THE WHITEWASHING OF WILDERNESS: HOW HISTORY AND SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION INFLUENCE BLACK AMERICANS' PARTICIPATION AT NATIONAL PARKS

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THE WHITEWASHING OF WILDERNESS: HOW HISTORY AND SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION INFLUENCE BLACK AMERICANS’ PARTICIPATION AT NATIONAL PARKS

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science Degree State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry Syracuse, New York April 2018

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Abstract


Various publications argue that National Parks are not ethnically diverse amongst visitors and personnel, particularly amongst Black Americans. Although the most cited causes for lack of visitation to areas include cost, lack of access, lack of knowledge, and racial bias, more research is needed on how National Park promotional materials impact Black American visitors. This research offers an assessment of Black environmental attitudes regarding outdoor recreation with interviews being the primary method of data collection. Additionally, to investigate how park guides influence Black Americans’ attitudes and intentions towards visiting National Parks, a content analysis was performed. This research aims to fill the gap in information on how the whitewashing of wilderness has impacted Black Americans’ intentions to participate. Preliminary findings demonstrate that there is a symbolic annihilation of Black people in National Parks and that impacts Black Americans intentions; therefore, lessening their intentions towards visiting National Parks.

Keywords: diversity, exclusion, national parks, symbolic annihilation, whitewashing, wilderness
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 – Overview

Various publications have recognized there is a lack of participation from Black Americans’ engaging in environmental interactions such as voting for an environmental referendum, attending public meetings, and participating in protests (Jones, 1998) and that Black Americans have little to no relationship with National Parks (Jones, 1998; Taylor, 1989; Krymkowski et al., 2014; Weber & Sultana, 2013; Pease, 2015). Some reasons given for the lack of environmental and National Park engagement include a lack of access and resources, disinterest (Taylor, 1989; Weber & Sultana, 2013), discrimination and exclusionary practices (Pease, 2015; Weber & Sultana, 2013). Although research has been substantial in pointing out these causes, there is little information on how National Parks’ promotional materials such as park guides impact visitor and non-visitor demographics at National Parks. This thesis will explore the influence these materials have on Black Americans’ attendance to National Parks to determine whether this is a viable reason as to why they do not venture to these destinations. Promotional materials may be a significant factor in determining how the lack of visual representation may or may not impact a person’s behavioral intentions.

1.2 – The National Park Service and Diversity

The National Park Service (NPS) was established in 1916 and since then has been entrusted to care for America’s National Parks and is a bureau of the United states Department of the Interior (NPS, 2017). The overall mission of the agency is to preserve the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, and inspiration of this and future generations (NPS, 2017). The NPS claims to help citizens revitalize their communities, preserve local history, celebrate local heritage, and create close to home opportunities for
children and families to go outside, be active, and have fun (NPS, 2017). Despite their efforts
towards inclusion and diversity that include educational programs and workforce workshops,
their visitation (NPS, 2017) and employment records (Taylor et al., 2011) still exhibit a lack of
diversity. More specifically, there is a disconnect between Black Americans and nature
excursions that are stark in comparison to individuals that are White. An NPS survey study found
that only seven percent of visitors to National Parks between the years 2008-2009 identified as
Black, nine percent Hispanic, three percent Asian, one percent American Indian or Alaskan
Native, while seventy-eight percent were White (Rott, 2016). Additionally, surveys are
conducted every ten years; therefore, the NPS has yet to perform another study to determine
whether diversity in park visitation has risen (Sanders, personal communication, 2017). Eighty-
three percent of National Park employees identify themselves as White; therefore, ethnic
diversity in this organization is sparse (Root, 2017). The national demographics of the United
States is not reflected in the visitor demographics of the National Park Service. According to the
U.S. Census Bureau (2016), the racial composition of the country is sixty-one percent White (not
Hispanic or Latino), eighteen percent Hispanic or Latino, thirteen percent Black, six percent
Asian, and one percent American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Although integrative youth programs are gaining steam in diversity, there is still a
concern that the culture of the NPS is not relevant and relatable. It wasn’t until 2013 that the
NPS created the Office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion to address the lack of people of
color in National Parks. Sangita Cheri, the head of the Diversity and Inclusion office stated that
the NPS has not become relevant to the lives of people of color (Root, 2017). The issue of
relevancy may be answered if the NPS showed more visual representations such as videos and
photographs of people of color through their promotional materials such as websites, brochures, and park guides.

1.3 – Environmental Justice Aspects

Environmental justice in the context of this thesis is defined as equity of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income in regard to the development, application, and enforcement of environmental laws, policies, and regulations (US EPA, 2018). The National Park Service has a legal obligation as a federal entity to address environmental justice in minority and low-income populations via the Executive Order (E.O.) 12898 established in 1994. E.O. 12898 directs all federal agencies to identify and address the disproportionately high environmental health effects of their actions on these populations, to the most significant extent practicable and permitted by law (US EPA, 2018). The lack of diversity in the National Park Service relates to environmental justice issues because people of color are often left out of the narrative of environmental issues, publications, and organizational roles. To further justify that this as an environmental justice issue, it is important to understand that since the majority of National Park visitors and employees are not ethnically diverse, then people of color are being left out either intentionally or accidentally. Either way, they are not accessing a privilege that is theirs and that they are entitled to experiencing. According to Cole (2017, n.p.), “a combination of history and branding left people of color out of National Parks and nature.” There is an overrepresentation of White Americans participating in National Park initiatives and visitations thereby limiting the breadth of nature in America to a racialized space of exclusion.

Diversity and inclusion are imperative not only for National Parks but to the larger picture of environmentalism that the creation of National Parks has inspired. The National Park Service has acknowledged the need for diversity and inclusion to be resilient, relevant and
successful (NPS, 2017). Furthermore, to represent the changing demographics and interests of citizens and to remain relatable, the NPS must create a culturally diverse and inclusive workforce (NPS, 2017). In the broader movement of environmental justice, this issue concerning the lack of Black visitation to National Parks is worthwhile considering because Black and Brown individuals and communities are more likely to suffer the consequences of environmental degradation (Bullard, 1993). Therefore, reestablishing a relationship with nature may be necessary for Black peoples’ survival. For example, Black people are three times more likely than White Americans to die of asthma (DeNoon, n.d.) that in part is triggered by air pollution (Guarnieri & Balmes, 2014). A lack of physical activity has been correlated with health disparities such as diabetes, obesity, and asthma which are prevalent amongst Black people (DeNoon, n.d.). Being in nature or having a healthy environment has been proven to aid in boosting the immune system, lower blood pressure, and increases one’s overall energy level (NYS DEC, n.d.). The NPS could play a part in helping to build community capacity and environmental literacy while also galvanizing Black people and other people of color to understand how nature impacts them and vice versa. Building a coalition between environmental justice advocates and the NPS would not only benefit the public but would also improve the environment.

1.4 – Context of Research

Black people have been left out of the narrative of National Parks due to factors that include racism, prejudice, discrimination, lack of access and resources (Taylor, 1989; Weber & Sultana, 2013) and media (Finney, 2014). I would like to observe Black Americans’ attitudes and intentions towards participating in outdoor recreational activities at National Parks. Therefore, the target population for this study are those who identify as Black and American. Over half of
the Black population in the United States lives in the South (US Census Bureau, 2010).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau of 2016, Black people have large populations in the Southern states that include: Maryland (30%), Virginia (19%), North Carolina (22%), South Carolina (27%), Georgia (32%), Alabama (26%), Mississippi (37%) and lastly Louisiana (32%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Due to such a large population of Black Americans living in the South and my previous contacts for interviews being located in North Carolina where the Great Smoky Mountains (GSM) are, research was conducted there. Additionally, visitor ethnicity to the GSM is disparate with ninety-seven percent of visitors being White and the remaining three percent minority, with less than one percent being Black Americans (Papadogiannaki, Eury, & Hollenhorst, 2009). I observed how many Black people are featured in the GSM published park guides and whether they are representative of the population living in North Carolina or more so representative of how many Black people visit the National Park.

1.5 – Rationale for Study

This purpose of this thesis is not to criticize the NPS, and it is not to say that the NPS is a discriminatory or prejudice institution. However, this thesis serves to address the disparity of Black American visitors to National Parks. Additionally, this thesis aims to offer new findings as to why there is this disparity and highlight how National Park promotional guides affect the intentions of visitation from Black Americans. Furthermore, this thesis will aim to investigate how photographs in NPS park guides bolster the perception that Black Americans have little to no relationship with National Parks.

Also, this thesis research is personally helpful toward my professional development. I plan on utilizing this research and expanding it into further investigation as a dissertation in the
hopes of continuing my education towards a doctoral program in Environmental Studies or Sociology.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE AND CONTEXT

Prior research studies indicate that Black Americans are less likely than their White counterparts to engage in outdoor activities and they are less likely to visit National Parks (Martin, 2004; Mott, 2015, Weber & Sultana, 2013). Research has been conducted on this phenomenon in a variety of contexts, where methods and findings have been nearly universal in the conclusion that White people participate more than Black people (Krymkowski, Manning & Valliere, 2014). In understanding the reasons why many Black Americans do not engage in outdoor recreation at National Parks, it is imperative to review the prior literature on the matter.

This chapter will offer some background context to explain why there is a lack of participation from Black Americans within National Parks. The topics discussed in this literature review include a briefing on the history of whitewashing, racism, and discrimination within the foundations of the National Park Service, and racial intimidations experienced by Black Americans in wilderness areas at National Parks. “Wilderness areas” are defined as a large tract of public land maintained in its natural state and protected against the introduction of manmade artifacts (Merriam Webster, 2018). Additionally, this chapter will discuss how various Black Americans participate in outdoor recreation at National Parks to counter the argument that Black Americans are not outdoorsmen. Lastly, this chapter will offer theoretical perspectives such as the theories of “Symbolic Annihilation” and “Social Comparison” that will be applied in this thesis as a lens for analysis of this study’s findings.

2.1 – History and Its Impact

To understand better the reasons why Black Americans have a strained relationship with the natural environment, one must recount the past experiences Black Americans have had with these spaces. The book, To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental
History by Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll (2006), gives an extensive history of Black Americans and their involvement in the environment from historical events taking place during slavery to the environmental justice movement. According to the text, slavery in North America has shaped the history of the environment in several ways. First, slavery made it possible for southern agriculturists to gain revenue from an environment (Glave & Stoll, 2006). Then, slaves who were African or African American developed their own uses of the environment that were a mixture of African customs and practices produced by the condition of bondage and sometimes produced struggle for access to shared resources (Glave & Stoll, 2006). Lastly, slavery has shaped the environmental attitudes and values of both masters and slaves. The authors go on to state that the origins of conservation and environmental thought for both races emerged from the experience of slavery and the kind of agriculture such as cotton and other plantation crops that the labor of slaves supported (Glave & Stoll, 2006).

Carolyn Finney’s book is one of the main sources in laying the foundation for this thesis as well as one of the main sources for building this thesis’s bibliography. Finney’s book Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors, provides a comprehensive guide for understanding the relationship Black people in the United States have with wilderness areas and will be the basis of information related in this literature review. According to Finney (2014), “The dominant narrative in the United States is primarily constructed and informed by White, Western European, or Euro-American voices” (p. 3). Finney (2014) goes on to state that these narratives shape the way that nature is symbolized, constructed, and perceived in our daily lives, and ultimately informs our national identity. For instance, the cultural narrative that best represents the “first” Black environmental experience on American soil is Black people being slaves to a White slave master, working for free (Finney, 2014). The
relationship between Black people and nature can arguably be described as strained. Finney (2014, p. 49) writes,

the removal of four hundred thousand acres of land from Black people’s hands, the inability to participate in government authorized regulations such as the Homestead Act, being publicized as the “missing link” and considered to be too savage to be considered citizens, to die at the hands of those who believe they are morally justified in their actions, ultimately has left Black people at times physically and psychologically exiled from their homeland while still living in it.

Therefore, it is difficult for Black Americans to have an uncomplicated relationship with the natural world in comparison to White people living in the United States (Finney, 2014). Black Americans were purposely excluded from visiting National Parks; thus, do not have much experience visiting National Parks. Historically, wilderness areas are for nature and White peoples’ leisure, and as a result, Black Americans have been systematically left out of National Park recreation and operations (Finney, 2014).

2.2. – Discrimination in Foundations:

2.2.1 – America’s Best Idea

Another essential aspect to consider when discussing the relationship between Black Americans and the National Park Service requires a closer look at the foundation of National Parks and its affiliated public figures. National Parks in the United States were founded upon discriminatory practices and prejudice and by people who were eugenic enthusiasts, xenophobes and White supremacists (Mock, 2016). The manifestation of National Parks has contributed to the national identity of the United States and as a result has inadvertently defined what it means to be American (Finney, 2014). Ken Burns, articulates this symbiotic relationship in the PBS film, The National Parks – America’s Best Idea. The documentary features Clay Jenkinson, a historian, who made the following remark,

…Thomas Jefferson would say if you go out into the heart of America and see the continent
in its glory, it will embolden you to dream about the possibilities of life, that American nature is the guarantor of American Constitutional freedom, that if you don’t have a genuine link to nature in a serious, even profound way, you cannot be an American (Burns, 2009).

Statements such as this reinforce the connotation that being American means to be White and to be White means to be normal, anyone not fitting that description does not belong in America; therefore, does not belong in America’s National Parks. So, does that mean that because Black people today are primarily an “urban population” (Finney, 2014, p. 9), removed from the wilderness, with little to no access to wilderness areas, that they are not considered to be American?

2.2.2 – The “Father” of Our National Parks

John Muir is widely known as a wilderness preservationist and “the Father of our National Parks” in the United States and is an inspiration for environmental activists everywhere (Sierra Club, 2017). Muir helped to inspire President Theodore Roosevelt’s conservation programs and was the founder of the environmental organization, the Sierra Club in 1892 (Sierra Club, 2017). Although Muir and his passion for National Parks and wilderness spaces have been an inspiration for numerous environmental movements, organizations, and individuals, what is not well known about him was his indifference to people of color, particularly Black people and Native Americans.

Merchant (2003) describes the prejudice Muir exhibited, stating that he was unsympathetic toward Black Americans. In his “Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf” in 1916, Muir wrote that he viewed most Black Americans as lazy and noisy and that “one white man could easily pick as much cotton as half a dozen Sambos and Sallies” (Merchant, 2003, p. 386). He went on to describe an evening campfire that he attended as similar to deviltry:
In the center of this globe of light sat two Negros. I could see their ivory gleaming from the great lips, and their smooth cheeks flashing off light as if made of glass. Seen anywhere but in the South, the glossy pair would have been taken for twin devils, but here it was only a Negro and his wife at their supper (Merchant, 2003, p. 386-387).

According to DeLuca and Demo (2001), Muir modeled an attitude that environmentalists have, unbeknownst to them, imitated to a great extent and his position is the precedent for today’s eco-tourists or “eco-elitists”. Muir’s ideology advocated for what is currently a Whitewashed wilderness, with roots in discrimination, racism, and prejudice that work together to make social distinctions and encourage hierarchies of class, race, and culture (DeLuca & Demo, 2001). Therefore, impacting the NPS culture and reinforcing the racism and prejudice practices that influence the lack of Black attendance at National Parks.

2.2.3 – Madison Grant

Another prominent figure that helped to establish National Parks is Madison Grant. Although Madison Grant contributed significantly to the National Park movement and nature conservation efforts, he also added greatly to the death camps of Nazi Germany (Mock, 2016). Racism was not something which Grant hid from the public. White supremacy was an integral part of his worldview including his opinions about nature conservation and National Park creation (Mock, 2016). For instance, one of his followers, White nationalist and anthropologist, Roger Pearson, wrote in 1995 that a wildlife conservation organization, the Boone and Crockett Club which Grant helped to create, was largely encompassed of eugenicists and eugenic sympathizers (Mock, 2016). Pearson also wrote that Madison Grant worked as fervently to preserve the “natural heritage” or “old American” component of the American population as he did to preserve the natural environment (Mock, 2016).
Madison Grant was a notorious racist and wrote the book on White Supremacy, *The Passing of the Great Race* in 1916, which Adolf Hitler adopted and relied on profoundly during the Holocaust (Conniff, 2016). This book contained eugenic and xenophobic views on immigrants, Indigenous People, and Black Americans. Particular beliefs about Black people were mentioned within this book. For example, Grant wrote that Black people were a valuable element within a community as long as they remained submissive followers who only obey the wishes of the “master race” as they have done in the past (Conniff, 2016). Grant’s views about Black people were explicit in his distaste for the race and their existence. In his book, he writes about the English and Dutch populations residing in South Africa, stating that these European ethnic groups have to come together if they want to maintain any part of Africa as a “White man’s country” due to the “menace” of a large Black Bantu population that would eventually dominate unless otherwise (Grant, 1916). Grant even resorts to mentioning solutions to eradicate Black people from the continent of Africa. He continues to suggest poisoning native Black people living south of the Sahara because they would prevent the establishment of any purely White communities and that the ceasing famines, wars, and the slave trade would be suicidal to White men (Grant, 1916). Grant states that because Black people multiply so rapidly that there will not be standing room on the continent of Africa for White men, unless, the “lethal sleeping sickness” is deployed, which was more lethal to Black people than White people and should do the job as long as it goes “unchecked” (Grant, 1916).

Concerning Black Americans, Grant (1916) expressed that they were not a serious problem until they were given rights to be citizens. He continues to state that Black Americans did not bring with them their native language, religion, or customs but instead have assimilated to the dominant race. Grant’s views about racial blending were also expressed in his book. He
conveyed the ideology that being of mixed race was a disgrace to the “dominant race” because although Mulattos were partly White, they are still Black in the sense that despite physical modifications they were not transformed in any way to the physical stature of a White man (Grant, 1916).

2.2.4 – Smokey Bear is Racist?

A public figure that is most prominently affiliated with National Parks and forestry, although fictional, is Smokey Bear. Smokey Bear has earned the nation’s trust as a stalwart protector of the forest and has gained the admiration of several generations of Americans (Kosek, 2006). Smokey has become a household name and so deeply embedded in the nation’s collective consciousness that he is seen as one of the most readily recognized icons in America today (Kosek, 2006). He has been credited with reducing the number of forest fires by forty percent between the years 1940-1998 and arguably has helped to save millions of acres of forests from being burned and billions of federal dollars from being spent in fighting forest fires (Kosek, 2006). Although Smokey has been the most significant, trusted, and beloved symbol of both nature and the nation of America today, he is met with much animosity from residents of Northern New Mexico (Kosek, 2006).

Land politics in northern New Mexico are not just struggles of property but instead are invested with regional histories of racism, national exclusion, and state violence, all of which were central in representations of Smokey (Kosek, 2006). For instance, before the creation of Smokey, there were fire prevention posters made to encourage people to be conscious about their actions but instead contributed to racial tensions. Fire was often understood during that time to be used by “other” races including Japanese, Native American, Hispanic, and Black people (Kosek, 2006). Posters displayed images that bared stark resemblance to Asian people and a
slight resemblance to Black people characterizing them as “evil” and the “enemy” regarding fire being the enemy of forests therefore the enemy of the nation. According to Kosek (2006), one of the advertisements resonates with racist depictions of African Americans (Figure 1). Although the soldier in the advertisement is depicting an Asian person, the soldier has thick lips, a broad nose and ears, and dark skin while having long, skinny fingers with long tipped nails which were often attributed to portrayals of wickedness. Here the connection is made between stereotyping people with darker skin to having immoral intentions or associations with wickedness and devilry. Throughout American history and American popular culture, Black people or anyone with a darker skin tone were often associated with perceptions of evil or negativity (Banks, 2013). Satan was often described as a Black man during the late 1600s by Puritans as well as during the 1800s by White supremacist theologians, while Jesus was characterized as White (Banks, 2013). In other words, those with lighter skin are perceived to be innocent or of good nature, and those with dark skin are more commonly perceived as dangerous. Postwar advertisers eventually thought their messages were too frightening for children. However, advertisers still wanted to convey the same message, so they decided to change the imagery being used thus the creation of Smokey (Kosek, 2006). Although these advertisers wanted to shy away from their racist forest fire prevention flyers, they didn’t get very far with Smokey.

Smokey has been characterized as a malicious and tyrannical land thief and associated with the history of land loss, racial tensions and an antagonistic outsider (Kosek, 2006). According to Salomon Martinez, a longtime forest worker, and Cordova resident, Smokey Bear is a constant reminder that the woods no longer belong to Chicanos. Instead, Smokey now watches over the woods like a correctional officer who is not there to help people but to keep Chicanos out (Kosek, 2006). Kosek (2006) argues that the racialized histories underlying the
Smokey Bear campaign have seeped the bear and national forests with exclusionary constructions of U.S. nationalism. Together with the possession and mismanagement of forest lands by the Forest Service in northern New Mexico, have inevitably shifted Smokey from a compassionate protector of public forests to a “white racist pig” and “land thief”. Kosek (2006) continues to state that the conceptions of race and nation that were central to Smokey’s production conflicted with the racial and national history of the region. Residents of New Mexico believed that the Forest Service stole land from the people of the region, favored people who were not from the area (mostly White Americans) by giving them logging permits and grazing permits, and largely abused the forest land. Additionally, Moises Morales, an activist, stated that Smokey is a “symbol of White nationalism” and a symbol of “White oppression” (Kosek, 2006). Smokey does not care about the well-being of the forest, its dependents, or about what the people of New Mexico need from it. Instead, Smokey cares about the financial exploitation of the woods and its resources for timber and tourism (Kosek, 2006). Therefore, Smokey has become recognizable through imagery, manners, and interests of White people and has become inadvertently understood as White. Smokey can perform the dual gesture of appropriating nature while at the same time normalizing racism and nationalism (Kosek, 2006).
2.3 – Racial Intimidation in the Woods

Among scholars and park managers, perceived and latent discrimination is often noted as being a barrier to more minority participation in outdoor recreation (Mott, 2015). This perception involves the sense that racial minorities feel unwelcome in the National Park Service (Mott, 2015). Mott (2015) provides an example of a case study where Black people residing in St. Louis reported the reason they did not camp was that they felt vulnerable to “racial intimidation” and that these prospective visitors worry about disparate treatment by, and implicit racial bias of White park staffers. A study by Virden and Walker (1999) suggested that Black people are cautious of wilderness areas due to perceived threats from wildlife and other people. Park rangers and administrative staff of the NPS are mostly White individuals making up approximately eighty to eighty-five percent of the workforce (Root, 2017). Therefore, it could be
possible that park personnel could unconsciously hold racial bias, contributing to people of color having a sense of “unwelcomeness” in National Parks (Mott, 2015). Additional studies have found that Black people are less likely to visit wilderness areas such as National Parks or participate in outdoor recreational activities there (Mott, 2015; Floyd, 1999; Krymkowski et al, 2014; Weber & Sultana, 2013; Pease, 2015; Martin, 2004; Byrne, 2011; Taylor, 1989). Some reasons for this lack of participation include factors such as the lack of knowledge, resources/funds, and cultural values informed by discrimination, slavery, and African heritage (Finney, 2014).

Racism is thought to have played a major role in restricting the number of Black Americans participating in outdoor wilderness areas (Finney, 2014). Virden and Walker (1999) present an example about a Black outdoorsman reaffirming this belief stating that historically bad things have happened to Black people in the outdoors and that associations with the woods can trigger images of dog chasings, lynching, and the Ku Klux Klan. There are many occasions where Black and Hispanic people were attacked for visiting “White” outdoor-recreation areas (Virden & Walker, 1999). A recent example of these negative racial encounters took place on October 2016, in the Adirondack Park. President of the Sierra Club, Aaron Mair, a Black man, was working with the Adirondack Life magazine doing a photo shoot when a group of rafters who were all White, both men and women, approached Mair and the accompanied photographer inquiring about the photoshoot. After some dialogue and disagreement on environmental issues, the White rafters began using explicit language calling Mair and the accompanied photographer derogatory names (Mann, 2016). On another occasion, Alvin Codner, who was working at a camp in the Adirondacks as a sports instructor was also met with hostility while visiting the area. Codner along with a mixed-race group of friends were exploring the area’s retail stores and restaurants
where they too experienced a negative racial encounter and were also called derogatory names (Mann, 2016).

Black people are traumatized by the long-term psychological effects of slavery and oppression, and through ethnic socialization, they have a different association with wilderness. A subconscious fear of the heinous acts committed in the woods by White Americans against Black Americans lingers in the “collective memory” of Black people (Finney, 2014). Evelyn C. White (1996), articulates this deeply embedded fear in her written piece “Black Women and the Wilderness.” White (1996) talks about her collective racial traumas and how these traumas have impacted her relationship with wilderness. White shares her experience about going on a trip to the woods of Oregon’s Cascade Mountains stating that she was certain that if she ventured out into the woods that she would be taunted, attacked, raped and maybe even murdered because of the color of her skin. She continues to say that her genetic memory of her ancestors being hunted down and preyed upon in rural settings leave her with feelings of being exposed, vulnerable, and unprotected – a target of cruelty and hate (White, 1996). White (1996), provides an example of Emmett Till being beaten, lynched, and dumped in the Tallahatchie River, with a rope around his neck, for allegedly whistling at a White woman at a local store. She goes on to say it seemed that Emmett’s fate had been a part of her identity since she was born and that “in his pummeled and contorted face I saw a reflection of myself and the blood-chilling violence that would greet me if I ever dared to venture into the wilderness” (White, 1999, p.285). Lynching at the hands of White Americans has arguably altered the view of wilderness spaces for Black Americans, and therefore these outdoor spaces do not have the same appeal for Black Americans. Wilderness spaces may be tied more to the history of domination, enslavement, and lynching than to any romanticized sense of getting back to nature (Martin, 2004).
The poem “Strange Fruit” written by Abel Meeropol in 1937 and sung most notably by Billie Holiday in the 1950s reminds people of the lynching that took place all over the nation. The “strange fruit” mentioned in the song is a metaphor interpreted to be Black bodies hanging from trees during the Jim Crow Era (Genius, 2017). Trees and lynching have been synonymous amongst Black culture and being that trees make up what one could consider to be forests, nature, and wilderness and the majority of lynching took place in wooded areas; therefore, some Black people may not feel comfortable going into the woods for fear of death. Most lynchings took place in the South where the majority of Black people still live today (NAACP, 2017). Historically, Black people were hunted by White mobs through woods and once caught, they were hung from trees with a noose. From 1882-1968, 4,743 recorded lynchings occurred in the United States and of those people lynched, 3,446 were Black (NAACP, 2017). Finney (2014, p. 60) paints the perfect depiction, “lynching has succeeded in limiting the environmental imagination of Black people whose legitimate fear of the woods served as a painful and a specific reminder that there are many places a Black person should not go.”

2.4 – Where are the Black People?

There is a reason why the language circulated about this topic uses the word “perceived.” There is a general perceived lack of attendance from Black folk at National Parks participating in outdoor recreational activities which have potential effects for their participation in the grander scheme of environmentalism. However, some would argue that Black people participate on a small scale from walking on hiking trails to large-scale behaviors such as environmental activism. Today Black people are participating all over the nation, and although it may not be in a massive or unified effort across the entire population, some groups and individuals are proactive about being interacting with wilderness in various ways. Black people have been
breaking the “green ceiling” in a multitude of ways that have had an abundance of impacts. Black environmental activists are shifting the narrative that there is a lack of participation from Black people by immersing themselves in a story that hasn’t always included them and by giving people of color a voice. In direct relation to National Parks and outdoor recreation, there are several Black Americans and a couple of organizations led by Black Americans that are worthy of mention.

Shelton Johnson has been a Forest Ranger at the Yosemite National Park in California for over 15 years. Johnson takes pride in educating young children and teens about the importance of nature and the role that the Buffalo Soldiers played in National Park Conservation (Edmondson, 2006). Additionally, there is another Black Park Ranger that is making a difference and breaking racial barriers in the Smoky Mountains. Cassius Cash began his role as the first Black American Superintendent of the Smoky Mountains in 2015 (Davis, 2015). A part of his focus in working for the NPS is to let other Black people know, especially children, that they are capable of fulfilling the same role and motivating them to seek out similar opportunities (Davis, 2015).

Another individual that has broken barriers to wilderness participation is a woman by the name of Rue Mapp who founded the organization “Outdoor Afro – Where Black People & Nature Meet” (Outdoor Afro, 2017). This organization is taking the lead in helping Black Americans reconnect with nature through outdoor recreation at National Parks and other wilderness areas. With activated networks in nearly 30 states, Outdoor Afro reaches approximately 20,000 people to promote healthy lifestyles. Outdoor Afro amplifies the Black outdoor experience through social and traditional media efforts that reach millions of people across the nation. Additionally, this organization focuses on changing the visual narrative of the Black outdoor experience that has motivated them to seek access to not only pristine nature areas
but urban nature areas as well. Black Americans have gravitated to this organization for advice on where they can participate as outdoorsmen, what tools and equipment are needed, and what causes they should focus on (Outdoor Afro, 2017).

According to Mott (2015), celebrity endorsements are a way for the NPS to galvanize a more diverse audience to visit National Parks. Mott (2015) states that celebrity visits to National Parks and the national exposure that results has the ability to influence people’s perceptions about the outdoors. She continues to mention the “Find Your Park” campaign that was set in place to motivate diverse park use. There are a couple of Black celebrities that have caught wind of this campaign and have joined in on the efforts to get a more diverse crowd to visit National Parks. One of these celebrities is actor and television host Terrence Jenkins also known as “Terrence J.” In 2015, Terrence J became a Centennial Ambassador for the “Find Your Park” campaign. Terrence J feels that his outlook on the importance of nature has changed since visiting the Yosemite National Park. Terrence J believes that younger generations of people are attached to technology at a young age and believes that they can learn a lot from nature that technological devices can’t offer (VIBE, 2015). Former first lady, Michelle Obama, is also a major advocate for the “Find Your Park” movement (GoldFuss, 2015) as well as actor Taye Diggs (1A, 2017).

2.5 – National Park Promotional Media and The Theory of Symbolic Annihilation

National park media representation or a lack thereof is a salient aspect to consider when discussing the lack of Black visitation. According to James Mills, freelance journalist, and writer of “In Search of Diversity in Our National Parks,” there is a need for more positive exposure of people of color in National Park media (Monahan, 2017). Additionally, Mills believes that media’s lack of coverage of positive stories about people of color in the outdoors is keeping
Black people and other minorities out of the wilderness. If the stories of Black people and their relationship with the outdoors are not documented or visualized, then inherently they will not think it is natural for them to be associated with nature (Monahan, 2017). Although including images of Black people could make a difference, it is vital to incorporate an abundance of these images. Therefore, it is not enough to add a few pictures of Black Americans engaging in outdoor activities at National Parks to influence their intentions to visit there. Inadequate visual representation is critical in understanding the relationship between Black Americans and National Parks. To accurately represent Black Americans, the NPS would need to update their promotional park guides and websites with images that are representative of the national population in number and in context to which they are represented.

The lack of visual presence of Black Americans engaging with the natural environment has been associated with an intentional lack of visitation to these spaces (Martin, 2004). An analysis of media content representation of magazine advertisements reveals how outdoor recreation and National Parks have become racialized activities and areas. In his publication, Derek Martin demonstrated that there is a racialized outdoor leisure identity disseminated in magazine advertisements. This study found that after using stratified random sampling of forty-four issues of Outside magazine spanning a ten-year period (1991-2001), there was a total of 6,986 pictures and 4,602 of them contained pictures of people. Out of those pictures that contained people only 103 (0.02 percent of images) featured Black people, mostly as athletes in urban settings (Martin, 2004). This percentage is shocking in comparison to Black Americans making up 13 percent of the nation’s population (US Census Bureau, 2017). Martin’s study speaks to not only the lack of significance Black bodies represent in the outdoor recreation advertisement but also sets up imagery of how Black Americans are contextualized and framed.
within National Park promotional materials. If the only interaction Black Americans see themselves engaging with the natural environment is in the context of being an athlete in an urban setting, then that becomes the identity in which they relate. This is why evaluating the lack of visual representation of Black Americans in National Park promotional materials is imperative.

To add context to the lack of visual representation experienced by Black Americans in National Park published guides, the theory of symbolic annihilation should be considered. The Theory of Symbolic Annihilation originated in 1972 by George Gerbner and postulated that representation in the fictional realm signified social existence, while absence meant symbolic annihilation or erasure. Mostly applied to women, racial, and sexual minorities, symbolic annihilation focuses on how subpar media treatment contributes to social disempowerment; therefore, symbolic absence in the media can erase racial/ethnic groups and individuals from public consciousness. Additionally, Gerbner used the concept of symbolic annihilation to reveal how representations, including omissions, encourage dominant assumptions about how American society works and, as a result, where power resides (Coleman & Yochim, 2008). Coleman and Yochim (2008) argue that,

the symbolic annihilation of race facilitates a deeper look at media as a site of American cultural politics in which imagery is not seen as simply positive or negative, but what things mean and how they register (p. 2).

The media often treat men and women of color as fringe audiences, not large enough in number to influence the content directed to the mass audience (Kulaszewicz, 2015). This occurrence could serve as an explanation as to why Black people are scarcely featured in National Park guides. They are not seen as enough in number to influence the content. Therefore, it could be inferred that as a result of symbolic annihilation of Black Americans in National Park
related promotional materials, Black Americans do not envision themselves in these spaces. 

Black & Brown Faces in America’s Wild Places photographed and written by Dudley Edmondson in 2006 attempts to change the narrative that people of color do not enjoy or frequently visit outdoor spaces. His book contains twenty individual personal accounts from Black and Brown people across the nation that includes various images of them interacting with nature. In one particular interview, with Nina Roberts, an educational outreach specialist for the NPS, she mentioned the idea that marketing is a barrier to participation for Black Americans (Edmondson, 2006). Roberts reports that more efforts are needed to get outdoor product companies to change their marketing strategies to include minorities. Additionally, Roberts states that as a result of Black people not seeing themselves in the outdoors, they do not believe it is for them. She continues to say that marketing is a massive factor for consideration when discussing the lack of visitation to National Parks from Black Americans and that it has a more substantial impact than people may realize (Edmondson, 2006). The lack of visual representation in National Park marketing and advertising is indeed an act of symbolic annihilation, or erasure of race that contributes to the psychological divorce Black people have with wilderness spaces. The following sections will discuss several theories that will aid in understanding how people’s perceptions of abilities and visualizations impact their perception of behavior.

2.6 - Social Comparison Theory

Another theoretical framework that will be utilized later on as an analytical tool within this thesis, is the “Theory of Social Comparison Process” developed by Leon Festinger (1954). Festinger (1954) contends that a person’s cognition (opinions and beliefs) about the predicament in which they exist and their appraisals of what they are capable of doing (their evaluation of their abilities) will together have an impact on their behavior. Additionally, the holding of
opinions or inaccurate appraisals from others of one’s skills can be punishing or fatal in many situations. Simply put, a person’s self-evaluation of their capabilities to participate in an outdoor recreational activity such as hiking is dependent to an extent on the opinions others have formed of that person’s ability to go hiking. Another main takeaway from Festinger’s theory is that a person will tend to move into groups that she/he believes have viewpoints s/he agrees with or have similar abilities near her/his own. In turn, people are more likely to move out of groups in which they feel are incompatible with their opinions and abilities. This theoretical framework is particularly useful and elucidates the claims that will be made throughout this thesis. For instance, the claim will be made that Black people may feel they do not belong in wilderness areas because through exclusionary practices, White people have not made these areas welcoming to people of color. Secondly, this thesis will claim that as a result of Black people being excluded from partaking in activities in wilderness areas at National Parks due to discrimination, this has impacted their perception of their ability to participate. Therefore, Black people have not primarily joined traditional environmentalism groups and visited National Parks as a result of not feeling a sense of belonging. Regardless, people have a strong desire to identify with group norms and boost their self-esteem by comparing their social identity to the standards and attitudes of relevant outgroups and media offers people opportunities to develop and maintain their social characteristics (Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016).

2.7 – Tying Literature Together

In summary, this chapter provided a brief overview of the prior literature and research findings point to the conclusion that Black people are not actively participating, visiting, and engaging in outdoor recreational activities in wilderness areas at National Parks. There are various explanations as to what invisible barriers and glass ceilings are holding Black Americans
back from being a part of the NPS on all levels from park affiliation to park utilization. Although these studies are pertinent and integral to understanding Black attitudes, behaviors, and intentions towards visiting National Parks, there is an element missing on how National Park promotional materials implicitly impact Black peoples’ perceptions of the outdoors. Although studies have been conducted on visual representation in advertisements, this study will focus on park promotional materials published and disseminated by an established National Park instead of associated commercialized conglomerates that promote consumeristic National Park engagement. Additionally, this study will further this investigation by interviewing Black Americans regarding their sentiments towards environmentalism, outdoor recreation, wilderness and National Parks.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This chapter describes the methods applied in this study to answer the research questions deployed by the researcher. As a result of the nature of this research involving human subjects, to collect data, I had to participate in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program and submit an exempt application #17-179 to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to Syracuse University to uphold the integrity of ethical research standards. Overall, the methods of data collection for this study included qualitative semi-structured interviews and performing a quantitative content analysis of the Great Smoky Mountains’ National Park promotional guides.

3.1 – Research Methods

Multiple methods were conducted to answer several research questions adequately. When thinking about why I chose to do interviews and a content analysis, talking to various professors was how I initially became interested in these methods of choice. The content analysis was the first method I was interested in but after consultation with my steering committee members it was advised that I also conduct interviews. Additionally, in thinking about why I chose these particular methods, I considered using surveys, a method that was suggested while taking courses EST 603 and EST 797; however, conducting surveys was not appropriate. The research questions for this study ask: why do Black Americans not visit National Parks as much as White Americans do and how do National Park promotional materials such as park guides impact their intent to visit National Parks? The first method consists of qualitative interviews where participants were asked to explore their attitudes regarding the natural environment, outdoor recreation, and National Park use. The second method included a content analysis that will investigate Smoky Mountain National Park guides’ photographs. I chose to do a content analysis to supplement the interviews and to gain insight as to whether Black people are visually
represented in the Great Smoky Mountain park guides. This investigation will serve to explore how National Parks utilize their promotional publications to engage with the public and who are primarily utilizing the parks’ resources. Collectively these methods will begin to answer the overarching question of why there is a lack of involvement from Black Americans in outdoor related activities.

3.2 – Interviews

Research interviews were helpful to this study because they enabled me to explore the beliefs, experiences, opinions, and motivations of Black participation in National Parks. Interviews also provided an in-depth understanding of this subject matter that may not have been obtained from just using qualitative methods such as the content analysis performed in this study. I chose to implement the methodology of interviews because this method enabled a deeper understanding of how Black Americans perceive National Parks and outdoor recreation. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews of 13 participants, I explored the environmental outlooks of Black Americans including how they frame and utilize the natural environment. In total, there were thirteen interview participants that all identify as Black and American, they were over the age of 18 and currently reside in North Carolina. Five out of thirteen participants were between the ages of 18-25, four participants were between the ages of 26-50, and the remaining four were 60 years of age or older. Majority of interview participants were college educated. Three out of thirteen participants were current college students, six out of thirteen were working professionals, and the remaining four were retired. Four participants of this study were military veterans while the remaining nine had no military affiliation. Only two participants of the study had a background education in environmental studies or a similar field. In selecting interview participants, I wanted to be able to interview Black Americans that were in various stages of
adulthood, but I also wanted to reach out to the elderly population in this community. Senior citizens were represented in this study because of their longer exposure to marginalization than younger Black people. Furthermore, due to their age group they may be isolated from internet resource because they are not digital natives.

Figure 2 below provides information about each interview participant that includes their age, gender, and professional characteristics. Each participant was assigned a letter in chronological order based on the order they were interviewed in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Other Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A (+)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Working Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some College Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. B (+)</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Retired</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Veteran</td>
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<td>College Educated</td>
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<td>3. C (+)</td>
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<td>4. D (-)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College Educated</td>
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<td>5. E (0)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. F (-)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. G (+)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Environmentalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. H (-)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Working Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College Educated</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>I (+)</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>J (-)</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>K (-)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>L (+)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>M (+)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1 - Interviewee Characteristics, 2018.* **Key:** (+) Pro-environmental attitudes and engage in outdoor recreational activities (0) Pro-environmental attitudes with no activity (-) Negative environmental views with no activity

Interview respondents were evaluated based on their overall environmental attitude based on responses to interview questions #6 and #19 provided in the appendix of this thesis. Interviewees with a positive response to these questions have a (+) next to their pseudonym, while those interview respondents that provided a negative response were assigned a (-) next to their pseudonym. Lastly, those interview respondents who exhibited neutral environmental attitudes were assigned an (0). These “environmental scores” were based on whether or not interview respondents had what they expressed to be a connection to nature and secondly, their stated level of engagement with the outdoors was a factor in determining their overall score. For example, some participants expressed that they are not the “outdoor type”; therefore, do not participate in outdoor recreational activities and do not find value in nature were assigned a (-) score. While on the other hand, one participant stated that they value the environment, but do not participate in outdoor recreation or engage directly with nature. Therefore, this participant was assigned a neutral score of (0). Then some participants claimed to have a sincere appreciation of nature and expressed during interviews that they are actively participating in
outdoor recreational activities and were assigned a (+) score. Based on the chart majority of interview participants had a positive environmental rating.

The research question in this study asks, what are the environmental attitudes of Black Americans and what are their past behavior and intentions towards participating in outdoor recreation at National Parks. It is hypothesized that Black Americans are not concerned about environmental issues; do not appreciate the natural environment; have experience visiting national parks, and national park promotional materials do not have an impact on their intentions to participate.

As mentioned earlier, the most cited barriers to environmental participation from Black Americans include lack of access and knowledge, cost (transportation and admission) and racial discrimination (Mott, 2015). Although these barriers to participation are often cited, further research is needed on how National Park promotional materials such as park guides, and websites influence Black Americans’ visitation. To get a better understanding of how the National Park promotional materials impact Black Americans, participants, were shown photographs from a Smoky Mountain visitor guide and asked a series of questions regarding their intent to participate in the outdoor activities based on the images featured. Therefore, the second research question of this study asks, how do National Park advertisements impact Black Americans’ intentions to participate in outdoor activities. The images and interview responses are located in the appendix of this thesis.

Participants in this study were asked to engage in semi-structured interviews ranging from twenty minutes to an hour. Each interview participant, whether the interviews were held in person or through email, were asked the same series of twenty-three questions in the same order. Only three out of 13 interviews were conducted via email. Majority of interviews were
conducted in-person. Only one interview was conducted via telephone; therefore, that person was unable to see images from the park guides. Recruitment of interview participants began with existing contacts that reside in North Carolina. I reached out to participants via email, telephone or in person to schedule a time and date for an interview. Following the initial contacts, additional participants were recruited through purposeful sampling, in the form of snowball sampling and based on predetermined criteria such as being a community member or individual employed at environmental organizations. In-person interviews took place in various locations that depended on where the interviewee was comfortable meeting; however, all interviews were conducted in an indoor setting. In-person interviews were audio-recorded on an encrypted device and transcribed by the researcher. Each interview transcription took approximately one to two hours to complete depending on the length of the audio recording. Once the interview transcription process was complete, transcriptions were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software NVivo.

NVivo is a tool used to assist researchers in generating a codebook and determining themes among the interview responses. I utilized the software in a simple way by using it primarily for categorizing interview responses. NVivo was helpful in organizing and creating nodes that would later develop into themes of my thesis. Under each node there were additional nodes that were references of each interview participants’ transcription. NVivo assisted in creating a node of hierarchies where for example, the node “culture” was listed at the top and interrelated nodes such as “fear” and “safety” were listed below as more specific topics. Additionally, NVivo was able to organize the top recurring words into a list. For example, I ran a “query” or search for the 100 most frequently used words that then generated a list. From this list, the results were then saved as “nodes.” I was then able to filter the list based on whether I
wanted the words displayed in alphabetical order, how many sources (interviews) in which the word was referenced, or how many times the word was referenced in throughout all interview transcriptions. From that list, I was able to select a node and NVivo would populate the interview transcriptions where that node was said. NVivo would then display which interview transcription contained that particular node and how many times during that interview that node was mentioned. For example, the node “animal” had 12 sources and was referenced 42 times throughout all of the interview transcriptions. Some of the leading themes that emerged using the NVivo software were an increase in media advertising, better or more nature programs in schools, raising awareness in Black communities. I have included a sample data set of these codes in the appendix of this thesis on page 89. Some words were not to be taken into account such as “environment” as they are used by the researcher in asking interview questions; therefore, these words were coded as “outliers.” Based on the nodes that came out of the query, themes were developed from the references that were within the nodes. For instance, with the node that contained information about “beaches”, the theme developed was that Black Americans prefer to visit beaches than they do mountains to satisfy their outdoor recreational needs.

3.3 – Content Analysis

Performing the content analysis enabled me to indirectly study people through media such as images and documents. I chose to use this method in combination with interviews because it is unobtrusive and would allow me to detect the propaganda around whether there is an adequate amount or lack of visual representation of Black models depicted in the Great Smoky Mountain Park guides. Additionally, I became interested in the content analysis because I wanted to be able to identify the intentions of the National Park Service when it comes to visual
representation of racial diversity. Methods of data collection were adapted from an article published by Martin (2004) that consisted of a content analysis of magazine advertisements that were hypothesized to reproduce a racialized outdoor leisure identity. The study found that Black models were rarely featured participating in wilderness leisure activities and were often confined to urban and suburban environments within the magazines. It is important to note that, like Martin, I acknowledge that determining a person’s race based on an image can be problematic.

Competition in this study was coded as White, Black, Asian, Latino(a), Native American, or “other.” Following Martin (2004), race determinations were made subjectively based on visual cues such as skin color, hair type, facial features, and style of dress (for sex). It is hypothesized that the NPS adequately addresses the lack of racial diversity in the organization’s planning materials, programs and literature.

To determine whether or not National Park promotional materials perpetuate racialized spaces, I performed a content analysis on 307 images from the Great Smoky Mountain National Park published guides. Through a content analysis of National Park promotional materials, I explored whether or not Black Americans are featured in National Park guides and if so, in what context they are featured in. I specifically chose the Great Smoky Mountain National Park guides to evaluate, to complement the interview data I collected in North Carolina. This study analyzed fifteen Smoky Mountain park guides spanning the years 2013-2017 that were available for digital download. All seasons that were available for digital download were included in the content analysis. According to Karen Key, the GSMNP Senior Publication Specialist, the park guides are only available in hard copy during the season it is advertised for (Key, personal communication, 2018). There are no hard copies available at the end of the season because there is no archive kept of the guides and they are all given away to park users. The guides are only
accessible either online or at visitor centers at the National Park (Key, personal communication, 2018). Even if I were able to venture to the Smoky Mountains, depending on the time of the year that I went, I would only be able to collect one park guide versus having internet access to current and past park guides.

The methods for collecting the park guides included an online search for Smoky Mountain publications of park guides, downloading the files, and then saving the documents from the park’s website. Following Martin’s strategy, a content analysis was performed that required counting the images on each page of each guide, counting how many photos are included in each guide and how much percentage of the page the pictures occupy. Individuals that were not facing the camera or where their race was indistinguishable were still counted but counted as racially ambiguous or “other.” Images that were duplicate (featured in more than one park guide) were not included in the image coding process. Another rule that was adapted from Martin’s study was that if an image featured a cartoon character or drawing of a person, then that picture was not counted in the final analysis. This action was performed because such images are fictionalized and do not project a distinct or consistent racial personality with which viewers of the content can identify. More details of each photograph were recorded such as whether the images were in color or grayscale, if they portrayed people, whether the people depicted were visitors or park employees. Furthermore, the content analysis serves an examination of whether the Smoky Mountain park guides depict images of Black people and if so, what context they were portrayed in. Since I was mainly interested in the visual representation of Black people, I only examined pages that contained pictures and not text. In addition, since I was particularly interested in Black people within the park guides, I coded each photograph of them individually. Details recorded included a brief description, age (child, adult, senior), gender, whether they
were a park affiliate or park user. Further details were recorded of Black models such as whether they were pictured in a group or individually, skin tone, and activity they were engaged in.

To ensure accuracy and scale of calculations, this study will also offer a final analysis that is adapted from Derek Martin’s research methods. The implemented rules of methodology from Martin’s content analysis are listed below:

1. Up to four people were counted per advertisement.
   a. Justification: Martin (2004) gives an example of an advertisement that was featured in *Time* that depicted the Zion Baptist Gospel Choir of four Black males and four Black females. However, because this advertisement was the only one in that issue that featured Black people, counting each member of the choir individually would lead to the false impression that Black people were more represented throughout the issue that they actually were.

2. Only examined advertisements that contained pictures.

3. Advertisements that either did not feature people or where their race was indistinguishable were not included in the analysis; therefore, models coded as “other” were not included in the analysis.

4. Advertisements that featured cartoon characters were omitted from the analysis.

5. Images that were “collage ads” that featured a large group of diverse people where no individual identity is dominant were excluded from the analysis.
   a. Justification: Martin gives an example of a collage ad that featured a schoolteacher and a classroom of students. The identity of the main character (the teacher) was noted and the rest of the advertisement was coded as a “collage”. According to Martin, collage ads were excluded if there was no
main character present. Complications with this rule will be addressed in the limitations section of this thesis.

6. Advertisements that show multiple photos of the same person counted only as one person.

3.4 – Review of Other Content

In conducting this research, it is essential to acknowledge the efforts of the NPS to promote inclusion within the organization. The NPS has made attempts to encourage people of color to visit National Parks; however, despite these attempts, there is still a lack of visitation and participation from people of color, particularly Black Americans. I wanted to investigate the NPS programs and initiatives that are promoted on the organization’s website to see what the experience is like navigating online to find these resources.

To supplement the interviews and content analysis methods, I briefly evaluated the online content published by the NPS regarding its diversity and inclusion initiatives. Performing an online search for the National Park Service diversity plan, I came across the National Park’s Director’s Order (D.O.) #16B: Diversity in National Park Service effective March 29th, 2012 (NPS, 2012). Other web pages that were evaluated were the links to the “Call to Action Plan,” “Youth Programs” and the “Support Workforce Diversity” webpages (NPS, 2012).

Evaluation criteria of the websites are listed below:

– Goal of the website
– Problem addressed
– Dissemination of information
– Target audience
The next chapter of this thesis will discuss the findings of both research methods. Initial results from the content analysis provided evidence that images of Black people in National Park promotional materials are sparse and that there is a lack of visual representation among this ethnic group. Additionally, interview findings suggest that media representation impacts interview participants, and therefore this has an influence on their intentions towards participating in outdoor recreation at National Parks. Further evaluation of the NPS website shows that there are programs and opportunities for Black engagement at National Parks.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter will present the research findings for the interview and content analysis. Each method will be broken down into subsections within this chapter. Research findings for the interviews presented that a majority of participants do take an interest in the natural environment and its wellbeing, they do engage with wilderness, and although may not have visited a National Park, they do attend local and state parks. Research findings also provide evidence that there is a perceived difference in culture and that participants do feel like media has some influence on Black Americans’ intentions towards visiting National Parks.

In performing the content analysis, I found that a majority of the models depicted in the park guides were racially ambiguous and coded as “other.” Meaning that because of the angle the photograph was taken, most models were not directly facing the camera. However, this does not mean that models looked like they exhibited characteristics of multiple races, but that race was merely challenging to determine given the quality of the photograph, direction the model was facing, or the distance of the model within the frame.

4.1 - Interview Findings

Drawing on semi-structured interviews of six men and seven women over the age of 18 who identified as Black Americans and reside in the state of North Carolina, I investigated how they define the word environment and their thoughts on what environmentalism is. I chose to ask these questions because I wanted to be able to gauge participants’ knowledge about the environment and what environmentalism means to them. It has been argued that Black Americans lack knowledge about environmentalism and what environmental issues are currently a priority (Mock, 2014). Their responses are provided and located on page 83 in the appendix of this thesis document. Some interview participants defined the environment as immediate
surroundings, and others included animals, plants, and ecosystems into their definition. In defining Environmentalism, some participants were well informed about what environmentalism is and what environmental issues are taking precedence in the media.

Additionally, I investigated how Black people identify their relationship with the natural environment at National Parks and their suggestions as to what factors influence their participation - and the broader population of Black peoples’ involvement - in the outdoors. Additionally, I explored how media impacts their relationship or perception of outdoor recreation at National Parks. The findings of this study intersect with one another and present some ideas that are noteworthy to the body of literature on this topic concerning the lack of Black attendance at National Parks. There is the perception that Black people do not visit National Parks (Finney, 2014; Mott 2015; Weber & Sultana, 2013. Based on interview findings majority of interview participants have not visited the Smoky Mountains and have never been to a National Park. Figure 3 provides quotations from some interview participants as to whether they have attended a National Park if they have or haven’t their reasonings behind their participation or lack thereof.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Respondents</th>
<th>Question 8: Have you ever visited the National Park in North Carolina? If so, why there and not somewhere else?</th>
<th>Question 9: If you have not visited the National Park in North Carolina, why not?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>I’ve been to about 5 parks, but they are all a part of the Smoky Mountains. I go there every year and plan to go again in the future. You don’t see trash and electronics everywhere or cars you just see people who enjoy the mountains like you who just want to relax and just take in all the fresh air and scenery. That is why I tend to visit the mountains more.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td>Not the National Parks in the states. It’s on my bucket list. I haven’t made it there yet, but I plan to. I want to go out to Arizona and see the Grand Canyon.</td>
<td>Just haven’t gotten around to it. For the longest time, I was traveling around with the military and you know you never know where you’re going to be or when you’re going to be it’s just one of those very nomadic type lifestyles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td>National Parks…no I haven’t visited National Parks…I’ve visited a few federal parks or state parks but not any of the major National Parks.</td>
<td>Well my first excuse would be time. And I use the word excuse because that’s really what it is. I think it’s kind of like a balance you have a lot of things on your list and although you are very concerned about the environment it is not your first priority. Maybe your second priority and I think that’s…most of the areas that I’m in the National Parks have not been immediate. So maybe immediacy may have something to do with that. If it was closer, then I’d be there. That type of thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>It wasn’t a National Park, so I would say no…it’s a local park. Local parks but not National Parks.</td>
<td>I’ve never really been interested to go, so again I’m not the outdoorsy type of person so that wouldn’t be an interest of mine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td>I haven’t visited National Parks, but I’ve visited parks that aren’t included to be national.</td>
<td>Well I haven’t really had my license as much as most people have had it. So, I did not get much opportunity to go to National Parks and be able to see things like that because it’s kind of very out of the way with how the schedule was but like the older I get I have more friends who like to do a lot of outdoor stuff so it’s a plan to at least visit as many as I can.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yes, I’ve been to Pisgah National Park. I went hiking there one time but it’s up in Asheville. I was taking a class and we had to do personal projects. It was like an environmental philosophy class.

No, I have not. Danger. In total transparency, I don’t see it as a place I want to be.

No, I have not visited a National Park. I haven’t visited a National Park because I never really thought about it, but this question has Figure provoked some thought about it.

Table 2 - Interview Responses to Visitation at National Parks, 2018

4.1.1. - Relationship with the Natural Environment

According to previous scholarship, Black Americans are perceived to have a complicated and strained relationship with wilderness areas (Finney, 2014). To investigate these claims, during my interviews with participants, I asked them to describe their connection with the outdoors. The most central aspect of this study was that participants believed to have a relationship with the outdoors personally and enjoyed being in nature. Majority of interview participants claimed to have a moderate to a strong connection with the outdoors.

When asked, “how would you describe your relationship with the outdoors,” an appreciation for nature was expressed. “I love being outdoors…I appreciate the fact that if it weren’t for the trees, I would not survive.” – (B). Another respondent stated,

As you go through life experiences or as you age you develop an appreciation for things that maybe before you didn’t think twice about. So, I realize that in today’s environment I am more dependent on that environment than I thought I was. – (C).

Another aspect mentioned was that being outdoors or being in nature has effects on one’s mood. “I love working outdoors…I do not like it when it rains. I get moody. The weather affects
me mentally, emotionally.” – (I). Another interviewee mentioned a similar sentiment stating, “I love being outdoors...if I am inside for too long, I get claustrophobic.” – (B).

Other participants demonstrated a growing relationship with the outdoors or expressed the desire to engage with nature on a deeper level. For instance, one participant mentioned that although they participate in outdoor recreational activities, they believe their relationship with nature could be even stronger. “It could be stronger honestly; I try to strengthen my relationship with the outdoors by going out more...I go out on hikes now, walks, and on nature reserves, but it could be stronger.” – (G).

Measuring the levels of engagement that interviewees have with the environment was a part of this category. A majority of participants reported that they were active in outdoor recreational activities, have participated in some form of environmental conservation in the past, or are currently involved in conservation efforts. Outdoor recreational activities that were mentioned comprised of playing sports (football, basketball, baseball), walking (exercising), running, fishing, landscaping, camping, hiking, horseback riding, nature watching, kayaking, beach cleanups, and participating in outside gatherings such as cookouts. When asked whether or not the interviewee participated in environmental conservation activities, one aspect that was mentioned was volunteering where one respondent stated, “I do volunteer for environmental groups like the Sierra Club...”. – (G). Another aspect that was mentioned by another participant in response to the same question was recycling, “I do recycle...I guess when I use things I am conscious to make sure they are disposed of properly.” – (J).

When discussing why Black Americans do not visit the “Great Outdoors” answers varied. Although only half of the participants made the following claims, it is still important to incorporate it into these findings. Cultural differences were one aspect brought up during the
interviews, in the aspect that Black Americans have alternate cultural values in comparison to White Americans. When asked the question, “do you think there is a Black versus White environmentalism,” one participant stated,

Yes, I think it’s something that Black folks specifically identify with the environment much different than the average White person. They have a cultural thing; they have a tradition. They certainly don’t identify with camping or fishing. At least most of them don’t or hunting. So, I think that’s where there is a cultural difference there. – (I).

In discussing culture, some subcategories were mentioned that were thought-provoking to this study. The subcategories presented within the context of culture included a history of racism and slavery coupled with a feeling of being unsafe in wilderness areas. When asked the question, “what kind of connection, do you think Black people have with the Great Outdoors,” one participant made the following statement making the connection between the two subcategories,

Black people sometimes have had a really hard time, in some harsh environments so I think that sometimes it colors the way they might feel. Like for instance I don’t think necessarily a Black person would feel safe naturally, just going out and camping in the woods by themselves and they have a reason from previous history, to be apprehensive, so, you’ve got to keep all that in mind too. – (B).

To add context to this idea of a sense of fear in wilderness, one participant mentioned that the necessity of self-preservation or self-protection is embedded deep within the Black culture, “They have a very real sense of fear...of self-protecting.” – (I). A sense of survival is a part of being Black for some and going into the woods threatens that survival, “we can adapt but there’s something that is deep in our culture a healthy sense of self-preservation.” – (I). Another comment made by another participant suggested that Black people would feel safer in numbers when asked the question, “what are some ways that you can think of that Black Americans engage in environmental activities,” the respondent made the following comment,

I think it has to be done in a group, a group setting. They don’t go because they always finding something negative to say about it... but it’s a fear thing... fear of the
unknown...you hear a lot of stuff and you watch a lot of movies, so you don’t want to go out there because you think all these things might attack you out there. – (B).

When asking the same participant another question regarding the reasons why Black Americans may or may not choose to participate in environmental activities including outdoor recreation, she responded,

There has been a history in this country of abuse towards black people. Let’s face it. You hear the stories about the Ku Klux Klan and all the things that happened in the woods and all that stuff and I think people, those stories, even though some people might not personally experience them but being told about it coming down from the family or seeing things happen to your family member it impacts the way you think about being out there especially at night. – (B).

When asked the same question, another participant mentioned a similar idea about history but in the context of Black people being enslaved.

Well you know back in the early centuries they (Black people) were enslaved, so they were out there picking cotton, they were picking plants all day long, they were out there most of the time, they were out there connecting with themselves and with their culture and different cultures as well. – (F).

Another aspect mentioned within this context was the idea that Black people do not want to be reminded of the days of enslavement, therefore, do not wish to participate in activities that resemble that. One participant stated, “I think that you find that there are very few Black farmers today and I think it stems from that stigma of not wanting to be on a plantation.” – (I).

4.1.2. - Media

The most central aspect of this study was that there is a lack of advertising in urban and Black communities and also a lack of advertisements featuring Black people in wilderness areas. A majority of interview participants agreed that there is a need for more National Park promotional materials disseminated in their communities as well as a need for more visual representation of Black people interacting with the natural environment. Furthermore, a majority
of interview participants agreed that media has a profound influence on Black people and themselves as individuals. One interviewee mentioned the feeling of being unsafe from imagery seen on television and that influencing them. The participant stated,

*I’ve grown up watching too many movies with some Black person driving through the Smoky Mountain, or Mississippi, or Tennessee or wherever those mountains are...getting driven out into the mountains and dying.* – (H).

When asked, “what do you think can be done to get more of this population to participate,” a desire for more environmental and outdoor recreation advertisements in Black communities was expressed. “*Maybe try to target some of the educational information more... put up some billboards instead of a liquor store sign especially for the kids they need to start advertising.*” – (H).

One aspect mentioned was that there is not only a need for more advertising in urban communities, but there is a need for the advertising to be appealing to those members of said communities; “*if you advertise around it and that’s what you do you are trying to get people interested because you show how fun it can be if they go out and participate*”. – (J).

*In urban communities where the influence is predominately Black you don’t hear those things being advertised. You don’t hear people talking about let’s go to the mountains one weekend. I think these [environmental] clubs need to focus on the urban community. Make it look cool.* – (A).

The majority of interview respondents reported that media has a substantial influence on Black people. One aspect mentioned was the importance of media for Black people to understand the significance of appreciating and engaging with the natural environment.

*I believe the media has a great impact on African Americans. We are a race where we use media for influence. So, I say this to say that the media can do a better job of pointing out the importance of the environment and recreational activities. In addition to that, get more Blacks involved, the audience for environmentalism doesn’t only have to be Whites. With better representation of the environment in the media, I’m sure Blacks will become more willing to participate when they understand the importance of it.* – (K).
Media representation was a subcategory that was explored in this study. Some respondents felt that media representation was an essential factor in impacting Black peoples’ participation. When asked if media, such as photographs have an impact on how you view places such as the Great Outdoors, one respondent stated, “that is what you identify with. It could be whether it is negative or positive that is what you associate yourself with…so media has a significant impact especially on Black folks.” – (I). When asked if there is “an abundance, good amount or lack of Black people participating in outdoor recreation”, one respondent stated, “definitely, there is a lack of…it boils down to media and how we are being portrayed.” – (A). When asked, “do you think media such as photographs have an impact on how you view places such as the Great Outdoors,” one interviewee responded,

Absolutely…if we see us more in media then we tend to gravitate more to what we see...maybe if we see ourselves in more movies and magazines and things of that nature we will be a little bit less afraid to engage in outdoor activities.” – (A).

When asked the question, “can you think of any reasons why Black/African Americans may or may not choose to participate in these activities including outdoor recreation”, one respondent stated,

If you are a part of it, you are not just a minority, but you are a real minority. – (C).

Overall, the results of this study refuted the hypotheses that Black Americans are not concerned about environmental issues and do not appreciate the natural environment, Black Americans do not utilize the natural environment and Black Americans have experience attending National Parks but have experience visiting local and state parks. This study also
refuted the hypothesis that the lack of visual representation in National Park guides has no impact on Black American intentions towards visiting National Parks.

4.2 - Content Analysis

4.2.1. – Raw data

The hypothesis that there is an adequate amount of visual representation of Black people in National Park guides was refuted by the findings of the content analysis, as there were few Black people featured in the Smoky Mountains promotional publications. Not including duplicates, there were a total of 307 images displayed throughout all of the guides. Out of the 307 images, only 107 (34.8%) images depicted models. Out of the 107 images that included people, 48 images included models that were ostensibly White (44.8%). Out of the 107 images, there were five images (4.6%) that depicted Black models. Out of all the images presented in the park guides, a total of ten (9.3%) images were depictions of cartoon characters. The remaining 44 (41.1%) images were of models coded as “other” for race. Therefore, more images were depicting White models, cartoon models, and other models than there were of images depicting Black models.

Throughout all 107 photographs, there was a total of 366 individuals counted. Of the 366 individuals counted, there were a total of 41(11.2%) cartoon characters. Out of 325 real-life individuals, 97 (29.8%) of the individuals depicted were White models, while 33 (10.2%) individuals were depicted as Black models. The remaining 195 (60%) individuals depicted within the park guides were coded as “other” because their race was indistinguishable. Based on these findings, I concluded that there were more individuals depicted as White, cartoon, or “other” than there were of individuals depicted as Black.
I was particularly interested in the Black models featured in the magazine, so more details were coded for the Black individuals depicted. Only three photorealistic images featured people that were ostensibly Black. An analysis of the character types (park affiliates versus park users) revealed significant differences in character portrayals. One photograph featured a single Black man who was a park affiliate in the form of the Smoky Mountain’s Superintendent (Figure 2), and another picture featured one Black woman who seemed to be a park visitor reading a park guide accompanied by an older White woman (Figure 3). Another image featured a large group of approximately thirty-one Black Buffalo soldiers who were affiliated with the Smoky Mountains National Park (Figure 4). The image of the Buffalo soldiers is an outlier meaning that the representation of Black models depicted in the park guides’ photographs was not evenly distributed throughout all of the guides. The image of the Buffalo soldiers was featured on a timeline along with various other photos and comprised less than 25% of the page it was featured on. Thus, it is important to note that because such a large group of Black individuals were featured in one picture, the calculations of representation are not to scale in this study giving the impression that there is more representation of Black people throughout the guides than there was. This would have a different impact on viewers of the guides if there were images of 33 individual Black models depicted throughout the entirety of the guides versus 31 Buffalo soldiers in a small image and two individuals. If this study were to determine the number of Black visitors depicted in the park guides in comparison to the number of Black
park affiliates, then that number would be one (3.1%). In contrast to the number of all visitors depicted in the park guides, Black models would make up a total of one individual which is equivalent to 0.38%. In contrast, the total number of Black park affiliates featured in the park guides equal 32 (47.7%) while the total number of park affiliates of another race equaled 35 (52.2%) individuals. Therefore, this study concluded that Black models depicted as park users and park affiliates were less than users and affiliates that were White or coded as “other.”

All images of Black models took up less than 25% of the page in the guide they were featured in. Out of the three images, only the picture of the Black woman was displayed in color while the two images depicting Black men were in grayscale. Majority of the Black models depicted were of dark-skin tone. The pictures featuring Black models are displayed below in figures 4, 5 and 6. A total of zero percent of Black models featured in the park guides were engaging in outdoor recreational activities and were only featured as models that were posing or standing still. Out of all images depicting people in a group setting (55 images = 96.4%), there were only two images (3.5%) that depicted Black people in a group setting. Therefore, this study concluded that there are less Black models featured in a group setting than there are models depicted as White or “other” in a group setting. Zero percent of Black models were depicted in a family setting or depicted interacting with any children. Additionally, there were not any Black children (0%) depicted within the park guides in general in comparison to 91 children depicted in park guides that were coded as either White or “other” (35.2%). Thus, this study concludes that
there were less Black children models depicted in park guides in comparison to all the children depicted in total. Figure 7 offers a visualization of these quantitative findings where models that were Black are shown on the bar graph in the color blue, and all other models are exhibited in the color orange based on the issue of the park guide.

4.2.2 – Martin’s Methods

To efficiently analyze this study’s findings, methods were adapted from Martin’s content analysis conducted in 2004 on advertisements in magazines. Based on some of his methods, the results of my content analysis are different in comparison to the data I provided in the previous section. I was particularly interested in investigating whether there were Black models featured in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park guides and in what context they were featured in.

Following the rules of analysis given in Martin’s article, there were a total of 71 people that were coded as either Black or White. Out of the 71 models, 2 individuals that were categorized as Black and 69 models categorized as White shown in Figure 8. Therefore, the number of Black models featured in the park guides made up only 2.8% of the population while in contrast White models comprised 97.1% of photographs. Taking Martin’s methodology into consideration, this study’s findings suggest that there are less Black models featured in park guides than White models. Thus, this study refutes the hypothesis that there is adequate visual representation of Black people depicted in the Smoky Mountain park guides.
4.3 – Evaluation of NPS Websites on Diversity and Inclusion

In evaluating the NPS diversity and inclusion websites, I came across some interesting findings. I had to do an online search purposely looking for diversity initiatives by the NPS; therefore, dissemination of information is not readily accessible on the organizations home page or home links. The first link that came up in my search was a link to the Director’s Order #16B
on diversity and inclusion. The purpose of D.O. #16B is to provide regulatory standards for addressing the problem of the lack of diversity in the National Park Service (NPS, 2012). I did not see this document readily available on the diversity and inclusion webpage of the NPS website. Furthermore, the target audience for this document appears to be for an internal audience within the organization (NPS, 2012). Navigating to the diversity programs webpage was relatively easy with a direct online search. There are, however many different links to different programs that didn’t offer a lot of information. Another link that I was led to, was the “Call to Action Plan” implemented in 2016 (NPS, 2015). The purpose of this plan was to address all the changes and improvements the NPS wanted to implement in the years to come. The target audience of this information seems to be both internal and external persons of the organization.

The links led to more weblinks that led me to specific programs regarding Black American participation efforts being made by the NPS. Specifically, the NPS targets Black Americans with two diversity initiatives that were substantial to this evaluation. The first initiative in engaging youth was a link to the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Initiative (HBCUI) (NPS, n.d.). The purpose of this initiative is to give Black students the opportunity to gain internship experience working for the NPS (NPS, n.d.). However, there was no problem to be addressed on the webpage, but it can be inferred that inclusiveness of young Black people was the problem being addressed.

The second initiative was found by clicking the link “supporting workforce diversity,” then clicking on another link “employee resource groups.” The “Employee Empowerment Collective” addresses the “unique” needs of Black American employees and visitors (NPS, n.d.). The purpose of this initiative is to adhere to the agency’s goals to promote diversity, inclusion, and relevancy while also enhancing the visibility of Black American history in the National Park
System (NPS, n.d.). There were no further links to this program, but a contact email was given to inquire for more information.

4.4 - Summary of Findings

Overall, this chapter provided results of the content analysis and interviews. Conducting these studies provided support for the hypotheses that Black people are not as likely to be featured in park guides as White Americans are. This study also suggests that Black Americans are knowledgeable about environmental issues but do not partake in outdoor recreation at National Parks for reasons that are in part associated with a lack of visual representation in National Park publicized media.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter will provide a more in-depth analysis of the results demonstrated in the content analysis and interviews. The overall research questions of this thesis ask, why Black Americans do not visit National Parks as frequently as White Americans, and how do National Park promotional materials impact Black peoples’ intent to visit National Parks? The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the significance of this study’s findings and make connections to what is already known about the topic. Overall, the findings from the content analysis have refuted the hypothesis that there is an adequate amount of visual representation of Black people depicted in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park guides. Research findings from the interviews also disproves the hypothesis that Black Americans do not exhibit environmental concern and appreciation, that Black Americans do not engage with the natural environment, and that Black Americans have experience visiting National Parks. The first half of this chapter will focus on National Park promotional media and its impact on Black Americans’ intentions to visit wilderness areas. The latter half of this chapter will discuss the other findings revealed in the interviews.

5.1. - National Park Promotional Media and its Impact

5.1.1 – Smoky and Mirrors

National Park promotional materials or media such as park guides, and websites are used by the NPS to distribute information to the public about each National Park and its attributes. In order to investigate how these promotional materials impact public participation, mainly from Black Americans, a content analysis was performed as well as a series of interviews. Findings from the content analysis offer evidence that there is a lack of visual representation of Black people within the Smoky Mountain park guides. Findings from the interviews provide evidence
that Black people are negatively impacted by the lack of media representation by the NPS; therefore, limiting their willingness to visit these wilderness spaces.

According to Root (2017), eighty-three percent of National Park employees identify themselves as White and seventy-eight percent of National Park visitors were identified as White (NPR, 2016). Specifically, within the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, visitor ethnicity is even more disparate when compared to the NPS as a whole. Being that the Great Smoky Mountains is ranked as the most visited National Park in America (National Geographic, 2017), one would think that there would be all different kinds of people from all different backgrounds and ethnicities visiting this popular tourist destination. However, in 2008, approximately 97% of individuals (out of 2511 people) that visited the Smoky Mountains identified as White and 1% of visitors were Black. In comparison to the content analysis of the Smoky mountains park guides, White models comprised 97.1% of photographs as visitors and non-visitors. Therefore, it is apparent that the National Park guides of the Great Smoky Mountains reflect the reality of the demographics within that National Park. Instead of diversifying the content of the park guides to attract a grander audience, it is apparent that the Smoky Mountains promotional materials mirror the dominant users of the park.

5.1.2 – Symbolic Annihilation of Black Americans in Smoky Mountain Guides

The lack of visual representation of Black Americans in National Park guides is apparent in the Smoky Mountain park guides, therefore not making the Smoky Mountains relevant or relatable to Black people. With such a large population of Black people living in the South in close proximity to a National Park, there should be more visual representation of Black people not only in reality but within the fictional realm of the NPS park guides. This echoes the theory of symbolic annihilation mentioned earlier in this thesis that postulates that subpar media
treatment contributes to social disempowerment, erasing individuals and groups from public consciousness (Coleman & Yochim, 2008). Coleman & Yochim’s argument that the symbolic annihilation of race, facilitates a deeper conversation about what things mean and how they register, applied to the content analysis of this study. For example, the images that depicted Black models within the Smoky Mountain park guides featured one Black woman and one Black man. Both of the Black models depicted were not engaging in any particular outdoor recreational activity nor were they depicted to have any friends or family. The image of the Black woman was displayed in color while the picture of the Black man was shown in grayscale. Picture size is known to have an impact on advertising and larger picture sizes have a more favorable effect on the overall brand attitude by the audience (Percy & Rossiter, 1983). Neither of the images featuring Black models occupied more than twenty-five percent of the page in the guide they were featured in. Therefore, images depicting Black people were not significant in scale to some of the other content and images included throughout the park guides.

Symbolic annihilation is a process by which the media rarely or never shows certain types of people (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). Media being a cultural mechanism has the ability to dispense images accompanied with messages with these types of people and in that process sends symbolic messages to viewers/readers about the societal value of the people comprising that group (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). Some Black Americans have spoken to the effect symbolic annihilation has on their perception of wilderness. Superintendent Cassius Cash of the Smoky Mountains expressed in an interview with the Washington Times that he thinks it is important to let young children and teens know that they can do what he is doing at National Parks because growing up he didn’t see anyone like him in the role that he is in (Davis, 2015). One interview participant of this study spoke to how the symbolic annihilation of Black Americans in media
relative to outdoor exploration from environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club, has an influence on her sense of obtaining a position in that organization. Furthermore, it reifies the perception that the Great Outdoors is a racialized space where if a Black person enters they have the perception that their life might end. When asked the question, “do you think media such as photographs have an impact on how you view places such as the Great Outdoors,” interview participant “G” said the following,

Yeah, I think it has a lot to do with how I view the Great Outdoors because commercials that have to with hiking and mountains and all this type of stuff that’s geared to more the outdoor and vacation type of people... and when you see the spokespeople for these big environmental groups like the Sierra Club and when you see their panel it’s not really diverse. So, I feel like it would be hard to get a role there and it would be hard to have a voice in those type of groups because they are predominately White and run by men. So, I feel like people make hiking or going out in nature “a White thing”. Like people go to the park or go hiking that’s how you get killed or something like that. It has a negative connotation for Black people when you talk about the environment or going outdoors. – (G).

This quote is a testament to the Black experience and confirms some of the reasons why Black Americans do not visit National Parks. The underrepresentation of Black Americans in National Park promotional materials and the organizations that have partnerships or advocate for the usage of National Park space has a profound influence on Black visitation. In relation to this concept of visual representation or lack thereof, another interview participant mentioned the aspect of the NPS using endorsements from Black celebrities that are then openly broadcasted through media to engage Black Americans to attend National Parks. When asked the question, “what do you think can be done to motivate more Black Americans to participate in outdoor recreation at National Parks”, interview participant E said the following,

Media. A lot of media. A lot of Black people follow their favorite celebrities on the internet. If their favorite celebrities or public figure acknowledge the Earth and give indication that they support the Earth, then you would tend to see Black people following that movement really fast and it happens a lot with other movements. So as long as the
In relation to the Theory of Symbolic Annihilation, there was the concept that people of color were at one point deemed as the “enemy of the forest” during World War II due to their dependence on fire for survival and retaliation by means of protest (Kosek, 2006). Fire became more so associated with deviance and evil over the years and eventually there was a strong connotation with “social degenerates” and wild fires. The themes of being an “enemy of the forest” and “symbolically annihilated” are inextricably linked; the antagonistic misrepresentation associated with the former has influenced the subsequent near invisibility of people of color in the media surrounding National Parks. For instance, the fire prevention posters during that time perpetuated racist sentiments and depictions but realizing that these posters were scaring children the Forest Service brought in the fictitious character Smokey the Bear (Kosek, 2006). The Forest Service did not change these ads because they were racist. So, the media pertaining to National Parks and wilderness conservation went from perpetuating racist stereotypes to then nearly eliminating people of color from being a part of the outdoors. Coleman and Yochim (2008), argue that media has the ability to perpetuate a “modern racism” where the rejection of systematic discriminations that have plagued Black Americans are exhibited. Additionally, pertaining to race, specifically for Black people, means that racial group that is not presented as fully developed in media whether through absence, condemnation, or trivialization, may interpret that as a diminished social status (Coleman & Yochim, 2008).

Furthermore, Black models as depicted in the park guides, arguably are socially disempowered and nearly erased from public consciousness. For instance, if Black Americans are not depicted participating in these activities, then they are then erased from the public
consciousness that surrounds National Parks and outdoor recreation. This erasure not only removes Black Americans from the psyche of the public as a whole but from the subconscious of Black people themselves when it comes to visiting National Parks. In other words, if Black people are not included in National Park related media or visualized participating at National Parks, then they will believe that is a place they don’t belong in. Having a “sense of belonging” is an essential human need for functioning in every-day life (Enayati, 2012). This perception of not belonging has been confirmed in an interview of this study. When asked the question, “can you think of reasons why Black Americans may or may not choose to participate in outdoor recreation at National Parks” one interview respondent mentioned the aspect that media has a way of influencing Black Americans into believing that they are not a part of that wilderness subculture. Interview participant “C” stated the following in response to the aforementioned question, “I think sometimes the way the media portrays things can influence Black people. That may lead to Blacks not feeling that they should be a part of that or something like that.” – (C).

As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis, one of Outdoor Afro’s main focal points is to change the “visual narrative” that Black people don’t belong in wilderness areas. In this particular study, while one interview participant was viewing pictures from a Smoky Mountain park guide, they explicitly stated that they did not see themselves and did not see other Black people in the photographs advertising outdoor recreation. Another participant also made that distinction; however, majority of interview participants did not for those particular photographs. Still, other distinctions were made during the interviews such as the need for more representation in Black communities and of Black people in guides in general before viewing the photographs.
The following subsection of this chapter will discuss how National Park promotional materials aid in limiting the sense of belonging to Black Americans in wilderness areas by looking through the lens of the theory of social comparison.

5.1.3 – Social Comparison Theory and the Wilderness

People have a strong desire to identify with the norms perpetuated by particular groups (Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016). One statement made during one of the interviews I conducted, directly related to the way in which Black people think about themselves in comparison to others when thinking about their ability to participate in an activity. The participant specifically stated that media influences Black people in a way that may lead them into thinking that they should not be a part of the NPS. For example, the perception of being a “real minority” was mentioned that explains that for some Black Americans, being a part of environmental initiatives or visiting a National Park would make that person who is already a minority to the general public even more of a minority. This statement was interesting to make a note of and can be connected back to Festinger’s Theory of Social Comparison (1956).

According to the Theory of Social Comparison, people tend to move into groups in which they feel share similar beliefs or have similar abilities to his/her own. Also, the theory of social comparison proposes that people tend to move out of groups that they feel are incompatible with his/her beliefs and abilities. Therefore, in relation to National Parks, White Americans may feel like visiting National Parks is part of the norms of their culture as an ethnic group whereas Black Americans may not feel like environmental groups, causes, and activities reflect their values, beliefs or abilities. For instance, when discussing how media such as photographs impact Black Americans, some interview participants specifically spoke to how some Black people may gravitate more to outdoor recreation if they see other Black people are participating. Many
participants stated that media such as photographs have a way of shaping peoples’ identity and their associations with certain groups. One participant said, “if we see us more in media then we tend to gravitate more to what we see.” – (A). Another participant stated,

*When you see that media…that is what you see that is what you identify with. It could be whether it is negative or positive that is what you associate yourself with. So, what we do is that we draw our conclusion based on that we make opinions based on what we read and what we see on TV as opposed to actually going there and experiencing that for ourselves. – (I).*

There is also the perception amongst Black Americans that if one were to engage in outdoor recreational activities in wilderness areas at National Parks that would mean that person would be “acting White” (Martin, 2004). Frequently, Black Americans may fear that participating in activities that are deemed as “for White people” will result in them being ostracized by their peers (Martin, 2004). This perception then contributes to an individual’s social identity and social satisfaction. National park media such as park guides, and websites have impacted Black peoples’ social status and reinforces a sense of not belonging in outdoor recreational and nature groups. For instance, referring back to the documentary by Ken Burns (2009) about National Parks mentioned earlier in this thesis, historian Clay Jenkins states that if a person does not have a genuine link to nature that is serious and profound, they cannot be an American. A majority of persons who visit National Parks are ethnically identified as White; therefore, reifying the sense that nature belongs to White people. Also, that if someone is not White and has not been connected to nature through visiting a National Park, then they do not qualify to be an American. Therefore, this way of thinking may be a subconscious barrier to participation that may need more investigation.

The following subsection of this chapter will delve deeper into other exciting findings that have emerged from this study. Some of the results will discuss how a history of slavery and
oppression has contributed to a negative association of the woods, thereby lessening the intentions of Black people to visit wilderness areas in avoidance of negative racial encounters and collective cultural memories of abuse. Additionally, the following section will discuss other influences that contribute to the invisible barrier of participation from Black Americans.

### 5.2. - Other Findings

#### 5.2.1 – History

Previous research indicates that throughout history Black Americans have a negative association with wilderness areas as a result of slavery (Finney, 2014). Prior literature has also suggested that due to being excluded from National Parks through discrimination practices such as Jim Crow, Black people are less likely to have the urge to visit these particular destinations (Mock, 2016). According to Weber & Sultana (2013), White Americans are more likely to value nature and wilderness than people of color. Specifically, for Black Americans, there may be a different historical relationship to wilderness areas. Rather than the freedom that National Parks may represent to White Americans, those wilderness areas may represent enslavement, strenuous labor, or fear of violence due to a history of slavery and racism exhibited during the Jim Crow Era. While conducting interviews, certain participants mentioned this strained relationship between Black Americans and nature as a result of the racism and discrimination they have faced in the past. In the interviews, a thought emerged that Black Americans are not as enthusiastic as White Americans are about going into the woods because of the traumatic events that took place there such as slave hunts and lynch mobs. One interviewee mentioned that Black Americans are impacted by slavery in a way that makes them not want to do things that would remind them of what their ancestors went through. When asked the question, “can you think of any connection that Black people have with the outdoors?” one participant stated, “from the days of slavery...I
think that you find that there are very few Black farmers today and I think it stems from that stigma of not wanting to be on a plantation.” – (J).

Other publications have mentioned this phenomenon that Black people fear venturing into wilderness areas due to the ramifications of racism (Finney, 2014; Virden & Walker; 1999; White; 1996). This hypothesis was presented in my study and the context provided by interviewees may be beneficial for understanding how Black Americans have come to avoid the woods. When asked the question, “when you think of wilderness and the Great Outdoors what comes to mind,” one respondent stated, “I always think it’s dangerous and not somewhere you want to be.” – (H). Another respondent mentioned the aspect that some National Park travel destinations are appealing to the eye but may present unforeseen dangers. When asked the question, “do you think media such as photographs have an impact on how you view places such as the Great Outdoors”, one respondent made the following remark,

Some places may look very peaceful, but sometimes they can be very dangerous to people who are trying to visit there...they don’t know about like the actual dangers that are there. – (F).

Brownlow (2006) discusses “fear of the unknown” in outdoor recreational areas amongst Black communities and individuals. According to Brownlow (2006), fear is indirectly affiliated with a perceived absence of control over one’s welfare. In discussing this concept with Dr. Alec Brownlow (2017), fear, at the base level, is personal and varies from individual to individual. However, fear can be structural, that is causes of fear can be identified and explained within histories and politics, including race, gender, and sexuality (Brownlow, personal communication, 2017). Fear can also be socially constructed wherein people are told what, who and where to be afraid of. The notions of safety are then exploited for political and economic gains and reproduced and institutionalized and through media and pop culture (Brownlow, personal
communication, 2017). Brownlow (personal communication, 2017) also mentions the aspect that survival is at the root of both fear and safety and how it moves upward, for example, from the individual scale to family/loved ones, then to neighbors, and the community. This insight was confirmed in some of the interviews I conducted, included Chapter 4, concerning the aspect of fear, safety and survival. *Black and Brown Faces in America’s Wild Places* (2006) by Dudley Edmondson interviews 19 people of color about their devotion to wildlife conservation and outdoor recreational activities. One of the interview participants was Shelton Johnson, the Black Forest Ranger that was mentioned earlier in this text. Johnson expresses why he thinks Black Americans may be apprehensive about participating in outdoor recreation at National Parks. According to Johnson, he believes one of the reasons why Black Americans are not visiting wilderness areas is because they feel conspicuous about when they are at National Parks regarding safety concerns. He continues to say that over the years Black people have heard stories about acts of racism at the National Parks that has possibly deterred them from visiting and even as a Park Ranger himself, he has experienced racial prejudice in the outdoors. Johnson tells a story of how he led a family on a tour of caves in Great Basin National Park and that they identified as Ku Klux Klan members. He dealt with them by reassuring them that he was vital to their safety and survival through the caves (Edmondson, 2006). Unfortunately, if that were a situation with a Black person who was not in a position of authority their fate may not have been the same. This story runs parallel to the sentiments of fear that were expressed in the interviews of this study.

The feeling of being unsafe correlates to a perception of risk in National Parks. Some perceptions of safety may be technical or related to park safety procedures such as handrails and signs. Other perceptions of safety that have been aforementioned in this thesis relates more to
societal or psychological risks. Risk perceptions are shaped by community memberships, values, beliefs and lived experiences (Rickard, 2014). Additionally, perceptions of risk are emanated by meanings and connections that are attributed to a physical setting (Rickard, 2014). According to Slovic (1987), “risk concerns may provide a rationale for actions taken on other grounds or they may be a surrogate for other social or ideological concerns (n.p.).” With this information, the ramifications of a history of slavery and discrimination are still being experienced when it comes to the comfortability of Black Americans in wilderness areas at National Parks.

The next subsection will cover additional findings that resulted from the interviews of this study.

5.2.2 – Additional Findings

Some additional findings were interesting to make a note of and may be worthy of further investigation and discussion in the future. Some of these findings include topics such as having environmental programs in schools, tactics for raising awareness in Black communities, and cultural differences in outdoor recreation. Additionally, this section will discuss the initiatives and programs that the NPS has implemented to address the problem of a lack of diversity in National Parks. Although these findings were not included in my initial results, I feel as though they are still relevant to the argument of why Black Americans may not visit National Parks but may also speak to lack of participation in environmental activism.

Participating in environmental and nature programs in schools was a theme that emerged during the interviews. For instance, some participants mentioned that their connection with nature was primarily made through nature programs or classes in elementary or secondary school. When asked the question, “do you participate in any environmental conservation or outdoor recreation activities,” one interviewee stated, “I used to in high school and we would
normally once every two weeks go around the school and just clean up the trash that’s left outside.” – (E). Another respondent stated that school programs were their way of participation and that being out of school they do not get to experience that opportunity anymore.

When I was younger and in school yes, those things were accessible to us but now as far as your average citizen they don’t have the accessibility to learn more about environmental activities. – (M).

Other interview participants mentioned that there is a need for more of these programs in schools within Black communities in order to build community capacity.

I think it’s not being taught in schools…black public schools… when it comes to high school and middle school I don’t recall having a class about the environment and in college it’s optional, it’s an elective unless you are studying something pertaining to the environment if you don’t select those class you don’t become aware. – (M).

Another interview participant mentioned that there is a need for more programs that are inclusive.

Having programs to include everybody…to include their families…having more access to the outdoors. Not making parks so far away from certain places. Making it every time you go outside there is an opportunity to have an outdoor experience. – (G).

Prior literature has suggested that there is a need for more nature programs that are targeted towards communities of color. According to Mott (2015), implementing preferred programs that are intentional towards meeting the needs of different racial groups is a way to help make National Parks more accessible and attractive to a more diverse group of citizens. Mott (2015) states that this solution is as simple as determining which outdoor activities people of color prefer to participate in and then centering marketing around those activities. According to this report, only three percent of Black Americans participate in hiking. Instead, Black people are more likely to participate in outdoor activities such as running, jogging, nature trails, biking and fishing (Mott, 2015). These activities coincided closely will the findings of my study’s interviews. While some interview participants reported having participated in hiking, others
stated that they preferred jogging or walking through a nature trail. Some participants explained why they believe Black Americans do not participate in hiking as an outdoor recreation activity specifically. When asked the question, “what kind of connection, do you think Black Americans have with the Great Outdoors,” one participant made the following remark,

*It’s all negative... I would approach them and say hey do you want to go hiking for a weekend? ... oh no there are too many bugs outside...it’s too sweaty...what if I get eaten by an animal? – (I).*

Another participant mentioned the aspect of feeling like something bad would happen if a Black person were to venture into the woods. When asked the question, “have you noticed an abundance, a good amount, or a lack of Black Americans participating in outdoor recreation”, one participant made the following statement,

*I think it’s a cultural thing where I don’t think nature was presented to us where it was a good thing just to go hiking, it wasn’t presented as a recreational activity. It wasn’t taught as something recreational. So, when we think about hiking we think something bad is going to happen. We shouldn’t be in the woods. Were as a Caucasian person may feel like this is nature. I think it is taught. I think it is a generational thing. I think it’s taught where they had the awareness and we didn’t. I believe it’s cultural. – (D).*

When asked the question, “do you think media such as photographs have an impact on how you view places such as the Great Outdoors,” one participant mentioned the aspect that marketing for these wilderness areas are catered to a White audience which reinforces the stereotype that hiking is a “White thing.”

*I think it has a lot to do with how I view the great outdoors because commercials that have to with hiking and mountains and all this type of stuff that’s geared to more the outdoor and vacation type... and when you see the spokespeople for these big environmental groups like the Sierra Club and when you see their panel and all that stuff it’s not really diverse. So, I feel like it would be hard to get a role and it would be hard to have a voice in those type of groups because they are predominately white and run by men. So, I feel like people make hiking or going out in nature a quote on quote a white thing. Like people go to the park or go hiking that’s how you get killed or something like that. It has a negative connotation when you talk about the environment or going outdoors. – (G).*
Another interesting aspect of outdoor participation that was brought up was the way in which Black Americans utilize the outdoors aside from the popular activities such as hiking, jogging, camping, etc. Some participants mentioned that how Black Americans use outdoor spaces may be culturally different than how White Americans have traditionally used these spaces. When asked the question, “what is your definition of the outdoors”, one participant stated, “Going outdoors means fun...get together with family, friends, play games, music, and food” – (I).

This quote speaks to the subculture/ethnicity hypothesis that suggests racial and ethnic differences in recreation behaviors can be caused by different norms, value systems, and socialization practices that are adhered to by ethnic groups that are aside from socioeconomic factors (Floyd, 1999; Weber & Sultana, 2013). This hypothesis also emerged during my study, although it was not a significant factor mentioned, the quote mentioned by the respondent are worthy of inclusion. When asked the question, “do you believe there is a Black versus White environmentalism,” one interview participant mentioned that the aspect that environmentalism is slowly becoming a part of Black American culture.

*I would say that I believe for the Black population...I think that...when it comes to environmental awareness, it started out being in a White culture versus a Black culture. I think that we didn’t really get it. We are getting better at catching onto it, but I think it was something that we didn’t care about. So yes, I believe that there is. Yes, there’s a difference. – (D).*

Although these trends were not significant amongst all thirteen interview participants, I believe they should still be discussed in this study’s findings. In summary, these findings present the argument that Black Americans do use outdoor spaces but in different ways from White Americans there may be enviro-cultural differences between Black and White Americans, and
that there is a need for environmental programs in urban schools that should either be continued or implemented.

According to D.O. #16B the NPS acknowledges that its most significant promise of this century cannot be accomplished until improvements are made to include the diversity of the Nation in all National Park Service activities (NPS, 2012). Furthermore, this document states that the most urgent challenge is to “actually increase” the overall participation of diverse groups in all NPS activities, which would demonstrate the organization’s dedication to achieving the goal of diversity in the workplace. D.O. #16B was made effective in 2012 and acknowledges the responsibility of the organization to adhere to federal policies such as E.O. 12898 (NPS, 2012).

However, when looking at the “Call to Action Plan” disseminated in 2015 the organization has yet to check the box on “Valuing Diversity” (NPS, 2015). In valuing diversity, the NPS plans to conduct a service-wide cultural diversity assessment and to also complete competencies training for all supervisors in order to develop an inclusive work environment (NPS, 2015). There is no mention of increasing diversity amongst park visitors or increasing racial diversity specifically. However, the “Call to Action Plan” does have visual representations of Black people that may or may not impact viewers positively or negatively. For example, there are images of Black visitors and Black Park Rangers including an image of Shelton Johnson, the Park Ranger mentioned earlier in this thesis. However, there is also an image of three Black people portraying slaves on a plantation (Figure 9). Although it is critical to address the historical relationship Black Americans have had with the NPS, the imagery of slaves on a plantation is precisely the type of visual representation or narrative that many Black Americans see as problematic reminders when visiting a National Park.
The following section of this chapter will discuss limitations of this research study.

5.3 – Limitations

It is important to emphasize the challenges of this study for future research on this topic. There were several limitations to this study. Each limitation will be highlighted in this section based on the methodology used.

5.3.1 – Limitation of Interviews

It is acknowledged that as a result of starting interviews using snowball sampling, that there is researcher bias in purposefully selecting interview participants. Additionally, the sample size of interview participants was a limitation to this study. It is acknowledged that only interviewing 13 individuals is not representative of the entire state of North Carolina or the national population of Black Americans. Another limitation of interviews as a method is that interviews responses are usually open ended in a way that doesn’t allow for a standard answer.

5.3.2 – Limitations of the Content Analysis
There were several limitations of performing the content analysis. One limitation of this study as mentioned before is the methodology from the researcher in determining the race of models featured in the park guides. Determining race is subjective given that the researcher was unable to ask each person what race they identify with. The only cues that the researcher could use were skin color, facial features, and hair type. Therefore, if someone else were to do this study using the same park guides they might have different perceptions about which model should be coded as White, Black or “other.” Additionally, it is understood that following the methods used by Martin could have complications when using racial terms such as “White,” “Black,” and “other.” Using the term “other” may not allow room for diversity beyond the binary races by lumping all other racial groups into one category. Another limitation of the content analysis is the exclusion of indistinguishable persons. Not being able to count models due the quality of the photographs is problematic when trying to determine an accurate depiction of who is represented in the National Park guides. Exclusion of models that were in what Martin categorized as a “collage ad” was also a limitation to this study. For instance, excluding the photograph of the Buffalo Soldiers further marginalizes a racial group that isn’t represented well within the NPS. Another limitation of this study lies within the methodology adapted from Martin’s study. Only counting up to a maximum of four individuals per image could be problematic due to the issue of symbolic annihilation. There is a lack of visual representation of Black people in both Martin’s study and mine that is in part due to the exclusion of the researcher.

5.4 – Overview of Discussion

Overall, this chapter provided a psychological and theoretical perspective on the results found in this study. Theoretical aspects that were utilized to analyze the results of this study were
the theory of symbolic annihilation and social comparison. Key findings hold implications that there is a disparity of images representing Black Americans within the Great Smoky Mountain park guides. Additionally, results hold that interview participants do embrace nature and do engage with nature, just not at National Parks in the ways White Americans do. Most interview participants share the sentiment that media does have an impact on their social identity and perceptions of National Parks but may also be impacted by the post-traumatic effects of slavery and discrimination. Based on analysis of findings it is apparent that the GSM marketing and communications departments should consider diversifying their online and park guide photographs to be more representative of the demographics of the nation and not just the demographics of visitors to the park. The psychological divorce Black Americans have with the NPS thereby impacts the lack of visitation from Black Americans to National Parks. This in turn creates a cyclical effect which trickles down to the symbolic annihilation of Black Americans from National Park promotional materials which then reinforces the psychological divorce Black Americans have with the National Park Service. Figure 11 provides a visual representation of this relationship.
Psychological Divorce from National Parks

Symbolic Annihilation of Black Americans in Park Guides

Lack of Visitation to National Parks

Figure 7 - Cyclical Relationship, 2018
CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS

The overall research questions of this study investigated the reasons why Black Americans do not visit National Parks as much as White Americans reportedly do and how do National Park promotional materials such as park guides and online content impact their intentions to visit National Parks. Methods to investigating these research questions consisted of performing a content analysis of photographs published by the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. To add more context to this study, interviews were conducted with thirteen Black Americans that live in the state of North Carolina where part of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park is located. From the content analysis, it was hypothesized that there would be adequate visual representation of Black models in the park guides. From the interviews it was hypothesized that Black Americans are not concerned about environmental issues and do not exhibit an appreciation for nature, Black Americans do not engage with nature, and that Black Americans have experience visiting National Parks. The following sections will provide some suggestions on how to remediate the issue of the lack of Black visitation to National Parks.

6.1 – Suggestions for Research and Policy

The NPS has acknowledged that there is a lack of diversity at National Parks (NPS, 2018). In an effort to diversify National Parks, the NPS may consider the following recommendations. Given the content of the interviews and analysis of the Smoky Mountain park guides, there are a few suggestions that may be a starting point to galvanize Black American National Park engagement. The first half of this section will discuss recommendations primarily for the NPS, and the latter half of this section will consider suggestions for future researchers that are interested in this topic.

6.1.1. – For the NPS
Advertising and marketing are integral ways that the NPS can combat the issue of the lack of Black attendance in National Parks. Based on the findings from both the content analysis performed on the park guides and the responses from interviewees from this research, there is evidence that there is a link between the lack of visual representation of Black models and the lack of participation from Black Americans. According to Richins (1991), advertising does not claim to picture reality as it is but reality as it is supposed to be. Therefore, one could argue that the images being portrayed in National Park promotional materials could be perpetuating a lifestyle worth emulating that is whitewashed and exclusionary. In order to be more inclusive, the NPS may want to consider redirecting their advertising and marketing methods as well as diversifying their marketing team of employees if the NPS has not already done so.

Integrative Programs are also another way for the NPS to build a rapport with Black individuals and communities. Like Mott (2015) suggested, I believe it is imperative for the NPS to implement preferred programs that cater to an inclusive audience. However, I do believe it is vital for the NPS to take into consideration the outdoor activities that Black Americans like to engage in such as playing sports, jogging/running, and having celebratory get-togethers. It may also be worthwhile for the NPS to market their park services in urban communities that are suffering from environmental injustices such as poor air quality and drinking water, or even obesity. Showing the health benefits associated with outdoor recreation may be a way of getting more Black Americans involved.

Another option to consider is a coalition between Black and Brown outdoor groups and the NPS. There are outdoor groups catered to diversifying outdoor recreation attendance such as Outdoor Afro and Brothers of Climbing. If the NPS were to contact these groups in an effort of
sponsorship or partnership the NPS could get more recruitment for visitors and non-visitor employees.

6.1.2. – For Future Researchers

The NPS is not the only entity responsible for making future adjustments. There are previous studies that have investigated the lack of participation from Black Americans (Finney, 2014; Weber & Sultana, 2013; Mott, 2015). Although these studies have been useful in finding some reasons as to why Black Americans do not participate in outdoor recreation in wilderness areas at National Parks, they have not explicitly focused on how a history of slavery and discrimination have impacted the behavioral intentions of Black Americans to visiting National Parks. Additionally, future research should attempt to investigate more thoroughly how the lack of visual representation influences not only Black Americans’ intentions towards visiting National Parks but also for every underrepresented group. Also, investigating the demographics of all National Parks regarding visitors and non-visitors would be ideal for understanding the disparity of diversity.

6.2 – Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this study has contributed to the body of literature that explores the relationship Black Americans have with wilderness in National Parks. This study has used a mixed methods approach that included qualitative interviews, a quantitative content analysis, and evaluation of websites. The findings of these methods were then analyzed using the theories of Symbolic Annihilation and Social Comparison. This study implies that the lack of visual representation amongst National Park promotional materials has been shown to have a potential impact on their intentions towards participating in outdoor recreation activities at National Parks. Majority of interview participants mentioned that media has an influence on their intentions
towards participating in outdoor recreational activities at National Parks. Furthermore, that National Park promotional materials need to demonstrate more visual depictions of Black Americans engaging in outdoor activities. This study also implies that there is a lack of visual representation of Black Americans in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park guides. Overall, this thesis has offered a historical analysis of how the whitewashing of National Parks due to slavery, discrimination and symbolic annihilation has influenced Black American’s visitation to wilderness areas and participation in outdoor recreation.
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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. How would you define the word “environment”?
2. What are some activities that come to mind when you think of “environmentalism”?
3. What do you think about the current state of the environment?
4. What is your definition of the outdoors?
   a. How would you describe your relationship with the outdoors?
5. Do you participate in any environmental conservation or outdoor recreation activities? If so, what activities specifically?
6. When you think of wilderness and the Great Outdoors what comes to mind (this can include images, feelings, scents, activities, etc.)?
7. When you picture wilderness and the Great Outdoors what do you see?
8. Have you ever visited any National Parks in North Carolina? If so, how many and where?
   a. If you have visited a National Park why did you go there and not somewhere else?
      Why did you decided to visit a park and not somewhere such as New York City or Hollywood?
9. If you have not visited a National Park, why haven’t you?
10. Do you believe there is a black vs. white environmentalism?
11. What kind of connection do you think Blacks have with the Great Outdoors?
12. How would you define environmental activity?
13. What are some ways you can think of that Blacks/African Americans engage in environmental activities?
14. Can you think of any reasons why Blacks/African Americans may or may not choose to participate in environmental activities including outdoor recreation?
15. Do you know of any Black/African American Outdoor groups?
16. Do you think media, such as photographs, have an impact on how you view places such as the Great Outdoors?
17. Do you think media, specifically photographs, impact your participation in outdoor recreation?
18. What do you consider to be some outdoor recreation activities?
19. Do you participate in outdoor recreation?
   a. How often do you participate in outdoor recreational activities?
20. Why do you choose to participate in outdoor recreational activities, and why so seldom or why so often (depending on frequency reported)? If no, why not?
21. When you look at this image can you see yourself in this landscape? Why or why not?
   (show approximately five images of landscapes from National Park brochures and websites)
22. Where is your favorite place to go when you want to a moment to yourself?
23. Have you noticed an abundance, a good amount or a lack of Blacks/African Americans participating in outdoor recreation? Why?
   a. If participant thinks there is lack of Blacks/African Americans participating, follow up with the question: what can be done to motivate more Blacks/African Americans to participate?
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<tr>
<th>Interview Respondent</th>
<th><strong>Question 1:</strong> How would you define the word “environment”?</th>
<th><strong>Question 2:</strong> What are some activities that come to mind when you think of “environmentalism”?</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>I would define environment as an ecosystem with organisms. I would say organisms that come together for an ecosystem to thrive and that ecosystem is solely based on the outcome of those organisms meaning an environment of animals, an environment of human species, an environment of plants that are together to build that ecosystem.</td>
<td>Awareness that promotes healthy living…it could be recycling to promote the environment and sustain a healthy and strong environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>I would define that as not just the physical space around you but so the people that create that space around you. Also, the environment is a part of the whole of the ecosystem, how the animals thrive and survive, how we protect them, how we destroy them, things like that. It’s all a part of it and our responsibility.</td>
<td>Protecting the air, the water supply, because without that we would not exist. And just being kind to animals, and people, because we are all a part of this chain, and if we are not protective of each other then we will end up destroying each other and the environment is a part of that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The space in which you live in…the space in which other living matters interact with us…and that’s how I see it.</td>
<td>I think of an ecosystem that needs to be appreciated and protected. I think of the activities that we do as humans…we go out and we interact with the environment but basically when I think environmentalism I think of a space in which it’s a shared space and it’s a space that needs to be protected because if it’s not protected then it presents some hazards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>The environment I believe consists of the air, water, I</td>
<td>Recycling is one of the things I think about, I think about</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
would say soil like the earth, anything from the earth, so I would say for me it would be the air, soil, and water. smoking as far as when people smoke, I think of cars and the smoke that comes out of cars, I think of the factories and buildings that...when they also have a lot of that...I would say I’m not sure what type of air that comes out of these buildings, but a lot of factories have that. That is what I consider certain things I think about when it comes to the environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>would say the things around you or the things outside of your home around you I would say would be considered the environment.</th>
<th>Ocean cleanups. Being a Park Ranger and doing jobs that require going out into the wild and studying things like botanists. I guess doing things that require having an ambition in a way of wanting to change the environment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>I would say the things around you or the things outside of your home around you I would say would be considered the environment.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Everything in an ecosystem like the trees, the animals...just how everything interacts together basically and how it is affected by other elements like weather, people and just in general anything that can drastically change it.</td>
<td>Environmentalism I would define that as doing something within your means to promote and keep the environment safe, protected and clean. So, activities that encompass doing things within the lines of saving the environment or conservation. For example, planting trees, repairing some dried-up grass in some areas, and in general fixing up the environment. Maybe cleaning up the water. Or cleaning animals that had some pollution on them from oil spills or helping or saving them from garbage that they ate or picking up trash left off the roads near some lakes and rivers. Just things that basically keep animals safe and people safe so that...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The environment includes everything around us which could be a technical environment, a cultural environment, it could be nature, outside. The environment is where you are and things that surround you.</td>
<td>Personally, I think of design because I want to go into Environmental Design…I also think of Psychology. I think of Environmental Law and Philosophy too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>The outdoors, the air, quality of the air, the quality of your surroundings, your living conditions, the people that make up the living conditions, the socio-economic surroundings…that’s how I would describe the word.</td>
<td>First when I think of Environmentalism I think of extremes…because I don’t incorporate it into my everyday life. Initially when I think of Environmentalism I think of someone who is trying to save the planet…I think about recycling…I think about not using things like aerosol sprays…I think about composts…I think about saving energy initially…because of what I see on television…but when I get deeper into it…when I think through the full expense of what it means…it really means quality of life and extending that for generations to come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>The environment is basically your surroundings. It could consist of the air I breathe, the water I drink. Activities I do outdoors that depend on maybe good weather. Basically, the environment is not just natural, not just nature but it could be the neighborhood from where you see it. It could be your environment is impacted by people you know, people you meet, people you associate yourself with. It all depends</td>
<td>Fishing, camping, hiking, any kind of sports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on how you look at it. Not just natural but the created environment.

| J | The environment would be anything around that exists to sustain human life and life on Earth or that is important to life. That’s your environment there, the trees, the oxygen around you, your sunlight, the clean air, the ocean, everything around. I think all these things contribute to life in general. That would be it in a nutshell. |
| Hiking, skiing, jogging. You’re trying to conserve the forest, the ozone, I guess. All those things. Clean air. I don’t usually think of this topic. I don’t think that we are very conscious nowadays about the environment and how it affects life or will affect life in the future or is necessary to life. I think a lot of us take it for granted of course that we have all these things around us that are important to life, so we tend to mess up the space around us, we tend to trash it. I think that recycling is important. Those people who value the environment… I guess if you live long enough and you see where the transitions have been made from fossil fuels to solar, all those things, I guess you become appreciative… in that sense I figure you are conscious of the environment because believe you me, when you live in the city versus living in a rural area you notice some of these things when you leave the city and you go out to the suburbs or rural areas and the air just feels different, it smells different, trust me I know because I used to live in the city and I used to pass the sewers all the time. It’s not very pleasant. |

| K | I would define the word environment as both a |
| In my opinion, Environmentalism represents |
geological setting that people are placed in and the conditions in which one lives in based on the current surroundings. advocacy for keeping the environment as clean as possible so some activities I think of are picking up trash in the area, recycling, less usage of water, etc.

| L | I would define the word environment as the surrounding and condition of where we co-habit as humans with animals and plants. | Some activities that come to mind when I think of Environmentalism are recycling, helping keep the streets & oceans clean, using resources responsibly and biking to keep car fumes out of the air. |
| M | I would define the word environment as the entire world around me. This can include my back yard, the neighborhood and everything that surrounds me. My definition goes beyond just what is in my immediate vicinity. | When I think of activities of Environmentalism, I think of anything that helps improve the quality of the environment. This can include picking up trash from the road side, cleaning up bodies of water or reducing the amount of pollution released into the environment. |

*Table 4 - Environment and Environmentalism*
## SAMPLE OF NVIVO “NODES”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Node</th>
<th>Sources (Interview Transcriptions)</th>
<th>References (Number of Times Said)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>Community</td>
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<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danger</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5 - NVivo Nodes*
IMAGES SHOWN TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

*(All of the following images are courtesy of SmokieMountains.Org, 2017)*

![Figure 8 - Jogging, 2017](image)

![Figure 9 - Caves, 2017](image)
Figure 10 - Nature Watching, 2017

Figure 11 - Motorcycling
Figure 12 - Watersports

Figure 13 - Cycling

Figure 14 - Fishing
**INTERVIEW RESPONSES TO IMAGES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Caves</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>_</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>_</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6 - Responses to Interviews*

**Key:**

✓: would participate
X: would not participate
-: did not view images
T’Shari L. White
8137 Suttonview Dr., Charlotte, NC 28269 | (646) 379-2609 | tshari.white@gmail.com

Education
State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, NY
Master’s Degree in Environmental Studies – May 2018
G.P.A 3.8

University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC
Bachelor’s Degree in Environmental Studies – December 2014

Professional Experience
State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF)
Position: Teaching Assistant/Research Assistant, August 2016 – May 2018
• Collaborated with professors to deliver a range of teaching and assessment activities.
• Participated in the assessment process using a variety of methods and techniques.
• Contributed to the development of teaching materials to ensure content and methods of delivery meet learning objectives.

Mecklenburg County Public Health/Environmental Health Department
Position: Seasonal Environmental Assistant, May 2017 - August 2017
• Coordinated with certified pool operators and pool companies to ensure the safety of public pools.
• Performed routine safety inspections for public pools by collecting and testing water samples.
• Record keeping and updating of pool safety checks.

HEPACO, LLC., Charlotte, NC
Position: Administrator, February 2015 - May 2016
• Experienced in data entry and payroll, asbestos permitting, processing employee purchases and reimbursements, purchase orders, and invoices.
• Honed the ability to multi-task, problem solve and work as a team member in a fast-paced environment.
• Collaborated with team members to develop and maintain environmental service jobs, contracts, date and paperwork for asbestos, remediation and emergency projects.

UNCG Office of Sustainability, Greensboro, NC
Position: Sustainability Intern, May 2014 - December 2014
• Communicated with faculty, staff and students to conduct research about the lack of minority students enrolled in the Environmental Studies major/program and lack of participation in sustainability initiatives at UNC Greensboro.
• Planned, coordinated and implemented an interactive outreach program to encourage students to participate in the Environmental Studies program and sustainable activities on campus.
• https://facsustainability.uncg.edu/minority-environmental-attitudes/

Wildlife Conservation Society, Bronx, NY
Position: Guest Programmer, May 2013 - August 2013
• Created guest activities at the Dinosaur Safari exhibit to promote an outstanding educational experience for children and young adults.
• Supervised interns and volunteers at the Dinosaur Safari exhibit to ensure the production of the exhibit.
Extracurricular Activities

- **CACE Conference – Greensboro, North Carolina**
  Panelist/Presenter, February 2018

- **Being Underrepresented at ESF – Syracuse, New York**
  Panelist, November 2017

- **Human Bookshelf at SUNY ESF Moon Library – Syracuse, New York**
  Volunteer, April 2017

- **Gender and Other Perspectives on Career Preparation Seminar – Syracuse, New York**
  Panelist, April 2017

- **Mecklenburg Police Department Animal Care and Control, Charlotte, North Carolina**
  Volunteer, February 2016 – May 2016

Key Skills

- Public speaking
- Education and Outreach
- Event Coordinating and Planning
- Microsoft Office Applications (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)