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**THE MOUNTAINS ARE CALLING, BUT WHO'S PICKING UP?
EXPLORING DIVERSITY IN ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK**

A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors

By

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Introduction

The general landscape of Nebraska is wholly uninspiring. Between Lincoln and Grand Island is a perfectly straight seventy-two mile stretch of interstate where the endless corn and soy fields are terrible for helping you mark your progress. However, that stretch of Interstate 80 led my family and I to the Colorado mountains year after year for our annual ski trip when I learned to love the mountains. I was always eager to get on the ski lift and talk to the other people about where they were from. I talked to a lot of local ski bums, Americans from across the US, and a number of internationals, often from around the Canadian Rockies or the European Alps.

In my own experience, seeing a non-white person on the mountain is fairly rare. Nearly all of the people that I met on the ski lifts were white. In all of my years skiing, I would typically only spot one or two African-Americans a day on the slope. The disparity is not just on the ski hill either, hiking trails too tend to be full of white Americans. With many free trails and such a wide variety of sights and difficulties, hiking should be more diverse. After hiking in the Grand Canyon, Oprah reflected, "hiking requires no particular skill, only two feet and a sturdy pair of shoes. You set the pace. You choose the trail. You lock into a certain rhythm with the road, and that rhythm becomes your clarion song" (Winfrey 2017). All of the research presented in this thesis confirms that this underrepresentation is real, and it carries over into a wide variety of outdoor activities that occur outside of the urban area.

There will always be people that prefer the city to outdoor spaces. However, programs like Big City Mountaineers and Outdoor Afro, which lead people of color on various outdoor adventures, are showing “city folk” that the outdoors can have meaningful relevance in their lives. People have used parks and outdoor spaces for rest, exercise, relaxation, and inspiration for decades, but this is still news for many people of color. Of course, in America, discrimination and the threat of violence kept minorities out of parks for entire lifetimes. Yet even now in 2019, it seems that those who enjoy the outdoors do a poor job at communicating the benefits and joys of nature and welcoming people of color into parks. Working to improve accessibility to park spaces will allow minorities to create their own connection to these places. Sharing these places is an excellent way to continue to build bridges between Americans and to foster a wider network of support for protecting and caring for the environment.

Before I proceed, I would like to define and address some of the terms I will be using throughout this thesis. First the term race. According to Feagin (1989) race is “a social group distinguished or set apart, by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of real or perceived *physical* characteristics.” Similar to this term is ethnic group, which is “a social group set apart on the basis of *cultural* or *nationality* characteristics” (Feagin 1989). Additionally, I will use the terms minority or people of color to refer to different groups that are not white whether by personal identification or based on the way studies refer to the group. Yetman (1985) expands this to say that due to its race or ethnicity, a minority group “experiences a wide range of discriminatory treatment and is assigned to a low status position in the

broader society.” Furthermore, it is important to recognize that minority is a term which might imply a small number, but which often refers to a large number of people (Chavez 2000). I will use these labels because they are convenient for talking about the issue effectively, but I do not assume homogeneity in any of these groups.

Nature or the outdoors, is so hard to define because it cannot possibly be fit into a box. People may disagree on what is considered natural, what landscapes are most beautiful, or what qualities or amenities they want to experience in nature. In the United States there is a tremendous range of natural and historical spaces that have been set aside for recreation. While I do not discount the beauty or recreation opportunities of these other federal or state landscapes, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine all federal and state landscapes.

In order to narrow all of these options, I have chosen to focus on Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) as the basis for discussion. I have a particular affinity for the mountains and the park itself is stunning; showcasing some of the best views of the Rocky Mountains. While not the only mountainous National Park, RMNP can be reached in just a 90-minute drive from the Denver Airport and downtown Denver. By comparison, it takes 3 to 4 hours to reach any of the National Parks in California’s Sierra Nevada range by car from any of the area’s major airports. There are regional airports near other popular parks like Arches, Yellowstone, and Glacier, but it is often cheaper to drive there. However, if you drove from Denver it would be 6 hours to Arches, 9 hours to Yellowstone, and 14 hours to Glacier National Park. Denver is also more centrally located in the country than Washington’s mountainous parks. The only mountainous National Park more visited than RMNP is

Great Smoky Mountain National Park in Tennessee and North Carolina. Great Smoky Mountain, unlike most National Parks, does not charge an entry fee and has a scenic highway running through it. These dynamics are unusual for a National Park, so I decided against this park.

RMNP comprises 415 square miles of protected land. The park's peak season is summer; in 2018 RMNP hosted an average of 808,900 people a month between June and September. It also hosts some 126,200 guests a month during the colder and snowier months of November to April (National Park Service 2019c). It offers both designated campsites with restrooms and backcountry camping (available in the winter too). The most popular activities are hiking, driving along scenic roads, and watching wildlife. The park also offers picnic tables at various locations throughout the park and park rangers lead guided and educational programs: hands on exhibits of animal skins and bones, a night sky guide, and others. Often through affiliated third-party companies, visitors can also engage in rock climbing, fishing, horseback riding, and biking. Snow-shoeing and cross-country skiing are available in the winter months (National Park Service 2019).

Due to its size, views, and range of activities, RMNP has become a well-known, top-tier park. According to the National Park Service, RMNP is the fourth most visited National Park with 4,590,492 visits in 2018 (National Park Service 2019b). Despite its popularity and relative convenience to a major metropolitan area, it is predominately filled with white visitors. Visitor Services Project surveys conducted by researchers with the University of Idaho in conjunction with Washington State University and the National Park Service seek to find out who are

the people that use the parks, where these people are from, and what activities and park qualities are important to them. One such survey was administered in the summer of 2010 at RMNP; 755 of 1,099 (68.7%) questionnaires were returned. The demographic data show that 95% of park visitors were white, 2% were Asian, and other races and ethnicities constituted 1% or less each (Blotkamp et al. 2011). 53% of the visitors in this survey were Colorado residents living between Colorado Springs and Fort Collins.

While Colorado has a higher percentage white population than the national average, the racial makeup of the state and the major towns on the Front Range do not explain the overrepresentation of whites at RMNP. As a whole, Colorado is 68.3% white, compared to 60.7% nationwide. Colorado has a slightly larger than average Latino population, 21.5% vs 18.1%. Meanwhile African- and Asian-Americans are, respectively, just 4.5% and 3.5% of Colorado's population but comprise 13.4% and 5.8% of the total American population (United States Census Bureau 2018). The Denver metro area and Colorado Springs have similar racial makeups as Colorado as a whole, but the demographics become increasingly white the closer that you get to Estes Park, the main entrance to RMNP. Estes Park itself is 91% white (United States Census Bureau 2018). With such a large disparity between locals and visitors, there is the question of whether RMNP is even relevant to minority populations.

Quantifying the extent to which minorities are underrepresented in the outdoors is tricky because of the myriad ways in which such data are collected/measured. One clear source is a phone survey run by the National Park Service (NPS) in 2008-2009. 4,103 people were asked, in English or Spanish, if they

had visited any National Park unit (i.e. including Parks, Monuments, Historical Sites, Battlefields, etc.)¹ in the past two years. Those who had visited a valid park unit were labelled “Visitors.” Whites and non-Hispanics accounted for 78% of the visitors surveyed. In comparison, whites comprise 60.7% of the US population (US Census Bureau 2017); although they were overrepresented in this survey as they were 70% of the respondents (Taylor et al. 2011).

Research on outdoor recreation has been conducted all over the country, in all designations of public lands. Interest in the outdoors is not limited to one park or even one type of park. Rather those who value open spaces may prefer different parks or parks closer to them than RMNP. People have different relationships with parks all over the country, some people will choose local or state parks over National Parks. While all parks have their appeal, I believe National Parks stand above state and local parks. National Parks have the highest legal requirements for protection and considerable funding which allows for a high level of protection not often found in other park designations. Additionally, the sheer size of most National Parks allows them to provide ample habitat for wildlife in a way that smaller parks cannot. While many parks can offer their own spectacular views, I feel that National Parks highlight the very best of a landscape with the ability to make it widely accessible.

My experiences in the outdoors have shaped me as a person and the incredible landscapes I have explored in the US National Park System have led me to

¹ The important classifications which I will directly reference are National Historic Sites (NHS) and National Monument (NM). A NHS “contains a single historical feature that was directly associated with its subject,” which means these are usually only less than an acre in site. NMs also only require one item of interest, National Parks require a variety of attractions and are generally larger than NMs (National Park Service 2015a).

my career path. These spaces have made an impact on me and I know how much they mean to my (white) friends. Why is there a gap between white and non-white visitors? Those that may be interested in parks are discouraged by longstanding idea that National Parks are spaces for white people. As I discuss in Chapters 1, 4, and 5 of this thesis, that idea is backed up with real evidence that Parks were built for white people and continue to be marketed to white people by the outdoor industry. This history and continued practices make this a issue of justice as we continue to strive for better equality in our country. I recognize that some people just truly do not enjoy the outdoors, but groups are not homogenous, and I believe there is a significant minority population, which would thrive in the outdoors if leaders in the field worked to remove barriers and increase inclusivity in National Parks. I hypothesize that Rocky Mountain National Park is near enough to Denver that some of the traditional barriers related to money and travel are less relevant compared to the cost and time of travelling to more remote parks. Removing the entry fees to the park is not an option as it would cripple the park's ability to repair, maintain, and update facilities, restore habitat, and support law enforcement (National Park Service 2018c). The outdoor community of RMNP must show why RMNP is worth the price of admission.

Chapter 1: History of Discrimination in Parks

One of the popular theories about why minorities are largely absent from parks is the Discrimination Hypothesis. Past and present trends in outdoor recreation are thought to make minorities feel unwelcome at parks (Finney 2014; Taylor et al. 2011, Byrne & Wolch 2009).). This section will focus on the history of parks to understand how and why parks are built, who they were built for, and why this past is still relevant today.

Parks are a relatively new phenomenon in history, yet they stem from ancient gardens that were under the control of rulers and nobles from China to Egypt to London. Often these spaces and lands were only for the enjoyment of their owners and their aristocratic friends. Over time these types of spaces were transformed for other uses, but they remained under the control of the elite. In Europe, the rich started preserving tracts of land as private hunting grounds and large landscaped estates, such as Versailles (Byrne & Wolch 2009). As these spaces were reserved for the elite, many of the people flocking to cities did not have access to green spaces. In the 1800s, America still had much more open space than England, but despite this, the poor and minority populations were trapped in the cities or farming on flat lands in the plains. In many wilderness areas, like the Rockies, early backcountry exploration could only be financed by wealthy white individuals. The cabins they built in the wilderness were prohibitively expensive for minorities or they refused access (Erickson, Johnson, & Kivel 2009).

In 1845, England branched out from gardens and hunting lodges and opened The Regent's Park as its first public park within the Royal Parks. Two days a week, Regent's Park allowed Londoners to stroll through the well-manicured gardens and the menagerie (The Royal Parks 2018). As similar parks began opening up across Europe, park creators designed parks in an attempt to cure real and social ills within the population. Medical practitioners at the time believed that transforming places like wetlands to parks could help prevent the spread of sicknesses like cholera or typhoid (Szczygiel & Hewitt 2000). The practitioners also believed that exposure to well-landscaped parks could influence people to be more "healthy, morally proper, socially responsible, economically prudent, and intelligent" (Byrne & Wolch 2009, 746). Many of these ideas manifested themselves in America, and park creators began implementing the same ideals. In the 1930s, walking paths and playgrounds increased in an effort to promote physical fitness. At the same time, more gathering spaces were put into parks. Designers hoped that city parks would foster mingling between different classes, races, and ethnicities and promote a democratic inclusiveness (Blackmar & Rosenzweig 1992). To the contrary, in the '20s, racial tensions increased in the park spaces and violence even broke out (Marne 2001; Chicago Commission on Race Relations 1922). What was it about parks that was particularly contentious?

In the mid-nineteenth century, it was obvious that parks were constructed for white people. The creation of many parks was used to gentrify and "elevate the class" of the area. Minorities came to understand this when they were dislocated by the new parks and pushed away from the park area. As parks became more

accessible for all races and classes in the late nineteenth century, dress codes, behavior rules, and activity constraints indicated that minorities should assimilate or leave (Taylor 1999). Some states, particularly in the south, even had racially segregated local parks and most (like Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountain National Parks) were subject to Jim Crow laws (Byrne & Wolch 2009). This history of all levels of parks shows that minorities were systematically kept out of parks or were displaced by new park sites perhaps explains the basis of their tense relationship with parks. Furthermore, this “green gentrification” is still an issue today; when parks are built in park-poor neighborhoods as a form of environmental justice, property values can rise and push out the very people the parks were built to serve (Wolch, Byrne, & Newell 2014; Gould & Lewis 2012).

One of the many things denied to minority groups through American history is a sense of belonging. America has long been described as a melting pot, a place where many cultures are blended into one American culture. This was primarily used to describe all of the European immigrants that came to America in the late 19th and early 20th century. While different European immigrant groups all experienced some discrimination upon arrival (Guglielmo & Salerno 2012; Garner 2003), the eventual intermixing of these groups and joint discrimination against other races led to a common white identity, which would evolve into the white identity of present day (Chomsky 2007; Morrison 1993). That is not to say that other races have failed to assimilate; however, some populations of minority groups are not assimilating as quickly as European immigrants did. Perhaps this stems from a desire to retain their cultural heritage or the very real possibility they were not allowed to assimilate

because of the color of their skin (Chomsky 2007). While ideas praising this diversity and multiculturalism have become more prevalent recently, there are still some aspects of acculturation that are hard to avoid and needed.

America remains a country that hosts a multitude of different cultures. These cultures are usually grouped by broad racial labels: White, African-American, Asian-American, Latino, and Native American. Some researchers have proposed the assimilation hypothesis to explain the dominance of white Americans in outdoor recreation. The crux of the assimilation hypothesis (in the context of parks) is that as minority groups become further integrated with the dominant (white) culture through cultural and structural assimilation, they will begin to share patterns of recreation (Gómez, Urzúa, & Glass 2014; Floyd & Gramann 1993). Similarly, when members of the non-dominant culture participate and interact with members of the dominant culture in leisure activities, they feel more connected to the host culture (Glass, Gómez, & Urzúa 2014).

These aspects that leisure researchers have found relevant are “cultural assimilation” and “structural assimilation.” Cultural assimilation is when a minority-group adopts certain attributes of the dominant culture, like diet, religion, and language (Floyd 2001, Gordon 1964). Slowly the US is becoming more accommodating to Spanish speakers, but it is still widely assumed that most people speak English. Structural assimilation is the “extent of social interactions between majority and minority groups in primary (e.g., family and friendships) and secondary (e.g., school, work, etc.) groups” (Floyd 2001, 46). An African-American boy who was born into a heavily segregated city may have a smaller range of experiences with

white people than another African-American boy who grew up in a white neighborhood. The second boy would be expected to be more familiar and comfortable with white culture than the first. The assimilation hypothesis gives voice to the basic idea that people in a group won't all act the same way and will have varying levels of interest in the outdoor based on past experiences.

Research on the assimilation hypothesis has found it is particularly relevant to Hispanic and Asian-American recreation patterns (Floyd & Gramann 1993; Carr & Williams 1993). Floyd and Gramann (1993) compared white and Mexican-Americans recreation habits in Arizona. Mexican-Americans who lived in the USA for two generations were "most acculturated," while more recent Mexican immigrants were labeled the "least acculturated." They found in their study that the "most acculturated" Mexican Americans chose to participate in the same activities as whites in National Forest land more often than the "least acculturated" groups. Additionally, those Mexican Americans with the lowest degree of structural assimilation were the most unlike the whites in regard to activity choice. Another study, by Steven Philipp (1999), found that middle-class African-Americans and White Americans living in the same area of the city had similar views on what kinds of activities that they would want their child to partake in. Admittedly, having their child go "camping in [the] mountains" was much more important to white parents than African-American parents.

Whether or not the Assimilation Hypothesis proves useful, it could be ill advised for the extant RMNP community to push the theory. As noted above, the idea of the "American melting pot" encouraged the assimilation of white European

immigrants and masked the brutal treatment of the native and minority populations living in America. Furthermore, it assumes that park recreation is part of dominant white American culture, therefore any person of color that goes to park is “acting white” and minority people not in parks are not as American as those that do. Increased communication and sharing of ideas are still valuable for society, but total assimilation should not be the goal. There is a richness in the diversity of America and we as a nation should encourage that. We also ought to do a better job of welcoming minority groups into these beautiful American public lands.

Returning to the history of parks, we look to the 1930s, as National Parks were continuing to spread across the country. Public lands in the 1930s had so few visitors of color that National Parks did not plan for that demographic. National Parks were largely not segregated, but the lands for Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountain National Parks were donated by the Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The parks were therefore subject to the states’ Jim Crow laws when they were established in the mid-1930s. Thus African-Americans had a difficult time securing campground and picnic areas because of segregation laws. In response to a demand for these spaces, Shenandoah built a completely separate facility, Lewis Mountain, for use by people of color. This was the only campground designated for African-Americans in the southern National Parks when it opened in 1940.

Interestingly, prior to construction of the Lewis Mountain area, park officials debated whether or not to build separate bathrooms and facilities for people of color in Shenandoah, but officials decided against it because there were too few minority visitors. Ultimately it was just as easy to build this separate area (Shumaker

2009; Young 2009). Lewis Mountain was actually desegregated just two years later as part of an effort to “improve Negro morale” during World War II, however many state parks in the southeast remained segregated until the 1960s (Young 2009; O’Brien 2007).

The experience in these southeastern National Parks and state parks can be compared to parks in Colorado where the state’s Jim Crow laws were not nearly as restrictive. Estes Park was founded just after 1900 and it continues to serve as the main entrance for RMNP (which was founded in 1915). Until the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans primarily were present in Estes Park as service workers (i.e. waitstaff, housekeepers, maids) for the tourist industry. According to Erickson and colleagues (2009), while there is evidence that they visited, African Americans from Denver rarely traveled to RMNP in the first half of the 20th century and when they did it was usually in larger groups. Furthermore, African Americans in the state did not experience the same discrimination when they visited state parks, so rather than visit RMNP, African-Americans in Denver would visit state and local parks like Red Rocks, Garden of the Gods, or Cave of the Winds (Erickson et al. 2009).

In the front range of the Rocky Mountains in the early twentieth century, most wilderness lodges only hosted white guests. The exception was a community called Lincoln Hills just southwest of Nederland, Colorado. In 1922 when it opened, Lincoln Hills was the only vacation resort for African Americans west of the Mississippi. It was developed by Edwin Regnier and Robert Ewalt. The pair believed African Americans should be able to experience the mountains too and sold plots of lands on which owners could build residences. Winks Lodge was a full-service resort

on the property. In 1927, Lincoln Hills also began to host an annual YMCA girls' camp for African-American girls: Camp Nizhoni. Lincoln Hills remained a cherished mountain refuge until the mid-1960s and the Civil Rights Movement (Lincoln Hills Cares 2017; Denver Public Library 2017).

Minority peoples who lived or grew up during the 1960s are still alive today and continue to be influences on today's generation. In the following chapters, I discuss how minority groups found alternate ways to recreate and travel based on where they were allowed before the civil rights movement of the 1960s. After the various civil rights legislation was passed in that decade, minorities had more opportunities, but their habits did not completely change overnight.

Presently, the legacy of racism and discrimination is still alive. As the National Park Service is a branch of the federal government, it has a legal obligation to ensure that all people are welcomed at its parks. Despite this, the Discrimination Hypothesis claims that part of the reason that parks lack minority visitors is that there is still discrimination at play today, real or perceived. The National Park Service (NPS) conducted a study in 2008 (the same study that found that whites were overrepresented in NPS units) and asked non-visiting people whether or not they agree with certain statements about why they do not visit the parks more often. Two of those statements were "NPS units are unpleasant places for me to be" and "NPS units are not safe places for me to be." Nearly a quarter of Hispanics agreed with both of those statements, while African-, Asian-, and Native American responses were around 10% for both. In contrast only 5% of non-visiting whites felt that NPS units were unsafe or unpleasant. There are other factors at play, but these statistics

are part of why the NPS has difficulties attracting new people of color.

Encouragingly, the survey also found that only 3% of respondents of all groups of minority people who had visited an NPS unit in the past year found the NPS units to be unpleasant or unsafe (Taylor et al. 2011), perhaps suggesting that the perceived discrimination is greater than actual discrimination.

Chapter 2: Accessibility is More than Simply Proximity

Economic barriers have always excluded people and the early years of Rocky Mountain National Park were no exception. As previously mentioned, only the wealthy could afford the equipment and travel costs that were necessary to trek the landscape. Some theorize that this type of exploration left a lasting impact about who chooses to access these same landscapes that are now preserved as parks, explaining this via two related hypotheses: Elitism and Marginality.

Part of the Elitism Hypothesis has to do with a lack of knowledge. Due to the history of discrimination in wilderness sites and outdoor education, minority families are largely unfamiliar with parks as a whole and often are unaware of how parks work and do not know what kinds of amenities and recreational opportunities are available to them (Roberts & Drogin 1993; Burns et al. 2006). Since minorities have been excluded for so long, they struggle to find meaningful ways to get involved in recreation activities in all parks, but especially parks further from where they live (Burns et al. 2006).

Undoubtedly there remains a legacy of elitism in terms of wealth as well. In the 1920s, clients would pay \$50,000 (or \$700,000 in today's money) for a three month stay at Fairmont Lodge in Banff, Canada, a luxurious hotel inspired by the European game lodges that were the precursors to parks. While this type of lavish wilderness retreat experience never really went away, it is making a revival in recent

decades, and it emits an aura of status that cannot be matched by most. It may give a false sense of what is needed to experience and enjoy National Parks.

The Marginality Hypothesis for underrepresentation boils down to a matter of resources rather than interest. The theory states that minority groups would participate in outdoor activities at the same rate as whites under similar socioeconomic constraints. Washburne (1978) was among the first to name and then discuss this hypothesis. Studies testing this hypothesis will generally compare a group of whites against some other minority group and make connections between wild land participation of each group and the socioeconomic status of each group. Relevant socioeconomic factors might include salary, time off work, and access to a car or some other form of transportation. According to Washburne's argument if a test group of whites and a test group of some minority have a similar socioeconomic status, then they should participate at the same rate in wild land activities. If differential rates still persist, other factors may be in play (Floyd 1999). Washburne concluded that some of the disconnect could be traced to economic barriers, but he and others (including: Edwards 1981; Woodard 1988; West 1989; Holland 2002) determined that other factors including past and present cultural trends and desires are more influential in their choices.

A fourth, more recent theory to explain why minorities are not in parks, is the Geography Hypothesis was developed by Weber & Sultana (2013). On a nationwide scale, accessibility to park units vary. America contains 58 National Parks and just 11 of those are east of the Mississippi River and on the mainland. While the western portion of the US is full of open land and the gorgeous National Park scenery, the

eastern portion of the US has a higher population with far fewer National Park options. The eastern half of the US holds 12 of the 58 National Parks, three of which are tucked into the Florida Keys. Minority groups are impacted more heavily because their population centers are more clustered than the white population. Graphs in the Weber & Sultana (2013) paper show counties with a noticeably large African American population in the southeastern US. Not being near an awe-inspiring park “might mean that national parks have no relationship to minorities’ lives and would not be thought of as a destination” (Weber & Sultana 2013; Edmondson 2006). Hispanic heavy counties are centered along the Texas border and throughout New Mexico, but also extend up to San Francisco. High population Asian American counties only appear near San Francisco. There are a large number of park options in California and the American southwest for Hispanic and Asian-Americans to enjoy, however because these populations are more spread along the edges of the country the Weber and Sultana algorithm also captured that they are far from park units in the north and west-central part of the country. Whites are fairly well spread across the country and would therefore be closer to more National Parks. Thus, it’s worth asking whether minorities live near National Parks of interest and, if so, if that impacts the visitation rate. While travel is easier than ever, it may still be a hurdle to accessing parks.

Weber and Sultana's (2013) study sought to address this, finding that whites had the most accessibility² to all NPS sites (including all federal sites: National Monuments, Preserves, Historic Sites, etc.). They determined that African-, Hispanic-, Asian-, and Native Americans had significantly less access to parks than whites: 19% (compared to whites), 16%, 5%, and 0.78% respectively. Weber and Sultana looked at 51 parks of any federal classification of representative accessibility and determined that when people of color live near a park, they access it more. While the general population distinguishes between National Parks and Historic Sites and related National Parks, the paper suggests that these smaller and newer park units might be the key for initiating a greater minority interest. These smaller and newer parks are not National Parks, but often National Historic Sites with a museum. It is uncertain if the interest in Historical Sites will translate into people of color attending more National Parks and open spaces.

It is unclear to what extent money prevents people from partaking in certain National Park activities. In general, there is little research on the relationship between minority populations and outdoor leisure. Only 4.5% of articles from five of the top leisure studies journals focused on race between their inception and 2005 (Floyd, Bocarro, & Thompson 2008), with few of these examining outdoor leisure or National Parks. Much of the research cited in this thesis, comes from parks at all

² I acknowledge a difference between accessibility and geographic distance; however, Weber and Sultana specifically refer to accessibility as the geographic concept of accessibility quantified by driving time to a relevant park. I will use their terminology when talking about their study.

levels (city, state, and federal) or based on leisure activities that might not even take place in parks.

I agree with Washburne and others that say there is more than just money at play in outdoor recreation choices in the sense that people might have the money for outdoor recreation but choose to prioritize it in different ways. My outdoorsy friends and I expect to spend a certain amount of time in the outdoors, so we budget for that and periodically expand and update our outdoor inventory (e.g.: hiking boots, packs, etc.) so that when we have the time, we can go outside with little prep. Skiing is a more extreme example because of the associated price, but a handful of my friends and I have all of our own ski equipment and passes to access the mountain. We could all go up at any time on short notice. However, my friends without their own equipment and pass will have to go out and rent skis, spend a large amount of money to ski just one day, and they still may not have the proper clothing for being on top of a mountain. If they had budgeted for skiing, it might not have been an issue, but they wanted to spend their discretionary money on hobbies that are relevant to them.

Travel choices indicate mixed support for regarding the Marginality and Geography Hypotheses. Generally African-Americans will travel farther than whites and will spend a similar amount of money on vacations (Agarwal & Yochum 1999). This suggests that African-Americans are not limited by the Marginality Hypothesis and are willing to spend money to travel across the country, but not to National Parks meaning that they are actively choosing not to do so. Meanwhile Hispanics (highly concentrated) in California and the southwest chose to enjoy federal

recreation areas near their homes in that area at a rate proportional to the Hispanic population of the area, whereas African-Americans (highly concentrated) in the southeast participate significantly less and not in proportion with the local population (Johnson et al. 2007).

While these lands being discussed are public, they are not free. According to US Census Data, the median household income in Denver for non-Hispanic white households is \$68,500, for Asian households is \$67,600, for Hispanic households is \$44,800, and for African-American households is \$44,400 (United States Census Bureau 2018). These data are independent from the rent of the house, the number of children in the household, and other factors but at the very least it tells us that different races experience different levels of income. Denver is geographically close to a variety of outdoor opportunities, but the price of admission or participation could be a deterrent.

For a single-family car in 2019, a single-day pass is \$25, and a seven-day pass is \$35 at Rocky Mountain National Park. An annual pass is \$70 for access solely to RMNP and \$80 for all of the more than 2,000 federal recreation sites for 12 consecutive months. A few of the bigger national parks have the same prices as RMNP, many smaller ones are \$5 cheaper for the single and seven-day pass, and then a few are free to enter. One of the reasons that the Great Smoky Mountains is the most visited National Park, with nearly twice the number of visitors as the next park, is that it is free to enter. Colorado State Parks also have entrance fees. It is \$8-10 per vehicle per day at any park, \$80 for an annual pass tied to a vehicle, or \$120 for an annual pass that can be used in any vehicle so long as the passholder is

present. For people who do not frequent the outdoors, spending \$25 on a Saturday to be in a National Park might seem like a waste of money when you could enter a state park for \$10 or any number of free areas in or around Denver.

For most potential visitors, the cost of the visit is not simply the cost of admission. To visit many National Parks, visitors often have to travel to small towns outside the park where the lodging and transportation increases the price tag of the experience. As early as 1924, the car made traveling to National Parks so much easier and cheaper for all Americans (James 1924). Now regional airports are fairly common, but usually flying into those smaller airports tends to be more expensive. Hotels are also more expensive around popular National Parks, but if you have the gear, camping is usually a less expensive alternative. If budgeted appropriately, a vacation to a National Park can be reasonably affordable. You can still have a great time even if you are not on a week-long getaway at a famous mountain lodge.

One of the reasons that I chose to focus on RMNP is its proximity to Denver. Few National Parks are near enough to a major city that visitors can do a day trip to the park. Therefore, Denver residents can experience the park without having to pay for lodging and other vacation related costs. Yet, despite the relative convenience (1.5-hour drive from downtown Denver or the airport) it does not draw a representative sample from the city. Remember that Blotkamp and colleagues (2011) found that whites constituted 95% of RMNP's visitors.

One of the potential solutions is reaching minorities where they are with park units that interest them. One of the first big steps towards that was the creation of Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountain National Parks in the east closer to the

center of the population. There was also a movement in the 1960s to create urban parks and recreation areas and introduce people to parks which proved successful. However, we must remember the issues caused by “green gentrification” which pushes minority populations away from new parks created to serve their previously park-poor neighborhoods. More recently park units that incorporate cultural and historical themes have been useful for drawing visitors (Weber & Sultana 2013).

Accessibility may not be the only reason that boosts were found at certain parks; what the NPS unit provides to its visitors may be the draw for some minorities. Weber and Sultana (2013) provide two examples of National Historic Sites (NHS) and a National Monument that draw higher than average percentages of a minority group because of the site’s rich history and relevance to them. The first site they list is Manzanar NHS which protects a concentration camp used to house Japanese-Americans during the Second World War and draws significant numbers of Asian Americans. The other sites mentioned are Nicodemus NHS, a remote Kansas town settled by freed slaves, and Pipestone National Monument, where various Native American communities quarried for stone to make pipes. Notably, there are no NHS sites relevant to Hispanic/Latino heritage. But NHS’s are relatively small, niche, and there are simply not that many; the NPS must look at how it can incorporate cultural significance into existing and future park units.

While historic sites may help draw people into the parks system, the goal of this thesis is to examine what needs to be done to get underrepresented groups (people of color) to experience the awe-inspiring views of National Parks. In that respect, RMNP may not need to add significantly more cultural material because

that is not ultimately the reason for the park. The stated purpose for RMNP “is to preserve the high-elevation ecosystems and wilderness character of the southern Rocky Mountains within its borders and to provide the freest recreational use of and access to the park’s scenic beauties, wildlife, natural features and processes, and cultural objects” (National Park Service 2015b).

Determining what story to tell about a park’s history is not always so straightforward. Acknowledging truths about the past can be murky and painful. Consider the story of a woman who wanted to donate land to the National Park Service. She could no longer care for her family’s beautiful former slave plantation in Florida, so she wanted it to become a public space in order to preserve the gardens and mansion. However, she asked the NPS to not talk about slavery at all in setting up the park (Finney 2014). You can understand the desire to forget a shameful past and focus on the remaining beauty, but slavery built that plantation and the African-American locals knew it. Given the history of the place, including slavery as part of the park’s story is essential. In comparison, RMNP does not have such an engaging story. The Ute and Arapahoe nations occasionally passed through the area where the park now sits, but it was not in either of their main home ranges. The area is otherwise notable for the ranches, like Estes Park and the Holzwarth Historic Site (in the western portion of the park), that were built around the time the area was declared a national park.

RMNP ought to evaluate their relevancy with minority populations and their familiarity with the services that the park does offer to them. RMNP can then decide what kind of features it might be able to add in order to draw a more ethnically

diverse clientele. However, different amenities require a varying degree of effort and may not necessarily be a good thematic fit for the park. Adding a new picnic area in RMNP to accommodate large groups appears much more relevant to RMNP than building a new expansive exhibit on Native Americans in the area. However, if done correctly with adequate dedicated staff and funding, such an exhibit could attract new visitors and serve as a bridge in the park between the nature and the historical reality of these native nations.

Ultimately, it seems unlikely that the Marginality and Geography Hypotheses should be contributing to the low visitation rates of minorities, specifically at RMNP. Despite the lack of abundant cultural history, RMNP has many factors that make it an attractive location to visit. For a family of four, a single day entrance pass works out to \$6.25 a person, less than a trip to the movies. RMNP's nearness to Denver requires just a single tank of gas (200 miles roundtrip) to take the park's world class scenery even by car. Furthermore, culture has been found to be a bigger indicator of how people recreate than money (Washburne 1978).

Mountain biking versus road/city trail biking is actually a good hypothetical example of how the theories might be seen in reality. Marginality/Elitism: A decent mountain bike can be bought for some \$350, while a decent everyday bike can be found for \$100. If somebody wants to get into biking but are on a tight budget, they might opt for the cheaper option, if they get a bike at all. They can use the cheaper bike on city pathways rather than paying three times the price for a bike that requires travel to mountain bike trails. According to the Geography Hypothesis, minorities would be expected to have poor access to quality mountain bike trails, so

they would opt in the area immediately around them on the cheaper bike. The Discrimination Hypothesis would simply state that minority riders would not be welcomed on mountain bike trails based on real or perceived fear of discrimination. The Subculture Hypothesis (discussed in detail in the next chapter) may argue that whites place a high value on testing themselves on difficult mountain bike trails while minorities may prefer to ride leisurely on concrete city trails and streets or with friends the neighborhood. Finally, the Assimilation Hypothesis would propose that over time whites and minorities will engage in similar riding habits.

Determining whether the Subcultural or Assimilation Hypothesis better explain minority participation is tricky because the rest of the hypotheses work with either of those while seemingly opposing each other. If the Subcultural Hypothesis holds a stronger pull, then minorities will point to geographical access, cost of the hobby, and real or perceived discrimination as reasons to continue to avoid parks. While if the Assimilation Hypothesis is correct, we might expect to see minority groups slowly start to budget and plan for new recreation experiences. Currently it appears that the Subcultural path is dominant, but perhaps the Assimilation will increase as other socioeconomic factors are slowly evened in this post-Civil Rights Era.

Chapter 3: Recreation According to Cultural Trends

A sixth hypothesis that has arisen to account for a lack of minorities in the wilderness is the Subculture/Ethnicity Hypothesis. It proposes that minority groups choose to spend their leisure time differently based on various cultural traditions. Consider how someone from a collectivist culture might opt for family or large group-oriented recreation while someone from an individualist culture might prefer to hike alone or with a small group of friends. However, even within groups, experiences can vary. Mexican-Americans in Denver have access to a myriad of forested and un-forested mountain trails, grassland trails, and even a few lake options. In comparison, Mexican-Americans in Omaha, Nebraska have many more temperate lake options, but far less wilderness trails in the grasslands or forest patches. While no minority group or ethnic group is homogenous, cultural traits and values persist that can help distinguish between groups.

Despite the intra-group differences and complications in collecting and classifying data, some notable recreation trends exist. In their leisure time, people are free to break away from the dominant culture in America and when free from this daily conformity, researchers believe individuals are likely to make ethnically influenced choices in activities that set one subgroup apart from another (Floyd & Gramann 1993; Kelly 1987). Part of these ethnic differences may be due to the fact that people understand leisure concepts differently based on the groups that they

were raised in (varies by culture, race, ethnicity, gender), and these definitions can change over time (Weber & Sultana 2013; Vale 2005; Tuan 1977; Nash 1967).

Americans today have an unbelievable amount of choices in regard to their free time. About 81% of Americans live in urban or sub-urban areas (Kolko 2015); areas full of restaurants, sporting events, clubs, movie theaters and all sorts of other venues in which people can socialize and spend their time. This chapter will examine the differing trends in recreation based on race. I argue that minority groups seek different experiences out of their park visits because of learned cultural norms.

Data from 1989 show a host of different activities available to urban Americans and reported the percentage of a racial or ethnic group that attended. These data and other data like them demonstrate how different groups come to be associated with different activities. They also highlight how groups spend their free time if not in parks or in addition to parks. They help to identify what might be of interest in attracting a person's attention in a recreation offer. An example of such data: 24.9% of Hispanics surveyed attended a Major League Baseball game in that year compared to 18.4% of whites and 9.7% of African-Americans (Nadkarni & O'Leary 1992). Hispanics and the "Other" category led in most of the chosen activities which covered professional sports, live performances, casinos, and other exhibits. African-Americans were the least involved of the surveyed groups (Dwyer 1994). As expected, whites had the highest rate of participation among the groups in visiting national or state parks. Unfortunately, more recent similar data are not readily available.

The Outdoor Foundation conducts yearly studies on outdoor participation and activities. The criteria for being an outdoor participant are that a person must have done one outdoor recreational activity over the course of the entire year. According to their qualifications, an outdoor recreational activity can be as simple as taking a walk through the neighborhood to as complex as taking a rafting trip through the Grand Canyon for a week. If a person took a walk around Sloan's Lake Park in Denver just once in a year, that qualifies them as an outdoor participant. Despite the low bar, 48.8% (144.4 million) Americans were considered outdoor participants. One clear point of the data is that whites are still overrepresented across all activities. On a national level, whites account for 73% of people who partake in outdoor activities. Although the people of color that do make up the remaining 27% go outside more frequently than whites. African-Americans (88 outings/year) and Hispanics (88 outings/year) averaged more outdoor recreation outings than whites (77 outings/year) and Asian-Americans (77 outings/year) (The Outdoor Foundation 2017). African-Americans and Hispanics make up 19% of the outdoor participants, so despite the higher frequency in visits, they are still dwarfed in number by the sheer volume of white participants. This gap may perpetrate the idea that the outdoors is just a part of white culture; an idea that will be discussed later.

The Outdoor Foundation's report compiled the most popular outdoor activities by participation rate and also broke those down by ethnic groups. Overall the most popular activities were: Running/Jogging (18% of Americans), Fishing (16%), Biking (15%), Hiking (14%), and Camping (14%). Whites participated in all

activities around the same rate, but their top categories were fishing, hiking and then running. Meanwhile running was the top category for African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans while biking was the second or third most popular choice, while fishing was fairly unpopular among minorities. Hiking was third for Hispanics and second for Asian-Americans, but fifth for African-Americans (just 4% participating) (The Outdoor Foundation 2017).

Here is where the data get tricky. The reported categories above are so broad that one activity (biking) can really mean a few different activities (mountain biking, road racing, leisure city path riding). Perhaps minority people are biking over Trail Ridge Road in RMNP or running up one of RMNP's forest trails but running and biking are both things that you can do in your neighborhood. It is much more logical that these activities remain popular in white and non-white communities because they can be done with minimal time or travel requirements. The report states that 64% of participants stayed within 10 miles of their home to participate in the outdoors (The Outdoor Foundation 2017), lending credibility to the idea that the majority of people stick to traditional routes and options available within the city or suburbs. This also related to the Geography Hypothesis and the idea that some parks are out of reach, but parks will be used if they are close and offer amenities of interest like biking or running trails. This is relevant to Denver's sizable Hispanic population (22.7%). The study indicates that 48% of Hispanics are outdoor participants yet make up 2% of visitors to RMNP (Blotkamp et al. 2011). Thus, Denver's Hispanic population, like other minority groups, recreate elsewhere, likely closer to Denver.

The categories compiled by the report are fairly limited and fail to capture the whole scope of what activities are out there. Many studies have identified trends among different races: white people hike in the wilderness, African-Americans favor team sports, Asian-Americans like to play golf, and Hispanics prefer to listen to music and picnic (Byrne & Wolch 2009; Gobster 2002; Lee & Scott 2016; Martin 2004; Stodolska, Shinew, & Li 2010). While these findings have been identified in multiple surveys and observations, these data have pigeon-holed these communities.

Such overgeneralizations can misrepresent interest and lead to faulty decision making by park officials. For example, say RMNP would like to draw more African-American visitors, but park officials associate African-Americans with team sports. Official may determine that adding athletic fields is outside the scope of the park and simply conclude that African-Americans will not be interested in the park without those features. And if officials did decide to add the fields, African-Americans may still not come because of other concerns, confusions, or fear. The park money may have been better spent on outreach and educational programs that make the targeted group more familiar and comfortable with the park and its offerings. Surface level understanding of the trends ignore larger systemic reasons as to why minorities choose not to visit parks.

Chapter 4: Parks are not Part of Minority Culture

The Civil Rights Act in America that ensured legal equality for all races was passed just 55 years ago in 1964. Many people that lived through that period are still parents and grandparents and their experiences have been passed down through the generations. First-hand accounts from living relatives, the experience of a community, and a knowledge of how whites have treated non-whites in America in the past and present create what many scholars refer to as a collective memory in impacted populations (Finney 2014; Erickson et al. 2009). As with all memories, it shapes how we move forward and interact with our environment. This is particularly seen in the African American population because even though “most African Americans have never seen a lynching, the act of terror perpetrated on a black person in the woods is remembered both for the place where it happened and the act itself” (Finney 2014). While lynchings are no longer a legitimate threat for African Americans visiting the woods, these violent acts, which have existed for nearly as long as America has, told the community that the woods is a place that they should fear and stay away from. But there is far more to what keeps African Americans out of the outdoors than past lynchings, the gorgeous US Parks system have always been exclusive and African Americans and other minorities still receive an uneasy welcome.

In America, it is difficult to know how much of the difference in cultures can be attributed to discrimination. One hundred years passed between President

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil Rights. During this century, minorities were considered "second-class citizens" and alternate travel and park visitation habits because they were not allowed to participate alongside whites. Literature discussing the African-American experience found that there were some parks, like the aforementioned Red Rocks Park outside of Denver, Caves of the Wind near Colorado Springs, and Lincoln Hills in the front range, where African-Americans did feel safe. But locations like this were scarce. The Negro Motorist Green Book was a yearly publication from 1936 to 1966 that compiled a list of all of the places where it was friendly for blacks to travel to. For African-Americans interested in locations for safe outdoor based recreation activities in 1936, the list included "one skating rink, three trailer parks, one resort, two bathhouses, one dude ranch, five cabin-rentals, one park, one recreation club, and one place to fish and boat that were available to African-Americans across the nation" (Erickson et al. 2009; Negro Motorist Green Book 1936). So, when African-Americans did travel for recreation, they tended to stay with friends and family where they knew they would be welcome (Erickson et al. 2009). In one survey of twelve African-Americans born between 1952 and 1991, eight of them did not consider traveling to visit relatives as a vacation. Traveling to have the opportunity to spend time with family was a higher priority than traveling for the sake of visiting new places (Tucker & Deale 2018).

These trends continue today. Erickson and colleagues (2009) sought to better understand the relationship between Denver's African-American community and Rocky Mountain National Park. They interviewed 19 men and 17 women between the ages of 13 and 65, half of which were between 41 and 55. As far as income, 22%

of the individuals earned over \$80,000 annually; 30.5% made between \$50,000 and \$79,000; and 22% made between \$10,000 and \$49,000. They found that a reason they did not go to RMNP was because their parents or their grandparents did not take them when they were younger. They were not in the habit of going to National Parks and that did not change as they became free to make their own leisure choices. The African-Americans she interviewed that had visited RMNP did so because they were brought there by church groups or the Boy Scouts. In this sample, those who visited had extremely positive experiences and are likely to visit again. This would indicate differing levels of assimilation with outdoorsy culture and while these people may or may not have the resources for frequent outdoor outings, it does indicate a willingness to budget for such outings.

Others who have not visited cited reasons that often fall into the well-known hypotheses seen in Chapter 2: Proximity is not the Only Measure of Accessibility. Chiefly they either lacked the time or resources to visit RMNP (tied to income inequality) or the history of racism kept them out of the park then and now (why they do not take their children to RMNP). A reason not common in the scholarly literature is the perception of certain words regarding parks. When one pastor offered to take a party from the congregation to visit RMNP, he was met with little enthusiasm. He explained that for African-American and Hispanic people RMNP was out in the “country” and to many in those groups associate the word “country” is associated with farmland, slavery, and low-income labor in harsh conditions. Despite the actual physical landscape of RMNP not resembling agricultural fields, the connotation is the same (Erickson et al. 2009). This is consistent with Finney’s (2014)

point about collective memory: while a member of a minority group might have no experience with the woods, they grew up to understand that it is dangerous to go there. And while the threat of violence is largely unfounded now, especially in Colorado, racism still manifests itself in long looks and silent judgements.

One of Erickson and colleagues' (2009) more interesting findings is that members of Denver's African-American community may deem people visiting RMNP as participating in "white culture" rather than "black culture." According to many in the study, going to RMNP is not a "black thing" to do. In researching the Subcultural/Ethnicity Hypothesis, the idea of members of a group pressuring other members to recreate like the rest has not come up.

This chapter has discussed why parks have only been a "white thing" since their inception and Erickson and colleagues' research touches on why that has not changed overnight. But there is no new evidence of changing trends. And as long as African-Americans and other minorities do not see people like themselves in the outdoors, they will not change their mind.

Chapter 5: The Media & Companies that Reach People of Color

My goal is to see how to encourage a cultural change in minority communities without dictating the direction of the change. This begins with an awareness of the underrepresentation and then to demonstrate that park spaces do not just have to be a part of white culture. In this chapter I illustrate how the media is failing to connect minorities and the outdoors. Then I share my own study to understand how RMNP tour companies are, or are not, utilizing media in their approach when seeking to draw a more diverse clientele.

Those not already going to parks may need to be drawn in by a recommendation/invitation or some sort of appealing advertisement. However, an overwhelming majority of outdoor recreation-based ads feature white people. In a stratified sample of pictures in *Outdoor Magazine* between 1991 and 2001, a study found that 4,602 pictures contained people but just 103 of those photos (2.2%) were African-Americans (Finney 2014). The author notes that of the photos that included black people, many were prominent athletes in an urban setting. Martin (2004) found similar results in which African-Americans constituted 1.3% and 0% of models in “the Great Outdoors” in *Outside* and *Time* magazine, respectively. Even *Ebony*, a magazine produced for African-American news, entertainment, and culture, only showed African-Americans in “the Great Outdoors” in 67.9% of outdoor photos. The media is perpetrating the idea that the outdoors are not a part of black culture, reinforcing the Subcultural Hypothesis.

In celebration of the National Park Service's Centennial Year in 2016, MacGillivray Freeman partnered with the National Park Service, REI, Subaru, Expedia, and Brand USA to produce a short documentary, *National Park Adventure*. It follows three white people as they travel all over the country climbing in various National Parks. The film was criticized for its lack of diversity (Nelson 2016). By my own count, white people comprise 81.6% (102/125) of the people that are shown in the film. The film makes note of a few sites that were revered by Native Americans, yet it fails to show a single Native American on screen. African- and Asian-Americans are each about 9% of those shown in the film. While the film does an excellent job of displaying the natural diversity of parks, it does little to highlight the racial diversity in parks.

It appears that a cycle has formed in which ad makers see mostly white people in parks and so they make their ads to reflect this. Minority populations see that only white people are in the ads and thus they continue to feel that it is not a place where their group goes, and it remains "white culture." Ad makers see that demographics have not changed and continue to make the same ads. Brian Winckler, an African-American who completed the Appalachian Trail, observed, "If you see a commercial for anything outdoor related, it's always a white person on it. I think if people saw someone who looked like [themselves] they would be interested. It's not advertised, so people think, That's not for me" (Haile 2017).

Survey of RNMP Tour Companies that Operate out of Estes Park

It is difficult to know who plays a bigger role in regard to the lack of minorities in parks. Have Denver minority groups written off Rocky Mountain National Park as a place of fun and relaxation or is the RMNP community not doing enough to reach out to those minority groups? To begin to answer this question, I wanted to know what the RMNP community knows about the diversity gap. Does the community recognize the gap? Are they working to address that gap? What methods are they using to do so? And are these methods informed or in line with any of theories discussed above.

I reached out to companies that led tours/excursion out of Estes Park, the western and main entrance to RMNP, to see if they were aware of minority under-participation and if they were taking any steps to fight against it. While partaking in a guided excursion adds to the cost of the trip, I thought that minority groups may be more interested in visiting with a guide that is familiar with the park. A tour company can help people identify what you need to bring into the park and a knowledgeable guide can increase the feelings of safety and confidence in a challenging and or new experience (Ewert 1989). Twenty-eight tour companies were identified online using TripAdvisor, the RMNP website, and the Estes Park Tourism website. I developed a brief online survey (Appendix C) and sent it to the companies. Sixteen companies (Appendix B) responded.

According to their websites, the companies that responded guide a wide variety of activities in RMNP including climbing, hiking, fishing, horseback riding, sightseeing trips, camping and backpacking trips and others. Twelve of the 16 companies noted that word of mouth was an important advertising method. Twelve

also pointed to TripAdvisor and/or local websites (Estes Park tourism and RMNP page) for attracting customers. The companies range in the number of guests from 30 to 16,000 with a median of 1,100.

Targeted Demographic

Most of the companies (75%) reported that did not have a target demographic, generally stating that they attract families, couples, and small groups. The exceptions were two climbing companies that were seeking men 25-40 with disposable income and a sightseeing company that hosts many wedding parties. While not necessarily the targeted demographic, one company did specify that most of its customers are Caucasian or mix-race families, where the parents are 35 - 45 years old, with 2.5 children on average, post-graduate education, and a household income \$150K+. All of these companies surveyed said that the overwhelming majority (>75%) of their visitors are white.

Demonstrating Diversity in Work and Advertising

Of these companies, 11 of the 16 (69%) said that they were attempting to diversify their clientele. Five of those companies failed to specify any new tactics to draw in a more diverse group. They simply stated that they were running “online promotions” or doing “nothing new, just using the same internet-based ads, but they are general for Google users overall.” For the 12 companies that praise word of mouth as good advertising, eight of them are trying to diversify. Naturally companies cannot control the content of “word of mouth” advertising, so it is not an avenue to promote their racial diversity. Furthermore, if word of mouth is so important, it

would appear that past white visitors are inviting more white visitors continuing the cycle that parks are part of white culture. Two companies said that another race or ethnicity comprises of more than 25% percent of clients (Latinx & Asian-American). Another two are the only companies in the survey that offer trips in Spanish; there is also one company that offers ASL guided trips. Understandably, these companies that are not utilizing new methods do not have a diverse range of subjects to photograph and place in their advertisements. However, that has not stopped other companies. The other six companies that are trying to diversify their clientele appear to realize that visibility and relevancy are key aspects in attracting minority populations. Four of the companies are working with organizations that do outreach to minority communities, three are working on hiring more diverse staff members and guides, and two are adding more diversity to their advertisements.

Big City Mountaineers (BCM), headquartered in Denver, was one of the organizations listed that does outreach work. BCM relies on donations and volunteers to finance backcountry trips and mentoring to at-risk youth in a handful of major metropolitan areas. They seek to instill values of youth, nature, community, collaboration, and accountability into the kids. Remember Erickson's (et al. 2009) study where the Denver African-Americans that used parks were those that were introduced to the wilderness at a young age? Many in Erickson's study said that it is not a priority to spend money adventuring outside. With BCM's free trips, it plants the seeds for the young people that these spaces do have value and might be worth their time. But without this experience, they may have never known it.

Environmental Learning for Kids, or ELK, is a similar program that operates solely in the Denver area. They strive to get underserved, urban youth excited about (environmental) science with intensive, year-round classes. They also value putting these kids outside and offer a variety of free day trip activities throughout the year, like snowboarding at Vail or snowshoeing in RMNP. They also host longer multiday camping trips and family trips.

There are a host of other organizations in Colorado and across the country that seek to change perceptions about who participates in the outdoors. Outdoor Afro, Latino Outdoors, Brown Girls Climb, National Brotherhood of Skiers, Melanin Base Camp, Outdoor Outreach, Diversify Outdoors, or the Camp Moreno Project are a few examples. Many of these target adults of color who are curious about exploring the wilderness but are unsure how to get involved. Outdoor Afro and Latino Outdoors offer a more active approach where they offer a nationwide network of local leaders of color that organize trips for various skill levels. Melanin Base Camp and Diversify Outdoors are present online trying to spread the word through social media that minorities are present in these spaces and are involved.

Follow Through

The sixteen companies that I surveyed work every day in RMNP and thus are expected to be familiar with the type of people that visit the park. Part of my survey asked the companies if they believed that minority groups are well represented in RMNP. They were asked to rank their belief on a scale from 1 to 7. A 1 expressed that the company felt that minority groups were very poorly represented, a 7

indicated that minorities were represented well, and in-between a 4 indicated that they believe that minorities are in the park in proportion to the general population. Five of the companies who claimed to be doing the most work in hiring diverse staff and collaborating with programs like BCM believed that minority groups are underrepresented in RMNP (2.8 average). As a whole, the 16 companies believe that minority representation in the park is proportional to the general population (4.25 average). Perhaps perceptions of race in the general population are skewed near Estes Park due to the white population there.

Interestingly those companies that considered minorities to be well represented and were doing less work to diversify also had among the higher number of visitors in the survey. When I asked these groups about non-whites in their client base, asking if any ethnicity exceeded 25% of their clientele was realistically too high of a bar. One company noted that they have clients of varying ethnicities, but none to the level of 25%. In that regard my survey failed to identify small margins in minority participation. With higher annual visitor totals, it is likely that there was some diversity, but the indicating that minorities are well represented higher than proportionally to the general population still with over 75% white visitors does not add up.

While there is apparently some work being done on the discrepancy, among the RMNP tour companies there is a wide range of knowledge and concern. With such a large potential white consumer base, there is no inherent need to diversify to keep up business. It is also impossible for me to assess the level of effort that companies are putting into their diversity outreach. Ideally another study could look

at a larger sample of RMNP-based companies and evaluate their commitment to diversity. I would also be intrigued to examine this issue from the eyes of Denver's minority community. According to Erickson's study (2009), Denver's African-American community was hesitant to go to RMNP even in a group of their peers. What methods of outreach are the most appealing to them? Will the Denver minority community respond to more diverse web ads? The process of getting advertisements and outreach to appeal to minorities will require constant feedback from between companies and participating-minorities to see what will appeal to non-participating minorities.

mind.

Conclusion

My top choice for pursuing my undergraduate degree was Boston College. I sometimes wonder how different my life would be if I had chosen to move east towards the major cities. The Rocky Mountains have proved to be an incredible refuge to me during my time at Regis. However, they are not a sanctuary for all. Parks in America have evolved alongside racial tensions; this past discrimination has left a lasting impact which all too often keeps people of color out of parks. The process for rectifying the situation is muddied by all of the different and valid hypotheses discussed throughout this thesis.

These hypotheses absolutely work in conjunction with each other to contribute to the divide we see today. At a very basic level, people can spend only so much on recreational pursuits. While RMNP is near Denver, free or cheaper park options that are closer may be more enticing to attracting minority visitors. Thus, the limits of this thesis are that I cannot say whether Colorado's wealth of other outdoor opportunities are attracting greater minority participation. Even if money and distance are not an issue, people of color that are new to the park community and are on the fence about coming to the park may opt to stay closer to home if they are not sure what to do in the park or are worried about their safety. My own experiences have shown me that the RMNP staff and visitors are friendly and helpful people, how can this sense of welcome be communicated to people that have yet to visit? Lastly, we cannot forget the history of discrimination that led groups to make

different decisions about how to spend their time. RMNP is a place that ought to be enjoyed by all peoples. It's important that minority groups know that this space is for them too, it can be a common ground that we're all proud of.

At various points in the thesis I discussed possible additions to Rocky Mountain National Park which may make it more attractive to minority groups: larger picnic areas, an Arapahoe and/or Ute Nation historical exhibit. Under federal jurisdiction, RMNP must work to accommodate guests of all creeds and color. RMNP's chief job is to preserve unimpaired natural resources and ecosystems in its boundaries. While not a perfect system, the way all National Parks that I have been to are run in a manner that works and is suitable for millions of Americans. As I write this thesis, I want non-visitors to experience the RMNP as we know it today with its focus on scenery, trails, and wildlife. Ideally this diversity gap can be fixed simply by exposing people to the wonder that this park can offer. If outside forces cannot influence the gap raises an important question of change. Does RMNP have an obligation to change to serve minority groups better if that meant changing makes it special? I do not believe the two are mutually exclusive. However, I cannot help but feel that RMNP and its excursion companies are taking a tolerant, but not accepting approach. Both give lip service, but their actions have not provided many grand successes.

To be fair to RMNP and its associate companies it appears that the best way for them to help this cause is to offer a helping hand when minority groups do show up. If cultural habits are so tightly held onto (Lee & Scott 2016; Erickson et al. 2009; Floyd 1999), then perhaps the best people to change the minds of minority groups

are their peers who are outdoorsy and organizations like Latino Outdoors where entry level activities are led by someone that looks like them.

An adoration for the scenery in National Parks is what inspired me to write this thesis, but scenery is not the only thing the Parks can offer to people. As a photographer, it is easy for me to leave RMNP and other National Parks with plenty of photos capturing the landscape. I cannot physically or digitally bring back feelings of relaxation and inspiration, but these are real and valid benefits of park visitation. Western literature has found that parks promote health and exercise, improve mental health, provide social support, and reduce stress among other benefits in both whites and non-whites (Ho et al. 2005; Tinsley, Tinsley, & Croskeys 2002). Based on a century's worth of support and increasing visitation rates, we know National parks have clearly been deemed beneficial and valuable to white America as a source of rest and relaxation. If we can do anything to share these benefits with minority groups, we absolutely should. The outdoors are not for everyone, but everyone should feel like they have the opportunity to try the experience.

Furthermore, National Parks rely on federal funding to operate. Without broad public support, the parks may not receive the same level of funding and thus have trouble maintaining the land. As the US becomes more and more diverse it is essential that those who currently enjoy National Parks communicate parks' value and welcome new diverse faces into parks so that public support remains high.

Lastly, as I previously discussed, there is a legal responsibility to welcome and serve people of color in National Parks. The fact that the National Parks Service and major environmental organizations do the bare minimum or awkwardly avoid

addressing the diversity gap (Finney 2014) is inexcusable. Hiring people of color in outdoor organizations and listening to other outside voices will help to bring up concerns more naturally and will hopefully help us to better formulate solutions going forward.

Appendix A – Summary of Hypotheses

Assimilation: The belief that as minority groups spend more time in America, they will conform more and more to the dominant (white) culture. As it relates to this thesis: it posits that minorities will eventually adopt.

Discrimination: Past and present discrimination, real or perceived, against people of color in the wilderness, parks, and all facets of life cause them to feel anxious and apprehensive about visiting parks.

Elitism: This idea argues that from an outsider's perspective, the outdoor community is exclusionary. As a result, it can be difficult for an outsider to break into the community because they are unfamiliar with how to make use of parks and what all is needed to enjoy park spaces.

Geography: The theory that that whites use parks more because they have greater accessibility (i.e.: live closer) to parks than minority groups.

Marginality: The theory that certain groups are limited from participating in outdoor recreation because they lack the monetary funds to do so.

Subcultural/Ethnicity: The idea that different groups have different ideas about how to spend their leisure time. Going to National Parks is supposedly just a part of white culture, it is not something that people of color do.

Appendix B – List of Companies Surveyed

The Mountain Guides Colorado

YMCA of the Rockies

Rocky Mountain Conservancy - Field Institute

Sasquatch Fly Fishing

Colorado Mountain School

American Alpine Institute

AVA Rafting & Zipline

Kent Mountain Adventure Center

New Venture Cycling

SK Horses, Ltd. and/or National Park Gateway Stables or Cowpoke Corner Corral

Tour Estes Park

Kirks Flyshop

Estes Park Trolleys

3 Did Not Identify

Appendix C – Questionnaire

1. What is the name of your company?
2. What are the most effective types of advertisements your company uses to attract people to your excursions in Rocky Mountain National Park? (Select the top two)
 - a. Newspaper ads
 - b. Magazine ads
 - c. Radio ads
 - d. Television ads
 - e. Billboard/Buses/Outdoor Signs
 - f. Mail, leaflets
 - g. Online ads
 - h. TripAdvisor
 - i. Word of mouth
 - j. Local Websites (Rocky Mountain National Park website, Estes Park tourism website, etc.)
 - k. Other (please specify)
3. Approximately how many customers do you serve in Rocky Mountain National Park in a calendar year?
4. Does your company have a targeted demographic for these RMNP excursions?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Could you briefly describe the demographic profile (age, race, families/individuals/small groups etc.) of your targeted demographic?
6. What types of groups sign up for most for your excursions?
 - a. Individuals (1 person)
 - b. Small Groups (2-4 people)
 - c. Large Groups (5+ people)
7. Do you tend to lead large excursions with multiple groups, or do you tend to lead smaller, private excursions with one group?
 - a. Large excursions, multiple groups
 - b. Small excursions, one group
8. What is the dominant ethnicity/race represented on your excursions?
 - a. White, non-Hispanic

- b. Hispanic/Latinx
 - c. African-American/Black
 - d. Asian-American/Pacific Islander
 - e. Native-American/American Indian
9. Please indicate if any other group exceeds 25% of your clientele, or select none of the above.
- a. White, non-Hispanic
 - b. Hispanic/Latinx
 - c. African-American/Black
 - d. Asian-American/Pacific Islander
 - e. Native-American/American Indian
 - f. Other
10. Do the people on your excursions reflect the type of people you advertise to? If not, how do they differ?
11. Do you offer excursions to Rocky Mountain National Park in any language other than English? (Select all that Apply)
- a. Excursions only offered in English
 - b. Spanish
 - c. French
 - d. German
 - e. Chinese
 - f. Italian
 - g. Portuguese
 - h. Other (please specify)
12. Does your company agree or disagree with the following statement? Ethnic and racial minorities are represented in Rocky Mountain National Park.
- a. (7) Strongly Agree (Minority populations are very well represented)
 - b. (6) Agree
 - c. (5) Slightly Agree
 - d. (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree (Minorities are represented about proportionally to their numbers in the general population)
 - e. (3) Slightly Disagree
 - f. (2) Disagree
 - g. (1) Strongly Disagree (Minorities are very poorly represented)
13. Is your organization attempting to draw a more ethnically diverse clientele?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

If you are trying to diversify, what (new) methods are you using to reach a new demographic?

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