

Some even founded their own conservation organizations, like the Citizens for Conservation and Trustees of the Earth, American Conservation Enrollees, and the National Association of CCC Alumni (Maher 2002: 435–462). Therefore, had nature protection activists been keener to draw working-class whites, blacks, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, Alaskans, Japanese, Filipinos, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders into their organizations or work collaboratively with enrollees, they could have tapped into a pool of 3 million CCC enrollees and their families. Some criticisms of the CCC by conservationists and preservationists were valid; yet their focus on vilifying the enrollees and the work they did served to alienate many CCC men from the environmental groups.

Racial Exclusion and Access to Outdoor Recreation

Despite the fact that people of color helped to build and maintain national and state parks and forests, these were—at times—segregated entities that barred blacks and other people of color from using all or parts of the facilities. National parks and other outdoor recreation areas have a long and complex history of segregation.

BLACKS AND THE DESIRE FOR WILDLAND RECREATION

Most of the effort to exclude people of color from outdoor recreation opportunities was directed at blacks but this did not deter African Americans from going to rural and wild areas to recreate. Several factors—some of them similar to those motivating whites to travel to the wilds—influenced blacks to travel to such places. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, blacks increasingly found themselves living in crowded, polluted, and unhealthy urban environments with no access to open space. Racially restrictive zoning laws and covenants¹ prevented them from moving to desirable neighborhoods in many cities and suburbs (Taylor 2014: 147–227). Once slavery was abolished, Jim Crow laws—prohibiting blacks from using facilities or transportation at the same time or in the same manner as whites—proliferated in the South and were instituted in the North as well. Consequently, blacks using urban parks risked violent attacks like the one that killed Eugene Williams² and triggered a five-day race riot in Chicago in 1919 (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1993: 104; Taylor 2009: 332–337; Tuttle, 1980: 3–10, 35–37, 199, 234–235).

Like their white counterparts, black elites in the Midwest, on the East Coast, and in parts of the South extolled the virtues of escaping the cities and

visiting the countryside. They used black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*,³ the *Whip*, and multiracial magazines like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's *Crisis* to reach blacks from all walks of life to encourage them to go to the wilds to refresh and renew themselves, connect with nature, explore their spirituality, engage in “respectable” recreation, and escape segregated neighborhoods and urban violence. The growing black middle class also resorted to the wilds to recreate and network with other black elites (Chatelain 2008: 199–255; Fisher 2005: 62–76; Foster 1999: 131–132; Taylor 2009: 332–337). For instance, Dr. William Wilberforce—the health editor of the *Chicago Defender*—explained to readers that a summer resort was “a place where . . . and one may get close to nature, to view the beauties of nature and get a larger vision of nature” (W. Williams 2014b: 8). He explained further,

We desire that you should get the habit of camping out . . . it will do you good . . . [we] hope that you will get the habit of treating yourself and family to a delightful summer outing in a camp . . . There is an ever increasing demand, for us to get out, and away from the city—to get close to nature—to commune with the running brooks, trees, and singing birds and all the growing vegetation—to get far away from the heat, the dust, the hurry, the bustling marts and the streets of overcrowded, jostling municipality and find some cool, shady spot to camp where one may find rest for the mind and body with nature's purest food, water and air . . . And do not forget to take along our fishing tackle. (W. Williams 1914b: 8)

African Americans were also drawn to and actively participated in the back-to-nature movement. Black elites, businesses, religious, and community institutions played key roles in encouraging black families to enroll their children in the Young Men's Christian Association and the Young Women's Christian Association, and in outdoor clubs like Boy Scouts (founded in 1910), Girl Scouts (founded in 1912), and the Camp Fire Club of America⁴ (founded informally in 1910 and formalized in 1912). The Camp Fire Club was formalized by leading conservationists William Hornaday, Dan Beard, and Ernest Thompson. Theodore Roosevelt was an early, ardent, and influential member of the club (Camp Fire Club 2015; *The Chicago Defender* 1916: 11; Chatelain 2008: 199–255; 2015).

Blacks did not separate race and class inequalities from conservation issues and experiences. Hence, the participation in leisure and nature experiences was part of a larger agenda of racial uplift that was salient in black communities. Racial uplift refers to a belief in mutual aid as well as to a slate of programs

and services that middle class blacks developed to help acculturate and facilitate the upward mobility of poor blacks (Chatelain 2008: 3–4; Du Bois 1921: 158–160; Gaines 1996: 4). Despite the fact that afore-mentioned youth organizations were segregated, as early as 1916 *The Chicago Defender* promoted the Camp Fire Club and urged its readers to join (*The Chicago Defender* 1916: 11).

SEGREGATING THE WILDLANDS

At the same time blacks were seeking to expand their access to outdoor leisure activities and supporting the conservation and preservation messages of exploring the wilds and connecting to nature, efforts to segregate the national parks, historic preservation sites, and national forests intensified. At times private entrepreneurs operating concessions on public lands orchestrated the segregation, at other times it was senior government employees who enacted and executed segregationist policies. For instance, the issue of segregating facilities came up almost immediately after the George Washington Birthplace National Monument was designated in Virginia in 1930 (Bruggeman 2008: 153–157; Shumaker 2006: 20–21). In 1931, Arthur Demaray, a high-ranking administrator in the Department of the Interior, corresponded with Horace Albright, then director of the National Park Service, about the desire to segregate facilities at the monument. Demaray wrote,

There is another matter which should be mentioned at this time. If the recreational area is developed at Pope's Creek and the Wakefield Memorial Association places their proposed recreational building at this location, there will be need of another recreational area where colored people can go. When we were at Wakefield this time, we went down to the old wharf on the Potomac River beyond the burial ground and found colored people bathing there. I understand that more and more this area is being utilized by colored people. I think this situation should be frankly met by encouraging the colored people to go to this point and by providing tables and other picnicking facilities for limited use by colored people. (Demaray 1931: 2)

In 1933 a comfort station in the Wakefield section of the monument was designated for "use . . . by colored people." The comfort station was constructed by the CCC (Shumaker 2006: 22). Sister Dominica describes the appalling conditions she encountered in 1938 when she took a group of black schoolchildren to the monument and was forced to use the Wakefield picnic grounds. She sent an angry letter to Arno Cammerer, the third director of the National Park Service.⁵ In it she wrote,

I was amazed when we reached the gates yesterday and were told by the superintendent that it was the law that colored people should be segregated from the whites on the picnic grounds. He then jumped into his car and escorted us to the place he claimed that was set aside for colored. It was about a mile from the mansion, and if we had gone much further we should have been in the water. There were no tables or benches such as you would expect to find in a picnic ground or any other conveniences. The superintendent returned later and brought two old and dirty buckets of water for us to drink from, also an old dirty dipper, and trashcan. He told us that if we left any trash he could, according to law, compel us to come back and clean it up. . . . Then too, at the tea room we were told that they did not sell soft drinks or ice cream, a statement which was untrue, but that we could get both at the Post Office . . . I should like to state as a criticism that you should choose a superintendent who is not steeped in prejudice and who is at least a gentleman. We are contemplating another trip to Wakefield and if the same thing happens I shall refer the matter directly to Secretary Ickes. (Dominica 1938)

In response to Sister Dominica's complaint, Superintendent Philip Hough corresponded with Director Cammerer. Hough explained the situation as such:

All that happened was due to the fact that they were segregated for their lunch only. All I can say is that that is the way it's done in Virginia. If I did wrong, I'm sorry—but then again if I had let them in the regular picnic ground we would no doubt be having complaints from the white visitors. This matter may become a real problem. I would say off-hand that not more than one percent of our visitors are colored and it does not seem justifiable to maintain a special picnic ground for them, and if we did we would soon be swamped with colored people. That kind of news travels fast . . . I fully realize that this place is open to all people, under definite regulations. We have never drawn any line except in the matter of their eating. We do not ignore colored visitors. We answer their questions civilly and try to give them the essential information about the place—but we do not go out of our way to encourage them to come here. (P. Hough 1938: 3)

Cammerer responded to Hough and reinforced the idea of creating separate facilities for blacks and whites. Cammerer argued that building segregated facilities was already de rigueur in some national parks and the practice should be continued. He wrote,

In the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks we have set aside picnic areas for colored people which will be further expanded as the demand increases. At Fort Pulaski National Monument and other areas we have separate comfort stations for colored people. It is our policy, depending upon the demand, to have equal accommodations for colored people and for white people. Since there apparently is a demand for this type of service at Wakefield, you should develop a picnic area for colored people that will be of equal character and attractiveness to the one provided for white people . . . If you make arrangements above as outlined, I think you will have no further trouble. (Cammerer 1938: 1)

Blacks were not welcomed as visitors at nearby Mount Vernon either. While blacks were hired to work at Mount Vernon, black visitors could not take the whites-only excursion steamer to the site. The few blacks who made it to the site by other means (on segregated street cars), were not allowed to use the facilities. Moreover, the River Queen, which carried black passengers, could not dock at Mount Vernon (Kahrl 2008: 62–63). The remainder of this section provides more examples of the segregation and exclusionary activities that occurred in these public entities. Despite their claims of protecting nature for the public good, conservationists and preservationists were silent as these discriminatory and inhumane practices were put in place and maintained for years.

Hot Springs, Arkansas. Native Americans (the Choctaws, Cherokees, Quapaws, and other tribes) once used the land now called Hot Springs. They used it for about eight thousand years calling that portion of the Ouachita Mountains, Valley of the Vapors. Native Americans quarried the area and made tools from the rocks; they also bathed in the water from the forty-seven geothermal springs that dot the area. An 1818 treaty forced the Quapaw tribe to cede the area to the U.S. government. Two years later a proposal was made to create a protected area at the site. The removal of native tribes from the area in the 1830s meant that site was stripped of Indian presence. Hot Springs reserve was created in 1832 and white settler-entrepreneurs were allowed to establish private facilities in the reserve (Hot Springs National Park n.d.; Paige and Harrison 1987: 21–22).

Until the early 1870s, blacks served as service workers at the 265-acre Hot Springs Reservation. They were also allowed to bathe alongside whites in the indoor and outdoor bathing facilities. However, during the Reconstruction era segregation laws proliferated and this led to the constriction of bathing privileges at the facility. When the federal government built a free bathhouse at the “mud hole” for the public in 1878, it was segregated by race and gender.

The segregationist policy continued in 1898 when it was remodeled. The other bathhouses at Hot Springs were also segregated. By this time Hot Springs had become an internationally known spa and blacks wanted to experience the curative powers of its waters. With newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* singing its praises, blacks traveled from around the country to visit the reserve. For instance, Representative Arthur Wergs Mitchell, the only black person in the U.S. Congress, traveled by train from Chicago to Hot Springs for a two-week vacation. He was prompted to file a law suit because he was evicted from the first-class cabin of the train as soon as he reached Arkansas. In response to the African American demands for bathing accommodations, black entrepreneurs began building bathhouses for blacks at Hot Springs in 1904; these were physically segregated also—they were located on the edge of the black business district, not on the main bathhouse row as the other bathing facilities. Park Service director, Stephen Mather, visited Hot Springs in 1916 and became very interested in developing the reserve. As a result, Hot Springs received national park designation in 1921⁶ (Hot Springs National Park 2006 1–4; *A. Mitchell v. United States et al.*, 1941; Paige and Harrison 1987: 74, 92–93, 135–137; Shugart 2003: 8; 2006; Shumaker n.d. 16–20).

Harpers Ferry. The first slave was brought to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia in the 1750s. Since then blacks have been a part of the tapestry of this site. In 1859, the abolitionist John Brown and 21 men—including five blacks—launched an ill-fated raid on the armory at Harpers Ferry.⁷ In 1867, Storer College, an integrated institution aimed at educating freed slaves opened on Camp Hill in Harpers Ferry; Frederick Douglass was a trustee of Storer. The college was such an important symbol among blacks that the Niagara Movement, the forerunner of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People, held its second national gathering there in 1906. W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the leaders of the movement, participated in the conference (Gordon 1961: 445–449; Kahrl 2008: 57; Moore 1999; Whitman 1972: 46–84).

Harpers Ferry and Storer College served important commemorative, associative, and recreational functions for many African Americans. By the 1880s, urban blacks traveled by train to visit Harpers Ferry and the college, pay their respects to those who participated in the rebellion, have picnics, go bird watching, hike the mountain trails, or stroll along the banks of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers. During the summers, African Americans repaired to the countryside at Harpers Ferry. In 1881, Storer College decided to open its dorms to black and white visitors. By the following year, black newspapers in the mid-Atlantic region began publicizing the availability of housing for black

travelers to Harpers Ferry (Kahrl 2008: 57–59). In imploring blacks to visit Harpers Ferry, newspaper articles drew on the significance of the site in black liberation and the promise of freedom. One article said:

The spirit of freedom has always been dwelt among the mountains, and when old John Brown looked upon the mountains which rise in majesty round about the place, the spirit of liberty stirred afresh within him, here he resolved to do and dare and die, if need be, that his fellow man might come forth from the chattel house of bondage. (*Washington Bee* 1888: 1)

Black elites from the Niagara Movement raved about Harpers Ferry in the newspapers. The Baltimore & Ohio railroad also advertised their weekend excursions to African Americans; the railroad also urged black churches and other organizations to hold events at Harpers Ferry. For some black middle class families on extended stay, mothers and children stayed for weeks at a time while the fathers joined their wives and children on the weekends. Beginning in 1883, black entrepreneurs opened guest houses and hotels at Harpers Ferry (Kahrl 2008: 57–59, 64–68; *Washington Bee* 1888: 1).

Shenandoah National Park. The Shenandoah Valley and surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains were occupied by Native Americans⁸ who farmed, hunted, fished, reared cattle, and participated in the fur trade. The containment of native tribes in the region began during the eighteenth century. In 1722 the Iroquois signed the treaty of Albany that stipulated that they should cede their lands east of the Blue Ridge Mountains and confine themselves to the west of the mountains. This made way for European settlers to gain control of land in the fertile valley. However, the frequent conflicts between the indigenous peoples and the settlers led to the signing of a second treaty. The Lancaster Treaty of 1744 also mandated that the tribe cede their lands and stay to the west of Blue Ridge. Blacks were enslaved in the Shenandoah Valley; they were used to grow tobacco, cotton, and fruit trees on the plantations (Hofstra 2004; Kappler 1904: 659; Rountree 1993: 195–196).

From around 1740 to the time of the civil war, a portion of the land that Virginia's Shenandoah National Park occupies was dotted with plantations. In the late nineteenth century entrepreneurs built resorts such as Skyland to lure vacationers to the area. As early as the 1880s, mention was made of building a large park in the Southern Appalachia. Once the National Park Service was established, Stephen Mather and other park activists began to look for suitable sites in the eastern part of the country to create parks. The search began around

1920 and in 1923 Mather outlined he plan to create such a park in his annual report. Five prominent men were also chosen to serve on the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee charged with helping to identify a site to establish a park. The owner of the Skyland Resort, Hugh Naylor, became an enthusiastic supporter of establishing a national park in the Blue Ridge area. He formed a Northern Virginia Park Association to promote the idea. President Herbert Hoover, who built a retreat—the Rapidan Camp (also called Camp Hoover)—on 164 acres in the area in 1924 also supported the park idea. Hoover used the camp during his presidency. Congress authorized the park in 1926 and Shenandoah became a national park in 1935. The CCC helped to build the park and Skyline Drive which snakes through it (Hunter 1931; Lambert 1989: 38, 67–68, 177–178, 193–196; Updyke 2004; Weaver 1987).

Not even the presence of a presidential abode in Shenandoah could spare blacks from unequal treatment if they visited the park. Arno Cammerer, recognizing that a park so close to Washington, D.C., and other cities with large black populations would be frequented by blacks, thought the park should be segregated. Hence, in 1932—three years before the park was opened—Cammerer sent a note to the National Park Service Director Albright calling for “Provision for colored guests” (quoted in Shumaker n.d.: 24). Arthur Demaray expounded on this idea in a 1936 document:

The program of development of facilities . . . for the accommodation and convenience of the visiting public contemplates . . . separate facilities for white and colored people to the extent only as is necessary to conform with the generally accepted customs long established in Virginia but not to such an extent as to interfere with the complete enjoyment of the park equally by all alike. . . . To render the most satisfactory service to white and colored visitors it is generally recognized that separate rest rooms, cabin colonies and picnic ground facilities should be provided. (Demaray 1936)

In 1937 Lewis Mountain, a site seven miles south of Big Meadows, was chosen to build a picnic area, campground, lodge, and cabins to accommodate blacks. The facilities at Dickey Ridge, Elkwallow, Skyland, and Big Meadows were reserved for the exclusive use of whites. Notwithstanding, blacks were flocking to the park—between 1938 and 1940, ten thousand African Americans visited Shenandoah (Engle 1996; Lambert 1989: 259–266; Shumaker n.d.: 24–25). Demaray continued to promote the separate but equal doctrine arguing that, “the Park Service must insist upon early provision for Negro accommodations equal to facilities for white persons . . . so that charge cannot be made that we

are not furnishing at least the same type and character of facilities that are provided for whites" (Demaray 1939).

Secretary Ickes of the Department of the Interior also insisted on separate but equal dining facilities in the park but he wanted to experiment with integration. He mandated that the Pinnacles Picnic Grounds should be open for use by blacks and whites. The secretary also prohibited park staff from mentioning the segregationist practices in park materials or in presentations to visitors. All of the park's picnic areas were integrated in 1941; however, the restaurants remained segregated until 1945. In 1945 the federal government issued a directive that ordered the National Park Service concessioners to desegregate all their facilities in the national parks. The gradual desegregation of the remainder of Shenandoah continued through 1946 and 1947; Lewis Mountain was integrated in 1947 (Engle 1996; *Federal Register* 1945: 14866; Lambert 1989: 259–266; Shumaker n.d.: 24–25).

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Similar segregationist policies and practices were established in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (created in 1934 on the border of North Carolina and Tennessee). The park's master plan called for three black campgrounds. After much debate in 1941 it was suggested that the word "colored" be removed from descriptions of the campgrounds but plans for the segregated facilities should move forward. The facilities designated for whites and blacks were not publicly designated but park staff enforced segregation in the operation of the park. All-white CCC crews began construction on the park facilities. There was opposition on the park staff and in surrounding communities when four black CCC companies were assigned to work on the park. In response, white units were brought in to replace the black companies (*The Regional Review* 1938: 42; Shumaker n.d.: 32–34).

THE RISE OF BLACK RESORTS AND RURAL GETAWAYS

Like their white counterparts, African Americans gained more free time and disposable income during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Consequently, many sought to travel to resorts and the wilds. So in the 1870s and 1880s black aristocrats from Louisiana, Detroit, Memphis, and Boston vacationed at Saratoga Springs. Some resorts in other places like Newport, Rhode Island; Cape May, New Jersey; and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts also extended their services to the growing cadre of prosperous black vacationers. But as the number of blacks traveling to leisure destinations grew, so did the discomfort of white recreationers. This resulted in the institution of Jim Crow segregationist policies that permeated the leisure and travel industries.

However, some excursion companies saw the business potential and advertised to black clients. Notwithstanding, by the 1890s blacks were forced to stay at black-owned inns or those catering exclusively to a black clientele in resort locations (Foster 1999: 132–133; Haizlip 1996: 12–14; Jefferson 2007: 23–24; Nelson 2005).

Blacks responded to the violence, exclusion, segregation, unequal treatment they encountered when they tried to recreate in the outdoors by developing rural getaways and outdoor recreation areas. They also patronized recreation sites specializing in catering to black vacationers. Hence beaches, ranches, and resort development catering to blacks proliferated. By the beginning of the twentieth century, black resorts and retreats were developed all over the country. In California alone, Lake Elsinore, Bruce's Beach in Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica Beach near Pico Boulevard (also pejoratively known as "the Ink Well"), Val Verde in the Santa Clarita Valley, and Murray's Dude Ranch in Apple Valley–San Bernadino County catered to blacks (Foster 1999: 130–137; Jefferson 2007: 1–2). In addition to Hot Springs and Harpers Ferry discussed above, black retreats could also be found in the Poconos Mountains of Pennsylvania; Silcott Springs, Backroe Beach, Bay Shore, and Mark Haven in Virginia; Sag Harbor on Long Island in New York; Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard; Freeman Beach in Wilmington, North Carolina; Buck Eye Lake near Columbus, Ohio; Arundel-on-the-Bay (also called Highland Beach) near Annapolis, Maryland; Barrett Beach in Port Monmouth, New Jersey; Lake Ivanhoe in Wisconsin; Fox Lake near Angola, Indiana; the Gullah Sea Islands in South Carolina and Georgia; American Beach in Florida; and Gulfport near Biloxi, Mississippi (Cromwell 1984: 2–35; Dresser 2010; Foster 1999: 136–140; Holland 1991: 3–26; Jefferson 2007: 25).

Two rural retreats were developed in Michigan. Blacks found out about destinations like these through word-of-mouth and through descriptions in newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*. For instance a 1915 article described one of the resorts as such:

The West Michigan Resort [in Benton Harbor] easily ranked as the pride of the colored citizens of Chicago and the Mississippi valley . . . it is understood that it was never the purpose of the management to make money out of this enterprise . . . They are perfectly willing to break even, provided they can give the people a nice, quiet, clean resort, away from the dust, flies, heat and noise of the city, where the people may go and find awaiting them quiet rest, good pure food, splendid bathing facilities, fresh air, and get close to nature and nature's heart; where they may

regain and rebuild that which they have lost and torn down during their busy life in the city. (W. Williams 1915: 8)

Idlewild—located about seventy miles north of Grand Rapids—was Michigan's most famous retreat. The 2,700-acre property consisting of previously logged forest containing Lake Idlewild was purchased by four white developers in 1912. They sold lots to blacks wanting to purchase sites for their camps or cabins; blacks took control of the property in 1921. Those staying at Idlewild went hiking, horseback riding, boating, swimming, and fishing. By the 1940s the summertime residents of Idlewild numbered around twenty-two thousand (Foster 1999: 138–139). W. E. B. Du Bois, who purchased lots in Idlewild, said “For sheer physical beauty, for sheen of water and golden air, for nobleness of tree and shrub, for shining river and song of bird and the low, moving whisper of sun, moon and star . . . and all the wide leisure of rest and play—can you imagine a more marvelous thing than Idlewild?” (Du Bois 1921: 158–160).

Oak Bluffs was another renowned black resort. Blacks were living on Martha's Vineyard as early as 1765. Some of these black residents intermarried with the Chappaquiddick and Wampanoag Indians. Throughout the nineteenth century blacks settled in and vacationed in Oak Bluffs. Increasingly black vacationers from Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C., flocked to Oak Bluffs (Cromwell 1984: 2–35; Dresser 2010; Kenan 1999: 34–35).

For much of their history conservationists and preservationists either ascribed to or promoted discriminatory policies or remained blind to them. These actions made it challenging for people of color and the working class to engage in environmental activities on an equal footing with the white middle class or to collaborate with them.

Conclusion

The Rise of the American Conservation Movement describes the movement of elites from teeming, polluted, and disorderly cities to the urban fringes and rural suburbs, and eventually to remote areas. This outward movement occurred for a variety of reasons, including concerns about safety, status, and taste; quest for cleaner environments; improved health and well-being; the need for more space; access to greater recreational opportunities; dwindling wildlife stocks; and westward expansion. Those most likely to go searching for wild nature were affluent, well educated, or well connected socially and politically. Some of the outward bound were also ideological thinkers who openly criticized industrialism and promoted rural and wilderness lifestyles as antidotes to the perceived ills of the city.

In America, the Transcendentalists were among the first to openly express their concerns about creeping industrialization and environmental degradation and suggest people turn away from the cities as a means of combating the conditions brought on by unfettered industrial growth. They tried to attain the idealized lifestyle they wrote about by moving from cities and relocating in villages and small towns. Though Transcendentalism captured the imagination of some of the leading thinkers in New England, the movement was constrained by its focus on theoretical ideas and individual action as the key to societal transformation. Transcendentalists published journals and newsletters, but these were not aimed at a mass audience. Likewise, there were some collective efforts among Transcendentalists to build utopian communities, but these were short lived and not particularly successful.