



Race and Environment: Rhetoric of the Early American Environmental Movement

Elizabeth Papa | Honors Thesis Spring 2023
Advisors: Professor Pampinella & Professor Sullivan







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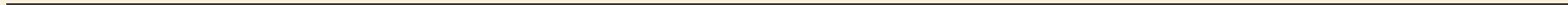


Racial Discourses in Environmentalism



The mobilization of Western, Christian rhetoric in the early environmental movement enabled white settlers to exclude indigenous nations' histories and actors from foundational conservation and preservation efforts, and to elevate white actors' interests.

This Eurocentric discourse illegitimizes indigenous individuals' sovereignty and agency. It erases indigenous culture, knowledge, and experiences from the environmental history of the United States.



Existing Debates on Race & Environment

Civilization and Race

Eurocentric frameworks

Climate Impacts Race

Scientific racism

Religion & Environment

Romantic conceptions of nature



National Park Creation

White dominance of national parks,
John Muir as a key actor

American Environmental Movement & Theodore Roosevelt

The myth of the frontier
& offensive racism



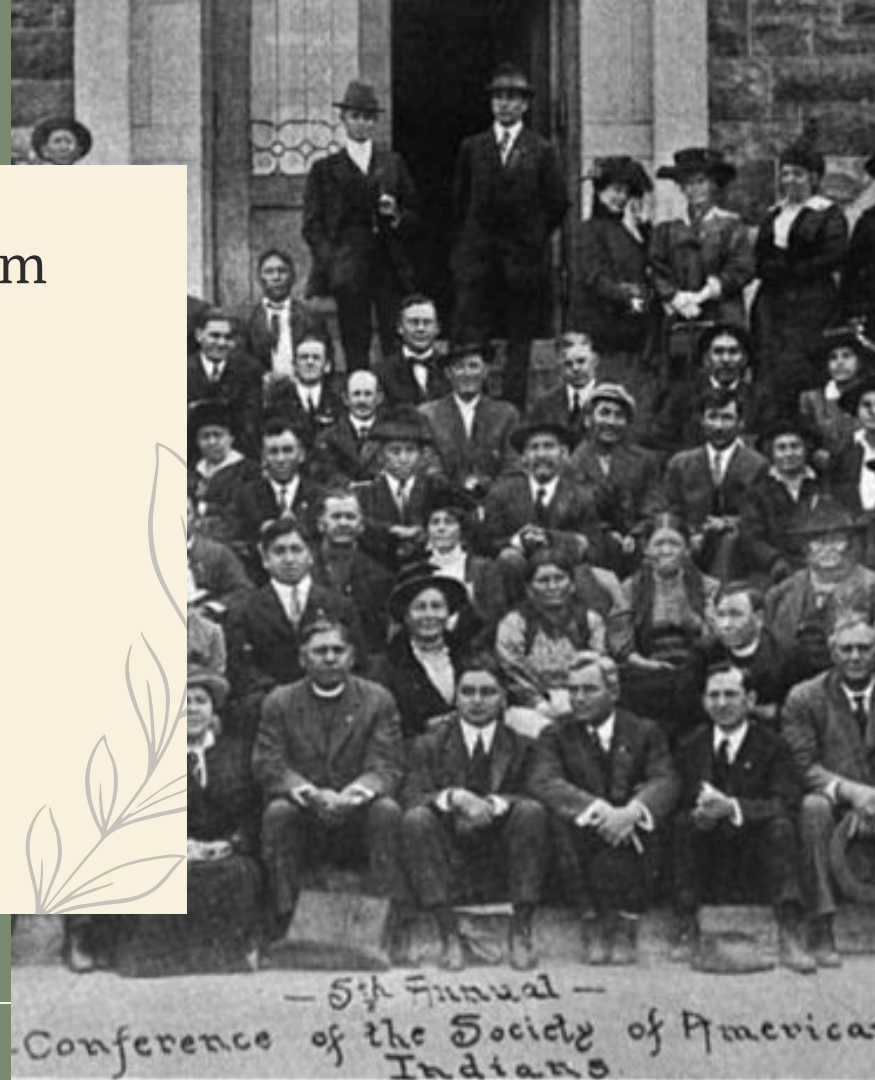
Poststructuralism & Postcolonialism

* *Poststructuralism*

- Foucault, Jackson, & Neumann
- Discourse constitutes structures, structures constitute discourse
- Importance of rhetoric & symbols
- Exclusion of actors/knowledge

* *Postcolonialism*

- Said
- Civilizational boundaries





Main Actors

John Muir

Theodore Roosevelt

U.S. Congressional Record

Yosemite Nation

Society of American Indians

Main Events

Yosemite National Park

Mesa Verde National Park

Hetch Hetchy Dam





Discourse Analysis

John Muir

- * Utilizes religious connotations of nature; Edenic, "virgin" landscapes
- * Excludes indigenous actors from beauty of the landscape
- * *Picturesque California*, 1888, *The Wild Parks and the Forest Reservations of the West*, 1901, Letter to Roosevelt, 1907, *Sierra Club Bulletin*, 1908

Theodore Roosevelt

- * Separates indigenous actors from ideals of civilization and progress
- * Generates racial hierarchies and civilizational boundaries
- * 1902 State of the Union Address, Flagstaff Speech, 1903, "Conservation as a National Duty" Speech, 1908



Discourse Analysis

Congress

- * Uses religious connotations, appeals to progress and civilization
- * John Muir's petition
- * Congressional Record (1890, 1901, 1913)

Indigenous Actors

- * Challenge the subjugation of indigenous agency, sovereignty, and humanity
- * Confronts the inequities and the racism of U.S. policy initiatives
- * Yosemite Petition to Congress 1890, Society of American Indians's *Quarterly Journal*, 1913-1914



Hon. HALVOR STEENNESON,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

DEAR SIR: The Yosemite National Park is not only the greatest and most wonderful national playground in California, but in many of its features it is without a rival in the whole world. It belongs to the American people, and in world-wide interest ranks with the Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. It embraces the headwaters of two rivers—the Merced and the Tuolumne. The Yosemite Valley is in the Merced Basin; the Hetch Hetchy Valley, the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne, and the Tuolumne Meadows are in the Tuolumne Basin. Excepting only the Yosemite Valley, the Tuolumne Basin in its general features is the more wonderful and larger half of the park.

The Hetch Hetchy Valley is a wonderfully exact counterpart of the great Yosemite, not only in its cliffs and waterfalls and peaceful river, but in the gardens, groves, meadows, and camp grounds of its flowery, park-like floor.

At a recent session of Congress a most determined attack was made by the city of San Francisco to get the right to use the Hetch Hetchy Valley as a reservoir site, thus depriving 90,000,000 people of one of their most priceless possessions for the sake of saving San Francisco dollars.

As soon as this scheme became manifest public-spirited citizens all over the country entered their protests, and before the session was over the park invaders saw that they were defeated and permitted the bill to die without bringing it to a vote, so as to be able to try again.

Ever ready to take advantage of every political change, a bill having the same destructive purpose has been reintroduced at this session of Congress and is now pending before the Public Lands Committee, and

its supporters are speciously urging that it should be rushed through at this special session as an emergency measure, when in reality nothing like an emergency exists.

San Francisco may be in immediate need of an increased supply of water, but her own engineers admit that the present supply can be more than doubled by adding to present near-by sources, and that is the first and most economic plan of development before the city eventually goes to the Sierra for additional water.

The advisory board of Army engineers "is of the opinion that there are several sources of water supply that could be obtained and used by the city of San Francisco and adjacent communities to supplement the near-by supplies as the necessity develops. From any one of these sources the water is sufficient in quantity and is or can be made suitable in quality."

We are preparing data based on the reports of the Army engineers which will demonstrate that San Francisco can obtain abundance of pure water from other sources than the Tuolumne Hetch Hetchy.

So important a bill should not be rushed through Congress without mature consideration and time allowed for its opponents to be heard. Anything less would be unjust to the American people; therefore, in behalf of all who appreciate our mountain parks and believe that they should be preserved we call on you to aid us in postponing consideration of this destructive bill until the regular session of Congress, for we have not even seen a copy of the bill now being considered. Ever since the establishment of the Yosemite National Park by act of Congress—October 8, 1890—constant strife has been going on around its boundaries and is likely to go on as part of the universal battle between good and evil, however much its boundaries may be broken or wild beauty destroyed.

When this application was first made, over 10 years ago, the Secretary of the Interior then holding office emphatically denied the right, saying in part:

"Presumably the Yosemite National Park was created such by law because of the natural objects of varying degrees of scenic importance located within its boundaries, inclusive alike of its beautiful small lakes, like Elleanor, and its majestic wonders, like Hetch Hetchy and Yosemite Valleys. It is the aggregation of such natural scenic features that makes the Yosemite Park a wonderland which the Congress of the United States sought by law to preserve for all coming time as nearly as practicable in the condition fashioned by the hand of the Creator—a worthy object of national pride and a source of continual pleasure and rest for the thousands of people who may annually sojourn there during the heated months."

In behalf of all the people of the Nation we ask your aid in putting an end to these assaults on our great national parks and to prevent this measure from being rushed through before it can be brought to the attention of the 90,000,000 people who own this park.

Faithfully, yours,

JOHN MCIR,
E. T. PARSONS,
WM. F. BADE,
R. V. COLBY.

or even philanthropists, none of the statements they have made descriptive of Hetch Hetchy dammed or undammed are true, but they all show forth the proud sort of confidence that comes of a good sound substantial irrefragable ignorance. For example the capitalist, Mr. James E. Felton, says "there are a thousand places in the Sierra equally beautiful as Hetch Hetchy, it is inaccessible nine months of the year, and is an unlivable place the other three months because of mosquitoes". On the contrary there is not another of its kind in all the Park excepting Yosemite. It is accessible all the year, and is not more mosquitoeful than Yosemite. "The conversion of Hetch Hetchy into a reservoir will simply mean a lake instead of a meadow: it is a Yosemite Valley. Engineer, Mr. Mars Karaden Kanson also calls the Valley "a lovely meadow" "a common sinner feature" in no sense a natural curiosity or wonder" and to submerge it "would greatly enhance the beauty of the Park". And so the fight goes on. Ever since the Park was established it has called for defense, and however much it may be invaded or its boundaries shorn while a single mountain or tree or waterfall is left the poor stub of a park would still need protection. The first forest reserve was in Eden and though its boundaries were drawn by the Lord, and angels set to guard it, even that most moderate reservation was attacked.

I pray therefore that the people of California be granted time to be heard before this reservoir question is decided: for I believe that as soon as light is cast upon it, nine tenths or more of even the citizens of San Francisco would be opposed to it. And what the public opinion of the world would be may be guessed by the case of the Niagara Falls.

Faithfully and devotedly yours

John Muir

The President

O for a tranquil camp hour with you like those beneath the Sequoias in memorable 1903.

The
Quarterly Journal
of the
Society of American Indians

"The honor of the race and the good of the country shall be paramount"

JULY—SEPTEMBER, 1913

ARTHUR C. PARKER, Editor-General

Contributing Editors

SHERMAN COOLIDGE, B.D. HOWARD E. GANSWORTH, M.A.
HENRY ROE-CLOUD, A.B., B.D. CARLOS MONTEZUMA, B.S., M.D.
JOHN M. OSKISON, A.M.

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Contemporary Connections

- * **Infuse indigenous actors, knowledge, perspectives, and history into preservation and conservation efforts**
 - Indigenous actors in positions of leadership: Deb Haaland, Chuck Sams
 - Return indigenous tribes' collective jurisdiction of the existing national parks, with federal aid
 - Utilize public land trust systems to return tribal ownership to certain national parks
 - Biden's Executive Order, Office of Environmental Justice



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