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America's Best Idea: Settler Colonialism and Recognition In The United States National Park Service Website

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AMERICA'S BEST IDEA: SETTLER COLONIALISM AND RECOGNITION IN THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL PARK SERVICE WEBSITE

by

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Introduction

"National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst." This quote from author Wallace Stegner is prominently featured on the National Park Service web page *Learn & Explore*. The idea that national parks represent the best of America is often reflected in rhetoric by newspaper sources and other various governmental groups and private organizations. The government funded television station PBS even made a 2009 documentary series called *National Parks: American's Best Ideas*.

Historically, the concept of separating out some "undeveloped" land for public enjoyment was created and popularized by European settlers in what is now the United States during the late 1800s, with Yellowstone being the first established national park. Today, the national parks system in the United States has expanded to over 400 parks. In a truly American way, the concept has even expanded globally, with there now being some 1200 national parks or similar preservation works in over 100 countries (National Park Service, Quick History of the National Park Service n.d.). From their historical creation to the present day, the existence of national parks has general approval with the American public (Brown 2021). Especially with greater and greater public concern over preservation and protection of the environment, there is support for the government creating and protecting spaces of "wilderness" from settler development. However, from an Indigenous perspective, everything about national parks and their creation is much more complicated. Arguably, national parks truly are absolutely American in how they reflect the goals of the settler state. Specifically, triumphalist narratives of national parks

erase the histories and presents of settler colonial violence and destruction against Indigenous populations with the goal of displacing them from their land.

I first began to realize how little the violence inherent to national parks was being addressed when I had to use the National Park Service (NPS) website for the first time for a college class project. Living in California my whole life, I had visited Yosemite a few times, but my family had never been particularly interested in visiting national parks, so I had little exposure to them. However, I am Indigenous, so I had always been very aware of the destructive nature of settler colonialism and the fact that the land in which I lived and that made up the United States had been stolen violently from Native tribes and communities. I first stumbled across the way the National Park Service addresses this violence when researching Mount Rushmore for a class project. I was horrified comparing the history of the monument that I had learned through research with the history the National Park Service described. Violence and dissent were easily dismissed or even entirely omitted.

These experiences are the motivation for this thesis. Through virtual ethnography that examines representations of U.S. National Parks on the internet, I compare and contrast the National Park Service website with newspaper interviews of Indigenous people and different tribal nation websites. I work to unpack and explain the differences that exist between these perspectives. I specifically focus on Yosemite and Glacier national parks and the way their histories are addressed. These two parks are specifically interesting examples due to their differing relationships with federal tribal recognition and how that impacts their relationship with the National Park Service. Yosemite offers a look into how the National Park Service both talks about and interacts with federally

unrecognized tribes while Glacier demonstrates how the National Park Service explains and interacts with a federally recognized tribal nation whose reservation land borders the national park. In attempting to reckon with its violent past, the National Park Service foregrounds on its website programs of cultural heritage preservation and environmental conservation as means to extend recognition to contemporary Indigenous nations and communities. However, a comparison between National Park Service self-representation and various Indigenous perspectives reveals ongoing processes of settler colonial erasure and dispossession. Specifically, I argue that this comparison demonstrates the failure of recognition politics and how it is impossible for the National Park Service as a government agency to "mutually recognize" Indigenous communities (Coulthard 2014).

Research Methods

The National Park Service has a very detailed website (National Park Service, National Park Service Homepage n.d.). The NPS has ensured that their website is well organized with content that is easy to digest. There are hundreds of subpages, containing information about each park as well as general topics related to national parks. Each national park has its own subsection with many web pages containing information about the park – such as how to access the park or a discussion of the park's creation. In addition to information about each specific national park, there are also many pages featuring related information, such as the history of the National Park Service or Native American and general park relations. Many of the web pages for the national parks include sections that touch on the park's history with the Indigenous people whose land was stolen to create the parks as well as the current relationship between the park and Indigenous people. As a government run site, it is written in service of government

narratives that perpetuate settlers right to the land. However, it does contain historical information and resources for interested users to consume. It is likely that the majority of the use of the site comes from those planning to visit or people looking for basic information about specific parks.

Settler Colonialism

One of the most important concepts of this thesis is settler colonialism. In order to properly unpack why the history of the National Park Service as presented on its online website differs from the experience of many Native communities, it is necessary to first unpack and understand what settler colonialism is. At its core, settler colonialism is a project of elimination. It is a process of replacement, where an invading population systematically attempts to remove an Indigenous people from their land with the goal of settling on that land. This is a process where, as Patrick Wolfe explains, the "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe 2006, 388). In other words, there is not one singular event that defines settler colonialism, but a continual process of dispossession and violence with the ultimate goal of the complete destruction of the Indigenous people in order for the invading population to claim complete ownership and control of the land they have stolen. At the very core of settler colonialism is the land. Land is what drives the settler colonial project. More directly – within the project there is an assumption that settlers have the right to access Indigenous lands and use them for whatever goals the settlers may have (Liboiron 2021). More specifically – land is at the very core of the National Parks project. The assumption that land is for settlers to access is what drives the very concept of taking Indigenous land and turning it into a national park. This assumption is what drives forward the tactics of elimination that

Wolfe describes. Each national park was created and is upheld through both overt violence towards Indigenous peoples as well as a host of settler cultural projects such as assimilation, historical erasure, and settler denial.

It is important to remember that Indigenous people have never passively reacted to settler colonialism and settler violence. Throughout this thesis, I work to weave in various experiences of Indigenous people and communities to show various ways Indigenous people resist and react to settler colonialism. This is often understood under the concept of Native Survivance, where "survivance is an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry" (Vizenor 2008, 11). The National Park Service often frames the discussion of their violent past through a lens of tragedy and reinforces domination by the state. It is important to understand that this framing is a part of the structure of settler colonialism and the narratives it works to uphold. These narratives seek the erasure of the present existence of Indigenous people and thereby deny the ability of anyone to challenge the settler state's claim to the land they have stolen. And yet Indigenous people continue to exist and resist. The experiences Indigenous people have faced and continue to face are important to highlight as they deepen historical understanding and demonstrate that settler colonialism is not a natural or inherent conclusion.

Recognition

A second important thematic concept is that of recognition. Recognition has a big effect on the existence and nature of a relationship between the National Park Service and each Indigenous community, tribe, or nation. In the context of settler colonialism in North America, the work of Glenn Coulthard offers a useful explanation of recognition

and its politics as well as an important look into their failings. Coulthard is a Yellowknives Dene scholar, and his work *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejection the Colonial Politics of Recognition* on the politics of recognition examines the failings of recognition in the context of Indigenous communities and the Canadian settler state. He draws on the work of Frantz Fanon and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to explain what recognition should be – a process of mutual acknowledgement between persons on equal footing with a goal of reciprocity. He calls this ideal 'mutual recognition' (Coulthard 2014). Coulthard then explains recognition politics as a political paradigm meant to expand the limited rights and recognition of Indigenous communities. It is often centered around cultural projection and expansion of tribal territory. Recognition politics gained global prevalence in the 1990s around the passing of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention by the International Labor Organization, a subset of the United Nations.

In reality, recognition politics take place in the context of domination and unbalanced systems of power between Indigenous communities, tribes and nations and the settler state. Coulthard builds on the work of Fanon and Hegel to explain that it is impossible for recognition politics to ever truly offer up mutual recognition. Through the very structure of colonial recognition, the interests of the settler state are weighed more heavily than those of Indigenous people (Coulthard 2014).There is a large difference in power between Indigenous communities and the settler state. The settler state has uncontested authority and therefore the power to decide who is even worthy of recognition as well as evaluate what they consider a legitimate Indigenous claim for recognition. This places Indigenous communities at the mercy of the settler state rather than allowing for self-determination, simply furthering the very forms of domination and

inequality recognition politics claim to mitigate (Coulthard 2014). The politics of recognition are therefore an insufficient means for Indigenous sovereignty and political power. However, this does not mean that recognition cannot provide protection from the violence of the settler state or be a useful tool for Indigenous communities. The situations at various national parks often demonstrate the ways in which recognition politics can both offer protection, opportunity and land access while ultimately failing Indigenous communities.

Within the United States, a major source of recognition comes from federal recognition. Federal recognition involves the United States government formally acknowledging the existence of a tribe as a distinct group. This often includes an acknowledgement of tribal rights to a section of land and the right to a certain degree of self-governance. This is important in the context of national parks because as a federal government agency the National Park Service is bound to any federal agreements made with tribes. While many of the tribes mentioned on the NPS website are federally recognized, some have been unable to receive this recognition. The settler government has a long list of requirements for tribes who are petitioning for federal recognition. In particular, requirements about who is considered a tribal member pose a significant barrier for many tribes given how the violence of settlers has decimated the Indigenous population. While the National Park Service has no requirement to acknowledge tribes that are not federally recognized, they often do work to collaborate or interact with local tribal communities. On their site, the National Park Service acknowledges that there are many tribes who lack federal recognition but whose land was stolen in the process of creating national parks. This acknowledgement comes in a few forms, some small, such

as describing current local tribes who had 'previously lived on the national parks,' as well as larger actions such as collaboration projects on park grounds or ongoing tribal tourism work. For example, the Indigenous tribes that live in Yosemite and the surrounding areas are not officially federally recognized but are recognized by the National Park Service as having ancestral claims to the land and as deserving access to the land in the present day. In the end however, as Coulthard explains, recognition always takes place on the settlers' terms and for the settlers' benefit. I argue that while the NPS may have good intentions in their pursuit of recognition for Indigenous communities, ultimately, they are constrained by the conditions of settler colonialism and will never be able to properly reckon with their past.

Summary

By examining closely how the National Park Service misrepresents their history and current relationships with Indigenous communities I work to demonstrate the depths of this misrepresentation and the impacts it has on various Indigenous communities and nations. In the first chapter, I explain how the history of national parks is founded on fundamentally opposed conceptions of land between Indigenous people and settlers and how this difference was used as justification for settler violence. In chapter two I explore the ways in which the National Park Service uses cultural collaboration to further tourist experience at the expense of respecting and properly representing local Indigenous communities. Finally, in chapter three I explore how projects of ecological conservation by the National Park Service further misrepresentation through the way they operate as unequal collaborative projects and how different conceptions and relations to land create

differing goals between the National Park Service and Indigenous communities that leads to very different types of conservation efforts.

Chapter 1: National Parks as a Settler Colonial Project

The history of national parks is a key part of the history of settler colonialism within the United States. To imply differently ignores the role of the National Park Service as a government entity and the ways individual settlers and colonizers used national parks to continually destroy Indigenous people and their lands. This chapter seeks to further contextualize the National Park Service and the creation of national parks that predates it within the broader framework of settler colonialism. In order to analyze the narratives of the National Park Service about its actions past and present, it is necessary to first understand what its history is. For those in the settler United States, this history is often presented through the distorted lens of eurocentrism, emphasizing European ideals and beliefs as objective reality instead of the constructions they are. It is my goal for this chapter to unpack this and provide understanding of different Native beliefs that provide the balance and context to understand the history of national parks.

What Is Land

The differing conception of the relationship between man and nature is central to understanding the inherent violence in the existence of national parks. As Patrick Wolfe notes, "Land is life–or, at least, land is necessary for life." (Wolfe 2006, 387). For both the Indigenous people and settlers during the period of the founding of the first national parks, land was intensely important for survival. However, the "use" of land between these groups were fundamentally different, as was their conception of land itself.

In terms of land usage, settlers imposed European models of agriculture onto the land they had stolen, often clearing large patches of land of trees and other vegetation in order to grow food in rows (Anderson 2005). However, more important to the creation of

national parks is the way European conceptions of nature influenced the design of the parks and the way Native people were treated during their creation.

There are two colonial conceptions that settlers imposed onto the land they had stolen. The first was based on European models of agriculture that dictated that land was property and needed to be made agriculturally productive. The second, and arguably more important to the creation of national parks, was the belief that land not being used for agriculture was "pristine nature" and required government protection. Understanding the development of this second colonial conception in the United States is necessary to understanding the reasoning behind the creation of national parks. Within this colonial concept, nature and man are two distinct entities. Nature reflects the purity of the colonial God's creation and must be protected from the evils of man. Man unchecked will damage or destroy nature, and thus the government must step in and section off the best of nature to remain untouched and protected. Any land that is not sectioned aside as protected "nature" is to be developed for agriculture (Anderson 2005). This understanding developed into the current understanding of public and private property. Today, land is sectioned away by the government for public use (such as national parks) and any land that is not owned by the government can be owned by private citizens. Proper uses for this land are to live on it, cultivate it, and develop it for industry (Cronon 1983). In this way, land has become a commodity – either a privately-owned commodity or available for public – but controlled – consumption.

There is no one universal Native perspective on land. However, there is a stark contrast between the European colonial understanding of land and Native perspectives – mainly in that Native people center reciprocity in their relationship to land. Potawatomi

scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer explains this distinction beautifully writing that "in the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us" (Kimmerer 2013, 17). Indigenous communities understood a much wider range of possibilities for relationality to land. A useful framework for understanding this different relationality to land is Kim TallBear's description of "caretaking relations." TallBear describes "caretaking relations" as a general alternative Indigenous people have, where they take care of the land and in return the land takes care of them. Whereas settlers view life through "toxic hierarchies" that place settler life on top, Indigenous people work to be in "good relation" with land and community (TallBear 2019). Further, there is an understanding of the animate nature of land. Land is not simply alive but "full of thought, desire, contemplation and will" (Watts 2013, 23). Within European colonization, land is a commodity to be dominated. As Kimmerer explained, for the settler, its uses are property, real estate, capital, or a natural resource to extract. For Indigenous people, however, their relationship to land is important and is central to personal identity. Patrick Wolfe articulates how "as far as Indigenous people are concerned, where they are *is* who they are, and not only by their own reckoning" (Wolfe 2006, 388). Further, "it belonged to itself… [it is] not a commodity" (Kimmerer 2013, 17). Through an understanding that land is animate, an intimate relationship with land then becomes a central part of personal and collective identity. There is a recognition of the ways in which human, animal and plant lives are interconnected (Anderson 2005). This is demonstrated in the ways Indigenous people cultivated and cared for the land long before European settlers

invaded. These Indigenous relationships to land are erased under settler views of land, which deeply affects Indigenous communities. Kim TallBear explains that:

> The issue is not only that material dispossession of land and "resources" builds the settler state but also that "dispossession" undercuts co-constitutive relations between beings. Property literally undercuts Indigenous kinship and attempts to replace it. It objectifies the land and water and other-than-human beings as potentially owned resources (TallBear 2019, 32).

It is not simply land ownership through the stealing of land that hurts Indigenous communities but also the imposition of new settler beliefs that objectify land as resources and attempt to destroy Indigenous relationships to land. These settler beliefs are the foundation for colonial conservation and are built into the very foundation of the concept of national parks. I briefly explore these differences in beliefs around land and therefore conservation in chapter three through the collaborations between Indigenous communities and the National Park Service on ecological conservation issues.

The Conception of National Parks

The differences between the initial concept and what national parks look like today are startling. National parks shifted from something that resembled a human zoo to sections of land set apart for viewing and preservation that make up the national parks today. Artist George Catlin was the first to vocalize the concept of a government run national park. In his 1841 book *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians,* he proposes the concept of a national park that would contain both Indigenous people and buffalos. These parks would be places where

the “Indian” could roam free and live off the land–though they would be confined within the barriers of the park. This first conceptualization was similar to a hybrid of a human zoo and a preserved natural landscape. Tourists (Settlers) would be able to view both man and beast in their “natural” habitat. As initial settlers moved west and reshaped the landscape for their European ideals of agriculture and industry, settler society became concerned that the nature and lifestyles of Indigenous people would be destroyed (Kantor 2007).

Catlin’s human zoo park dehumanizes Indigenous people as objects for settler consumption. However, it recognized a real relationship between nature and humans that later conservationists (settlers) soon dismissed. In his concept, the idea of nature was not complete without the Native, but it was separated and confined away from settler development. Catlin recognized the ways in which Native peoples have personal relationships and connections to land that defied the settler beliefs of how humans should interact with land. These relationships were in direct contrast with European settlement, agriculture, and industry.

Catlin believed it was therefore necessary to separate Indigenous lifestyles and environments from settlement/development, agriculture, and industry. Doing so allowed for the justification of the remaking (destruction) of Native peoples and lands to replace with settlement. This was the crux of Catlin’s concept. Importantly, this separation is central to the violence of settler colonialism and was accomplished by ignoring the complexity of Native lands and peoples in favor of a reductive understanding of land and nature.

Following Catlin and his human zoo park, the idea for what a national park would look like shifted to better fit settler needs. From 1840s to the 1860s settler expansion westward increased. Settlers began violently pushing into more and more Native land, often forcing Indigenous people to flee even further west to escape settler violence. Indigenous people were now seen as immediately in the way of development, representing a shift in the settler view of their place in the natural landscapes (Kantor 2007). Because land is at the center of the settler colonial enterprise, Indigenous peoples' removal is necessary for the settler to remake the land as their own (Wolfe 2006). Conservationists considered Indigenous people harmful to the environment, citing Indigenous activities such as fires and hunting to justify this. In a similar vein to the justification for initial colonization, nature became something that needed to be either protected from the Natives or developed by the settler (Kantor 2007).

National parks were now envisioned as places of preserved "pristine" nature that was "untouched by man" (Kantor 2007) (Spence 1996). Settlers were often willfully ignorant to the ways Indigenous people shaped and protected the land. For example, Indigenous ritual burnings of underbrush prevented wildfires, made hunting easier, and were a necessary cleansing for the plant and animal life (Spence 1996). Yet settlers saw these fires as unnecessary destruction, not bothering to learn the reasons for these practices. This new understanding of national parks as stretches of land to be preserved from the destructive practices of man was the founding concept that led to the official creation of federally managed national parks.

What is the National Park Service?

The creation of national parks predates the existence of the National Park Service. When Yellowstone was created as the first national park in 1871, the Secretary of Interior was placed in exclusive charge of park management. As more parks were created, other departments of the US federal government began to get involved in park management and park creation. Due to clashes with settlers and Indigenous people, the War Department began using military force to carve out park borders and to prevent Indigenous people from accessing the land. Additionally, the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture became involved in ensuring the forests were "protected" and "maintained" in response to settlers misinterpreting Indigenous ritual forest burnings as dangerous – not understanding the intensely important role these fires played in maintaining the health of the forests. These various agents of the federal government were not unified and resulted in disorganized park management practices. Therefore, on August 25, 1916 the president of the US federal government Woodrow Wilson signed an act that created the National Park Service, underneath the Department of Interior. At the time of its founding, there were only 35 existing national parks. Soon thereafter, national monuments and military sites managed by the Forest Service and War Department were transferred by executive order over to the National Park Service. This further cemented the National Park Service as the sole manager and protector of the US national parks. In its creation, the National Park Service inherited a legacy of violence towards those whose land was coveted for national parks. The land and Indigenous people who lived on each park each have their own specific history with the common theme of forced removal (Sonnenblume 2016). The Department of Interior, backed by the federal government, had

been terrorizing Indigenous people since Yellowstone's founding. The land on which the parks sit became places of consistent conflict between the government attempting to enforce settler rule and Indigenous people trying to access their ancestral lands that had been stolen from them (Spence 1996). This did not change with the founding of the National Park Service and in the following chapters I explore the ways in which this remains the case today.

The National Park Service Online

The National Park Service has a web page titled Origin of the National Park Idea (National Park Service, Origin of the National Park Idea n.d.). Here they explain that the "concept of national parks was one of the most popular ideas" ever created by the US government. They also credit artist George Catlin as likely the first to conceptualize the national park, explaining that he was drawn to such an idea after viewing the "vast landscapes, still untouched by development" of the American West. They quote him as writing that "Indian civilization, wildlife, and wilderness were all in danger [unless they could be preserved] by some great protecting policy of government...in a magnificent park.... a nation's Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild[ness] and freshness of their nature's beauty!" They then go on to explain how Yellowstone was set aside as the first national park after strong urging from conservationists who convinced congress to pass several different legislations allowing for the creation of Yellowstone and other such parks.

It is telling to see what the National Park Service chooses to include and exclude in their description. There is no mention of the ways in which beliefs about what the parks should look like shifted from Catlin's initial concept to their current structure.

Additionally, there is no critique of the idea of containing Indigenous people into a park in something that looks very much like a human zoo. Finally, they also do not explain that Catlin's initial idea is not the final conception that Yellowstone ended up being modeled after. Later writers and politicians evolved Catlin's idea, specifically removing Indigenous people from being included in the land and focusing more on protection of a "pristine nature." Further, the National Park Service does not mention Indigenous people at all in relation to the creation of national parks outside of a direct quote from Catlin. They specifically erase how Indigenous people lived on the lands that the parks now make up long before they were made into parks as well as how Indigenous people were forcibly removed by settlers from these lands in order to create the parks. This version of the past perfectly fits the settler narrative that Indigenous people had no relationship to the land – no agriculture, no development, no protection – and that it took settlers arriving for nature to be protected and preserved.

This contrast between the historical reality of the creation of national parks to the abridged version by the National Park Service demonstrates the depth of the settler disregard for the lived experiences of Indigenous people and an unwillingness to contend with the reality of settler colonialism. There is an erasure of the violence of removal as well as Indigenous relationships to land. As a federal government entity, the National Park Service represents the official positions and opinions of the settler United States government. Its websites, materials, and narratives are the websites, materials, and narratives of the federal government and the ways they change over time represent shifts in the beliefs, goals, and opinions of the federal government.

Those employed by the National Park Service are federal government employees and when acting within their job, are representatives of the settler state. This is not to say that Indigenous people have not had roles within the National Park Service or been paid for services by the National Park Service. Given the discrimination Indigenous people consistently faced, this one of the few available ways to make money. Additionally, these roles are often the only ways for Indigenous people to access their homeland. When formally employed by the National Park Service there is potential for the need to negotiate internally between the demands of the settler state required by the job and the inherent desire to have access to one's homeland. The history of Indigenous employment in national parks is complicated and is discussed further in the following chapters.

The NPS Story of Glacier National Park

Glacier National Park is the homeland of the Blackfeet tribe. As a federally recognized tribe, treaties between the tribe and the US government led to the creation of a reservation in Montana that included the mountainous Eastern half of what is now the national park. Suspecting mineral deposits in the mountains, the US government tried to negotiate with the Blackfeet tribe to purchase the land. The Blackfeet tribal leaders very much did not want to sell, but faced with the prospect of starvation that winter, they eventually did. However, importantly, they retained hunting and gathering rights on the land (Sonnenblume 2016). In the legislation that created Glacier National Park, these rights were never mentioned, and the park employees still refuse to recognize these rights (Kantor 2007). This conflict between the NPS and the Blackfeet tribe continues to this day (Wolfe 2006).

The description of the history of the tribes that lived on Glacier National Park provides a demonstration of how the NPS uses their descriptions of the past to disguise the existence of and their complacency in the ongoing structural violence of settler colonialism. The National Park Service has two webpages describing the "American Indians" who lived on the lands that became a part of Glacier National Park. One talks about each of the three individual tribes who make up the larger Blackfeet tribal group and explains how they each lived in the past before settlement (National Park Service, Glacier: American Indians n.d.). The second webpage explains the origins of the park and invites visitors to attend a lecture series by tribal members (National Park Service n.d.). The first webpage clearly places the traditional practices of the Blackfeet into the past, which given the NPS' continued denial of hunting and gathering rights is likely very intentional. On the second webpage, the NPS explains that:

> As resources were depleted, the tribes eventually signed treaties that would increasingly confine native people to reservations and leave them dependent on the U.S. government. Today, the 1.5-million acre Blackfeet Indian Reservation, which shares Glacier's eastern border, is home to about 8,600 members of the Blackfeet Nation, the largest tribe in Montana (National Park Service n.d.).

This description is carefully worded to downplay the coercion that took place to get the Blackfeet tribes to sign over their rights to the lands that became the eastern half of Glacier National Park in the very treaties that confined them to these reservations. Additionally, it fails to mention or defend their refusal to allow the Blackfeet to hunt and gather in the park despite the Blackfeet contesting that they have the legal rights to do so.

By denying hunting and gathering, the NPS denies the Blackfeet their traditional livelihood, forcing them into a settler concept of what life looks like. The National Park Service may 'recognize' that Glacier is the ancestral home of the Blackfeet, but they refuse to make that recognition meaningful by denying the Blackfeet the right to practice their traditional lifestyle. The limited collaboration between the Blackfeet nation and the National Park Service demonstrates a lack of meaningful recognition on the part of the NPS.

History of Yosemite

Yosemite is one of the most well-known national parks. It is located in central California in the Sierra Nevada mountains. The historical and current relationships between settlers and Indigenous people that have taken place within this park are an important example of the failures of recognition politics, the violence of settler colonialism, and the ways the National Park Service fails Indigenous people.

It is important to first provide some context about the naming of this national park. It is now known as Yosemite, which is a Miwok word – or more accurately a slur – meaning "those who kill" (Mayer 2020). The main Native community whose land was stolen to make the national park are the Ahwahnechee. They are a part of a larger cultural and linguistic group called the Southern Sierra Miwok. There are several other Miwok tribes in the surrounding area as well as another tribal group called the Mono-Paiutes that live on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada (Spence 1996). The Ahwahnechee named their land Ahwahnee, which translates as "big mouth," in reference to the way the peaks tower over the valley floor (Mayer 2020). The land was renamed by settler Lafeyette Bunnel, who was a member of a battalion that violently displaced the Ahwahneechee

from their land. He had learned of the word Yosemite from neighboring tribes, who referred to the Ahwahnechee as Yosemite. He summarized his findings of the land and justification for the name in his book *Discovery of the Yosemite and The Indian War of 1851*. In explaining the new name, he wrote "it would be better to give it an Indian name than to import a strange and inexpressive one; that the name of the tribe who had occupied it, would be more appropriate than any I had heard suggested that we give the valley the name of Yo-sem-i-ty, as it was suggestive, euphonious, and certainly American; that by so doing, the name of the tribe of Indians which we met leaving their homes in this valley, perhaps never to return, would be perpetuated" (Bunnell 1892).

The Ahwahneechee were allowed to live on their land longer than other Indigenous communities whose land was also stolen to create national parks. However, this does not mean that there was no displacement and violence in this history. The Ahwahneechee faced intense violence from settlers who invaded their land looking for gold and land (Spence 1996). The California Gold Rush led to an influx of settlers into the Sierra Nevada mountains in search of gold. The impact of this invasion into the region was the decimation of several Native communities that lived there. New diseases caused epidemics among the Native communities and the search for gold destroyed carefully tended ecosystems, which in term destroyed the ways of life of these communities. But most horrifically, these settlers committed mass murders, often with the blessing of the Californian and US federal governments. In 1851, the government started a military campaign to "subdue" and relocate the Indigenous people from their land. This violent campaign involved mass murder and the burning of all dwellings

(Spence 1996). This campaign and other similar acts of mass murder and displacement of Indigenous people is referred to by settlers as the Mariposa War.

Despite these attempts at relocation, the Native populations of the Sierra Nevada mountain region returned and consistently re-established their presence on their land. Their endurance and successful navigation of settler systems paved the way for collaboration with both park employees and settler miners. Many Indigenous people from these communities started to work for or with miners and then eventually with Yosemite park as park employees or as a part of the tourist industry that sprung up following the official creation of the national park. Especially within the valley itself, which was very isolated and where sources of labor were scarce, Indigenous people were critical to developing tourist industries.

Today, the Ahwahneechee community continues to remain actively involved in the national park and has a tribal presence in the area. However, the Ahwahneechee remain federally unrecognized, something the tribe continues to appeal and fight against. Both the historical and current collaborations between the Ahwahneechee and the National Park Service offer an important look into the failures of recognition and collaboration to dismantle oppressive settler systems.

Conclusion

Central to the project of national parks is the belief – founded on European understandings – that nature and man are separate entities and that to preserve nature one must separate it from the destruction of man. This ignored the deep relationship Indigenous people had with the land and the ways they cultivated the ecosystems in which they lived. European settlers did not understand that agriculture and development

could look different or be more subtle than what they experienced in Europe. Additionally, they often wrote off anything that did not fit the narrative that Indigenous people were underdeveloped. Understanding these assumptions and beliefs is necessary to fully understand the ways in which the National Park Service and the narratives it presents fit within the larger project of settler colonialism. The goal of the settler nation is the elimination of the Native and the complete redevelopment of Native land in the settler image. This process is ongoing and can be seen through the representation of history on the National Park Service website. This history provides context for the ways in which the government and the National Park Service continue to deny Indigenous people full access to their lands and life. Throughout the next two chapters I will further develop the specific ways in which this history continues to this day by comparing and contrasting Indigenous perspectives and the National Park website regarding different collaboration projects centered around cultural and ecological preservation in Yosemite and Glacier national parks.

Chapter 2: Cultural Collaboration and Recognition

The National Park Service has continually taken advantage of Indigenous people in the name of cultural preservation. However, it is important not to dismiss the agency of Indigenous collaborators and the ways they have worked an unequal system in order to regain access to their homeland. Looking at cultural collaboration projects demonstrates how the National Park Service furthers settler colonialism and fails to mutually recognize Indigenous communities. This occurs through their consistent tourist-centric framing as well as by erasing the unequal power dynamic inherent in these collaborative efforts. It is often difficult for Indigenous people to access their own cultural spaces or items due to the tourist-centric nature of the parks and the fact that the National Park Service can refuse to allow access for any reason.

Weaving and Cultural Collaboration

Indigenous communities in and around Yosemite often work with the NPS and private businesses to profit from tourism to the park. Basket weaving has remained one of the most popular ways since the park's founding. Native women were able to both make money off of tourists as well as gain esteem in their own community by weaving baskets. Better quality and more quantity of baskets showed off the wealth and status of these Native women, as well as providing lucrative ways for them to offer monetary support to the community and their families (Spence 1996). Basket weaving still remains a highlighted and highly esteemed art by the Indigenous communities in and around Yosemite. However, the National Park Service both historically and currently on their website focuses on tourism over meaningful cultural collaborative projects with the local Indigenous communities.

On their website, the National Park Service features a virtual exhibition of various historically well-known weavers as well as an explanation of a 2013 exhibit from their onsite museum that displayed various baskets from weavers of both the past and present. These baskets remain in Yosemite in their museum collection. The virtual exhibition includes a description of tourism and basket weaving that perfectly demonstrates how historically and through descriptions the National Park Service consistently emphasizes tourism over respecting Indigenous communities:

> Baskets have long been a trade commodity in the Yosemite region. The seven Traditionally Associated Tribes of Yosemite traded baskets with each other, and with many other Californian tribes as well. As tourism to Yosemite Valley increased in the mid- to late-19th century, so too did an appreciation for the artistry and skill of local weavers. By the mid 1890s, the sale of baskets and beadwork to tourists and collectors alike had become commonplace. Interest in Yosemite basketry continued to grow through the turn of the century…Tourism waned as World War 1 captured the world's attention. To draw visitors to the park, Yosemite established the Indian Field Days, a culturally insensitive rodeo, pageant, and fair that encouraged American Indian stereotypes, occurring annually from 1916 to 1926 and again in 1929. One of the main attractions of this fair was the basketry competition in which several Yosemite-area weavers were regular participants. In addition to competing, they also exhibited and sold baskets and demonstrated basket weaving (National Park Service, Yosemite National Park Basketry Exhibit: Tourism n.d.).

The NPS explains how they used "Indian Field Days" to attract tourists – who then were able to purchase baskets as well as see a basket weaving competition. By their own admission, these field days involved "culturally insensitive" displays that "encouraged American Indian stereotypes" (National Park Service, Yosemite National Park Basketry Exhibit: Tourism n.d.). However, they fail to make explicit that it was the National Park Service employees who forced local Indigenous people to participate in these field days in exchange for access to their ancestral lands and the potential of tourists purchasing their work. Worse though, park employees forced local Indigenous people to dress up in regalia of tribes from the Midwest that were completely foreign to the various cultures of Indigenous people of Yosemite and perform dances for the tourists' amusement (Spence 1996). Historically, it is very clear that the National Park Service motive was to satisfy tourists and draw more people to the park, and they were willing to force Indigenous people into uncomfortable and disrespectful situations in order to accomplish this. Their explanation of these events further disrespects Indigenous people because they do not accurately and completely address the true nature of the events in the past nor the need for accountability by the National Park Service and its employees.

Weaving in the Present

The tourist-centric nature of cultural collaboration projects continues to the present. One of the most well-known current weavers is Julia Parker. Julia Parker is a respected elder of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria and is mixed Coast Miwok and Kashaya Pomo. Her work is on display around the world as well as in the Yosemite museum. She continues to weave using plants from the park itself. She is also a park ranger and works as a Native American cultural demonstrator at the Yosemite Museum.

CNN quoted Yosemite National Park spokesman Scott Gediman as explaining that "Julia interprets Native American culture to our visitors...she shows visitors how baskets were woven; toys or brushes were made, and acorns collected. Julia is truly a national treasure...she's been honored by universities, she has baskets all over the country, she's consulted with museums" (Torigoe 2009). From the NPS perspective, Julia's work is interpretive, and the emphasis is placed on what the tourist gets from the experience. This is distinct from the way Julia herself discusses her work and demonstrates the way in which the National Park Service focuses on the tourist experience over respecting Indigenous creators and collaborators.

In a YouTube video titled "Julia and Lucy Parker in Yosemite National Park, California," Julia Parker explains her process of collecting plants and materials from the park, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between the earth and herself as the weaver. She explains that you can only take from the earth with permission and that "when you do take from the earth you take with a please and you give back to the earth with a thank you" (Autryvision 2010) As a weaver, she considers herself the tool and the plants the masters. The emotional and spiritual depth of the process of weaving is captured in her own words but is lost in the passive explanations of the National Park Service website. Additionally, Julia addresses the way her community has motivated and inspired her to learn to weave as well as to develop her own style. She explains in the video that as she "learned more and more about baskets, I wanted to be like all of the women who helped me" before realizing that she could embrace her own style and make her weaving a reflection of herself and what she likes (Autryvision 2010). Through weaving Julia Parker continues the traditions of her ancestors. She finds agency through expression of

herself and connection with her homeland both in the making of baskets but also through the way she has positioned herself through collaboration. By working as a park ranger and a cultural demonstrator and educator, she is both allowed access to her homeland and paid to educate and perform for tourists. Her work gives her agency, opportunity, and access in order to continue to practice traditional weaving and to be present on her homeland, something that the NPS and US federal government often work to deny.

It is important to note that Julia Parker's position is unique and something that is not accessible to all Indigenous people. However, her roles do demonstrate ways Indigenous people have collaborated with the NPS as park rangers or cultural interpreters to be paid to exist on their stolen homeland. These collaborative efforts create opportunities for access and agency for Indigenous people within a system that is deeply exploitative. The National Park Service historically has taken advantage of Indigenous communities for the benefit of tourists by leveraging the power they have to deny access to the parks (Spence 1996). In the present, over the past few decades, the National Park Service has increasingly begun to hire Native peoples to work as interpreters and to provide unique cultural interpretations of the parks to tourists – again demonstrating how their cultural collaborations are deeply tourist centric. Further, these interpreters are paid poorly and given very little opportunity to join key management roles or be involved in decision making (Poirer and Ostergren 2003). This exploitation demonstrates the system of settler colonialism will always have greater power than the Indigenous people whose land is being occupied. There may be opportunities for some Indigenous people to gain access and agency, but ultimately the power imbalance between the settler state and Indigenous people will always result in exploitation and the continuation of settlement.

Conclusion

While cultural collaboration projects with the National Park Service have offered access to land and agency to Indigenous communities, the tourist centric nature of these projects demonstrates how the National Park Service is not truly interested in respecting and properly representing Indigenous people. Through these projects, the National Park Service furthers the settler dynamic, where Indigenous people are not given respect and are blocked from accessing their lands. Further, any collaboration that happens occurs on the terms of the settler, in this case represented by the National Park Service. They downplay how they mistreated the Miwok people through "Indian field days" by forcing them to dress as "plains Indians." They center examples of weaving and basketry around tourist experience. They underpay Indigenous cultural representatives. They make it difficult for Indigenous people to access their own cultural spaces or items due to the tourist-centric nature of the park and they can refuse to allow access for any reason. Clearly, the relationship between the National Park Service and Indigenous communities is not one of respect and mutual recognition, but rather one of settler domination and control.

Chapter 3: Ecological Conservation and Control

Another important form of collaboration between Indigenous communities and the National Park Service is ecological conservation. Climate change has become a very direct threat to both Indigenous communities and the national parks. Two of the most glaring examples of this are Yosemite and Glacier national parks. Both of these parks and their surrounding Indigenous communities continue to face severe ecological threats. In Yosemite, wildfires have become increasingly more common and deadly. Glacier park faces similar threats from wildfires and global warming – which is causing the glaciers and ice in the park to melt – as well as potential threats from drilling, dumping and pollution. The ways in which these threats are handled by the National Park Service and Indigenous communities is very much shaped by recognition politics and further demonstrates the ways in which the National Park Service perpetuates systems of settler colonialism.

There are two specific ways in which the National Park Service maintains the conditions of settler colonialism through their ecological conservation efforts. The first is through the fact that their collaboration efforts are unequal. For true mutual recognition to occur, it must be on equal ground between equal parties, and this is very much not the case (Coulthard 2014). By looking at the various collaborative projects at Yosemite national park, it is clear that the National Park Service has failed to create mutual collaboration with Indigenous communities. It becomes clear in the comparison of the Blackfeet reservation practices with those of the NPS at Glacier that different conceptions of and relations to land lead to very different types of ecological projects – and that those of the National Park Service very much play into settler goals of land domination.

Unequal Collaboration at Yosemite

In general, the National Park Service uses ecological conservation as a way to include Indigenous communities or practices within park projects at any of the National Parks. Collaboration is not exclusive to Yosemite. However, Yosemite offers an important example where a national park (Yosemite) recognizes that local Indigenous tribes lived or were associated with the land and works with those tribes, even as the federal government does not recognize those tribes. In this example, the main source of recognition comes from the National Park Service, demonstrating how they are the ones with the power and control. The NPS is the one with the power; therefore, the park dictates the terms of how it would like to collaborate with the local Indigenous communities. Because the park dictates the terms, there is an inherent inability for mutual recognition as the Indigenous communities can only collaborate or be welcomed into the park on the terms of the National Park Service – there is no equal ground nor are they equal partners. While this seems clear in the broad sense, looking at examples of collaboration efforts demonstrates the subtle ways in which this holds true.

River Management

The National Park Service at Yosemite has several current collaborative ecological projects with local Indigenous communities. On their website, they have a list of many of the current ecological projects happening at the park (National Park Service, Yosemite: Park Planning n.d.). Of the seven current park projects listed, three of them specifically list collaboration efforts involving Indigenous communities – the *Merced River Plan*, the *Tuolumne River Plan*, and the *Parkwide Programmatic Agreement*.

The *Merced River Plan* is meant to protect the Merced River's "free flowing condition, water quality, and unique values" (National Park Service, Yosemite: Merced River Plan n.d.). The project is described as a "rich collaboration amongst the public, research scientists, park partners, traditionally associates American Indians, and park staff" (National Park Service, Yosemite: Merced River Plan n.d.). The *Tuolumne River Plan* is a similar protection effort as the *Merced River Plan*. One key difference however is that the National Park Service notes that it "consulted" with "members of the public, traditionally-associated American Indian tribes and groups, and other key stakeholder groups" in accordance with the statues of the National environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act (National Park Service, Yosemite: Tuolumne River Plan n.d.). The *Parkwide Programmatic Agreement* is an update of the Yosemite's consultation "requirements and procedures with the California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation (ACHP), Yosemite's traditionally associates American Indian tribes and groups, the public, and other interested parties." While the SHPO and ACHP are signatories to the agreement, the Indigenous tribes and groups were "invited to be concurring parties to this agreement" (National Park Service, Yosemite: Parkwide Programmatic Agreement n.d.).

There is a subtle but important wording choice that demonstrates how the National Park Service is participating in unequal collaborations with Indigenous communities. Specifically, the use of the words "invited" and "consulted" shows how the National Park Service is the one with the control. Any collaboration that occurs between Indigenous community members and the National Park Service is happening on the National Park Service's terms. This is in line with the reality of the situation, whereby

controlling the homeland of Indigenous communities, the National Park Service has power over these communities. This uneven power dynamic is inherent in the very system of settler colonialism. While the NPS may have good intentions in their collaboration efforts with Indigenous communities, the very nature of these collaborations is unequal – and this is made clear through the word choices used by the National Park Service.

Fire Management

The lack of official collaborative work around fire management exemplifies the unequal nature of collaboration. Of all of the current projects the NPS is working on in Yosemite, the *Fire Management Plan* is the most detailed and intensive. Wildfires are one of the more immediate and significant threats to the park, and the detailed fire management plan demonstrates how seriously the NPS takes this threat to Yosemite. None of the seven traditionally associated tribes of Yosemite are listed as contributing partners in the Yosemite *Fire Management Plan*. In the *Operation Fire Management Plan (2009)* there is mention of Indigenous communities as stakeholders and contributors of traditional knowledge around the practice of ritual burnings in order to prevent wildfires (National Park Service, Yosemite: Fire Management Plan n.d.). It is likely this means the potential exists for Indigenous communities to work with the government, park officials, and others to implement traditional fire management practices such as ritually burning away underbrush; however, the National Park Service does not list any plans or specifics for such potential contribution or collaboration. Additionally, there is no mention of the ways in which the local Indigenous community does continue to contribute to the practices of fire safety and fire management in Yosemite Valley. This

lack of collaboration further demonstrates the unequal nature of working with the National Park Service despite the fact that many local Indigenous community members try to find ways to get involved with the current fire management work.

There are many examples of Indigenous community members in Yosemite working to ensure they are involved in the protection plans for their homelands. Multiple tribes in the area have formed a council called the American Indian Council of Mariposa County. On their website, they have links to examples of their community members getting involved in various projects, including fire prevention and management (Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation n.d.). They list an article by SF Gate as a resource to understanding this involvement (Harrell 2020). The article explains how Alveta Coats, a 64-year-old Paiute woman and the daughter of Helen Coats (who was one of the last tribal members to live inside Yosemite National park) is working to save Yosemite's Mariposa Grove from wildfires. Coats leads a land management crew – made up of almost entirely Miwuk or Paiute workers – that works with the park to help to remove underbrush and do other fire prevention work. The SF Gate article explains that:

> She's doing it because she needs the money. But Mariposa Grove is also part of her ancestral homeland, and she wants to protect it. Coats' employment within the park is part of a long overdue reckoning over the inhumane treatment of Native Americans in Yosemite's history. She also sees it as an opportunity to fix some of the problems that have arisen since her people were driven out of the park (Harrell 2020).

Coats' goals are in line with what the founder of the program, Steve Wilenskey, hopes for. He explains that his organization is dedicated to "forest restoration and

stewardship and employing folks from Native American communities to do it...the same folks who were kicked out of the park are now going back and repairing some of the damage that was done since" (Harrell 2020). Through this program, Indigenous community members have made an intentional effort to push for involvement and change. It is clear that there is a desire for collaboration with the National Park Service around fire management. However, it is also clear that this is not reciprocated by the National Park Service. As reflected in the omissions on their website, they have not made an effort to work with these communities in an official capacity – despite listing the fact that there is potential for such collaboration. This again demonstrates how any collaborative work happens on the terms of the National Park Service. They are the ones who bring official joint work into fruition. Alveta Coats envisions collaboration – she wants to protect the park, but she also hopes to change the practices and policies of the NPS and to restore some traditional practices of her ancestors that may have prevented fire from reaching the park if the National Park Service and other governmental groups had not banned them. This is still in line with what the park recognizes in terms of Indigenous people being stakeholders and holding traditional knowledge around fire management and yet not making collaboration an official reality (National Park Service, Yosemite National Park Annual Fire Management Plan 2009). Indigenous communities can try to push for collaboration but because the National Park Service controls the land, they have the ultimate say on what will become reality. Further, when these collaborations do become reality, they are structured to best serve the settler state's goals. Paul Nadasdy explains this writing that:

> The need to integrate co-management processes with existing institutional structures of state management has led to a tendency to view co-management as a series of technical problems (primarily associated with the question of how to gather "traditional knowledge" and incorporate it into the management process), rather than as a real alternative to the existing structures and practices of state management…rather than empowering local aboriginal communities, then, co-management may actually be preventing the kind of change proponents desire. Indeed, co-management may actually be serving to extend state power into the very communities that it is supposedly empowering (Nadasy 2005, 216).

The attempts to collaborate on ecological conservation are often simply ways for the National Park Service to capture the traditional knowledge and further their own agenda. There is no room for meaningful change – either to their practices or to the larger settler colonial system. Further, these collaborations provide a way into Indigenous communities so that the settler state can extend further control over these communities. Any potential collaboration over fire management in Yosemite is carefully controlled by the National Park Service and there is no guarantee that Indigenous communities would be able to practice exactly their traditional ways. Within the settler system, there is no real opportunity to empower Indigenous communities. They are denied access to and control of their homelands and the settler state controls the extent to which any traditions are practiced. Clearly, these collaborations are not a meeting of equal partners on mutual ground but a meeting between the settler and those whose land has been stolen. This relationship is not true mutual recognition.

Misrepresentation and Green Technology at Glacier

While the biggest ecological threat to Yosemite has been forest fires, Glacier National Park and the surrounding reservation are experiencing climate change at nearly two times the global average. Similar to Yosemite, this means more fires, but it also means that the glaciers present in the park are melting. Because of this serious threat directly to the park and the neighboring reservation, both the NPS and the Blackfeet Nation include strong sustainability measures on their websites. However, there is a clear difference in the way that the NPS and the Blackfeet Nation understand and approach sustainability and land. When comparing their explanations of climate change and its effects, these differences become especially clear.

Narratives on Climate Change

For the NPS, the focus is largely on green technological solutions such as solar power or electric vehicles. Their sustainability homepage explains that:

> Glacier National Park's goal is to be a leader in understanding, communicating, and responding to the consequences of climate change. Responding to climate change requires a collective effort. Reducing your personal carbon footprint is a great way to take part in the response to climate change. However, most individual actions are neither necessary nor sufficient to stop climate change…ultimately, eliminating greenhouse gas emissions will require global solutions. Luckily, these solutions already exist and won't require much sacrifice or hardship by individuals (National Park Service, Glacier: Sustainability n.d.).

This explanation does not describe the reasons why sustainability is important. Further, the focus is on how a global effort is necessary to stop climate change and the fact that the solution lies in green technology. The National Park Service commits to be a leader in responding to climate change and is quick to reassure the reader that it is by larger actions such as reducing carbon emissions and not through their individual actions that climate change will be solved. However, they fail to explain the larger systems of capitalism and colonialism that are the root causes for the high levels of carbon emissions (Liboiron 2021).

In comparison, the Blackfeet Nation heavily emphasizes on their website that stewardship and tribal connection to the land are important and personal reasons for the nation's commitment to sustainability. Their website explains that climate change "is impacting our environment," "is impacting our health," and effecting "what kind of future…we want" (BlackfeetNation, Blackfeet Country and Climate Change n.d.) The Blackfeet nation is "building resilience to climate change…we are not alone in our efforts and find inspiration from adaptation efforts by Indigenous people around the world" (BlackfeetNation, Blackfeet Country and Climate Change n.d.). In contrast to the NPS, the Blackfeet Nation explains exactly how climate change hurts their community and therefore why sustainability is important. Further, they make a clear point about how conservation work is shared by Indigenous people around the world. Both explanations acknowledge global conservation work; however, there are deeply personal reasons for sustainability and conservation on the Blackfeet Nation's website. The Blackfeet Nation and the NPS both acknowledge carbon emissions as a significant cause of climate change; however, the Blackfeet Nation also emphasizes that through fighting climate

change as a nation they are building resilience and are a part of a collective of Indigenous communities around the world that are all working to fight climate change.

Stewardship vs Green Technology

The Blackfeet Environmental Office works to carry out environmental stewardship by implementing policies and regulations on their lands. Their mission states that they work to "protect, preserve, and enhance the environment of the Blackfeet Reservation and carry out environmental stewardship through development and implementation of environmental policies and regulations" (BlackfeetEnvironmentalOffice n.d.). There is a focus on the protection of the reservation itself, but many of these policies carry benefits outside of the reservation borders. There is also a clear emphasis on specific actions to take as well as the importance of these measures for quality of life. Their Environmental Office homepage lists several initiatives for water, land and air protection such as banning dumping and drilling as well as the regulations the reservation has in place with these goals in mind.

The emphasis on stewardship that is central to the mission of the Blackfeet Environmental Office is not present in the National Park Service at Glacier's website. The NPS' focus is first to dispel the idea that climate change can be solved by individual action or is a personal responsibility, but rather a challenge that requires global action. In terms of their specific actions, the NPS writes that:

> Glacier National Park has already begun an effort to reduce its contribution to warming climate. Solar array and hydropower help provide electricity throughout the park. Improvements to the recycling program are being made, more efficient LEDs are replacing energy-wasting light bulbs.

> Glacier's employees can reduce their own carbon emissions by riding the employee shuttle or biking to work (National Park Service, Glacier: Sustainability n.d.).

Clearly, the National Park Service focuses on green technology solutions not just in the context of the larger issue of climate change, but also in the ways in which they work to combat climate change at the park itself. Green technology is their answer to the problem of climate change. They do not address how colonial and capitalist systems are the root causes for climate change and how transformation of these systems is necessary. Interestingly – and unlike NPS at Yosemite – there are no specific initiatives for preservation of land or water at Glacier. Each sustainability measure is technological in nature and is focused on larger sustainability goals rather than the protection of land or water within the park. This is in sharp contrast to the efforts of the Blackfeet Nation, who focus largely on water and land protection in their environmental protection goals and regulations.

This reflects the very different relationship to land that the Blackfeet Nation and the National Park Service each have. The Blackfeet Nation is deeply connected to its historical and ancestral responsibility to protect its homeland. The NPS focuses on technological big picture solutions that adhere to colonial assumptions of land access. Though well intentioned, the National Park Service assumes the authority to control the stolen land and the ability to implement their solutions on that land. There is no Indigenous permission, consent or collaboration. In contrast, the Blackfeet Nation emphasizes their connection to the land – ancestrally and spiritually – as the driving force

behind their fight to protect and preserve. The land is deeply important to life. The land is their life (Wolfe 2006).

Conclusion

It becomes clear from analyzing the words and actions of the National Park Service that the institution is perpetuating settler colonialism in their ecological projects. The inability of NPS to engage in mutual recognition with Indigenous communities, even as they attempt to do so through recognition politics, simply further cements their unequal power dynamic with Indigenous communities. The situation at Yosemite shows how collaboration efforts always take place at the will of the National Park Service. Their descriptions and collaboration efforts make it clear that the relationship between Indigenous communities and the National Park Service is always at the terms of the National Park Service. They control the extent of and nature of the relationship. They can invite collaboration, or they can reject it. The National Park Service and Indigenous communities are not meeting on mutual ground and therefore cannot mutually recognize each other. Further, the differences between the way the Blackfeet Nation and NPS at Glacier promote sustainability shows how they have different relationships to land. There is an assumption of the ability to control Indigenous land on the part of the National Park Service that is deeply colonial in nature. Their green technology solutions may come from good intentions, but in reality, they are a tool that helps reinforce the uneven power dynamic between settlers and Indigenous communities.

Conclusion

The National Park Service online website offers an important example of the larger ways in which engaging in recognition politics with the United States government will always fail because it is rooted in an unequal power dynamic and the settler domination of land. No matter how good the intentions behind the attempts to include Indigenous communities into park history or park projects are, these attempts are grounded in the very structure of the settler state. The settler government will never seek to remove itself and its power – it seeks to continue its domination and control of Indigenous lands. Therefore, it is impossible for any attempts at collaboration between the settler government and Indigenous communities to be operating on equal ground. The settler government controls the terms of these agreements through its complete control of the land.

The National Park Service website offers a concrete example of how settler colonial domination is built into the foundation of the United States government, and therefore recognition politics will fail as a means to offer true mutual recognition with Indigenous communities. Chapter one works to contextualize the history of national parks and explain how violence and domination formed national parks and shapes the relationship between the United States government and Indigenous communities. Chapter two explains how the National Park Service uses cultural collaboration as a tool to further tourist experience and in doing so disrespects local Indigenous communities' cultural practices and their history. Chapter three uses examples of ecological collaboration to demonstrate how the National Park Service operates from a position of control and is incapable of mutually recognizing Indigenous communities. All of these chapters draw

from the National Park Service website to demonstrate the way National Park Service as a government agency perpetuates settler colonialism. Further, these chapters demonstrate how the ways in which settler colonialism is not simply a process of land dispossession and elimination but is also perpetuated more subtly through processes such as collaboration or recognition politics. Kim TallBear explains that:

> It seems easier for people to understand the links between land dispossession and the physical elimination of Indigenous people: fewer Indigenous people historically meant more land for settlers. However, representational assaults and identity theft seem harder to comprehend as violent dispossession. But such acts are co-constituted with physical violence against Indigenous bodies and theft of material resources. The diverse ways of dispossessing Indigenous peoples are historically linked, each made more possible by settler-state institutions and individual citizens who seek (knowingly or not) the ongoing systemic elimination of Indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada (TallBear 2019, 31).

TallBear speaks of a more general process by which settler governments and settlers commit identity theft of Indigenous people and perpetuate misrepresentation. The National Park Service and their online website offers one example of such misrepresentation and demonstrates a way in which this misrepresentation is historically linked to systemic elimination and land dispossession. As discussed in chapter one, national parks are built on a long history of violent settler massacres meant to remove Indigenous people from their lands. It is through chapters two and three that this history of violence and dispossession is linked to the inability of the National Park Service to

mutually recognize Indigenous communities they attempt to collaborate with. These chapters work to make clear the link between violent dispossession and more diverse ways of disposing Indigenous peoples (such as representational assaults) that TallBear describes.

Further Study

There are a few ways to expand on this work and further the study of the relationship between the National Park Service and Indigenous communities. Building on this work would include visiting national parks to see how the National Park Service displays information about the park, its history, and local Indigenous communities. How this information is displayed would speak to the level of commitment the National Park Service actually has to recognition politics as well as how they are attempting to shape the experience of those visiting the park. This would provide a deeper understanding of the goals of the National Park Service and what they want those who visit the parks to believe. Additionally, it would be informative to speak with National Park Service employees to understand what they know about both the history and current reality of the parks, local Indigenous communities, and collaboration efforts.

Indigenous Resistance Today

The Indigenous communities I wrote about in this thesis all have current efforts in which they are attempting to resist settler colonial domination. The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, which is one of seven traditionally associated tribes of Yosemite is currently fighting for federal recognition. They have consistently applied for formal acknowledgement since 1982. It is likely that in order to gain formal acknowledgement, they would need strong and influential outside backing during the period for public

commenting. Those who are not a part of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation providing this public support is one very simple action that can be taken in support of their right to exist.

The Blackfeet Nation on June 25, 2020 released a draft congressional bill that would permanently protect the Badger-Two Medicine as a Cultural Heritage Area. This would prevent drilling from occurring on this land. The Badger-Two Medicine region is located at the intersection of the Blackfeet reservation, Glacier National Park, and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. The Blackfeet Nation explains that

> The Badger-Two Medicine is sacred to the Blackfeet people. It is the home of our creation story and has continued to be a place of refuge and healing for 10,000 years. It provides strength, subsistence, and cultural identity to our people, which is why the Blackfeet Nation has vowed to protect it (BlackfeetNation, Protction of the Badger-Two Medicine n.d.).

The congressional bill is the latest effort to protect the Badger-Two Medicine region, and public support for the bill is critical to its passing. There have already been attempts to gain oil and gas leases in the area – though a June 16, 2020 US Court of Appeals confirmed the decision to cancel these leases. The proposed Badger-Two Medicine Protection Act is modeled off of similar legislation already enacted in other places and would keep activity such as drilling from harming the region. Further, it guarantees that existing treaty rights will be honored and provides the Blackfeet Nation with an opportunity to conduct trial maintenance and other contracted forest work so that they can care for their own land. Providing public support and speaking with congressional representatives on behalf of this bill is necessary for the passing of this legislation.

Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor

There is no way for mutual recognition to occur within a settle colonial system, therefore for mutual recognition to occur it is necessary to think of alternative ways of existence that do not rely on the settler colonial structure. True mutual recognition cannot occur without decolonization. Decolonization is the process through which the settler nation is abolished, and Indigenous sovereignty is upheld (Tuck and Yang 2012). Through this process, Indigenous communities regain their land and are positioned to engage in true mutual recognition with other non-settler communities.

Whenever the conversation about decolonization occurs, the question of reconciliation is often asked. Reconciliation is idea that those who are fighting for decolonization must explain what decolonization will look like precisely, what the consequences will be for the settler, what will the future for the settler will look like. Tuck and Yang in their brilliant article "Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor" explains this and describes a contrast to reconciliation in 'ethics of incommensurability.' They write that

> Incommensurability acknowledges that these questions need not, and perhaps cannot, be answered in order for decolonization to exist as a framework…decolonization is not obligated to answer those questions – decolonization is not accountable to settlers or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity (Tuck and Yang 2012, 26).

It is not the job of decolonization to explain what happens to settlers in the future, but rather to ensure the removal of the settler state and thus guarantee Native futures.

Decolonization is the end of the existence of the settler nation. It is nothing less. Decolonization is the solution to the impossibility of mutual recognition. Without decolonization, there will always be unequal ground between the settler state and its agencies and Indigenous communities. It is through the process of decolonization that Indigenous communities can achieve true agency and true justice for all that the settler state has imposed on them. While the section above explains ways in which one can support the Indigenous communities discussed in this paper, true resolution for these communities is decolonization – and I hope to see this occur within the settler United States within my lifetime.

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