have cars. (Latina, age 31, San Mateo County)

Not every ethnic group experiences national parks the same way, nor do members of an ethnic group use parks for the same purpose. Rather, a common thread that ran through each group was that there were constraints to using parks in ways that were culturally appropriate. Despite the differences within and among ethnic groups, it became clear that focus-group participants were generally in agreement when it came to discussing barriers to park visitation.

One group from Half Moon Bay expressed the need for greater information about "what the park offers" and "what to do there." Many, however, agreed that parks are natural spaces that make them feel healthy and happy, and because

of this they desire to have better access to them. As a 41-year-old Latina from Half Moon Bay expressed,

For me, nature is the most important thing because we achieve experiences through it [nature]—it relieves stress, and it also helps us learn and understand and explain to our children the significance of nature. It is very important.

As noted on several occasions in the literature, cost was a critical factor for all focus groups, in addition to transportation issues limiting access to parks and a lack of written materials or staff to assist visitors in a specific language or about activities within the parks. This ties in to two other issues that surfaced, although not listed as a fundamental barrier to park visitation: the lack of ethnic representation in the workforce, and activities that do not reflect a specific cultural context. Other issues were also identified such as cleanliness of bathrooms; fear of the presence of homeless people or drug addicts; and trail safety issues such as drop-off/cliff areas and difficult terrain. A lack of companions to share the park visitation experience, and fear of violent crimes such as murder and rape in the parks, as reported in the media, were also noted as constraints to visiting at all or more often.

Knowledge of Parks: Where Are They? How Do I Get There? What Is There to Do?

A lot of these places that I have been were because of field trips, and I think maybe they're not known, they're kind of secret places. They're not publicized. I wasn't aware of Point Reyes and the lighthouse before I went on the field trip with my son's class. (African American, woman, age 40, Marin City, Marin County)

Simply not knowing where to go or what to do is a constraint. All groups expressed frustration with the lack of information about parks (e.g., location, history) and park

activities in their communities, as well as in various sources of ethnic media. The frustration of not knowing the specific GGNRA parks that exist was reported in each community:

I have never been to any of these parks because, primarily, I don't know how to get to these parks—and my relatives are afraid to get into these parks. However, I've been to Ocean Beach because I know how to get there myself. (Chinese woman, age 68, San Mateo County)

Some focus group participants from Marin City and East Palo Alto also expressed a lack of knowledge about activity options, including special events (Marin and San Mateo Counties, respectively). These individuals also communicated the desire to see activities initiated in parks for families and children, such as “skating and dance classes” and “sports competitions.” They noted an increased likelihood of visiting if such activities were offered. This is indicative of not knowing what would be considered *appropriate* and what is available to them and their family.

Of all participants in six of eight focus groups, 40 ($n = 53\%$) spoke of not knowing how to get to the parks or where the parks were located. Several participants from all interviews indicated having “no idea these national parks or the Golden Gate National Recreation Areas existed.” Despite visiting “a park,” some participants never thought of the park as belonging to the public or being managed by the federal government. That is, they did not see themselves as part owners of these public resources.

Unfamiliarity with public transit routes to reach certain park areas surfaced as a barrier. Along with this was the inconvenience of no public buses that traveled from Marin City to the Marin Headlands, despite their adjacent geography. That is, residents of Marin County who need public transit to visit the Headlands must take a bus across the Golden Gate Bridge first, transfer to a different bus, and then return across the bridge by another route to enter the Headlands. The GGNRA has been attempting to address this with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) as part of its General Management Plan regarding park access, but, as of this article, nothing had changed. Furthermore, results show that once in the park, those unfamiliar with the area could benefit from an interpretive ranger. One participant from Marin County thought it would be beneficial to have a “tour guide” on a regular basis in order to get more out of the experience: “I think they need more information centers about parks in Black communities.”

A lack of experience with nature or technical outdoor skills (such as identifying poison oak and basic survival of food preparation, pitching a tent, or preparing an open fire) was also identified as a barrier in a Marin County group. Language-specific issues surfaced with all non-English-speaking individuals interviewed as a heavy concern, such as in written materials, bilingual staff, and signage.

Schools and educational institutions can be of tremendous support in diversifying national parks. The Marin County and San Francisco County Latino/Latina and African American groups stressed that school trips played an important role in exposing them to new experiences. They also included the role of youth organizations, such as the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts, in gaining experience and knowledge of national parks.

Parents who accompany their children on field trips are exposed to how parks are managed, thereby gaining the cultural capital to participate in park activities. For example, a Latino participant in the San Francisco group described not knowing how to make a reservation for a picnic or camping area. Furthermore, a lack of experience with technical skills (such as basic literacy, reading a map, knowing what to do in the outdoors, and knowing how to swim) was identified as a “knowledge” barrier to park visitation.

For Latino families, and in some cases the Asian focus groups, experiencing parks was related to extended family and more collectivist ways of recreating for greater enjoyment and participation. One 35-year-old Asian woman from San Francisco, for example, thought that family trips increased knowledge of, and experiences with, parks. Black participants from Marin County and San Francisco disagreed, stating that African American families do not regularly spend time in parks, but many indicated they would like to. As noted by this participant from East Palo Alto, “Being a 42-year-old Black man, there are fears in regards to going to certain parks because you don't know what's going to come out at you.” This same gentleman continued displaying desire: “But I still want to go. I want to go where I can see the stars in plenty, and you can only do that when you're away from the city lights.”

Diversity and Representation of Park Staff

It's a pride issue. If I see someone who's not a maintenance worker, who has a position of authority, who's helping to make decisions, I will not only frequent the parks more often,

I will make sure I get other people to go. (Latina, age 52, San Rafael, Marin County)

Across the board in the San Francisco Bay Area community, the lack of racial representation among park staff and constituents was raised as a barrier in that such lack of diversity reinforced the feeling that people of color “do not belong in parks.” However, only half of all the groups stated that this inequality mattered to their participating in parks. Some participants from each group expressed frustration with an inability to identify with park staff. The greatest concern came from African Americans; they discussed most the need for representative employment opportunities in national parks. Reference was made to the importance of “our history” and park “stories” or themes being told by African Americans. For example, stories about Buffalo Soldiers or other African American history as told by White staff felt inauthentic. Having rangers who represent the diverse culture of the community would promote greater interest and visitation by some of the African Americans. For example, if African American rangers told stories about White settlers just as the White rangers share Buffalo Soldier stories, the claim of inauthenticity might be less of an issue.

In every focus group, this similar *representation* concern was also expressed by some Latino participants who, for instance, indicated they feel underrepresented within the NPS workforce. Some expressed that if more Latinos were employed at these parks, more people of Spanish-speaking descent would visit these areas. In addition, focus-group participants discussed a desire to see more racially diverse staff at parks to orient visitors and help answer questions in their native tongue. These are some of their comments: “I would like to see more Latinos working at the parks because I feel that there is a little discrimination towards Latinos”; “If there would be more Latinos working at the parks there would be more Latino people visiting them”; and “Yes I think it would be a good idea to have more Latinos working at the Parks because we would feel more represented and feel well treated” (Latino community, San Francisco focus group).

The relationship of the race of park staff and rangers with visitors was consistently noted as *not* reflecting the culture of park visitors: “My kids don’t see themselves in the parks on staff or with other visitors” (Black woman, age 58, San Francisco). This can also mean that rangers and staff may therefore not serve as role models for minority visitors. The Chinese community in San Francisco was the only group that stated, collectively, the race of the park staff

“does not matter.” Further research is necessary to explore this perspective more deeply.

While some focus-group participants indicated race of the staff does not matter, other comments illustrate conflicted perspectives on the race and ethnicity of the park employees. Specifically, while only a few people indicated representation was not a concern, they felt they were occasionally treated poorly, yet may not have been if the people who worked in the parks looked more like they did: “It is not that I feel discriminated all the time, but there is some people that make you feel bad. It’s not that I only want to see Latinos; I want to see all races represented” (Latino, age 45, San Francisco). A park ranger who reflects the broader San Francisco Bay Area community might facilitate better communication and decrease potential misunderstandings.

Communication

All the ideas are well and good, but as far as getting the community organizations involved, they’re gonna have to do research, as well. They’re gonna have to get in touch with the national park and recreation organizations and get all that information for it to be accessible to us. And it’s getting them to understand okay, we as a community, we have all these park areas that we don’t get the access to them. Because a lot of us, like I said, transportation-wise, that’s an issue but we’re interested in starting to take our families out there. You know, how could you get in contact with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and get information and invite them out here for our community to provide information? (Latina, age 36, Marin County)

Statements in relation to this domain ranged from how the NPS communicates with schools, to the types of materials and signage available in the parks. This segment can be summed up by the research team’s graduate student assistant, who astutely declared, “It’s not what you say, but how you say it, where you say it, and what media you use to say it.”

Each group discussed a desire to have the NPS bring information about parks into their community by culturally established and preferred modes of communication. Although the exact method requested as to how to advertise park services and activities is unclear, a key component relates to who is delivering the message. The promotion must be tailored to the specific community by using cultural cues and even the native language. This further emphasized the desire by people of color in the study to have park staff representative of the community.

Discrimination: Implicit or Transparent?

No intentional discrimination, just being there and getting eyed like “what are you doing?” Or if you go into the little visitors’ center, then you’re closely being followed like you’re gonna damage one of the displays. (Latino, age 38, Marin County)

Implicit discrimination might best describe respondents’ comments about their experiences as park visitors. They describe the discrimination experiences as embedded, unspoken, hidden, and buried—yet often leaving participants feeling like they did not belong in the open space where they were recreating. At the same time, other respondents described explicit discrimination with concrete details of at least one situation involving verbal or physical mistreatment. If parks seem unwelcoming to ethnic minority visitors, the threat of hostility without law enforcement present only intensifies fear and thus disinterest and lack of belonging. One comment was “I was dating a White guy, and other people called my boyfriend a ‘nigger-lover’ and chased us out of the park” (African American woman, San Francisco, age 21). Another African American woman (age 42) from San Francisco noted, “It just makes you not want to expose your children to that type of stuff. You don’t want to take them, because why?” Furthermore, if visitors sense unfair treatment, however subtle, it ultimately impacts their experience:

Even how people look at you—you feel the discrimination because of your color or look. It happened to me with Afro-Americans, and also from the workers, when I didn’t speak English at all or I asked for information and they didn’t answer me and that humiliated me. (Latina, age 30, San Francisco)

Discrimination, whether perceived or real, can limit park access. This statement from an Asian man is a great case in point:

I don’t know if it’s just me, but I always get the experiences where we’re out fishing, where we’re the minority of that population, I won’t say the area, but some sort of cop stopped us, not a ranger but it looked like a neighborhood watch or something, and they asked if we lived in the area and if they could see our I.D. I was just taken aback because we’re out there to have a good time and automatically you’re just like “I don’t want to come back to this area” just because of the situation. We may be one out of a million that it happens to, but it kind of sets you off your game. (Vietnamese, age 32, Daly City, San Mateo County)

All groups, except for Chinese participants interviewed in San Francisco, discussed the experience of either obscured or transparent discrimination by staff or by other visitors. Participants offered implicit descriptions of racial slurs and

harassment (sometimes by other park visitors) and feelings of discomfort. Feelings of discrimination varied across the focus groups: some people felt discomfort only from other visitors, other groups by park rangers, and one group by both visitors and staff:

I visited many parks like Yosemite and other national parks and we, Latinos, like music so when we go to a park we put music on. But I noticed that when Americans listen to their music they aren’t told to be quiet—but when we listen to our music they [rangers] came and told us to put the volume down—meanwhile the Americans were talking loud until 2 in the morning and nobody told them anything. (Latina, age 45, San Francisco)

Not all discrimination is directed against gender, sexuality, religion, or race. Could it be a combination of these motivations? For instance, one focus-group participant, in particular, mentioned visiting with her autistic children, who are used to facing discrimination daily, and indicated this may not preclude even negative attitudes from park staff and/or visitors:

All three of my children are autistic so they face discrimination on a daily basis. And it’s better for me not reacting to it—I don’t want them to see that side because I don’t want them to feel like they’re not normal. So what anybody else in the park says, whether it’s the park ranger or what other visitors say, it’s irrelevant to me. I’m here to spend time with my children, I’m here to educate my children or just to get away from them and have time for me, and I’m not going to let anybody spoil that.” (African American woman, age 39, Marin County)

Any feeling of unfriendliness makes people feel unwelcome and impacts their overall experience (Roberts, 2007). Yet this facet notwithstanding, some have expressed that the park remains a refuge from their daily troubles, a way for people to spend time alone or with their families and shed the stress of their routine lives.

Accessibility

In addition to cultural capital of knowing what to do, for instance, visitors expressed frustration with the lack of physical access to certain areas and/or the multitude of activities in which they could have participated. For instance, several people admitted to not knowing where parks are located or how to reach them. They discussed the challenge of getting to parks without a car, as the schedule for public transportation to parks is not always easy to find. In the Chinese immigrant community, other basic skills were lacking, such as how to drive to a park by reading a map.

A participant from Daly City, San Mateo County, described an experience in which they had rented bikes from a private company they were visiting, but the bicycle rental offered no information on ways to explore the park. If one grows up in a culture and community that use bicycles regularly, this request might not be necessary. The point is that not all people in the Bay Area share this bicycle culture; thus the GGNRA should consider more explicit and proactive ways for such potential park users to be engaged by providing information to the bike companies. This is a prime audience for park promotion.

This category, the need for *accessibility*, was universal among all groups. All but two groups—Asian Americans in San Mateo County and African Americans in East Palo Alto—indicated that public transportation was a barrier to visiting parks. The lack of private transportation prevented some participants from taking full advantage of the parks (e.g., Half Moon Bay). African Americans in East Palo Alto, however, did not raise personal transportation as being a strong barrier to traveling to the parks. Additionally, some Latino groups, for example, mentioned the “frustrating” lack of clean bathrooms and issues with off-leash dogs and dog feces along paths and in the recreational areas.

Finally, the cost of park visits as a barrier to access surfaced in some capacity among all groups. Clearly, the majority of areas within the GGNRA do not require a use fee. Again, focus-group participants also spoke of other national park experiences and, in some cases, offered memories from state park visits. Low-income communities should, but do not always, have access to parks. Entrance fees, car expenses (e.g., gas, parking), buying food, and finding equipment and gear required for certain activities intimidated people who lacked such resources when growing up:

Typically, African Americans don't have home ownership to pass down to their children and so finances is a big issue as well. Not only do you have to know about the places and getting there, but they're usually far out, takes a lot of gas, takes money to eat out or bring a lunch with you, you have to be prepared, it takes money. (African American man, age 32, Marin City)

In addition, fear and safety concerns surfaced among all groups. Some focused on general fears of the unknown, and others on not knowing how to identify poisonous flowers and plants like poison oak. Misinformation about wildlife caused some to express fear of being in nature. Both crime and natural hazards also made families wary of going to parks.

Nature and the Environment

I feel that nature is like an antioxidant to your senses. It kinda helps you decompress, be at peace, calm down. When you're camping, or whatever, if you're fishing, it slows things down, especially if you're far enough away where you don't hear the city. I'm a city kid, but when I go to the camp or something, it puts me out of my element. It just makes me concentrate and get back at peace. (Black man, age 39, East Palo Alto)

Some focus-group participants equated the park to a refuge of sorts. Being in the midst of nature and fresh, untainted air, many agreed, has a calming, “stress busting” effect. They also feel the experience is beneficial for their children, which is an important reason to visit the park. Some have childhood memories of experiences in nature from their scouting days or from when their parents would bring them to green spaces for relaxation and fun. One participant stated, “I was a Boy Scout and I remember being around a campfire and I remember having those kinds of things and sleeping in a tent. That was pretty cool” (Black man, age 44, East Palo Alto). As noted above, another participant described visiting the park as an “antioxidant” for the senses. There was a general sense that communing with nature is an intensely personal and even spiritual experience that lifts these people out of their daily routine and into a clean, natural world.

A lack of understanding or experiences with natural environmental hazards also discouraged participation. For instance, dangerous trails, sharp rocks, and drop-offs caused by erosion were mentioned as concerns. According to one focus-group participant,

Some rocks are cut very sharp and then sometimes you can go on a trail and it can be way off and be down steep hills . . . [T]here ain't nobody out there so if you fall over and hit your head and fall out, that's it! (Black woman, age 42, San Francisco)

General fear related to unknown dangers like contacting poison oak or possibly encountering harmful wildlife causes anxiety and stymies participation in a myriad of national park activities. Nonetheless, many focus-group participants, when talking about lacking this type of experience, still expressed the desire to visit.

Recommendations for Future Research

This present study focused on a limited number of racial groups, yet the inclusion of 99 people makes this a large-scale qualitative study. The findings offer insight into a variety of essential topics that can be explored broadly in and around Bay Area national parks. For example, future

research could delve deeper into the relationship of culture and community to park and trail design. Clearly, more in-depth planning and local involvement would ensure better success in “connecting with culturally diverse communities in the Bay Area” (Roberts, 2007). Her study results suggest that the GGNRA and its park partner, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, as well as other resources, join forces and commit jointly to enhancing the park experience for a greater number of ethnically diverse visitors to these public lands and community places. The constraints that emerged from these interviews show what park managers ought to take into account if they want national parks as public open spaces to truly reflect and respect diversity. In fact, other studies (see Taylor and Winter, 1995) have revealed similar trends suggesting that these problems are persistent and that park managers have been aware of many constraints, yet, still, little progress has been made.

Another area worthy of future research, therefore, includes biracial and multiracial people. Little research has focused on these populations in the context of parks and outdoor recreation. Roberts (2007) states, “We have limited knowledge of how these identities mediate or influence the way people of mixed ethnic backgrounds experience parks.” Managers should consider these groups during the planning process, yet, to date, no studies provide a deeper understanding of outdoor recreation patterns and preferences of mixed-race people. To this end, Roberts also suggests that future research does not have to be parks initiated; rather, more projects could be funded and/or sponsored by community-based organizations, foundations, or park partners in collaboration, for example, with university scholars. Furthermore, her 2007 study results could also be used to assist in developing broader quantitative community-based surveys.

Future research should also delve into the experiences and patterns of recent immigrants in relation to national park use and visitation. Their experiences could be investigated especially when it comes to detailing the perceived differences between past experiences in their native country and the present ones in the US. These past experiences could have a significant impact on how park managers make a cultural connection with interpretive and/or educational programs.

Further studies could be conducted on the connection between parks and ethnically diverse youth in relation to career interests, as well as cultivate greater knowledge of the youth relationship to environmental and social justice.

More organized activities catering to this population within Bay Area national parks could contribute to creating healthier, well-adjusted youth as future leaders and potential park managers. With careful planning, park managers could provide this cultural connection (e.g., the relationship to their personal lives) that young people seek in order to find meaning, sense of place, and relevance. Youth organizations that serve racial minorities could also assist by creating paid job opportunities for youth in collaboration with the GGNRA.

In relation to the foregoing, future research could also investigate which of these organizations are willing to show commitment by engaging the GGNRA in innovative ways. Along these lines, a multitude of park partners do show a commitment. The reference here is specific in ascertaining which of these organizations would be interested in enhancing the park experience for various racial and ethnic groups by assisting in the development and promotion of community-oriented activities within the local national parks. Hence, since there has been a distinct gap, as reflected in this study and others, more research is needed to explore and understand the best modes of communication, to which audiences, and delivered how and by whom.

Finally, future research could include insight on how the GGNRA and current or prospective organizations can coordinate with transportation authorities to facilitate a positive transportation experience to attract those visitors, and potential visitors, who rely on public transport to reach the parks.

Conclusions

I like being in the outdoors because it makes me feel relaxed and comfortable. I'm retired now, so oftentimes we have gatherings with other friends or we have barbeques in the park and interact with each other. And also when we gather in the park we do tai chi and we dance, as well. It is a very good place to do such activities. And when we go to the beach we like to fly kites; it reminds us of our childhood times. (Chinese American man, age 69, San Mateo County)

For national parks to become welcoming to the multiplicity of diverse needs in the Bay Area, and increasingly around the country, park managers need to be more aware of the experiences and perspectives of people of color.

The GGNRA is well situated to create the opportunity for all people to discover the natural, cultural, scenic, recreational resources and amenities available in the Bay Area.

It is also in a position to serve as a model for other state and national parks, especially those that encompass large minority populations. Central to realizing this goal is action to facilitate informed decisions by a greater proportion of culturally diverse groups about visiting the park(s) and taking advantage of the recreational and educational opportunities offered.

Each of the communities interviewed generally recognized the benefits of visiting national parks. While the GGNRA study, from which these data were collected, included some initial input from recent immigrants residing in San Francisco, there is still little understanding of the attitudes and experiences of this population in relation to park visitation or management implications. Given the current and growing immigration population, it would benefit the GGNRA managers to know whether immigrant status makes a difference in relationship to the park staff and volunteers, as well as general ethnic and/or cultural connections to the park itself. Also, despite substantial growth of biracial and multiracial populations in the Bay Area and nationwide, very little research has been completed thus far on this group. As previously indicated, limited knowledge exists regarding how these identities mediate or influence the way people of mixed ethnic backgrounds experience parks.

Overall, participants mentioned the value of fresh air; exercise by walking for pleasure or for stress reduction; connecting with nature; finding inner-peace, social interaction, and an opportunity to spend time with family, friends, and their children; and enjoyment of learning about the natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources of the parks. Yet, barriers to visiting often led to feelings of exclusion, frustration with limited facilities, and either outright or more subtle forms of what may have been perceived or experienced as discrimination.

The GGNRA management staff must understand both the sense of appreciation for visiting parks and the extent of constraints. The adoption of simple solutions such as innovative marketing and promotions, hiring practices to reflect the community, culturally relevant education programs, and more outreach to local community leaders will assure that all people have access to our shared resource, but also that all members of our community support the preservation of our national treasures (see Jacobson, McDuff, and Monroe, 2006).

Finally, there are deeper, more meaningful considerations when thinking about outdoor spaces as a haven for all cultures. Johnson et al. (2007) explored this question: "Pro-

vide it, but will they come?" They state, "It is not incumbent on forest managers or the federal government to *change* recreation interests and behavior but to provide the opportunity for all Americans, irrespective of background, to experience the many benefits of nature engagement on public lands" (p. 264). The more people are able to break from the stress and demands of a daily life spent providing for their families and making ends meet, the more they feel like they could reap park benefits and are included in park efforts. As such, they feel the need more to protect their well-being by becoming more productive citizens and, with great connections to GGNRA, may increase their involvement and support as better park stewards. The vision of environmental and social justice may, therefore, contribute to cultural pluralism as an ultimate goal for our national parks. This situation is also true of young people. Give them a true sense of belonging, a belief in the meaningfulness of their lives, and opportunities for employment and career development, and they will grow into worthy, responsible citizens.

Extensive culturally competent education is needed that includes giving a voice to those park visitors or potential visitors who continue to be labeled as "underrepresented" or "underserved." Preserving parks and, most importantly, all individuals' and groups' experiences within those parks, is therefore not simply a matter of outdoor recreation, improving physical health, and providing another leisure outlet. It is neither a simple amenity for a community or society nor another opportunity for merely developing yet another "plan." All this is a matter of survival for the national parks of both today and tomorrow; the future of these parks depends on fully engaging with a changing America.

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