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Various publications have acknowledged a lack of participation from Black Americans engaging in outdoor recreation and environmental activities in nature (Taylor, 1989; Floyd, 1999; Martin, 2004; Byrne, 2011; Finney, 2014; Mott, 2015, Pease, 2015). Some of these studies postulate that Black Americans do not engage in these activities as much as their White counterparts due to a lack of resources, access, and interest. Additionally, racism, discrimination, and exclusionary practices have been suggested factors as to why there is a lack of engagement from Black Americans. Although research has been substantial in identifying these causalities, there is little information on how the history of slavery and discrimination in the United States has influenced Black Americans' perception of and visitation to natural spaces such as national parks and wildlands. The objective of this study is to investigate the influences of discrimination, racism, slavery, and racial violence (e.g., lynching) on Black Americans' interactions with wilderness to determine if this is a viable reason as to why they do not often venture to these destinations. The cultural and generational trauma has impacted Black Americans' perceptions of and experiences in wilderness, resulting in alternate pathways for Black American nature exploration. Such trauma has created a complex understanding of and relationship with nature for contemporary Black Americans. Implications of this research further our understanding of the relationship between race, nature, and the historical memories of Black Americans.

SEE IT OUR WAY: BLACK AMERICAN WILDERNESS PERSPECTIVES

by

T'Shari White

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving parents Marilynn and Wayne for their endless love

and support. To my grandparents for walking so I could run. A special thank you to my close

friends for encouraging me. To everyone else who supported me along the way, thank you.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by T'Shari White has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Historically, Black Americans[1] have been excluded from certain landscapes that limit their access to environmental recreation. These limitations have larger implications for climate change related issues as the demographics of the United States shift and more people of color are impacted by environmental disasters and degradation. Various scholars have acknowledged a lack of participation from Black Americans engaging in outdoor recreation and environmental activities in nature[2] (Taylor, 1989; Floyd, 1999; Martin, 2004; Byrne, 2011; Finney, 2014; Mott, 2015, Pease, 2015). Some of these studies point to racism, discrimination, and exclusionary practices as to why Black Americans lack engagement. The research presented in this dissertation is guided by the belief that history plays an important role in grounding peoples' decisions and perceptions (Makanju et al., 2020). More specifically, this research reflects on the negative associations Black Americans have with nature that are derived from slavery and lynching in the woods in the Southeastern region of the United States. Additionally, this research explores how Black Americans both as individuals and as a collective ethnic group relate to the outdoors on a personal level. In this dissertation, I offer a theoretical perspective and an analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data on how Black Americans identify with their environment. This dissertation expands the fields of environmental studies, geography,

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[1] In this study, Black Americans are defined as anyone who identifies as Black and is living in the United States regardless of their ethnicity or nationality. There are Black immigrants whose opinions should be considered due to their integration into American society and therefore subjection to racism and discrimination.

[2] Although I am aware that these words have different semantics and may not mean the same thing to certain people in the environmental and geographical fields of study, I use the words "nature," "wilderness," "wildlands," "woodlands," and "woods" interchangeably in this study to refer to any green spaces that include but are not limited to greenways, public parks, state parks, and national parks that are used for leisure and recreational purposes.

sustainability, and Black studies as it highlights the outdoor experiences of Black Americans arguing that the cultural trauma of slavery, lynching, and discrimination has created a complex understanding of and relationship with nature for contemporary Black Americans.

1.1 Study Significance

Researchers have begun to identify the ways Black Americans identify with and interact with their environment. However, this dissertation focuses on the residual implications that racial violence has had on Black Americans' perceptions of and participation in nature. This study also focuses on race-based environmental identities from a Black perspective. For instance, Black epistemologies of wilderness are not necessarily the same as those of (the otherwise predominantly White) professionals in the field. Black people in the United States have a unique understanding of their environment based on their upbringing, personal values, experiences, and historical precedents. Therefore, it is important to note that for Black Americans, wilderness may not be conceptualized romantically or as "pristine," which is commonly denoted by environmental professionals; rather, wilderness could constitute "unfamiliar' territories or landscapes. The expected larger-scale, longer-term significance of this project is that it will serve as a preliminary evaluation of how the enslavement of and discrimination against Black people have influenced Black Americans' wilderness perspectives today. This study's approach will elucidate a richer understanding of the sociopsychological impacts of slavery in the realms of Geography and Environmental Studies. The findings of this study suggest a more complex understanding of and relationship with nature for contemporary Black Americans, who:

- have their own definition of the word "environment,"
- are knowledgeable about environmental issues and appreciate the environment,
- have a strong spiritual connection with nature,

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- believe there are various opportunities to increase wilderness engagement, and

- believe that historical oppression and racial violence influence environmental interactions and percipience.

This study implicates that Black Americans have their own interpretation of what the environment is, have their own way of using and caring for nature, and have their own paths to participation.

1.2 Background

According to recent news, nearly 80% of national park staff are White Americans while less than 7% are Black. Not only are park staff predominately White, so are park visitors. Nearly 95% of park visitors are White while less than 2% of visitors are Black (Melton, 2021). Environmental organizations and companies are also at fault for a lack of diversity. According to Taylor (2014), staff diversity among environmental organizations are on average less than 16% people of color. More recent reports on this data suggest that the numbers have increased since 2014; however, there has been a decrease in ethnic demographical reporting from environmental entities (Love, 2019). Although earlier studies on ethnic attitudinal differences found that Black Americans were less concerned with the environment (Hohm, 1976; LaHart, 1978; Kellert, 1984), more recent research suggests otherwise (Ballew et al., 2020; Medina, 2019; Taylor, 2018; Yi, 2016). However, irrespective of perceptions on nature, there is still a lack of engagement from Black Americans in wilderness.

Black American wilderness engagement is essential for the resiliency of this demographic group (Charles, 2021). If Black Americans were to engage and participate in nature more, then they would understand the importance of nature and how natural disasters and hazards would have larger implications for the future of Black Americans as an ethnic group.

Black participation is also essential for broadening the constituency for crucial action on climate change and reorienting environmental politics away from the dominant White and middle-class interests. Additionally, having an intimate relationship with nature has been proven to decrease stress levels, decrease blood pressure, improve overall mood, increase happiness, and reduce illnesses (Robbins, 2020). These are all ailments that are prevalent in the Black community (Charles, 2021), but Black people do not have adequate access to green spaces that would help to alleviate some of these health implications. Additionally, Black Americans are more likely to suffer from health issues related to environmental pollution (McCormick, 2021). Nationwide, Black people are more likely exposed to higher concentrations of pollution such as particulate matter, while White people are less exposed. More specifically, Black Americans are 75% more likely to live near facilities that produce hazardous waste and are 1.5 times more likely to be exposed to pollution (Villarosa, 2020).

Environmental justice (EJ) is both a field of study and a social movement that seeks to address the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and harms. (Defining EJ is a challenge because there is no standard or widely recognized definition.) EJ has broadened the definition of the environment from just natural surroundings to where people eat, live, work, play and pray; it asks how environmental degradation impacts people of color and their daily lives (Bullard, 2018). Additionally, EJ asks if procedures, regulations, and decision-making are inclusive of the people they affect (Bryant and Callewaert, 2003). From an EJ perspective, it is imperative for Black Americans to foster a relationship with wilderness areas because they are more likely than Whites to endure the ramifications of climate change and environmental degradation. Additionally, Black Americans are less likely to have access to environmental benefits (Stewart, Bacon, & Burke, 2014). For Black Americans to be able to survive the implications of climate

change, they will have to establish an understanding of their surroundings, how to coexist with nature, and how environmental pollution jeopardizes their livelihoods.

Although a novel framework for EJ, this dissertation takes a nuanced approach that explores the injustice of barriers to environmental participation. More specifically, the issue of diversity in natural spaces has origins based in the U.S. National Park Service (NPS). For instance, NPS staff members are comprised of mostly White individuals, making up approximately eighty to eighty-five percent of the workforce (Root, 2017). Therefore, it could be possible that park personnel hold unconscious racial biases, contributing to people of color feeling unwelcome in national parks (Mott, 2015). The NPS still lacks diversity, and this place-based conditioning still exists today (Mock, 2016). Additional studies have found that Black people are less likely to visit wilderness areas such as national parks or participate in outdoor recreational activities while there (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, access, resources/funds, and cultural values informed by discrimination, slavery, and African heritage (Finney, 2014). To achieve racial reconciliation between the NPS and people of color — to seek, in other words, environmental justice — there needs to be an acknowledgment of these racist and discriminatory acts performed by the system's founding fathers.

According to Zaval and Cornwell (2017, p. 478), there are several psychological barriers that may prevent people who are aware of climate change from taking action to mitigate its implications. They point to four key reasons:

1. People have the tendency to use social norms to understand how their actions impact the climate, rather than review the evidence in full detail.

2. People's beliefs about climate change could be easily influenced by features of the decision environment as to whether there are risks or no risks involved.

3. People tend to seek out information that confirms their preconceived notions about the world and how their actions influence it.

4. A lack of knowledge about energy efficiency can inhibit an effective change of behavior. Understanding these challenges may help environmental entities such as nonprofit organizations and the NPS improve their goals of increasing diversity. Environmental companies and organizations have struggled with finding the correct strategies to increase environmental engagement from Black Americans (Taylor, 2014). Zaval and Cornwell (2017) suggest several strategies to incite meaningful engagement. One suggestion is the use of social norms because one's actions are more likely to be criticized when they deviate from societal expectations that result from either direct, socially communicated information or by observation of typical behaviors. So, to put this in an environmental context, if a Black person is not typically seen interacting with nature or venturing to the woods, then doing so would be out of the norm. Doing something out of the norm would result in scrutiny from their peers. Additionally, Zalan and Cornwell (2017) propose to use social and monetary incentives or disincentives on a national scale. Another strategy is to consider the personal values of your audience. Personal values are postulated to have shown a powerful impact on a person's volition to engage in pro-environmental activities. Also, working with the local community and religious leaders that are not normally considered to be pro-environmental can influence individuals to change their behavior. Furthermore, Zalan and Cornwell (2017) call for better communication of technical information in an effort to reach a wider audience. Active group participation in environmental discussions is cited as another mechanism that may help to increase involvement in nature-

related programming. Lastly, gamification of environmental issues has emerged as a unique type of strategy that can simulate interactive decision-making for diverse audiences to understand and act on climate-related issues.

1.3 Research Question

This research contributes to the literature on Black geographies and environmental justice by examining the role in which slavery and other discriminatory acts of racism have played in impacting Black Americans' interactions and perceptions of the natural environment. This study attempts to determine how a history of racial violence occurring in natural spaces — e.g. the legacy of forced toil in nature under slavery and, later, the prevalence of lynching in natural spaces — has negative implications for contemporary Black Americans and their relationships with wilderness. Additionally, this study examines how the legacy of racial violence influences Black Americans' perspectives of nature and how these perspectives then influence their participation in outdoor activities in wilderness spaces.

This research uses a mixed-methods approach of a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to investigate the relationship between Black Americans and nature areas to address the following question: How does a history of racial trauma affect Black Americans' perception of place and engagement in wilderness? The findings of this research suggest that the cultural and generational traumas of Black Americans have impacted their perceptions of and experiences in wilderness. This negative history has produced alternate pathways for Black American nature exploration. I argue that such trauma has created a complex understanding of and relationship with nature for contemporary Black Americans.

CHAPTER II: HISTORY PLAYED ITS PART

This chapter serves as both a literature review and a historical analysis of slavery and lynching. More specifically, this chapter illuminates how these histories have molded Black American perspectives on wilderness. I begin with historical background on slavery and point to relevant examples of oppression during the Jim Crow Era. I then delve deeper into the foundation of the National Park Service (NPS) and discuss segregation in national parks. The subsequent section describes cultural trauma and memory in relation to historical precedents in an environmental context. I close this chapter with the theoretical framework of critical geographies.

2.1 Historical Background

To understand the reasons why Black Americans are perceived to have a strained relationship with the natural environment, one must recall the experiences Black Americans have had with these natural spaces. Finney (2014) provides a comprehensive guide for understanding the relationship Black people in the United States have with wilderness areas. According to Finney, "The dominant narrative in the United States is primarily constructed and informed by White, Western European, or Euro-American voices" (p. 3).

This Western worldview sought the widespread establishment of colonial agendas that pursued to "enlighten" the rest of the world by "conquering wildness and bringing order and rationality to 'uncivilized' peoples and nature" (Fletcher et al., 2021). The western concept of wilderness romanticizes pristine, untrammeled land that humanity has not invaded (Smith, 2014). This idea of wilderness has played a crucial role in American culture and especially in the rise of American environmentalism (Henderson, 2021). This "western" or "Eurocentric" ideology also known as the "American Frontier" of wilderness began in the mid-1800s (Henderson, 2021;

Turner, 1893). The American Frontier was an aspect of romanticism that was pertinent to the rise of wilderness preservation. According to Turner (1893), America's wilderness became more about enviro-nationalism rather than environmentalism. Turner argued that several aspects of the "American character" that encompass a democratic spirit to independence were products of the American frontier experience, and the "great outdoors" of America became symbolic of pride and national identity; a key moment that birthed the "American wilderness perspective" was the end of the frontier and free land expeditions. The nostalgia for the end of the frontier inspired a lot of early preservation efforts. Transcendentalist writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau explored the beauty of nature, and Thoreau became widely known as the first major figure and intellect of the wilderness tradition. Other key figures were John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Aldo Leopold. Muir had a religious upbringing and did not have a positive perception of the American frontier due to his father making him work manual labor as an adolescent. Leopold was an avid naturalist and outdoorsman who believed strongly in science. All of these men were White, and although they came from different socioeconomic and political backgrounds, their influence had an intense impact on the environmental movement. Another key moment that defined "American wilderness" was the Wilderness Act of 1964, which established the National Wilderness Preservation System and instructed federal land management agencies such as the NPS to preserve the character of wilderness and manage wilderness areas (National Park Service, 2021). According to Finney,

> While Pinchot and Muir explored, articulated, and disseminated conservation and
> preservation ideologies, legislation was being enacted to limit both movement and
> accessibility for African Americans, as well as American Indians, Chinese, and other
> non-white peoples in the United States. This included the California Land Claims Act of

1851, the Black Codes (1861–65), the Dawes Act (1887), and the Curtis Act (1898).

During the same period, there were numerous race-related massacres of African

Americans: two hundred in Louisiana in 1868; nine in North Carolina in 1898; and

seventy in Colfax, Louisiana, in 1873. (Finney, 2014, p. 37)

A major critique of the "wilderness idea" in environmental and geographical studies comes from William Cronon's *The Trouble with Wilderness* (1996), in which he claims that "wilderness" is a social construct of humanity. Cronon argues that the removal of Indigenous People from their homes and lands that they lived in for centuries in order to create an uninhabited, pristine wilderness should incline people to realize just how invented and constructed the American wilderness really is. According to Luke (1999), the development of the Wilderness Society and the Americanization of nature serve as means to normalize American-ness. Callicott (2008), calls the wilderness idea a tool of genocide in which Native people were forcibly removed from their land for the economic and leisure interests of Europeans. The creation of national parks and essentially the wilderness idea itself were founded upon the removal of Indigenous people and contributed to their near genocide. Before the parks were established in 1916 and vacated for tourism, they were occupied by Indigenous peoples (Wolfley, 2016). Manifest Destiny is a prime example of how Indigenous people were exiled from their homelands. It was advertised as a way to justify conquering the land through the ideology that it was God's will for Americans to expand their territory. The White American mission for dominion had severe implications for Native people, including the removal policy implemented by President Andrew Jackson that became later known as the Trail of Tears (McLachlan, 2019). European colonizers did not believe that indigenous people were capable of using the land's resources efficiently; they did believe it was their duty to utilize those resources

for their own benefit. Voices of Indigenous people were either ignored or silenced, yet these voices disputed the idea of a wilderness. Natives did not think of the plains as "wild"; only White men did. Another critique of the wilderness perspective from a Black studies standpoint is that wilderness is for White people. Black people were left out of the wilderness idea and prohibited from visiting national parks during the Jim Crow Era (Starkey, 2005), therefore reifying the idea that wilderness spaces are reserved for the White and elite. In comparison to White people living in the United States, Finney (2014) concludes that it is difficult for Black Americans to have an uncomplicated relationship with the natural world.

The alternative conception that these perspectives offer is that wilderness is socially constructed and exclusionary of people of color in both theory and practice. According to DeLuca and Demo (2001), the environmental movement has been exclusively concerned with the preservation of land. Therefore, that narrow, class and race-based vantage point of what counts as nature, who belongs in nature, and who utilizes nature has resulted in the negligence of people and the places they inhabit, thus isolating the movement from civil rights and labor concerns and leaving it vulnerable to charges of elitism and "misanthropism." These narratives shape the way that nature is symbolized, constructed, and perceived in our daily lives, and ultimately such narratives inform our national identity in contemporary times. 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 depicted in Figure 1.

Glave and Stoll (2006), provide an extensive history of Black Americans and their involvement in the environment, from historical events taking place during slavery to the environmental justice movement. Additionally, Glave and Stoll (2006), argue that 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. Then, enslaved Africans or African Americans 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 a struggle for access to shared resources. Lastly, slavery has shaped the environmental attitudes and values of both slave owners and the enslaved. According to Glave and Stoll (2006), 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 enslaved Africans supported (Glave and Stoll, 2006). While similar to my argument, Glave and Stoll's approach is founded on historical evidence, while my approach is more contemporary. Therefore, the relationship between Black people and nature can arguably be described as strained:

> *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. (Finney 2014, p. 49)*

Figure 1. Depiction of Slavery.

Note. Cutting Sugar Cane in the South. By the North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy Stock Photo. 1800s.

Black Americans were purposely excluded from visiting national parks; thus, they do not have much experience visiting national parks. Historically, wilderness areas were for nature and White peoples' leisure, so as a result, Black Americans have been systematically left out of national park recreation and operations (Finney, 2014) thereby being excluded from other forms of nature such as local parks, walking trails, greenways, green squares, gardens, and other natural spaces.

Although wilderness areas have not always been a place where Black people have felt welcome, nature was once a place of refuge for enslaved Africans and maroons. The most common way that enslaved Africans escaped slavery was to flee the plantation and seek solace in uncultivated landscapes (Turner, 2012). Starkey (2005) articulated the dichotomy that wilderness was indeed a refuge for Black Americans during slavery, because "wilderness was also a physical and psychological testing ground, an unknown and potentially dangerous place in which

strength, knowledge, and endurance were put to the test in a quest for freedom." (p. 2) Woods

and rivers provided subsistence as well as wages and recreational opportunities for Black people.

For instance, the underground railroad served as a means to freedom; however, the journey was

treacherous. Those seeking freedom had to travel through dense thickets and cross rivers using

the cloak of night. Along the routes or "lines" of the underground railroad, freedom seekers used

a wide range of survival skills such as hunting, gathering, and fishing. Freedom seekers also

sought out homeopathic remedies by using their medicinal knowledge of plants along these

treacherous routes (Turner, 2021). Across the South, maroon communities, such as the Gullah

Geechee, implemented various methods to protect their freedom from slavery, including utilizing

the natural resources around them. American maroons built homes in trees, swamps, and

underground caves to ensure their survival and resiliency (Bledsoe, 2018). Evidence of this

exists in the Great Dismal Swamp, where certain freedoms were offered that were not in the

slave industry. In 2016, archeologists found that from about 1680 to the Civil War, the swamp

communities were dominated by Africans and African Americans (Grant, 2016). Grant ventured

to the islands of North Carolina and there he found remnants of tools, weapons, and clay pipes.

He explains that these "American Maroons" were erased from history in reluctance to showcase

the Black resistance and initiative, due to racial bias and the glorification of White involvement

in the underground railroad. He claims that the maroons of the Great Dismal Swamp were free,

that they emancipated themselves from capitalist enslavement and became chiefs with close-knit

communities that practiced African religion. Here, Black people survived off the land, used

whatever resources they could, and most importantly stuck together in the face of unimaginable

adversities. On one hand, Black Americans were reliant on natural resources as enslaved people,

and on the other hand, they were excluded from it once emancipated.

2.2 Racist Foundations

White supremacy is deeply embedded in the history of the environmental movement. Another essential aspect to consider when discussing the relationship between Black Americans and the NPS 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 by people who were eugenic enthusiasts, xenophobes, and White supremacists (Mock, 2016). In an interview Dorceta Taylor states, "we see the taking of Native American lands to turn into park spaces that are described as empty, untouched by human hands, pristine, to be protected" (Shapiro et al. 2022). 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. (In Burns, 2009)*

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, they are not considered to be American? What Finney means is that as a result of the Great Migration following the Reconstruction Era, when more than 6 million Black Americans relocated from the rural South to the industrialized cities of the North, Midwest, and West, their

connection with the "land" slowly diminished. However, there is now a "reverse" Great

Migration where Black Americans from the North are relocating "back" to the South (Dean,

2021). Although this phenomenon exists, there is still a lack of Black American participation in

wilderness spaces given the geographical landscape of the South with an abundance of greenery.

John Muir is widely known as a wilderness preservationist and "the Father of our

National Parks" in the United States, and he is an inspiration for environmental activists

everywhere (Wood, 2019). Muir helped to inspire President Theodore Roosevelt's conservation

programs, and he was the founder of the environmental organization the Sierra Club in 1892

(Wood, 2019). Muir and his passion for national parks and wilderness spaces of the West have

been an inspiration for numerous environmental movements, organizations, and individuals.

According to Turgeon,

> *Any discussion of the history of environmental thought is incomplete without addressing*
>
> *the contributions of naturalist John Muir. Muir, who dons the back of California's*
>
> *commemorative "state quarter" and has given his name to many mountains, trails, and*
>
> *parks all across the state, was perhaps America's most historically influential advocate*
>
> *for its natural places. (Turgeon, 2016, n.p.)*

However, not well known about him are his travels to the South and his intolerance to

people of color, particularly enslaved Black 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. (In Merchant, 2003, p. 386-387)

According to DeLuca and Demo (2001), Muir modeled an attitude that modern-day

environmentalists have, unbeknownst to them, mimicked 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). Muir and the people he influenced saw the presence of humans who

lived off the land as an endangerment to the environment because they were not civilized enough

to recognize nature's intrinsic value. Therefore, Muir's ideology impacted the NPS culture,

reinforcing the racism and prejudice practices that influence the lack of Black attendance at

national parks.

Another prominent figure that helped to establish America's the NPS is Madison Grant.

According to Mock (2016), Grant spent his career as an avid conservationist who helped found

the New York Zoological Society and the Boone and Crockett Club, which is responsible for

establishing Yellowstone National Park. Although Grant contributed significantly to the national

park movement and nature conservation efforts, he also added greatly to the death camps of Nazi

Germany and had a profound influence on Nazi ideologies. Racism was not something that Grant

hid from the public. White supremacy was an integral part of his worldview, including his

opinions about nature conservation and national park creation (Spiro, 2009). 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). Grant wrote

the book on White supremacy, *The Passing of the Great Race*,[3] published in 1916, which Adolf

Hitler adopted and relied on during the Holocaust (Conniff, 2016). Madison's views about ethnic

groups are pertinent to understanding how central racism was to both his ideas of society and his

approach to conservation. Conniff (2016) explains,

> *The Bronx River Parkway, for instance, was originally about cleaning up a polluted river*
>
> *and adding a roadway through newly picturesque landscapes. But Grant's commission*
>
> *carefully planned the project to take out "the wrong sort of development"—"Italian*
>
> *shacks" like my great-grandfather's, and neighborhoods populated by "Negroes."*

While Muir's prejudice towards Black people did not have as much of a societal impact as

Grant's bigotry; Grant perpetuated these ideologies into practices that permeated the inner

workings of the NPS. For instance, Grant was responsible for founding the Bronx Zoo, where he

personally helped to negotiate terms to take a Congolese man from the Mbuti tribe by the name

of Ota Benga and encase him in the zoo with monkeys as a zoo attraction (Newkirk, 2015).

2.2.1 The National Park Service

To further justify that this is an environmental justice issue, it is important to understand

that since the majority of national park visitors and employees are not ethnically diverse, then

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[3] This book contained eugenic and xenophobic views on immigrants, Indigenous People, and Black Americans. Grant's views about Black people were explicit in his distaste for the race and their existence. 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, p. 80). 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 otherwise 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, p.79). 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, p.80).

people of color are left out either intentionally or accidentally. The lack of diversity in the NPS

relates to EJ issues because people of color are often left out of the narrative of environmental

issues, publications, and organizational roles. The NPS was constructed by racist leaders and was

also subject to segregation during the Jim Crow Era, particularly for national parks located in the

South. Prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, people of color were legally banned from or

segregated at recreational sites designated for the public, including national and state parks (Scott

& Lee, 2018). The "separate but equal" mandate impacted several national parks including the

Hot Springs, Shenandoah, Great Smoky Mountains, and the George Washington Birthplace

National Monument (Shumaker, 2009). Before the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was

officially open to the public in 1934, the superintendent J. Ross Eakin received a letter from a

Black camping advocate who wished to confirm that there would be a place for his fellow

campers to recreate. The letter asked for the construction of a campground specifically for people

of color in fear that this park would end up like the others, which were for Whites only.

However, Eakin dismissed the letter, stating that the request was "premature and unnecessary"

(Young, 2009). There are public records showing that there were plans to segregate national

parks in the Southeastern region of the country, and some were already segregated. Some of

these plans included the implementation of separate bathhouses, campgrounds, and picnic areas

(Shumaker, 2009). Figures 2 and 3 below were taken during the Jim Crow Era when Black

Americans were forcefully segregated at the Lewis Mountain campground in Shenandoah

national park in Virginia.

Figure 2. Lewis Mountain Segregated Entrance.

Note. Lewis Mountain Entrance Sign. By the National Park Service Archives. Circa 1939-1950.

Figure 3. Lewis Mountain Segregated Picnic Area.

Note. Lewis Mountain Picnic Sign. By the National Park Service Archives. Circa 1939-1950.

The NPS has a legal obligation as a federal entity to address EJ 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, 2020). For instance, Harriet Tubman is known as a pioneer. She led a military assault, she was a spy for the Union, and she was a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Tubman is known for her civil rights contributions; however, she should also be acknowledged by the NPS and other environmental organizations and corporations as a wilderness exhibitionist, just like John Muir and Aldo Leopold. Tubman had to learn how to survive in the wilderness alone and also navigate through woodlands within a hundred-mile radius. She also utilized her wilderness epistemology to forage for food, find shelter, and use the night sky as a guide as depicted in Figure 4 below. Tubman was such a wilderness expert that she was able to mimic the sounds of an owl to warn her followers of danger without raising suspicion. Tubman's understanding of the environment, landscapes, and wildlife helped to prepare her for the journey through the Underground Railroad and even for the Civil War (Ruane, 2017; Keyes, 2020). These narratives are important for facilitating and building relationships between Black Americans and nature.

Figure 4. Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad.

Note. Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad. By Paul Collins. N.d.

It is critical 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 experience as Americans. 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 underrepresentation of Black 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 for the larger picture of environmentalism that the

creation of national parks has inspired. Although engagement in nature is not limited to national parks, the framing of environmental issues as related to them is largely exclusive to White and middle-class concerns. Ignoring the various ways in which Black Americans engage with and contribute to the preservation of nature is essentially atavistic. Therefore, re-establishing 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, lowering blood pressure, and increasing one's overall energy level (NYS DEC, n.d.).

2.3 Collective Memory and Cultural Trauma

According to DeGruy (2005), Black Americans of the 21st century are all subjected to what she calls "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome" (PTSS). PTSS is defined as a condition that exists when a group has undergone multigenerational trauma that has resulted from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and systematic racism. In addition, DeGruy explains that epigenetics research has revealed that the environment can manipulate our genes and that trauma can be transferred over generations. Furthermore, cultural trauma is rooted in an event or series of events, but not necessarily in their direct experience (Eyerman, 2001). Therefore, it is not the experience itself that produces the traumatic effect, but rather the recollection of it. According to Eyerman (2001), the trauma of willing servitude to the whims of White Americans was not necessarily something Black people alive today have experienced. However, slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent

collective memory. It is here that we might start to understand the connection between the lack of environmental engagement from Black Americans and the racism they have experienced.

The disturbing remembrances of racial violence have traumatized the collective Black community to a point wherein some Black people do not wish to engage with nature. Johnson and Bowker (2004), suggest that as a result of this negative relationship of having to work the land, Black Americans do not romanticize wilderness the same way White Americans do. Additionally, in the Black community, particularly those that identify as African American, stories about lynching are passed down from generation to generation. The memory or trauma of lynching is imprinted in the Black American psyche, where victims of lynching become emblematic ancestors (Sobierj, 2019). According to Johnson (1998), there is a need for more examination of how slavery and lynching have impacted Black Americans' perceptions of wildlands. Consideration of these historical factors may illuminate the lack of a Black presence in green spaces. Additionally, this negative experience may be crucial for southern Black Americans because this group's collective memory is associated with American soil. Johnson (1998) argues that these memories are engrained in the younger generations of Black Americans and thereby become a part of their collective identities, influencing their choices for outdoor exploration. It is imperative to acknowledge that the places where much of the slave labor and lynching occurred were mostly wild. As a result of beatings, killings, and lynchings taking place in uninhabited wilderness areas, it can be argued that Black Americans associate these spaces with terror. According to Johnson and Bowker, wilderness areas and natural spaces are not objective entities that hold the same value, meaning, or symbolism to all who interact with them:

Mainstream environmentalists frame wildlands, singularly, as

healing, revitalizing "therapeutic landscapes" or "fields of care," having the

power to recreate the human spirit. However, for African Americans, these

same terrains may be what cultural geographers refer to as "sick places" which evoke

horrible memories of toil, torture, and death. (Johnson and Bowker, 2004, p. 60)

Therefore, "sick places" are places that are associated with negative or traumatic occurrences that can have an impact on an individual's emotions. For instance, a Black American may have negative associations with wilderness areas due to the cultural trauma of lynching that often took place in densely wooded areas. Among scholars and park managers, discrimination is frequently noted as being a barrier to participation in outdoor recreation for marginalized groups of people (Mott, 2015). This perception involves the sense that racial minorities feel unwelcome in the NPS (Mott, 2015). Mott (2015) provides an example of a case study where Black people residing in St. Louis reported the reason that 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. A recent example of these negative racial encounters took place in October 2016, in Adirondack Park. President of the Sierra Club, Aaron Mair, a Black man, was working with *Adirondack Life* magazine doing a photoshoot when a group of rafters who were all White, both men and women, approached Mair and began using explicit and derogatory language (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 (Mann, 2016). Hostility towards Black Americans in wilderness areas is not uncommon.

Black people are traumatized by the long-term psychological effects of slavery and oppression, and through racial and ethnic socialization (RES), they have a different association

with wilderness. RES is described as the way in which parents teach their children how to navigate what it means to be Black (Gaskin, 2015). Therefore, the way Black Americans learn about nature may come from their parents, grandparents, or other family members. 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 "Black Women and the Wilderness." White (1996) talks about collective racial traumas and how these traumas have impacted her relationship with the wilderness. She 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 experience violence 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 leaves her with feelings of being exposed, vulnerable, and unprotected – of being a target of cruelty and hate. 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).

In recent news (Pires, 2018; Machado, 2020), racism and discrimination have been identified as factors of Black Americans' fear of the outdoors. As aforementioned, lynching at the hands of White Americans has arguably altered the view of wilderness spaces for Black Americans. Therefore, these outdoor spaces do not have the same appeal for Black Americans, which ties into the "sick places" ideology. A recent study, conducted in 2021 by Dietsch et al.,

found that Black Americans associate forests with lynching, which limits the Black experience and place-making ability. Participants of this study reported that nature-based areas, including forests, reinforce historical traumas and stereotypes concerning crime and safety issues for Black Americans specifically. These participants claim that forested areas are where past oppressive acts as well as acts of violence were committed. Additionally, Black Americans feel that these areas are places where discrimination is still present, and many have been warned by their elders not to visit. According to Davis (2019), wildlands were where Black Americans endured beatings, lynchings, and rapes. Therefore, these experiences are lodged in Black Americans' collective memories, and these memories shape the meanings attached to events, places, and things. Furthermore, Black Americans' collective memories of wilderness areas fashion wavering views towards these spaces, which often diverge from their White counterparts.

According to James H. Cone (2011), "the lynching tree is a metaphor for white America's crucifixion of black people" (p. 166). One may even consider the lynching of Black people to be a failed genocidal attempt. There are two sources that map the racial terror of lynchings that took place in the United States. Both maps are interactive and allow the user to click on either individual states or regions of the country to display data. The first map from "Equal Justice Initiative" visualizes data from 1877 to 1950 and shows lynchings on the state and county scale. So, for instance, in Figure 5 one can see that in North Carolina there were 120 reported lynchings, while there was only one reported lynching in Guilford County. However, the map created by "Monroe & Florence Work Today" provides more detail. This map differentiates between random acts of violence that were considered lynchings, but not performed in the traditional sense of the word. For instance, mob riots or beatings were considered a lynching. Therefore, this site allows the user to choose between random acts of violence against people of

color or just strictly lynching, which is hanging from a tree or another structure. This map is also interactive; however, it allows the user to select a region. It does not display how many lynchings occurred but instead rehumanizes the victims of these murders by providing details on each individual, which includes their name, gender, county, date of death, and the reason they were lynched. Figure 6 shows the visualization of lynchings from 1848 to 2020. This map also includes people of color that were not Black. Figure 7 provides an example of how each individual data point is personalized with details for each person who died. These maps show the extent of lynching not only by how many lynchings occurred but how widespread and common it was in the south.

Figure 5. North Carolina Lynchings.
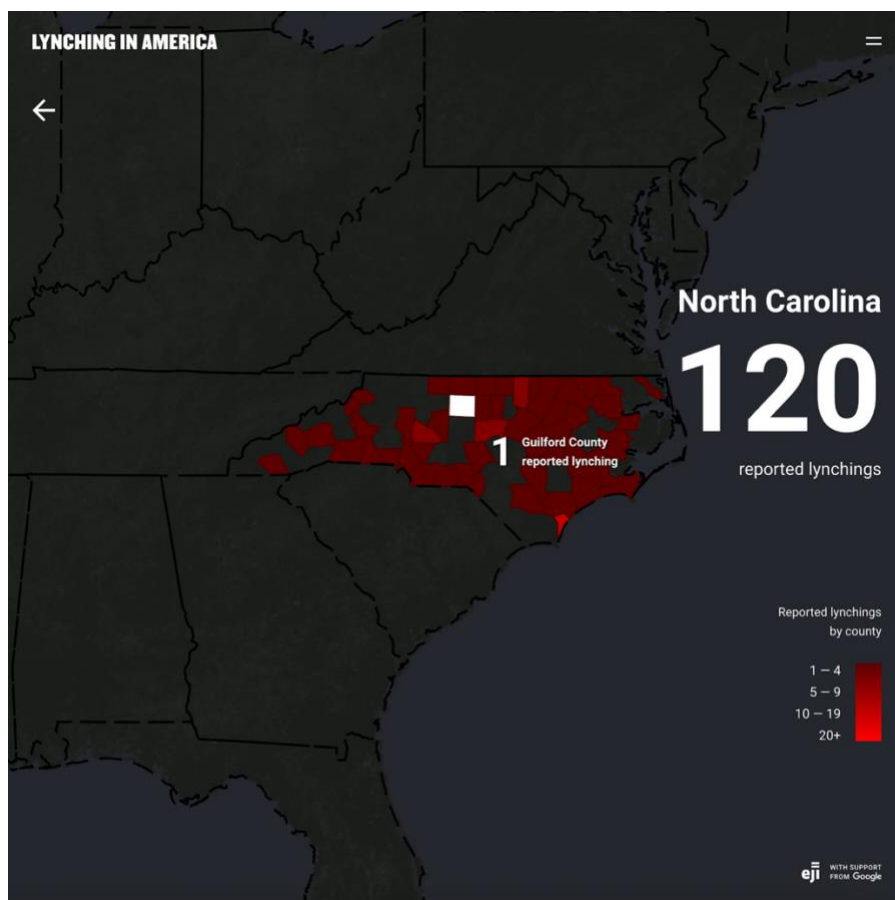
Note. North Carolina Lynchings. Provided by Lynching in America. 2022.

Figure 6. Map of Lynchings in the South.
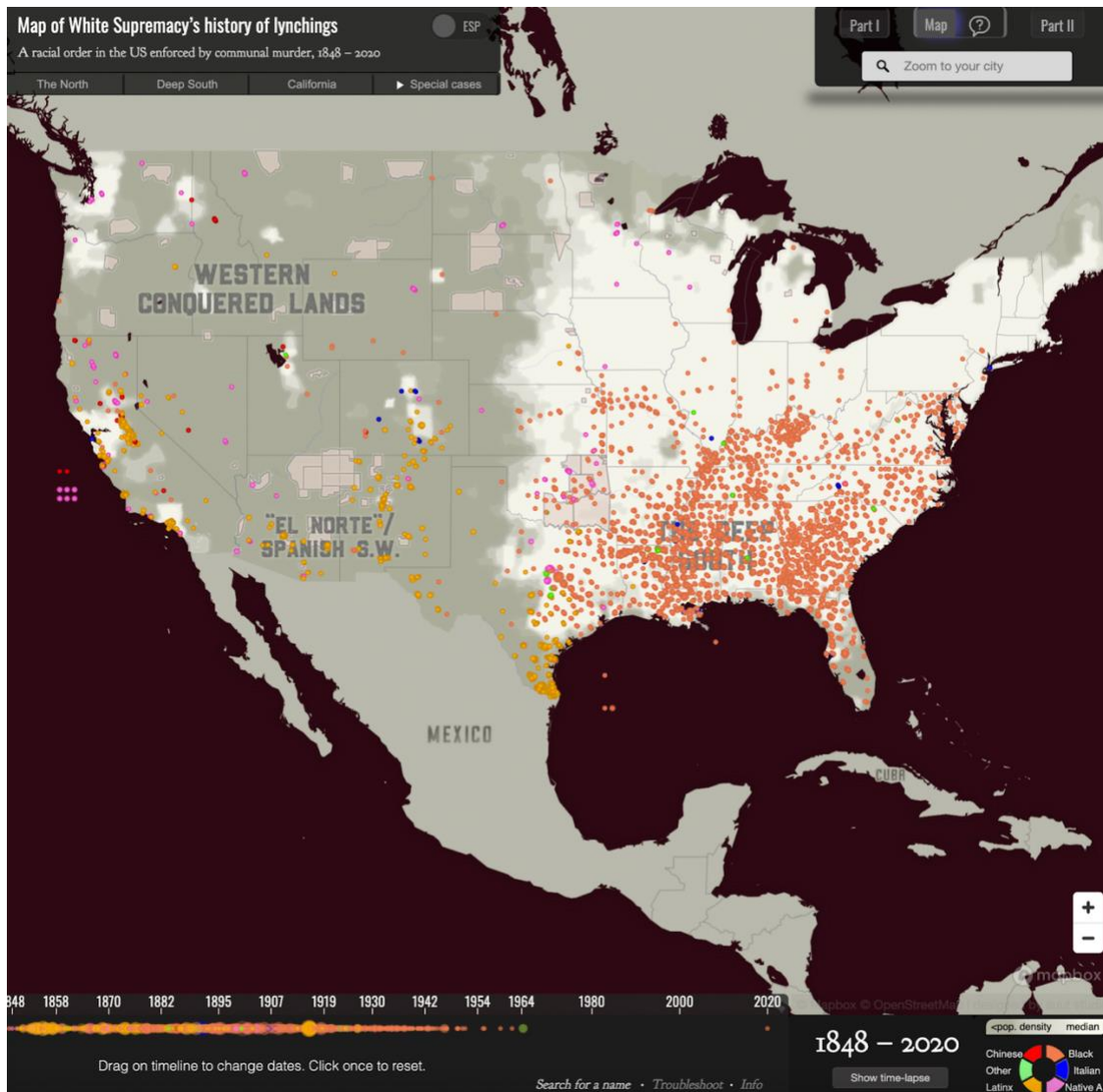
Note. Lynching in the Deep South. Provided by Monroe and Florence Work Today. 2022.

Figure 7. Eugene Hairston.
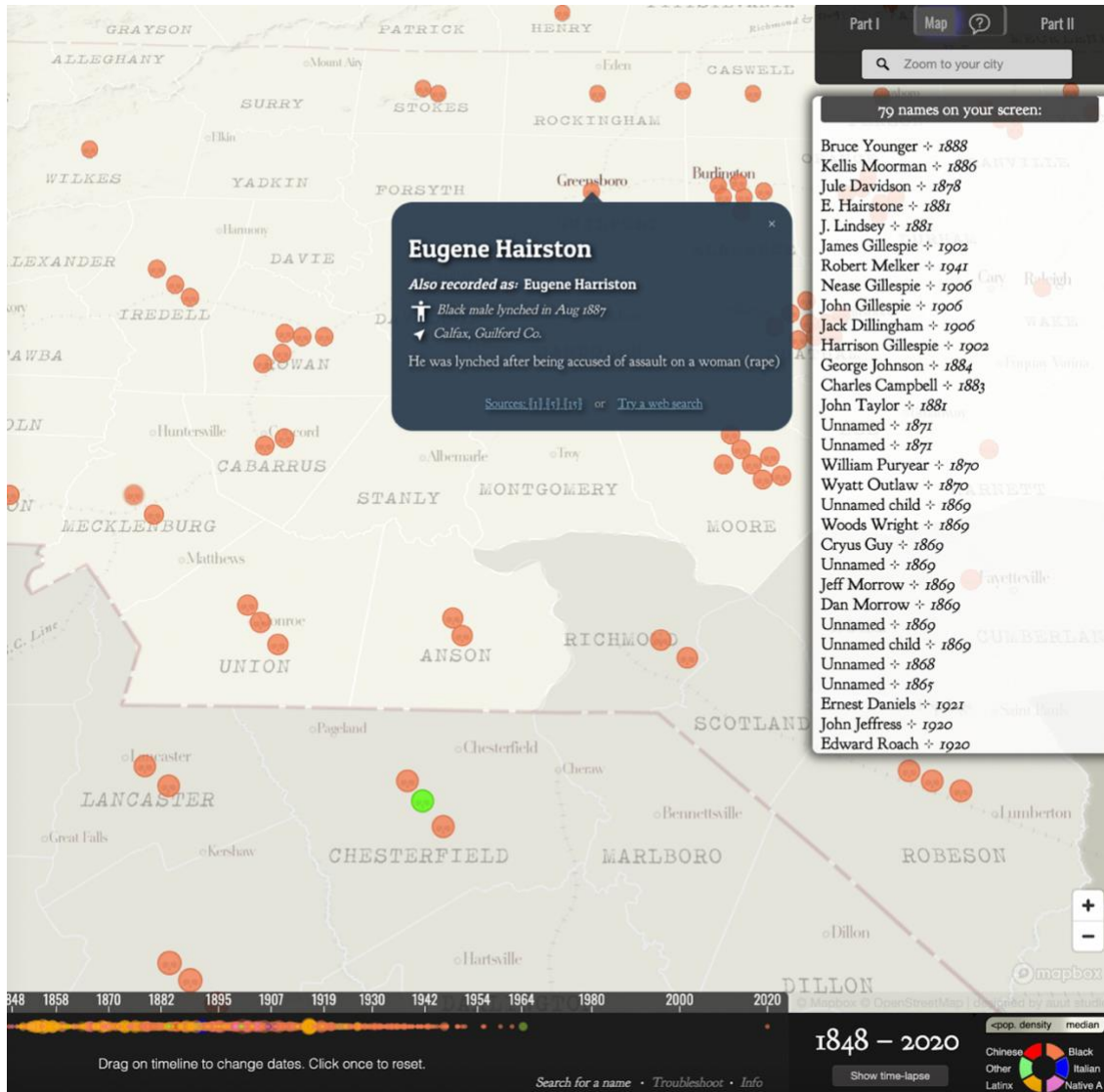
Note. Lynching in Guildford County. Provided by Monroe and Florence Work Today. 2022.

2.4 Black Geographies and Critical Race Theory

Various public expressions of racial anti-blackness in places such as Orlando, Charleston, and Charlottesville have called for a geographical analysis of Blackness to find solutions to the resurgence of racial violence across the South and the nation (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019). According to Bledsoe et al. (2018), Black epistemologies are crucial for further development and

knowledge of geographies of the South. Although racism is not just a southern occurrence, the landscape of the south has contributed immensely to the historical, social, political, and economic mechanisms of racialization. McKittrick (2006) states that a Black person's sense of place is produced by and through a long process of racialization; however, she also argues that a Black sense of place is not reducible to the racialization Black people have been subjected to. For instance, maroon settlements and other Black hubs both rural and urban become the foundation for an alternate sense of place. I position my research here as I explore the ways in which racial violence that occurred during slavery and the Jim Crow Era in the Southern region of the United States has impacted the Black sense of place in a geographic and environmental context.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) places race and racism in the middle of its critique and analysis, and it is connected to Black geographies, hence the nomenclature "critical geographies". CRT was inspired by the American civil rights movement through prominent figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the Black Panthers. Solorzano & Yotto's (2000) basic model of CRT consists of five elements focusing on: "a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to the dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective" (p. 63). CRT considers the ideological construction of race from broader perspectives of history, social and power relations, culture, and group and self-interests. Critical race theorists define racism as a social structure that systematically benefits White Americans at the expense of people of color (Allen, 2017). To address racial issues within environmentalism CRT is a useful theoretical framework for this study. CRT offers perspectives, methods, pedagogies, and insights that guide my effort to

identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of environmental studies and geography that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of green spaces.

According to Delgado & Stefancic (2017), there are three basic tenets of critical race theory:

1. "Racism is ordinary, not aberrational or 'normal science', the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (p 7). This means that racism is difficult to address because it is not acknowledged; it is, therefore, the embodiment of being "color-blind."

2. The system of white-over-color ascendancy serves critical purposes, both material and psychic, for the dominant group. This tenet is sometimes called "material determinism" meaning racism advances the interests of the White elites and working-class.

3. Race is a social construct. Race(s) are products of social thought and relations. Races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires whenever it may be convenient.

Central to CRT are the following insights: the need to redefine the current conceptualizations of race, a call for histories from the perspectives of people of color, and a critique of liberalism stemming from the failure of procedural colorblindness to remediate substantive racial oppression (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Implementing this theoretical framework is useful for emphasizing the importance of examining and attempting to understand the social and cultural forces that shape how people experience, perceive, and respond to racism in an environmental context. According to Allen (2017), "the goal of CRT is to work toward liberating people of color, whose voice and experiences of oppression are often ignored in U.S. society" (p. 2). Applying this framework, I will make linkages between how racism continues to be a pervasive component throughout a dominant society and why these consistent acts of racism

problematically deny individuals certain constitutional freedoms that they are endowed with.

This research will also draw attention to and address the concerns of individuals that are historically affected by racism and those who perpetrate and are seemingly unimpaired by racial prejudice and discrimination.

The CRT theoretical framework is useful for emphasizing the importance of examining and attempting to understand the social and cultural forces that shape how Black people experience, perceive, and respond to racism in an environmental context. As a study that draws attention to individuals who have been affected by racism and who perpetrate and are seemingly unimpaired by racial prejudice and discrimination, particularly Black Americans, this study shows how CRT and Black geographies go hand in hand. Although each approach addresses space, place, and historical memory differently, sometimes they overlap. For instance, CRT in geographic analyses has profound possibilities as an analytic tool for understanding how the practice of geography remains deeply racialized (Choi, 2018). Choi (2018) explores contemporary understandings of the roles of race, whiteness, and antiracism within the profession of geography in North America. Another study (Inwood, 2011) uses CRT in combination with Black geographies by examining how geographies of race in the American South have continuing legacies of Jim Crow segregation.

CRT has been valuable for academics to provide critiques and analyses of race and racism in America. At its core, CRT is interdisciplinary in building on scholarship in history, law, gender and women's studies, and racial and ethnic studies. Critical race theorists view racism as a persistent and permanent feature in politics, education, corporations, popular media, the criminal justice system, and sports. CRT also values the experiential knowledge of members of historically oppressed groups. Similarly, Black geographies lends itself to addressing race

issues as they connect to space-making, Black geographic imagination, racial capitalism, cities, policing, plantations, and carceral geographies (Hawthorne, 2019). Black geographies emerged in resistance to domination, to provide alternative pathways toward new understandings of space, and to undo the violent practices of geographic organizations. Black geographies draw upon Black Radical Tradition (policy), Black feminist theory, and Black Caribbean traditions. As "critical geographies," CRT has been used in Geography, Environment, and Sustainability Studies in regard to environmental justice. For example, several studies (Kurtz, 2009; Dickinson, 2012; Pellow, 2016; Willett, 2018) examine how CRT applies to the EJ in efforts to further our understanding of certain issues in the United States that reinforce environmental racism through legislative conditions and processes. More specifically, critical geographies provide a means to address spatial inequalities of access to parks and other green spaces.

By advancing Black narratives of a sense of place and place-making, this study is an opportunity for liberation from anti-Black sentiments surrounding outdoor recreation. According to Allen et al. (2019), "landscape is not simply a reflection of society's values, but is an expression of power, particularly of elite power" (p. 1006). Certain landscapes such as national parks historically have been deemed "for White people," thus embodying this sense of elitism and entitlement in which Black Americans and other ethnic groups are ostracized. According to McKittrick (2006), Blackness is at the center of both the production of space and the formation of European forms of geographic knowledge. Furthermore, there are means of Black geographic knowledge that have resulted in resistance to domination that provides alternative pathways to new epistemologies of space and to the deconstruction of violent practices of geographic organization. According to Hawthorne (2019), Black Geographies

counters long-standing trends in the discipline of geography, in which Black people were

seen as lacking geography (due to the upheaval of the trans-Atlantic slave trade); or as

victims of geography (due to ongoing practices of displacement and spatial segregation).

(p. 5)

One premise of CRT is to give a voice to those that have been historically oppressed and underserved. Therefore, CRT aids in this investigation by putting race at the forefront of environmental and geographical issues. The NPS has been nominally colorblind with staff and visitors being primarily White. CRT critiques such supposed neutrality. The fields of environmental studies and geography are still dominated by a White male perspective. This study offers other narratives to broaden the scope of academic, environmental, and recreation industries by providing alternative views.

This chapter provided a brief overview of the literature on the historical precedents to Black American environmental contexts. There are various explanations as to what may deter Black Americans from engaging in national park outdoor recreational activities; however, this literature suggests that racist geographies have excluded people of color from accessing land and the benefits that come with it. Exploring the pluralities and various avenues of Black space is imperative for the undoing of colonialism. This study investigates the issue of diversity by surveying and interviewing Black Americans regarding their views towards environmentalism, outdoor recreation, and wilderness in national parks. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on critical geographies (Black geographies and CRT) by exploring the historical patterns of spatial oppression and violence and the implications that follow from them.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This chapter describes the methods employed in this study to answer the research question. I begin this chapter by reflecting on my position as a researcher in this field of work. I then discuss the combination of methods used to triangulate my findings. Next, I explain the use of grounded theory to analyze my interview results. Then, I discuss the survey and interview design and analysis. Lastly, I disclose the limitations and challenges I encountered while conducting this study.

3.1 The Researcher

I often wonder why I do not see many people of color engaging in environmental activities. In my field of study, I would be lucky to walk into a classroom and see another person of color. My own personal experience of being a young Black woman — of being ostracized in these situations — has prompted me to investigate what stigmas revolve around nature from the Black perspective. As a Black woman, I am aware of my position as a researcher. All of my participants were Black; therefore, I was accepted and trusted by the community. I was also able to relate to my participants' lived experiences, having similar upbringings and socioeconomic statuses. Therefore, participants were comfortable talking to me; they would make jokes and tell me personal things about themselves that did not always pertain to the interview questions. I did face some challenges while conducting this research during the pandemic. For instance, conducting interviews via Zoom or on the telephone came with technical difficulties such as connectivity issues where it was sometimes hard to understand what the person was saying or the service would get disconnected entirely, which was time-consuming and inconvenient for myself and my participants. Conducting interviews in person would not entail these logistical issues and would have made the interview process run more smoothly. However, I was always able to

reschedule interviews if needed or reconnect with the participants via Zoom or telephone.

Additionally, when thinking about the challenges I have faced as a researcher, I thought about the recent deaths of Black Americans by police brutality and white fragility. I have always felt that racial justice and environmental justice issues blur together, and in certain instances, this intersectionality became more pronounced, especially with the death of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020. The same communities that are over-policed are the same communities that are over-polluted (Fields, 2021). According to Merritt (2021, p. 750),

> *George Floyd's death, the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change are on a continuum from the immediate shock of viewing a video-recorded murder to millions dying worldwide from disease to deaths related to climate change accumulating over a millennium.*

All of these phenomena happening simultaneously did impact me as a researcher. I felt compelled to delve deeper into the societal issues of environmentalism. However, thinking about these issues did cause mental fatigue and a sense of despair, which did impact my productivity. To combat these feelings, I reminded myself that the work I am doing now has larger implications for educators, scholars, government entities, and especially for Black Americans who are just existing in space — as were George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery at their untimely deaths.

3.2 Mixed Methods

Before beginning the data collection, I participated in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program and submitted an exempt application #21-0041 to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of UNC Greensboro to uphold the integrity of ethical research standards. I applied mixed methodological procedures: a quantitative survey and qualitative

semi-structured interviews. Qualitative and quantitative methods can complement each other in the same research study by providing key insights that are not obtainable using either methodology alone (Kanazawa, 2017). The use of mixed methods may play an important role in the environmental and geography fields because the results from each method in combination have the potential to enrich our understanding of current inquiries and concerns. The use of qualitative and quantitative methods in combination provided a better understanding of my research problem by triangulating one set of results with another and thereby enhancing the validity of this study's findings. The quantitative survey asked participants to explore their perceptions, experiences, and behaviors of national parks and wilderness. I conducted in-depth interviews to complement the survey results; the interview questions asked participants to reflect on their perceptions of nature and what factors have influenced those perceptions. Funding was not required to collect data for the surveys or interviews.

To help visualize the survey data, I created a map using Google My Maps. Each point represents one individual where some demographic information is featured. The map is color-coded for each region of the United States. Participants located in the Northeast are coded purple. Those participants located in the South and Southeast are coded orange. Green represents participants residing in the Midwest. Teal represents the survey respondents who reside in the West. Most survey participants (153 of 171 or 89%) were located on the East Coast. Therefore, most survey participants were regionally located where most Black people live in the United States, especially in the Southeast (Tamir, 2021).

There were and still are a plethora of barriers for Black Americans when it comes to environmental engagement. Might a history of racial trauma affect Black Americans' perception of place, nature, and wilderness? The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship

between Black Americans and nature. The goal of this study is to develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how the history of slavery and discrimination in the United States has influenced Black Americans' connectedness with the wilderness. Therefore, the research question of this study asks, how does a history of racial trauma impact Black Americans' perception of place and engagement with wilderness? I argue that the cultural trauma of slavery, lynching, and discrimination has created a complex understanding of and relationship with nature for contemporary Black Americans.

3.3. Grounded Theory

This study was performed using grounded theory methods. Grounded theory is a well-known methodology that is employed in both qualitative and quantitative research studies (Tie et al., 2019). Figure 8 displays the process of the grounded theory method, which started with purposive sampling in which participants were selected based on the research question. Grounded theory uses inductive reasoning to develop new theories that are derived from the data collected (Charmaz & Smith, 2003). Charmaz (2006) explains that grounded theory consists of positivist and constructivist inclinations. A positivist position is described as a perspective that comes from the human experience with objectivity, while understanding that a human's perception is imperfect. A constructivist approach is described as a perspective that comes from the notion that the human experience is relative to their paradigm, influenced by culture, society, or other external influences. I conducted this study using grounded theory with a constructivist approach. I sought to conceptualize the circumstances of each participant's experience, understand complexities built through coding the data from interviews, and build an argument based on the interpretation of their shared experiences. The tenets of grounded theory methodology used in this research study consist of coding, analyzing data as it is produced to

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construct an argument or theory, selecting core categories, and generating an argument. Based on

the constructivist approach, coding is performed in three phases: initial, focused, and theoretical

(Tie et al., 2019). Initial coding consists of examining each line of data and defining the actions

or events that are occurring. In focused phase (intermediate), coding is more direct and selective,

hence it involves synthesizing larger segments of data into a core category. Theoretical coding

integrates and synthesizes the categories that were derived from the initial codes, creating a

storyline and central claim (Charmaz, 2015).

Figure 8. Grounded Theory Methods.
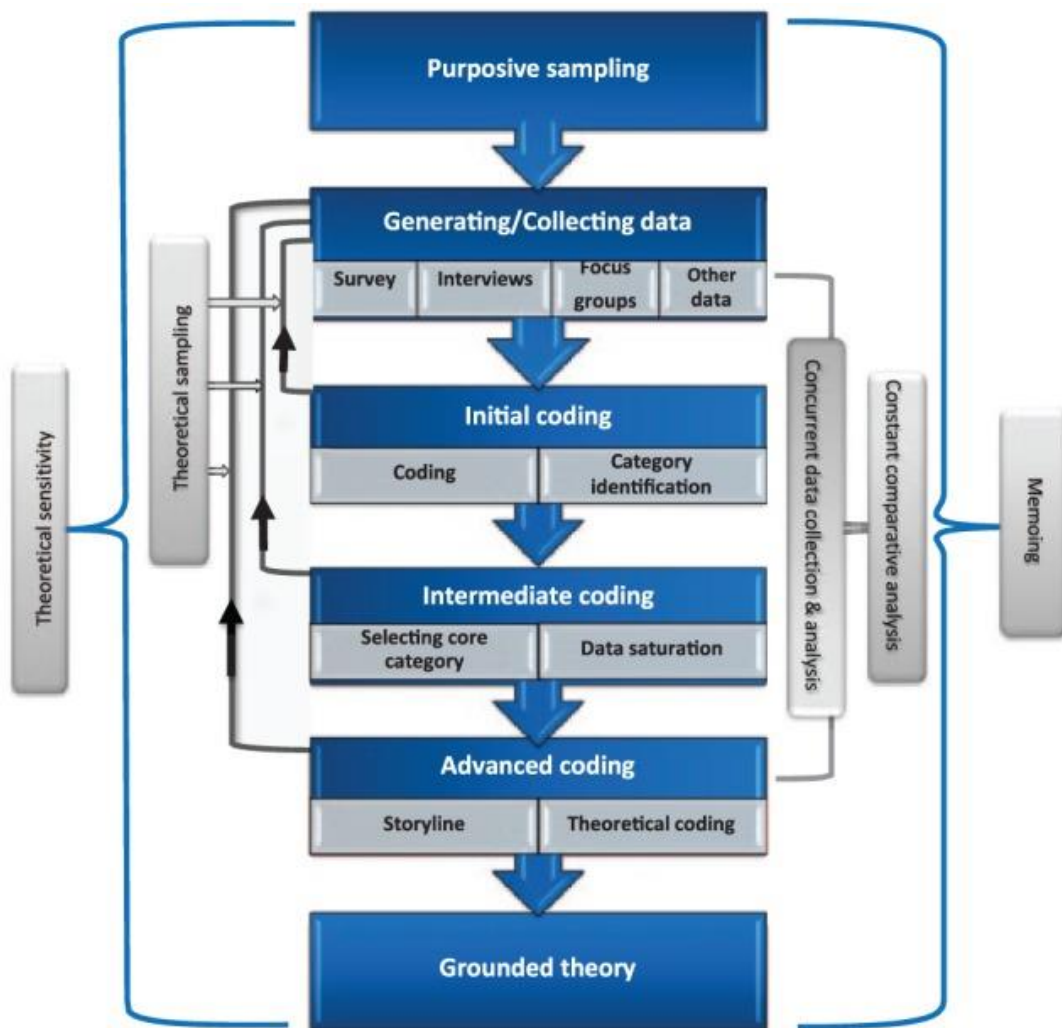
Note. Research design framework. By. Tie et al., 2019.

3.4 Survey Procedures and Design

Online surveys are useful for reaching a wider audience and are often preferred by respondents who can answer at their own convenience and pace (Ball, 2019). Approximately 200 participants in the study were required to answer questions for my online survey. Voluntary response sampling was used, which allowed participants the autonomy to respond to the online survey. Instead of directly choosing participants and contacting them, individuals volunteered themselves to participate in the survey. Voluntary response samples could be biased, as some people may be more likely to volunteer than others (Vehovar et al., 2016). I also used quota sampling, which is guided by a particular characteristic based on the population of interest (Etikan & Bala, 2017), which in this study would be race. This target sample size was determined based on three main factors: available resources, the goal of the study, and the statistical quality needed for the survey (Kelly et al., 2003). According to Kelly et al. (2003), for qualitative surveys using focus groups or interviews, the sample size required will be smaller than if quantitative data is collected by the questionnaire alone. Participants in my online study included anyone who identifies as Black or African American, over the age of 18, and who resides in the United States. Participants of this study are restricted to those who have internet access, as the survey was delivered electronically through email and social media postings. Additionally, participants of this study were proficient in the English language.

This survey functions in conjunction with qualitative interviews as a mixed-methods approach. Online surveys are beneficial for targeting a large audience and garnering a quick response (Jones et al., 2013). This study does have sampling bias, which is addressed in the section of this chapter on study limitations. There were more women who responded to the survey than men. According to the data, out of the 176 responses that were collected, 130 (74%)

were Black women; therefore, resulting in an underrepresentation of male participants. This may be due to the fact that women generally participate in online surveys more than men. Additionally, more educated and more affluent people are more likely to participate in surveys than less educated and less affluent people (Smith, 2008; Jang & Vorderstrasse, 2019). Furthermore, the use of voluntary sampling could have resulted in this sample bias.

The survey was constructed using the online survey generator Qualtrics. (A small pilot study was conducted for two weeks to determine the efficacy of the questionnaire.) The survey asked participants for general demographic information such as their age, gender, etc. No identifying questions were included in this survey. This survey took participants approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey included a consent page with screening questions and approximately 20 questions that asked participants about their environmental perceptions, behaviors, and intentions. Likert scales were utilized in this study; they included statements that were adapted from the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale (Dunlap & Liere, 1978). These statements were modified to specifically ask about the environmental activities in which participants would or currently participate concerning their perceptions of national or state parks and of nature generally. Other scholars have modified the NEP scale to fit the specifications of their research needs (Liu & Chen, 2019; Ogunbode, 2013); however, there is no exact protocol for making modifications to the scale. When constructing survey items, I considered survey methodology rules such as offering respondents open-ended answers and "other" options. I also used vocabulary that my audience could understand and avoided double-barreled questions (Ball, 2019).

Survey participants were prompted to fill out a series of likert scales and rate their responses on whether they agreed or disagreed with a particular set of statements. The first likert

scale consisted of statements that gauged the participant's perceptions about and experiences with national parks. The second likert scale concerns preconceived behaviors. The third likert scale included statements that gauged the participant's perceptions of nature and wilderness spaces.

3.4.1. Survey Dissemination

I disseminated the survey electronically to the public via social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. I also emailed the survey to various geography, environmental, and sustainability-related organizations via social media to gain the recruitment of participants. The social media accounts that were contacted for survey participation were: Environmental Educators of Color, Environmentalists of Color, Environmental Justice, African Americans Who Love the Outdoors Lifestyle, and Outdoor Afro-Charlotte. The survey remained live from July to August 2021, to recruit participants through these online channels. Additionally, some participants reported working in the environmental sector, e.g. for the EPA, as an environmental educator, a member of the Sierra Club, volunteering at a national park, being a park ranger, and being an environmental consultant.

3.4.2. Survey Analysis

To analyze the survey, I conducted descriptive data analysis of sample distributions and characteristics (race, ethnicity, age, and gender) of those participants who complete demographic questions. Descriptive analysis is useful when providing basic information about variables and highlighting relationships between them (Loeb et al., 2017). The tools I used to analyze the survey data were statistical measures of tendency and variation. According to Loeb et al. (2017),

Good descriptive research relies primarily on low-inference, low assumption methods

that use no or minimal statistical adjustments. Therefore, measures of central tendency

(such as mean, median, and mode), measures of variation (such as range and standard

deviation), and basic frequency analyses are particularly useful statistical tools for

description.

Therefore, the mean and standard deviations are provided for some survey data, such as the

information collected from the likert scales. This information is presented in chapters 4 and 5.

3.4.3. Survey Data

With a total of 200 survey respondents, 24 respondents did not identify as Black and were

filtered out, leaving 176 participants who identified as Black or African American. Of these 176

participants, the majority of them identified as female at 74%. Of these 176 participants, over

half reported being between the ages of 25 and 44 years old. More than half of the participants

(62%) reported that their household income was at least $50,000 or more. Additionally, only

40% of participants reported earning a Bachelor's degree. It is important to note that not all

participants answered every question; therefore, some data is reflective of how many responses

each question or survey item received. According to the data, out of the 176 responses that were

collected, 130 (74%) were Black women; therefore, resulting in an underrepresentation of male

participants. For more details on the survey questions, please see the sample survey questions in

the appendix on page 135. Questions asked on the Likert scales are also provided in the appendix

as figures 26-28. Please see Table 1 for additional details about sample characteristics.

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Participants (Identified as Black).

Variables	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	43	25%
Female	130	74%

Other/Prefer not to answer	3	1.6%
Age		
18-24	17	9.6%
25-34	65	37%
35-44	41	23%
45-54	29	16.5%
55 or older	24	13.6%
Household Income		
Below 19K	15	8.5%
20-29K	15	8.5%
30-39K	17	9.6%
40-49K	19	10.8%
50K+	110	62.5%
Education Level		
Did not complete High School	0	0%
High School Graduate	15	8.5%
Some college but no degree	30	17%
Associate Degree	16	9%
Bachelor's Degree	71	40%
Master's Degree	37	21%
Terminal Degree (JD, MD, Ph.D.)	7	4%

3.5 Interview Procedures and Design

Interviewing is the most common way to collect data in qualitative research (Jamshed, 2014). Interviews help researchers to better understand and explore research participants' opinions and experiences. Additionally, conducting qualitative interviews gives a voice to

marginalized and disenfranchised groups (McGrath, Palmgrem, & Liljedahl, 2018). Semi-structured interviews are useful when researchers are looking to understand the reasons why people exhibit certain behaviors by exploring their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions on a particular subject (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). Semi-structured interviews employ a series of open-ended questions that are based on a specific research topic. Therefore, providing opportunities for thematic concepts and subtopics to develop (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). Qualitative interviews are helpful to this study because they enabled me to explore the beliefs, experiences, opinions, and motivations of Black Americans and their level of engagement with wilderness. Interviews were also helpful because they provided an in-depth understanding of this subject that may not have been obtained by just using quantitative methods such as the online survey.

3.5.1. Interview Participants

I interviewed a total of 40 individuals following the same series of interview questions that are provided on page 138 in the appendix. Methods of recruitment for interviews were conducted in various ways, but most individuals came from the online survey: there was an option to be contacted at the end of the survey for those individuals who were interested in a follow-up session with the researcher. Additionally, the recruitment of individuals for this study consisted of dispersing flyers to individuals, organizations, or groups. I contacted some participants online through social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram as well as through email. Upon agreeing to participate in this study via a consent form, participants were contacted via email, telephone, or in-person to schedule a date and time for an interview. Following these initial contacts, additional participants were recruited through purposeful sampling, in the form of snowball sampling, and based on predetermined criteria such as

identifying as a Black or African American community member. I interviewed participants via telephone and Zoom due to the IRB COVID-19 restrictions. Participants of interviews were asked a series of semi-structured questions to explore their attitudes regarding the natural environment, outdoor recreation at national parks, and their level of engagement in nature. Interviews took approximately one hour, depending on the time constraints of the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded, and consent was provided for every interview before the process began.

3.5.2. Interview Analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded on an encrypted device and transcribed. Each interview transcription took approximately one to two hours to complete, depending on the length of the audio recording; therefore, transcriptions took me approximately two weeks to complete. When the transcription process was complete, I was able to start coding using grounded theory methodologies. First, I did a preliminary read of each interview transcription. For each transcription, I then went line-by-line and started to code by naming each line on each page of the written data. Once that process was complete, I then went to the second stage of focused coding. During this stage, I used the most significant or constant codes during the initial coding phase, thereby condensing the data. Theoretical coding began once the categories are established, where codes and categories are merged into a storyline. For example, I would read each quote line-by-line and note the keywords that were used. I would then use focused coding to develop the keywords into categories. These categories were later combined into larger central themes once I felt I reached saturation with the data. Saturation is defined by Urquhart (2012; p. 194) as "the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data." Therefore, I feel like I reached saturation with my data after interviewing and transcribing about 30 individuals after

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hearing repeated responses or coming across patterns for particular questions. See Table 2 below

for an example of this process. I have provided an example of a quote from one interview

participant where I analyzed her statement by using the grounded theory method. I went line by

line, then I used focused coding to create categories. This category ("culture") was later

combined with others (such as "history" and "the south") to develop a larger claim that would

result in my dissertation findings presented in the following chapters of my dissertation.

Table 2. Example of Grounded Theory Methods.

Initial		
	• **Cultural memory, storytelling**	*I think it's a part of our cultural memory, just like my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents were like stay away from dark places don't do this, don't do that.*
	• **Cultural history, fears**	*I really think it's part of our cultural history to be fearful of violence from White people in places where you feel like you may have less control over the environment…it definitely feels that way.*
	• **Awareness from older generations**	*I think it's rooted in that for sure I feel like that's where the stories like from my great-grandparents and stuff that's where it comes from, they were like you cannot be in these types of places at all.*
	• **Experience from colleague**	*I even have a colleague who's in charge of like a tri-state environmental education program at the field museum for 3rd through 5th graders, and we take part in it, and she was telling me like here in the city, so Chicago has like 500 parks and lakefront and all that it also has a forest preserve district that's also here.*
	• **Ventured out on her own as an adult to experience nature**	*There's a few that are actually inside of Chicago…so she's like I grew up literally 10 minutes from one and really never went there, had never been there, and she was in college when it became an interest.*
	• **Storytelling from older generations**	*She said the main reason was that her grandmother told "you're not going over there, all kinds of terrible things have happened there."*

	• **Passed down from elders**	*So yeah I think it's definitely rooted in slavery and definitely Jim crow it's like don't put yourself out there, like that. — (#6).*
Focused	• **Fear resulted in cultural history and memories** • **Storytelling from elders**	*I think it's a part of our cultural memory, just like my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents were like stay away from dark places don't do this, don't do that. I really think it's part of our cultural history to be fearful of violence from White people in places where you feel like you may have less control over the environment…it definitely feels that way. I think it's rooted in that for sure I feel like that's where the stories like from my great-grandparents and stuff that's where it comes from, they were like you cannot be in these types of places at all. I even have a colleague who's in charge of like a tri-state environmental education program at the field museum for 3rd through 5th graders, and we take part in it, and she was telling me like here in the city, so Chicago has like 500 parks and lakefront and all that it also has a forest preserve district that's also here. There's a few that are actually inside of Chicago…so she's like I grew up literally 10 minutes from one and really never went there, had never been there, and she was in college when it became an interest. She said the main reason was that her grandmother told "you're not going over there, all kinds of terrible things have happened there." So yeah I think it's definitely rooted in slavery and definitely Jim crow it's like don't put yourself out there, like that. — (#6).*
Theoretical	• **Cultural trauma passed down from older generations creates apprehensiveness in exploring the outdoors for younger generations of Black Americans**	

Searching for patterns across the data was also accomplished by using the software

NVivo. NVivo is a tool used to assist researchers in generating a codebook and determining

themes among the interview responses. I uploaded the transcriptions to this qualitative data

analysis software. Instead of uploading each individual transcription, responses were organized

into word documents based on the question that was asked. For instance, document #1 was compiled of all the interview responses to the question, "How do you define the word environment?" Then, I utilized the software in a simple way by using it for categorizing the responses to each question. NVivo allowed me to view the most frequently used words using a "query" which was converted into codes. These are codes that would later develop into themes of my dissertation. Using this software is particularly helpful because, under each code, there are "references" to each interview participant's interview transcription. Therefore, using NVivo, I can detect which interviewees said a particular word, in what context, and how many times the word was used. Additionally, I used NVivo to code individual documents as well as all the documents combined. I am aware that some words that were used by interviewees could have been said when answering other questions, therefore those words could be included in the coding process. For more details on the interview questions, please see the sample questions located in the appendix on page 135. Please see Table 4 for information on participant demographics also located in the appendix on page 140.

3.6 Study Limitations

It is important to emphasize the challenges of this study for future research on this topic. There are several limitations to be addressed. The first limitation is the lack of demographic variety (gender, income, education) among the survey respondents. This did not allow for comparative analyses or cross-tabulation of the survey data. For instance, many participants responded that they did not feel comfortable camping in the woods overnight. However, most of the respondents identified as women. Therefore, this did not allow me to compare genders to see if Black men took the same standpoint. Another limitation of the study is the survey questions. I included a question on my survey asking participants what their ethnicity was, hoping to

compare subcultural differences. For instance, I wanted to investigate if foreign-born Black Americans have differing opinions on wilderness than those born in the United States. However, the survey questions did not allow for such a comparison and cross-tabulation. Only one question on the survey showed a slight indication of differences. The questions asked survey participants to describe how they were raised to perceive nature. I did notice a subcultural difference, but not enough people responded to the question to analyze the data.

One technicality of using NVivo does not account for similar responses using different words. For instance, when asked if participants think having a relationship with nature is important for Black Americans, some will respond with the word "definitely" while others would use the word "absolutely" among other variations of the word "yes," and although these words are synonymous in this context they would not be counted frequently as responses using the software. Therefore, in these instances, coding was up to my own discretion. Based on the codes that came out of the query, themes were developed from the references that were within the codes. For instance, the word "afraid" was referenced 21 times, "fear" was referenced 22 times, and "scared" was referenced 15 times. These three words are synonymous with each other and were used in a context describing trauma which is then developed into a theme.

In summary, using qualitative methods to substantiate the quantitative data provided a clearer response to my research question. The survey asked participants about their experiences and opinions on national parks and wilderness, while the interviews provided in-depth findings and allowed participants to explore their relationship with nature in greater detail. Chapter IV will discuss the findings of both research methods, while Chapter V focuses on interview responses. Survey findings demonstrate that Black Americans have an appreciation for nature; however, there are some limitations as to what activities they are willing to participate in.

Interview findings suggest that Black Americans engage with nature in their own unique and

culturally specific ways.

CHAPTER IV: PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORS

This chapter includes survey findings on Black Americans perceptions and experiences in the environment. Additionally, these findings are related to prior research and literature. Furthermore, this chapter shows how Black Americans have their own understanding of what the environment is and how they have their own unique way of interacting and connecting with it. Research findings from the surveys indicate that Black people do enjoy nature and have an appreciation for nature; however, there are boundaries to their participation as far as what activities they are willing to engage in. Research findings also provide evidence that Black Americans define the environment differently than the environmental industry does.

4.1 Defining the Environment

Western environmentalism has defined the environment as a pristine wilderness, void of human activities and interactions. According to Dowie (2019, para. 15),

By glorifying pristine landscapes, which exist only in the imagination of romantics, Western conservationists divert attention from the places where people live and the choices they make every day that do true damage to the natural world of which they are part.

A salient part of understanding Black Americans' perception of their environment is understanding how they define their environment, which illuminates how they interact with nature. There is a distinction between the traditional concept of nature as defined by environmental organizations such as the NPS versus unconventional epistemologies and ontologies of wilderness, especially for Black Americans. This study shows that Black Americans still have a rich experience with nature; however, this relationship is not embodied in the predominately White spaces like national parks. Instead, Black Americans engage with

elements of nature on a more localized level. Below, Figure 9 displays a word cloud based on the

interview responses to the question, "How do you define the word environment?".

Figure 9. Defining the Environment.

Based on this study's findings, most Black American interview participants defined their

environment as their immediate "surroundings" or the things that are "around" them. When

asked, "how would you define the word environment," the majority of participants (77.5 % or 31

out of 40) stated that the environment included their "surroundings" or other variations of the

term. One respondent stated, *"Environment to me is anything that surrounds where you live. So,*

it wouldn't be just anywhere, it's where you live, specifically, it could be your home, your car,

your job, somewhere you do life." — (#7). Another interviewee shared a similar sentiment, *"The area that you live in and that you are surrounded by that includes landscaping, people, crime…just where your immediate surroundings are." — (#22).* A 30-year-old military veteran included the nature in their definition of the environment, *"All the things that surround us and are in our proximity whether it be within our own house… once you leave and step outside that household the different aspects such as the people, wildlife, nature, buildings, cities, or what is in your close proximity to work." — (#1).* Another interview participant stated, *"I would define my environment as my surroundings…my neighborhood, as well as the nature around me, the different landscapes, the air, the water, all of that, is part of the environment." — (#39).*

Some participants defined the environment using a cultural, political, or spiritual context, *"I would define the word environment as a combination of nature, trees, air, grass, and social and cultural and political what is happening in politics and culture." — (#24).* Another participant mentions spirituality associated with the environment, *"Your physical location and surroundings, the quality of those physical locations and surroundings, and the spiritual environment which may not be tangible in hand, but the vibrations around you…is it safe? Is it secure? Or your psychological environment." — (#26).*

To add insight into how Black Americans define their environment, I also thought to ask them to share their perspectives on environmentalism and current environmental issues. Some scholars indicated in past studies that Black Americans may not be knowledgeable about the environment; however, recent studies suggest that they are (Ballew et al., 2020; Medina, 2019; Taylor, 2018; Yi, 2016). This study further examined the understanding Black Americans have about current environmental issues and found that Black Americans are concerned and up to date with matters surrounding climate change. When asked, "What do you think of the current state of

the environment?" most participants are knowledgeable about environmental issues. Some issues that were mentioned included climate change or global warming and the associated implications, species extinction, pollution, and deforestation. More specifically, most participants expressed negative feelings and concerns regarding the current state of the environment. A 29-year-old male and military veteran states,

> *I think that the environment should be our number one issue that we should be tackling as a human race on this planet. There are a lot of opinions going around about whether climate change is real or not, but there are things that you can't escape. With polar caps melting and sea levels rising, temperatures in the ocean rising, and certain species of animals dying off. The human impact that we're having on a global scale is…there are certain things that we just can't ignore and there's just been an influx of certain natural disasters, whether there are earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, landslides, and things of that nature. I think we're in a critical state in our human evolution, and we have got some work to do to preserve our planet. — (#1).*

A 28-year-old male sales manager from Texas made the following remark:

> *It's not in a good state because we are running out of clean air and water. We are not being kind to the environment and animals, and the government does not put enough stock in the environment, and it's our biggest problem. Before racism, the environment is the most important issue. The ozone layer is probably not even a thing anymore, and we are using limited resources…everything is finite. A city in Michigan can't get clean water for almost a decade, it's a problem. Companies feel like they are taking measures to reduce plastic waste and there are efforts being made, but for the last 200 years, I can imagine the damage. 200 years is not a lot of time in human history, so it lets you know*

how much damage we have done in so little time. People are aware, but I know we aren't

in a good state. I hear stats like polar bears by 2050 won't exist. I will still be alive

during that time God willing, and it's alarming it's not just my kids or grandkids, it's me

as well…we run the risk of seeing millennials without polar bears or whales, so we are

not in a good space. — (#17).

When answering the question, "What do you think of the current state of the

environment?" some participants mentioned how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their

perceptions of the environment. Some participants believed that the pandemic has had positive

results for the environment, while another person felt that people are just as unprepared for the

pandemic as they are for climate change. One participant commented,

Because of the pandemic, I think it has gotten better because it's forced people to stay

inside and pollute less. So the hole in the ozone layer was able to close, which is great.

But I think there are a lot of things that need to happen in order to make the environment

safer. Because I think that there is a lot of pollution, whether that's in our food, in our

water, in our ecosystems. In order to make it safer, you just have to make things cleaner

and use less destructive material. — (#3).

Another response relating to COVID-19 came from an environmental emergency

specialist,

Obviously, it's troublesome for me… in Greensboro about a year ago there were changes

around what can be recycled they stopped accepting things, and they went into the

landfill. There are things that changed with the pandemic from not commuting as much

but then at fast food, you are waiting in the drive-through with the car running. Climate

change is an issue that we will be dealing with for a long time. There are local issues,

and they can wax and wane based on what you are dealing with…globally, and

nationally it's a problem…locally I've seen where certain things have shifted…there was

a push for community gardens and sustainable agriculture and home improvements…not

sure how to measure the local level it depends on who is in office but at the national

level, I am concerned…it's not black and white. — (#36).

Another respondent, a graduate student living in Virginia, stated,

I think the current state is horrible…horrendous. I think we are in a moment where we

have not learned to coexist with our environment…like the pandemic, we don't know how

to deal with it even though it's unforeseen…the environment is its own system, and we are

causing the system not to work properly…we cause our own problems. — (#16).

To summarize, participants of this study believe their surroundings and where they

partake in their daily routine to be a part of their environment. This coincides with the definition

provided by Bullard (2018) that the environment to Black American citizens includes where they

eat, live, work, play and pray. The general perception is that Black Americans do not care about

the environment; however, as we can see from this study, Black Americans are cognizant of

environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and waste. Black people migrated North

during the Jim Crow era to escape from lynching, but this transition also removed them from

southern landscapes of greenery to more urban environments. Based on this study, we now have

Black people defining the word "environment" as their immediate surroundings, which are

mostly urban landscapes. If Black Americans are not directly associating their environment with

nature, then this could have unforeseen consequences for diversity in wilderness engagement

efforts. Understanding how Black Americans conceptualize their environment has important

implications for future outreach programs and even environmental policies.

4.2 Survey Findings on Perceptions and Experiences in the Environment

There is much complexity in how Black Americans perceive nature and wilderness spaces. Some Black Americans are uninterested and uncomfortable in the wilderness, while others are keen on exploring the outdoors. Then there are those who like being outdoors but have limitations on what they can do or are willing to do regarding outdoor recreational activities. Multiple realities are true and can coexist simultaneously. To evaluate this complex relationship between Black people and the wilderness landscapes of America, I asked survey participants to explore their environmental perceptions and behaviors through a series of likert scales. The majority of the survey consisted of participants engaging with the likert scales. Therefore, descriptive data analysis was used as the method of analysis since the likert scales were such an essential component of the survey. There were three options for respondents to choose from (agree, neutral, and disagree). Each option is associated with a numeric value. For instance, agree = 1 which is considered the minimum, and disagree = 3 which is considered the maximum value. The mean is described as the average of all the responses and results in a value between 1 and 3. Therefore, if the mean is closer to 1 most participants agreed with the statement listed on the likert scale, and if the mean is closer to 3 most participants disagreed with the statement listed on the scale. The standard deviation then exemplifies the variance, or how dispersed the data of the variable is distributed around the mean. For instance, in Figure 11, for statement #5, the mean is 2.74 which would demonstrate that the majority of participants disagreed with the statement, "national parks are not for me". The values for each scale were computer-generated through Qualtrics.

4.2.1. Likert Scale 1

The majority of respondents that participated in this likert scale (127 of 151 or 84%) agreed with the statement that national/state parks are a positive experience. Many participants (135 of 172 or 78.5%) also agreed that parks are worthy of their time and are a good use of government funding (128 of 172 or 74%). Less than half of participants (83 of 172 or 48%) believe that national/state parks are welcoming to all Americans. Over half (113 of 172 or 67%) of respondents think parks are available to all Americans. However, less than half (70 of 152 or 46%) of participants believe that national parks are inviting to people like them. Contrarily, most participants (130 of 172 or 76%) disagreed with the statement, "national parks are not for me." Survey responses are visualized in Figure 10 below, and the standard deviations for each statement are listed in Figure 11 below. In the appendix, Figure 26 displays the statements from the first likert scale regarding their perceptions of national and/or state parks.

Figure 10. Perceptions and Experiences with National and State Parks.
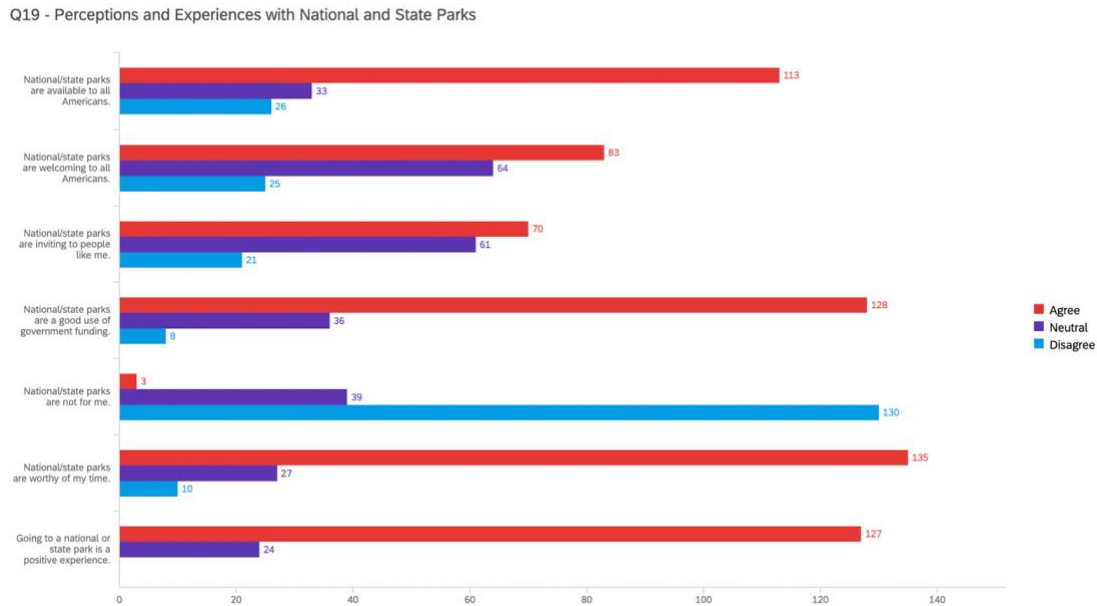
Figure 11. Likert #1 Standard Deviations.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	National/state parks are available to all Americans.	1.00	3.00	1.49	0.74	0.55	172
2	National/state parks are welcoming to all Americans.	1.00	3.00	1.66	0.72	0.51	172
3	National/state parks are inviting to people like me.	1.00	3.00	1.68	0.70	0.49	152
4	National/state parks are a good use of government funding.	1.00	3.00	1.30	0.55	0.30	172
5	National/state parks are not for me.	1.00	3.00	2.74	0.48	0.23	172
6	National/state parks are worthy of my time.	1.00	3.00	1.27	0.56	0.31	172
7	Going to a national or state park is a positive experience.	1.00	2.00	1.16	0.37	0.13	151

One of the most interesting findings based on these results is that Black Americans of this study have overall positive perceptions of national and state parks. Although national and state parks are "available" to all Americans, there is a distinction between these facilities being "welcoming" to Black Americans. Black Americans reportedly do not always feel welcome in these spaces (Mott, 2015). Similar sentiments are reported in this study. If national and state parks are concerned about increasing diversity in consumers and staff, then this feeling of not being welcomed must be addressed. CRT relates to this particular issue because national and state parks are nominally color-blind; therefore, they still advance the interests of White eco-elitists.

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4.2.2. Likert Scale #2

The majority of survey participants (151 of 171 or 88%) agreed with the statement "I have or would like to take my family or friends to a national/state park." Most participants (141 of 171 or 82%) agreed with the sentiment that they "would recommend visiting a national/state park." Over half of survey respondents (105 of 171 or 61%) believe that they would feel safe visiting a national and/or state park. Most participants (127 of 171 or 74%) disagreed with the statement, "I would feel bored visiting a national/state park." Most participants (126 of 171 or 74%) agreed with the statement, "I would feel excited to visit a national/state park." Over half (79 of 150 or 53%) of the survey participants think it is easy for them to get to a national/state park. Less than half of participants (67 of 150 or 45%) agree that they are knowledgeable on what to bring to a national and/or state park. Survey responses are visualized in Figure 12 below, and the standard deviations for each statement are listed in Figure 13 below.

Figure 12. National and State Park Behaviors.
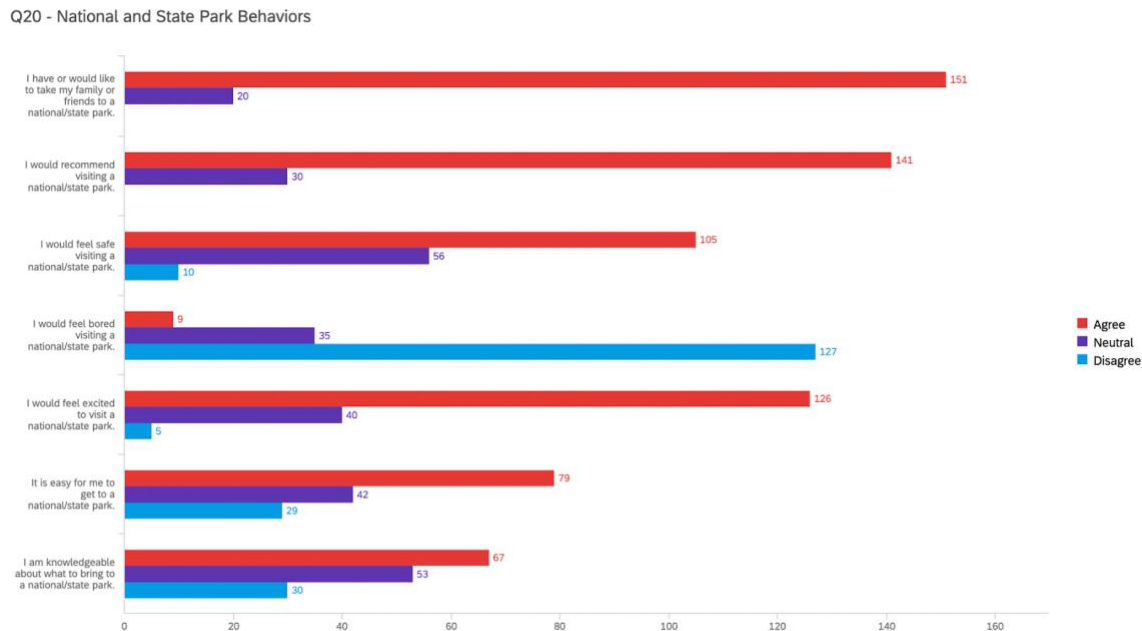
Figure 13. Likert #2 Standard Deviations.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I have or would like to take my family or friends to a national/state park.	1.00	2.00	1.12	0.32	0.10	171
2	I would recommend visiting a national/state park.	1.00	2.00	1.18	0.38	0.14	171
3	I would feel safe visiting a national/state park.	1.00	3.00	1.44	0.60	0.36	171
4	I would feel bored visiting a national/state park.	1.00	3.00	2.69	0.56	0.32	171
5	I would feel excited to visit a national/state park.	1.00	3.00	1.29	0.52	0.27	171
6	It is easy for me to get to a national/state park.	1.00	3.00	1.67	0.78	0.61	150
7	I am knowledgeable about what to bring to a national/state park.	1.00	3.00	1.75	0.77	0.59	150

One of the most interesting findings from this particular set of questions is that, although Black Americans may feel enthusiastic about venturing to national and state parks, they do not necessarily feel equipped to visit these recreational green spaces. This particular finding coincides with prior research that found Black Americans are not knowledgeable about parks or what equipment they need to partake in park activities. Black Americans living in contemporary society may not be knowledgeable about parks or what to bring to a national or state park due to the racial violence and oppression their ancestors experienced during Jim Crow that has deterred them from visiting for generations. There were two degrees of separation: (1) Black Americans were brutally murdered by way of lynching and, (2) they were purposely excluded from visiting these green spaces.

4.2.3. Likert Scale #3

Most survey respondents (137 of 150 or 91%) believed in the protection of wildlife. Most also (142 of 170 or 84%) believed that they have been or would be interested in learning outdoor activities or survival skills. Over half of the survey respondents (110 of 170 or 65%) agreed with the statement, "I enjoy being outdoors." Less than half of the participants (68 of 149 or 46%) agreed with the statement, "Enjoying nature is a part of my cultural upbringing." Less than half of the survey respondents (71 of 170 or 42%) feel comfortable walking in the woods. Only 39% (58 of 148) of survey participants agreed that they were raised to enjoy nature. A quarter of respondents (43 of 170 or 25%) believe they are experienced in outdoor recreation. Less than half of the participants (76 out of 170 or 45%) expressed that they feel comfortable camping in the woods. Survey responses are visualized in Figure 14 below, and the standard deviations for each statement are listed in Figure 15 below.

Figure 14. Perceptions of Wilderness.
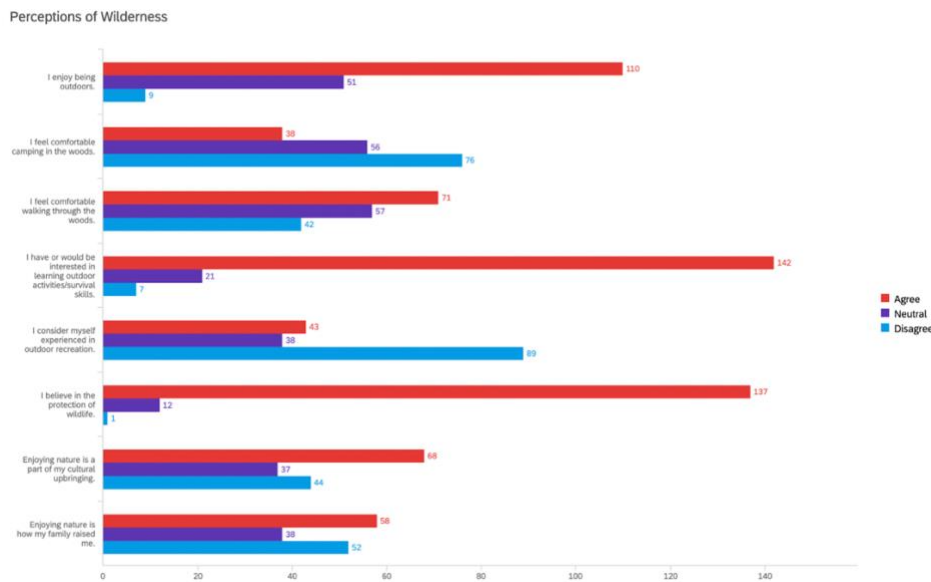
Figure 15. Likert #3 Standard Deviations.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I enjoy being outdoors.	1.00	3.00	1.41	0.59	0.35	170
2	I feel comfortable camping in the woods.	1.00	3.00	2.22	0.79	0.62	170
3	I feel comfortable walking through the woods.	1.00	3.00	1.83	0.80	0.64	170
4	I have or would be interested in learning outdoor activities/survival skills.	1.00	3.00	1.21	0.50	0.25	170
5	I consider myself experienced in outdoor recreation.	1.00	3.00	2.27	0.84	0.70	170
6	I believe in the protection of wildlife.	1.00	3.00	1.09	0.31	0.10	150
7	Enjoying nature is a part of my cultural upbringing.	1.00	3.00	1.84	0.85	0.73	149
8	Enjoying nature is how my family raised me.	1.00	3.00	1.96	0.86	0.74	148

Although Black Americans of this study express interest in wildlife and learning about

the outdoors, less than half agreed they would feel comfortable walking or camping in the

woods. Additionally, less than half agreed that enjoying nature is a part of their cultural

upbringing or a part of how they were raised. These findings tie into the perspectives that

wilderness is socially constructed and also exclusionary of people in theory and practice

(DeLuca & Demo, 2001). The "great outdoors" of America became associated with the nation's

identity — so associated, in fact, that in a documentary about the national parks, the narrator

states that if a person does not have a link to nature in a serious way, then you cannot be an

American (Burns, 2009). These particular statements facilitate sentiments about both national

and wilderness identities. If Black Americans do not feel comfortable in these spaces, it may be

because these spaces are repeatedly broadcasted to the public as "not for them." If Black Americans are not raised culturally or personally to enjoy nature, it is arguable that these results may be rooted in the forced historical exclusion from wilderness. According to DeGruy (2005), Post Traumatic Slave Disorder postulates that trauma is passed down generationally. Black Americans may be experiencing residual effects of generational trauma by intentionally or unintentionally avoiding these spaces. Less than half of the participants agreed that they were raised to enjoy nature and that enjoying nature is part of their cultural upbringing. Not being nurtured to enjoy nature may be an implication of the generational trauma passed down from older generations.

4.3 Other Findings

Past studies have postulated that Black Americans do not engage in wilderness or environmental activities (Taylor, 1989; Floyd, 1999; Martin, 2004; Byrne, 2011; Finney, 2014; Mott, 2015, Pease, 2015). In relation to Black Americans and their participation in outdoor activities and environmentalism, I asked the survey participants to select the outdoor activities they would participate in at a national or state park. More than half of the participants stated they would participate in hiking (132 participants) and water sports such as canoeing, kayaking, and whitewater rafting (102 participants), as indicated in Figure 16 below.

Figure 16. Environmental Activities Reported.
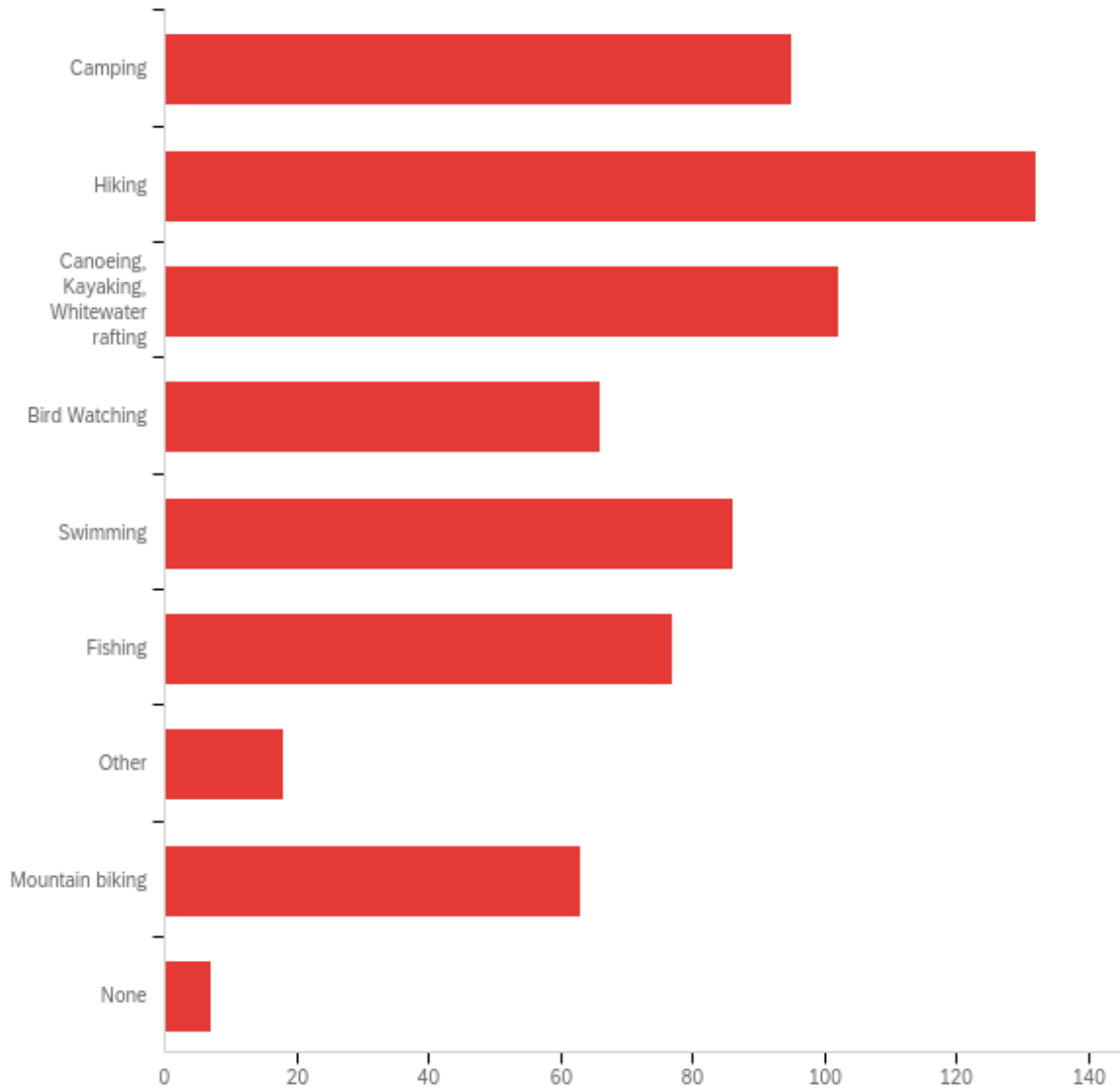
In this study, I also explored the environmental behaviors of the survey participants. Over half (120) of the survey respondents selected that they participate in recycling. This particular question was geared toward determining what conservation activities Black Americans are more inclined to participate in. Other activities included sustainable consumerism and energy efficiency, as shown in Figure 17 below.

Figure 17. Conservation Activities Reported.
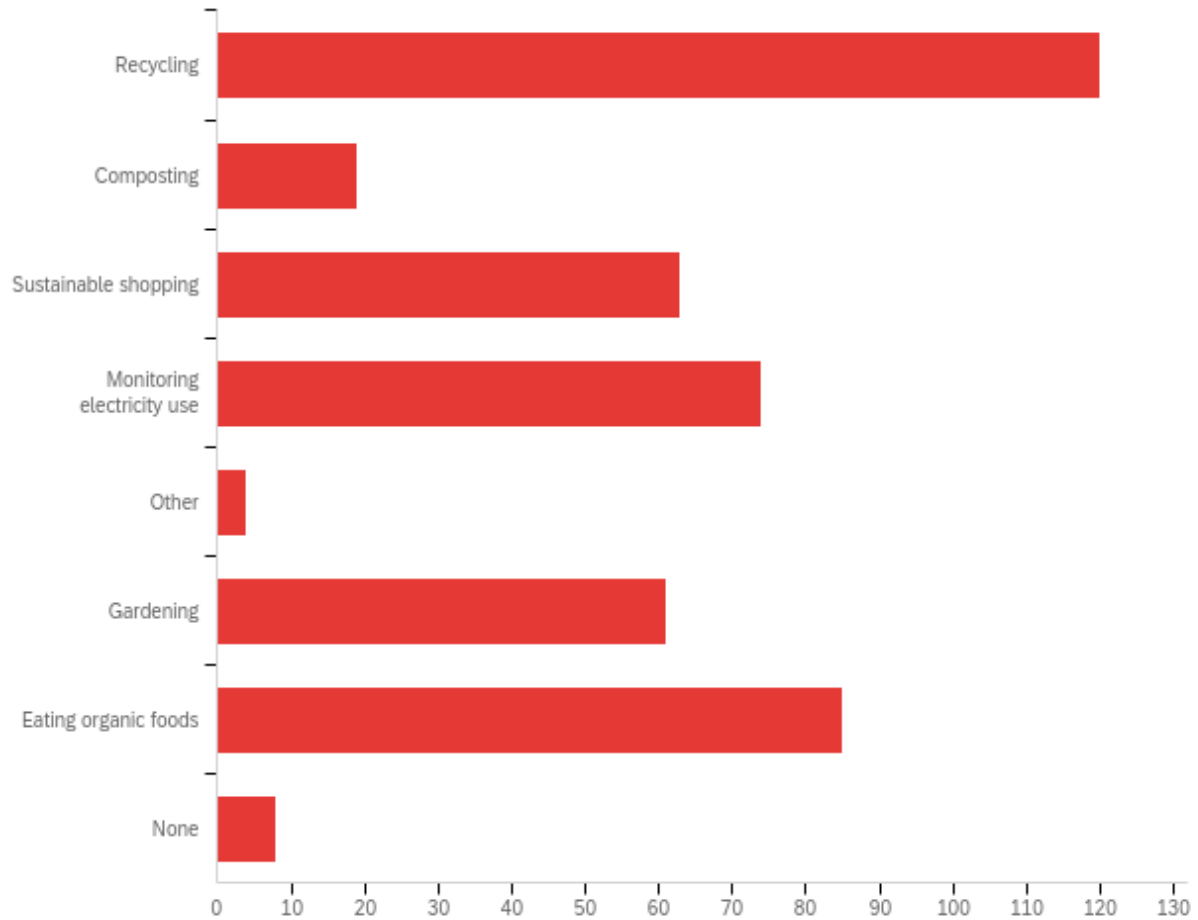
4.4 Interview Findings on Connectedness to the Environment

Interviewees were asked the question, "do you participate in any environmental conservation or outdoor activities?" More than half of the interview participants (62.5%) stated that they did partake in environmental and recreational activities. Some of the reported activities were gardening, walking, or jogging on nature trails, going to the beach, hiking, water sports, camping, using green products, donating money to non-profit organizations, and recycling.

Understanding how Black Americans participate in environmental and outdoor recreational activities is imperative for encouraging more engagement in nature-related programs and initiatives, which have demonstrable benefits for everyone but would benefit Black

Americans especially. Mainstream environmental organizations are meretricious in their attempts to salvage their connections to Black Americans. Part of that reason may be that these organizations and companies are not privy to what matters to the Black community relative to their environmental beliefs.

4.4.1 Relationship and Connection

Black Americans do not participate in environmentalism or outdoor recreation as much as their White counterparts (Finney, 2014), thereby insinuating that Black Americans are not as connected to nature as White Americans are (Taylor, 2018). This study found that Black Americans believe themselves to have a strong connection with nature, particularly a spiritual connection. Black Americans of this study also stated that it is important for them to have a connection with nature for mental and physical health reasons related to environmental justice. Participants of this study were asked to describe their personal connection with nature. Most participants reported having a moderate to strong connection with the environment. When asked, "what connection do you have with nature?" one interviewee, a 28-year-old customer service representative, responded,

> *My connection is strong. I like to consider myself a spiritual person and I do feel somewhat hurt when I see the negative impacts within a community like the tearing down of nature to build commercial properties. I feel some type of way when beautiful areas are taken away. I personally like to be around trees and flowers and things I know improve the quality of an area. It does make me feel some type of way. I don't know if it pushes me to want to do something about it, but I do notice how certain areas can end up looking bad when it's not taken care of…" — (#22).*

Another interview participant responded with a similar sentiment, while also mentioning spirituality,

> *My relationship is strong. I appreciate nature because it reminds you of your place in the*
>
> *world. You are at its mercy, your life depends on it to a certain extent. It's a part of a*
>
> *product of what God made and has given us to enjoy and sustain us. I also grew up on a*
>
> *farm. My father was a farmer. — (#38).*

From these responses, we can see that Black Americans consider themselves to be in tune with nature, both physically and spiritually.

Black Americans in this study were also asked to reflect on whether having a relationship with nature is important for Black people. On the subject of spirituality, a senior clinical operations manager stated,

> *It's a part of life. I believe you know with my Christian faith that those are things that*
>
> *God made for our enjoyment. For his good pleasure and for our good pleasure, and I feel*
>
> *like yes it's something that we should have exposure to and access to, and it just makes us*
>
> *more aware of who God is and his wisdom and his power and his creative ability. So yes,*
>
> *nature is a gateway to learn more about who God is." — (#7).*

Another participant, from Texas, added context to this spiritual connection with nature by stating,

> *There are spiritual reasons. I just think that the environment itself is just cleansing, I*
>
> *think that it does your soul good to get out and ground with something as ancient as the*
>
> *earth. I think it's important for Black people to know about the outdoors because there*
>
> *are many medicinal plants that are out there that we don't know anything about. I mean,*
>
> *it's important because what happens if this all stops…do you know where fresh water is?*
>
> *Do you know what plants are edible, and if you had to build a shelter would you know*

how to or where to? It's important to even find your direction, are you able to be outside?

Like, if you didn't have a compass and all you have to use was the sun, could you figure

out your direction in which way you were going? It's for your survival. — (#5).

Although this participant mentions spirituality, she also mentions how essential nature is for survival. Black Americans do believe that having a relationship with nature is significant for a multitude of reasons; however, this study found that most participants believe nature to be critical for health reasons and to sustain life. When asked whether a relationship with nature is important for Black Americans, another interviewee elaborates on this survival aspect, stating,

It's give or take…for wanting to survive longer, yes. It's important to be able to use your

environment to survive like the Indigenous people… I don't think it's that important to

knock down locations with other organisms there…global warming is a real thing and

the ozone is open and not blocking UV rays…the weather is constantly changing. It's

important to be aware of, so we can avoid damage before we end up like that movie I AM

LEGEND. The environment is the biggest thing that affects our lives…the only way we

breathe is through photosynthesis from plants and trees. I learned all this from taking

biology… — (#16).

Other participants talk about the importance of having a relationship with the land in relation to spirituality, but also regarding nature's health benefits specifically for Black Americans. These perspectives tie into the principles of environmental justice when considering the equal distribution of environmental benefits to improve the quality of life for low-income communities of color. Therefore, having a healthy environment provides a healthy lifestyle, both mentally and physically. One interviewee stated, *"It is absolutely important, especially because Black people have shorter life spans because of health issues." — (#31).* Another participant says,

I think it is nature as we all know provides a peace of mind. It does a lot for our health and also the healing elements of nature (herbs and medicinal). If we had more of a connection to nature it would give us a sense of peace and give us the sense of reclamation and give us benefits as far as wisdom and health. Nature was a great place for African spiritual practices with learning roots and herbs…like drinking Moringa Tea or hoodoo spiritual practices. We are so far removed now, we no longer access those tools that can give us a lot of empowerment. — (#26).

Another interview participant reaffirms this aspect of nature's salubrious qualities by saying,

I think the outdoors and fresh air really helps your mental health. Being indoors can be very draining, where in nature you can recharge and renew yourself. From a medical standpoint, Black people are typically low in vitamin D. It is important, it helps your overall wellbeing. — (#10).

Another interviewee adds to this point by saying, *"I think it's important for everyone. I have read and experienced levels of mental relief. I think it does something for one's mind." — (#13).* Another respondent elaborated on the environmental health aspect of being in nature,

It is really, really important, especially considering that I feel like Black communities are often harmed the most…when it comes to Black communities, Brown communities, Indigenous communities for sure. When it comes to issues of the environment when it comes to we're going to dig here, we're going to build here, then there are issues with water. Then, if there is a dump site to be built, it seems to be near where we are, if there is. It is important for us to get have our own language around what these things are, what it's rooted in and what it means for our outcome for a healthy community. To have healthy drinking water, to have a healthy land environment around where you live, so

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everybody doesn't have asthma for 40 years because they built "X" plant. It feels like

there's so many entries into knowledge about the natural environment around you, but

there is zero connection again like people aren't really centered in that conversation, and

then, when you get to Black people being centered in it, it's real. I think it's critical. —

(#6).

4.4.2 Galvanizing Engagement

The participants of this study were asked, "What should be done to get more Black

Americans engaged with wilderness?" Their responses were divided into the following three

categories:

1.   educational opportunities for exposure,

2.   visual representation, and

3.   community engagement.

Some of the responses from interview participants of this study touch on the strategies mentioned

by Zalan and Cornwell (2017). For instance, one participant states that the environment needs to

be more "fun" in order for Black people to find it interesting. For example, if one were to apply

the suggestions made by Zalan and Cornwell (2017), one potential strategy to increase

engagement would be to create a video game that showcases environmental pollution and

cleaning up inner cities. Another strategy would be to consider the personal values of their

audience to facilitate engagement in pro-environmental activities. Figure 18 below demonstrates

a word cloud of the interview responses to this question.

Figure 18. Engagement Word Cloud.

4.4.2.1. Educational Opportunities

Some interview participants believe that providing more learning opportunities to Black Americans would increase their collective engagement with nature. One participant states that being knowledgeable about the environment would help Black Americans to become more engaged with nature: *"Education and learning more about it…that would be the best thing I can think of…a lot of people don't know about it so if they knew they would do better." — (#29).* Additionally, environmental impacts were mentioned when discussing educating Black Americans about nature, *"We have to educate Black folks about the environment and how it affects them and their nutrition, which comes from the environment. The environment has an*

impact and if we are pouring crap into the earth it's coming right back into our (bodily)

systems." — (#31). Another interview participant talks about educational opportunities involving

the Black family structure,

> *Education…if we are going to change it generationally, then we have to get the kids to*
>
> *sign on, and we have to get their parents. Starting somewhere where you have a group*
>
> *and you kind of just target areas where there are Black families. Get some parents and*
>
> *maybe do a one-day excursion for new campers or something like that…it could be in the*
>
> *cabins to slowly start integrating them into nature and having family events outside.*
>
> *Because kids can dictate things and if kids have a great experience outside in a*
>
> *particular environment, their families would be more likely to keep repeating that*
>
> *experience. Start doing things geared towards families, Black families, Black parents.*
>
> *Even people of our generation, we are going to be the next parents so trying to get us all*
>
> *together and slowly but surely trying to bring us out and gaining those experiences going*
>
> *camping and stuff like that, so we can be the messengers to our children and so on and so*
>
> *forth. School wise, that can be a long shot because of the politics involved in that like*
>
> *how do you add that program into the school versus if you could put a group together*
>
> *easily and start inviting people to come out. You can do that without having to go*
>
> *through hoops to put that into a school system. — (#9)*

4.4.2.2. Visual Representation

An increase in visual representation is cited as another method of recruitment in

wilderness excursions for Black Americans. Some participants specifically state that social

media is the preferred method for motivating their peers to interact with nature. One interviewee

said, *"Unfortunately, I believe that social influencers get Black people to do everything else and*

with social media you get influencers involved in the environmental effort to get African

Americans outside and participating in those nature-related activities." — (#24). Another

interview participant adds context to this by stating,

> *It starts with discussions about it (nature) and being able to say it is something we should*
>
> *care about. We should be talking about it in schools and on social media…starting with*
>
> *youth and making if fun and trendy on social media…the most we hear about the*
>
> *environment is like doomsday and other than advocacy, there is not much other thought.*
>
> *Making it fun is more appealing than saying if you don't do this, we all die. — (#25).*

Additionally, one participant mentions how social media impacts their personal decisions and

may influence other people to participate in certain environmental trends: *"Use social media. We*

need to see different types of people living different lives. If I saw Black people hiking and

traveling on the internet…it's what we're missing and there could be a great impact." — (#33).

Visual representation is also interpreted another way by interviewees. Some participants

believe there needs to be more representation on environmental boards. One participant claims,

"This year we've seen the first Black man to be entered into the EPA as the director. The woods

are not all that we were told it is. It is not scary, it is possible. We need more of this

representation, and it's not just for White people." — (#10). Another participant recommends

representation for Black Americans concerning environmental decision-making:

> *We need to work on cultivating an awareness that nature is everywhere, and we are*
>
> *nature and not separate from nature. There is the city, there is the country, and there are*
>
> *apps that help you identify different plants and where to find trails. There is a cultural*
>
> *piece and understanding what aspects of nature people are connecting to, so who are the*

decision-makers? There needs to be more representation in these decisions and the right

questions being asked. — (#36)

To add context, one participant made the following remark:

I think that if you are talking about recreational nature, it is one modeling and showing

people doing those things. On one hand there is Dick's Sporting Goods or REI who are

actively promoting diversity and creating pathways by working with schools or the

YMCA to support youth participation. There is a role to play in diversifying leadership. A

friend of mine got a job with the national wildlife commission to work on diversity

initiatives with them. When my friend looked at a picture of the board and saw the

commissioners, it is a large group of White men except for one White woman. In North

Carolina, I would think they are conservative and having more representation at that

level as well not just on the frontline but on the board who can be more influential and

showing people what is possible and for some people how nature can be fun. — (#38)

Another participant states:

I think what would help is if these environmental institutions and organizations or

anybody who does that work really needs to re-evaluate how they hire and how they can

get more people of color working in those outward-facing roles. I honestly think that

people need to see people that look like themselves. — (#1)

4.4.2.3. Community Engagement

Increasing community engagement and collaboration is another tactic that is

recommended by interview participants to incentivize Black Americans to participate in nature.

One participant, a Director of a nature center, made the following remark on this suggestion,

All of my staff is White and some have to go into communities and work with community partners who are Black and Brown. Some people have a reaction to them, but if I go out there it is a different reaction because there is an assumed trust. The other thing is that there are people in the community doing this work and have knowledge about their natural environment and their built environment. I think finding new pathways to connecting to people and doing some things to establish and collaborate would open these institutions to being flexible. Also, the people who are in charge of land management and things like that…it would open them up to hear what people of color need in nature. If you do these things, I think that you would see better engagement from Black people. — (#6)

Another participant states that community activities are needed to recruit Black Americans into environmental and outdoor entities. *"There needs to be community organizations and guided tours that show green spaces and then when kids are aware of things it sticks to them, and they will ask their parents to take them, which will get adult involvement." — (#13).* Another respondent added context to this by stating, *"We need community events…a block party. Having influential speakers to talk about it. Do clean-ups and neighborhood watches. I would to have a big block party provided food and did clean up in certain areas and if we got together and tried to improve some areas that are predominantly minority I would do that." — (#22).* Another participant exclaims, *"We need to have more community meetings where everyone can actually contribute. Black people have to be committed to the environment. We could try to conserve energy and how things affects us going forward. It's not a big thing where you have to spend a lot of money, it's just having a conversation." — (#31).* To add context, another participant states, *"It needs to start at a younger age, do more things on a community level to get more*

people out in nature and involved to introduce a new generation to nature, and they may bring it

to the older generations and also do things for older generations like a pottery class in nature or

trips like going to the Grand Canyon." — (#39). According to the Black Americans of this study,

community engagement is imperative for increasing diversity and inclusion in environmental

activities, which relates back to the aforementioned strategies of participation suggested by Zalan

and Cornwell (2017).

In summary, the participants of this study have a deep appreciation for, connection to,

and spiritual affinity with a very broad conception of nature. Some participants seem to

consecrate wilderness and even perform and practice spirituality in nature. Black Americans of

this study reported having their own understanding of what the environment is, and they have

their own ways of engaging in nature that is not readily recognized by environmentalists and

geographers. Black Americans of this study also provided recommendations to increase the

engagement of this ethnic group in the outdoors. Particularly, Black Americans in this study

address environmental and geographical entities that have disavowed their racism and

recommend strategies to counter their vacuous efforts.

CHAPTER V: REMNANTS OF SLAVERY & LYNCHING

This chapter includes in-depth interview findings on the topic concerning slavery and lynching. As previous literature suggests, slavery and lynching impact Black Americans today in various sectors of society, including the environmental and geographical realms. To address my research question, I interviewed 40 participants on the subject of how slavery and lynching impact contemporary Black Americans' relationship with nature.

5.1 The South is a Sick Place

Placing race at the forefront of societal issues is the basis for critical race theory. In relation to CRT, critical geographies, and the continuing legacies of Jim Crow segregation, Inwood (2011) states,

> *Any engagement with the U.S. South must recognize the painful geographies of displacement and dislocation that permeate the region's history. The forced exile of First Peoples from native lands, chattel slavery, and the imposition of Jim Crow Segregation have left indelible marks on the landscape and continue to inform political, economic, and social structures in the region. (p. 565)*

Although 56% of Black people live in the South (Tamir, 2021), where there is an abundance of trees and green spaces, there are not many reports of Black Americans seen at national parks or interested in outdoor activities: only 2% of park visitors identify as Black (Scott & Lee, 2018). Generally, Black Americans are three times less likely to have access to green spaces and are 1.5 times more likely to bear the burden of environmental pollution due to environmental racism (Villarosa, 2020). Inwood (2011) goes on to say that the discipline of geography has played a part in perpetuating White supremacy and benefiting from its system, ignoring questions of inequality and social justice, particularly in the U.S. South. Historically, the South has been a

place of turmoil for Black Americans. Navigating through the American South as a Black person

has been and is currently dangerous depending on what state, city, or town one is in. Although

racism can be experienced anywhere in the world, it is no secret that the American South has

historically been a space colluded with racism, discrimination, and xenophobia. Additionally,

while systematic racism is experienced in every sector of society, my research focuses on

environmental racism experienced by Black Americans that have excluded and discouraged them

from participating in environmental-related activities, from policy decision-making to outdoor

recreation. The environmental movement has been whitewashed and has irrevocably hindered

the relationship between Black Americans and nature. Systemic racism in the South from the

eras of slavery throughout Jim Crow has traumatized contemporary Black Americans in ways

that deter them from currently participating in outdoor recreation. Figure 19 displays a word

cloud from interview responses on the topic of slavery and Jim Crow segregation.

Figure 19. Slavery and Jim Crow Word Cloud.

Some interview participants mentioned differences between the North and the South and how that has negatively impacted Black perceptions and behaviors concerning the environment, especially in wooded areas including national and state parks. When asked, do you see any connection between or slavery, lynching, and Black participation in the woods, one participant stated,

I think African Americans can find a way to tie slavery into anything. If there are a lot of

trees in a wooded area, especially in the South you are probably standing on ground

where someone was lynched, so this could be a reason why you don't see us out

there…it's generational. — (#10)

Another participant added context to this by saying,

It's connected in several ways. There is a documentary on PBS about Black travel and

how White people went to national parks, but Black people would visit relatives and left

the South because of Jim Crow. Culturally, White people go to parks and Black people

just visit their family and friends. Property is also different. Black people do not own a lot

of land and do not have that relationship, so they may not think of the benefits of going

out in nature. You don't know what you don't know. If our culture is avoiding White

spaces, it makes sense we would never explore those settings. — (#33)

Another participant talks about how racial tensions in the South have influenced their
interactions with the outdoors,

Now, down here, I was consciously aware that I was in the South. I was consciously

aware of the racial divide and that there were more people in the South that were racist

than were out in the North where I used to live. So I will go to different parks and I

noticed that there were not a lot of people if there were any people. Sometimes I would go

to parks and there were no people and I felt very uncomfortable as an African American

female walking around in a park where there was no one…it is still a thing. I know there

are Black people here that just won't do it they're just like no way I'm not going into a

park with no people in it as a Black person by myself, they just won't do it. — (#7)

Another participant touches on perceived dangers associated with the woods,

With my family growing up in the South, bad things have happened to Black people in the

woods, you see Wiccans transport spells in the woods. I think about Get Out, and the

woods is another sunken place…a place we don't come back from. For us who have

family from the South…we were brought here to work the land and most of us have in our

DNA is that we have historically always been connected to land and nature, and we have

also been exploited in that space, so I think it's a dual relationship between the land and

Black folk. There is a distinction between environmental racism…for Black people

defining the environment is different because of environmental racism…water and air is

not safe, we are crowded into smaller spaces…we are not allowed to own the

land…makes for a contentious interaction with Black folk and the luxury of

environmental leisure if we don't have the money, time, or transportation. — (#12)

Another participant mentions the dangers of the woods and that perceived danger is passed on

from older generations,

My parents did appreciate national parks and stuff, and they wanted us to experience

things, but with outdoor recreation, there was just a lack of it. It really did stem from

experiences my grandparents had living in the South where it was like you shouldn't be

anywhere dark and being Black in certain places much less the idea of going deep into a

forest, they are like why do you want to be in dangerous places. I feel like there's a level

of discomfort of what is unknown, and I think some of it is just knowledge passed onto

you from your parents and grandparents. From my parent's perspective and being

Central American, especially being in the South in the late 40s and early 50s, they are

like you don't want to go into those dark places. — (#6)

Thinking more broadly in terms of Black space-making and making connections to the

literature on Black geographies, it is important to acknowledge socio-spatial inequities. As

aforementioned, navigating through the South as a Black person was dangerous during Jim Crow

segregation. The *Negro Motorist Green Book* (see Figure 20 below) provided Black Americans with guidelines on how to safely travel through the South and with a list of places that were safe to lodge and dine. This reinforces the ideas surrounding what is considered a Black sense of place and space and how that can be produced by racialization. One participant, a woman who works for the Environmental Protection Agency, mentioned the *Green Book* in relation to what spaces are considered safe for Black Americans existing during the Jim Crow era to today in correlation with national parks:

> *I think there is a direct correlation between the Jim Crow laws and how African American or Black people experience national parks today, and with situations like this it's like what do you do? I think it's really sad to know that this stuff is still happening to prevent people from being able to use the privilege that they've been given, but they've had, like all people have the right to go to a national park, that's why they were created, right? So, it is truly unfortunate to have these situations happen... I wanted to touch upon the Green Book which was created for Black people and for establishments to write down whether or not Black people were accepted in a particular facility, so I feel like the very existence of the Green Book is sad. — (#3)*

Figure 20. The Negro Motorist Green Book.

Note. Variations of the Green Book., n.d.

5.2 Legacy of Limbs

Lewis Allen's poem and song "Strange Fruit" commented on the troubling history of

lynchings in the South, a lament that Billie Holiday most famously sang in 1939:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze

Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees

The lynching of Black people during the Jim Crow era occurred predominately in Southern

states. Lynching usually involved Black people being hanged from trees or other structures.

However, lynchings also include other forms of violence that occurred during Jim Crow that

were racially motivated, such as mob beatings. As aforementioned, there are two databases that

demonstrate the magnitude of lynching in the South through the visual representation of mapping. Figure 21 is from the "Monroe & Florence Work Today" project and demonstrates lynching in the deep South. The orange dots represent each individual Black person that was lynched. This particular website allows users to choose whether they want to map just the act of lynching or all racially motivated killings. This particular image only displays the lynchings that took place from 1848 to 2020. The second map provided by the "Equal Justice Initiative", seen below as Figure 22, displays a similar trend of lynching in America. While both of these maps are interactive, the two maps serve different functions. The map by the "Monroe & Florence Work Today" project personalizes each of the victims by showcasing their names, what county they were in, their gender, age, and what they were accused of. On the other hand, the map produced by the "Equal Justice Initiative" does not provide as much detail; however, provides a general numeric value assigned to each county for each state. For instance, if one were to click on Guilford County in North Carolina located in the city of Greensboro, the map would populate that there was only one lynching; however, 120 lynchings took place in the entire state. From these images, one can see that the majority of lynchings took place in the South, making it a space of turmoil and anguish: a "sick place."

Figure 21. Map of Lynching - Monroe & Florence Work Today
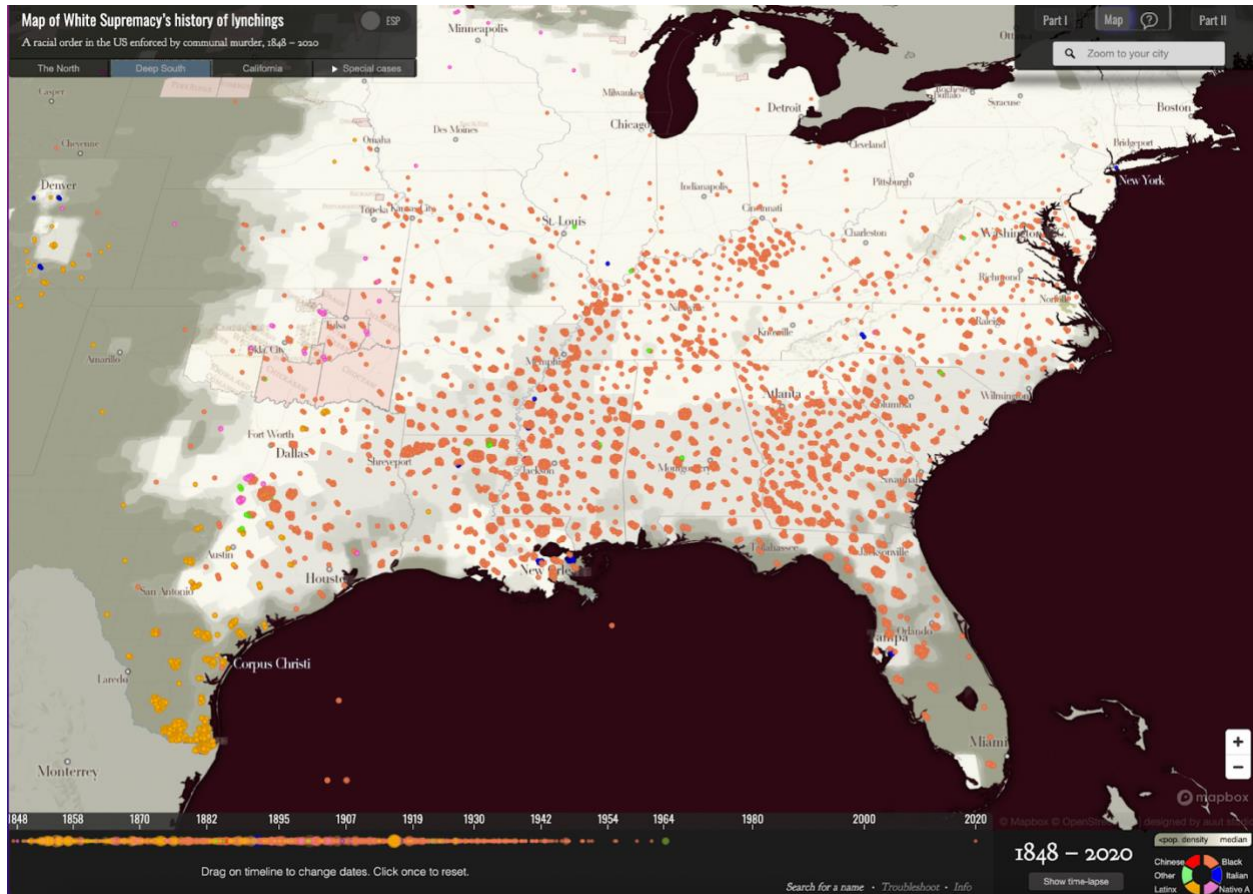
Note. Map of Lynching in the Deep South. By Monroe and Florence Work Today. 2022.

Figure 22. Lynching in America - Equal Justice Initiative.
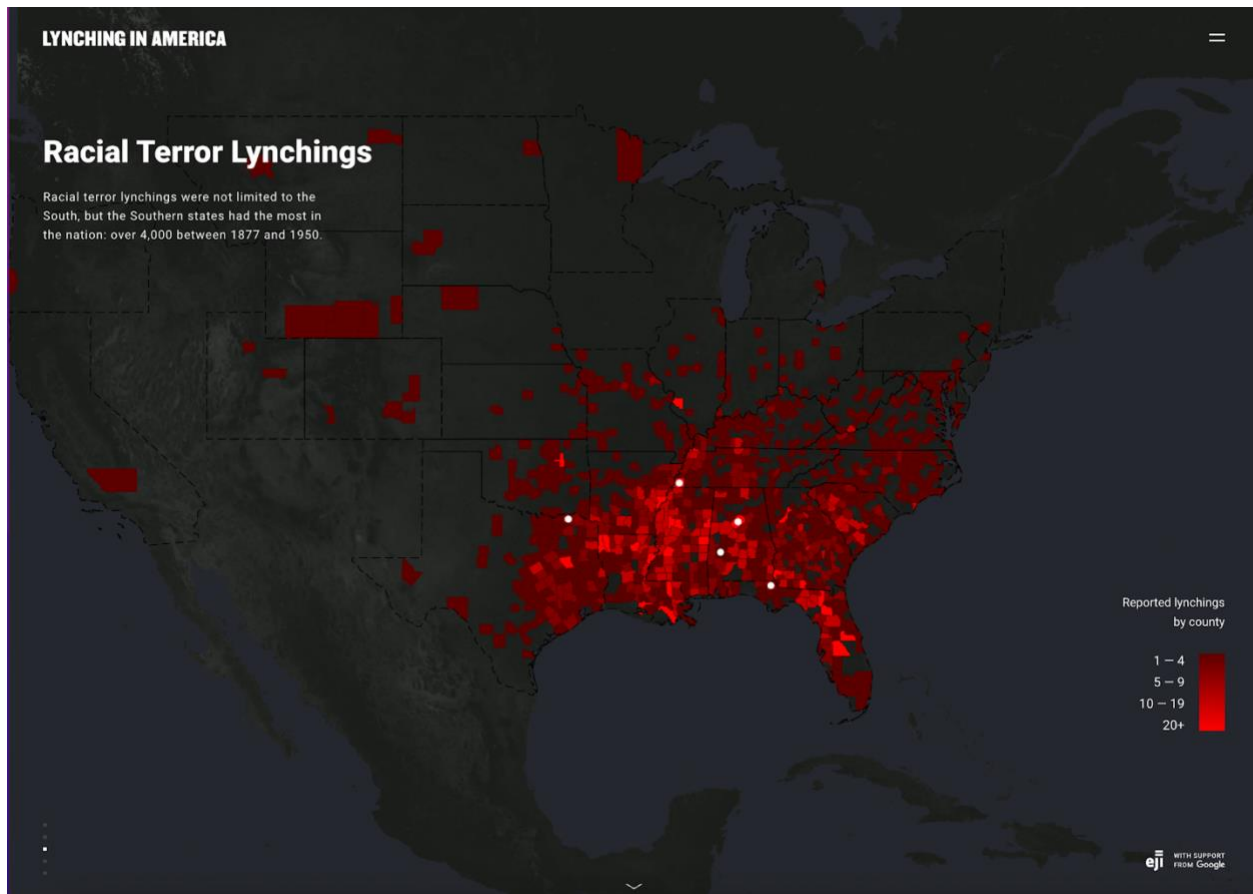
Note. Lynching in America in the South. By Equal Justice Initiative. 2022.

The terrorism of lynching has left a legacy and has impacted Black Americans'
relationship with wilderness. One compelling finding from my interviews was the perception of
trees in relation to the practice of lynching. Trees seem to hold a negative association with some
Black Americans due to the violence experienced during the Jim Crow Era. When asked, "do
you see any connection between slavery or lynching and Black participation in the woods?" a
50-year-old nurse said, *"Yes, when we look at pictures of our history and watch documentaries
lynching has been done with a tree in a park or backyard somewhere." — (#15).* Another
participant, a 28-year-old eyewear salesman, mentioned the Billie Holiday song "Strange Fruit"
in reference to lynching, saying,

Everything in this country is linked to slavery. Like for instance with the Netflix show

"Black AF," the title of each episode is some variation of the words "this is because of

slavery". This is because of lynching and slavery. Black people suffer from Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and because of it, it's a thing where a Black person

could never see a tree in their life, but they can suddenly come across one, and it may

trigger something because of what our ancestors went through caused by barbaric White

people. This has led Black people to not be so trusting. (starts singing Strange Fruit)

Yeah, so White people used to picnic and barbecue when lynching Black people. — (#17)

A young woman between the ages of 25-34 who is an environmental emergency specialist also

speaks on the symbolism of the lynching tree by making the following statement:

Black poets have written about this from an analytical and poetic standpoint. There is a

symbol of the tree, and when people think of nature they think of trees which have been

used to lynch people. You think of about the tree as the holder or container of that

memory. I don't have that simplistic or romantic connection as the White American mind.

There is a dualism where trees have been used as weapons but also used as a way for

people to build homes or used for fuel. Black people have a complicated relationship with

nature, we were historically farming and gardening doing labor-intensive things…if our

ancestors worked 20 hours a day working for someone else there is going to be a

negative association. Black people don't want to do that. They don't want to be

manipulated into the same subservient position their ancestors were in. They want to

pursue the American Dream of convenience and wealth, versus a backwards lifestyle of

living off the land. There are stories being told of crops and that knowledge came from

Black people, but they didn't get the credit. We have our own knowledge that we kept to

ourselves, and we assume we are disconnected, but we just didn't have a record of it.

That reclamation has to happen where we have our own visions and experience. Nature

is multidimensional, it's not just the lynching tree. There's complexity in nature, and

what is good for this may be bad for that. It is easy then to accept the beauty and tragedy

of being an earthling. Devastating things happen to life in general. We have to start

thinking less about the trauma of being African American, we have to have our own

spaces. There was a woman who created a series of postcards and stationery who

renamed the national parks after Black people. Maybe we need to rename and reimagine

history. What if there was a national park named after a prominent African American?

Reclaiming, reimagining, and renaming. Also, what role does the NPS play in

commemoration of Juneteenth? — (#36)

Another participant states,

I asked in a chat…why is it that some people view nature culturally different? And I

pointed to a tree. Some people can look and envision a child swinging happily, and some

may see a body swinging. It was at the end of the chat, and we had to cut it off, but there

are stories of true events that happened, and they are in people's family histories and

collective memories. — (#38.

Another interview participant, a college-educated woman from North Carolina, does not mention the word "tree" in particular, but instead talks about their perception of the woods,

The woods are really dense and sometimes when I am there alone I feel like someone

could take me and I wouldn't be found. The average White person probably wouldn't feel

that way unless it's somewhere known to be spooky. — (#37)

According to a study conducted by Diestch et al. (2021, n.p) on Black trauma and nature-based leisure,

> *Participants noted that nature-based areas, such as forests, can reinforce historical trauma and cultural stigmas (e.g., around crime and safety) for Black Americans in particular. These are places where past oppressive acts, including violence (e.g., lynching of Black Americans), were perpetrated, discrimination is still rampant, and many were warned by elders not to visit these places.*

These findings correlate with those results of this study, in which interview participants were asked to share any stories they heard about the woods as an adolescent or during their upbringing. Some participants explained how the act of lynching has impacted their perceptions of the natural environment. When asked the question, "Were you told any stories or watch any movies about the woods growing up, and did these stories have an impact on your perception or interaction with these spaces?" one participant noted generational differences in regard to wilderness perceptions:

> *You learn a lot of times from those horror movies where the Black people are the first to die, and that made it difficult for me traveling and getting an Airbnb at a cabin by the lake. I think of scary movies. Having people around you that won't speak up for you or protect you is a scary feeling, and that is a problem for Black people enjoying nature. I know Jason and Freddy are not out there running at me… I'll be fine but for my age group it's more based on social media and television, but with the older generation, racism would be the main problem with lynching and all of what happened in the past. —*
> *(#16)*

One participant, who identified as a 60-year-old Jamaican immigrant, added to this sentiment of "horror" by stating,

> *Yeah, when I was growing up they told us about ghosts that we call "duppy" in the Caribbean…they told us if we go into the woods the duppy will get us and as a kid you are scared. Then when I came to America what turned me away from forests were the lynchings of Black people in the woods but also the fear of being attacked by animals like bobcats or snakes. I am not a forest person." — (#32)*

Another participant further develops this concept of lynching and superstitions, saying,

> *I feel like growing up, there are always stories about the woods. I don't remember one particular story as a Black American…most people don't venture out because of slavery and racism. Those types of things, especially for Black women, is not a safe place to be. Especially in the woods, you hear about the boogeyman, and you hear these crazy things. You hear stories about Black people disappearing or being dragged into the woods. You hear plenty of stories from Black family members about lynching and being dragged into the woods and never coming back. And we see that lynching and racial tensions are building back up now. — (#39)*

A 40-year-old female accountant makes a point to address the issue of lynching and those responsible for the crime:

> *With White people, I don't think we have a fear of the woods because of lynching, we have a fear of the woods because of White people. Those are two totally different things. Black people are not afraid of the woods because of lynching, it's not that Black people are afraid of the forest people are afraid of those behind the lynchings. — (#5)*

This same participant expands on the concept of fear of the supernatural by saying,

The people I know who are concerned about being out in the woods at night or in isolation is because they know it's alive. It's a living organism, they are afraid of running into a ghost or something. They might be afraid of seeing something they didn't want to see, whether it's something of the nonphysical form or of the human form. The reason they don't go out there is because there are spirits out there. — (#5)

When asked, "what connection do you think Black Americans have with the Great Outdoors?" one participant made the following remark:

I think Black Americans do not have a good connection with nature. I think historically when we looked at nature or being in the woods or park it seemed like we were not supposed to be there or if we were working for 'the man' in the fields, and it was not recreational even with the negative connotation of lynching and hanging in the woods. I think our connection is terrible with the outdoors and nature and the environment. — (#15)

A 55-year-old motorboat specialist, added to this sentiment by stating,

Not as much as they should…they should embrace it more. Especially for Black Americans and the fear of White people. We heard stories about lynching Black people and killing us in the woods. With White people killing Black people, so they are scared. Black people are also afraid of wildlife, we don't want to be eaten, but they may be more so afraid of human contact than with wild animals. — (#20)

One participant who works for the Environmental Protection Agency mentions how even as a professional in the field, lynching has impacted their perception of the woods:

I can see a connection between lynching and the lack of engagement from Black Americans in relation to the woods because lynching and the cruelty and trauma goes

from generation to generation. Also, Black families having to move to cities…a lot of

parks are in remote areas, so we stay away from there. That is definitely a factor for

Black Americans because we associate those areas with rural racism. I hear that

hesitation from my peers, like "racist people will get me." Sometimes I think about

driving to those areas like West Virginia and those backcountry roads. It can get

intimidating with the police and the inception of being Black in America. I try not to let it

stop me. We need to start educating people who don't go. Going outdoors needs to be

sexy…how do we get Black people to really get out there and not just in a cabin? — (#9)

Prior literature on Black geographies suggests that the historical dispossession of land has had

implications on a Black sense of place (Allen et al., 2019). Furthermore, the Whiteness of

geography has produced racialized spaces that impact Black Americans. A 55-year-old woman

shares a similar sentiment about Black women's safety in wilderness, but also touches on the

conceptions of Black and White spaces,

It reminds me of the Billie Holiday song "Strange Fruit" and how it was recreational for

White people who would go on picnics to watch lynchings. For my family, we have been

living in forested areas for as many years as we have been in this country, so for me, it is

a double-edged sword. Even in emancipation, we weren't given the best land. Our

achievements are typically to move towards a city, and for White people it's to live in a

secluded space. I also think of when I watch crime shows of how many Black and Latina

women killed and are taken to the woods to be buried. It would be interesting to see any

studies on that, like how many Black female bodies end up in the woods. — (#12)

Participant #11, an insurance claims representative, said,

Slavery and lynching could be a reason why we don't see Black people outside.

Historically when slavery and lynching occurred White people had more access to the

environment. Black people were killed in those environments, they were drowned, put on

public display in the environment. That could be why Black people are so fearful, and it

discourages me from going into the woods. A Black person in the past was hung in the

woods, and Black Americans today have seen those things. They [White people] used the

environment as a way to kill Black people. We were burned in the woods, and it also hurt

nature by doing that. They would hold slave auctions outside in the woods and put us on

display. Even when cops are killing Black people today, they are doing it in a public

space. We just don't want to go there, much less alone. — (#11)

Another participant, a 49-year-old, stated,

I think the woods is something Black people are not comfortable with I don't think it is

something if they were offered between a beach and a state park I don't think a park

would be a first option there is still hesitancy there exploring the woods is not something

that is attractive because it has haunting memories and history. There were a lot of

crimes committed against Black people during slavery and Jim Crow. Even in 2020,

there was an incident with an attempted lynching in broad daylight of a Black man by a

White mob in the woods. — (#19)

Based on these findings, this study found that lynching has an impact on Black Americans'

perception of and participation in wilderness.

5.3 Cultural Trauma & Memory

The pernicious acts of violence that occurred in the rural South during slavery and the

Jim Crow era still have implications for contemporary Black Americans. According to Dietsch et

al. (2021), there are specific examples of oppression that are connected to historical trauma and the Black American experience associated with natural surroundings, including: White Americans tracking Black people who sought freedom from enslavement; lynching where Black people were often hanged from trees accompanied by beatings to punish and deter Black people from seeking freedom and equality; the segregation of park systems during the Jim Crow Era; creating legislation of unequal facilities and access to public lands; and terrorizing or killing Black Americans in outdoor spaces through force by means of the police or unsanctioned vigilantes. Figures 23 and 24 are lynching photographs that were digitally altered and presented as a series titled "Erased Lynchings" by artist Ken Gonzales-Day. Gonzales-Day removed the victims of the lynchings and the noose to guide the viewer to focus on the crowd in the image and to avoid revictimizing the victims. However, I place these images here to not only guide the viewer to focus on the crowd but the surroundings of where these lynchings took place.

Figure 23. Gonzales Day #1

Note. Erased Lynchings Series: East First Street #1. By Ken Gonzales-Day. 2006.

Figure 24. Gonzales Day #2.

Note. Erased Lynching Series: Leo Frank (Atlanta, Ga. 1915) (Set II). By Ken Gonzales-Day. 2013.

CRT calls for histories from the perspectives of people of color (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). This study provides a space for such narratives and addresses the concerns of the historically oppressed in an environmental and geographical context. Participants of this study were asked to describe their perception of how Black Americans as an ethnic group connect with nature. One of the most compelling findings of this study is that some participants describe cultural and/or generational trauma as a factor as to why Black Americans have a wilderness deficit. When asked, "do you see any connection between slavery and lynching and Black participation in the woods?" one interview participant, a natural resources professor, stated,

> *Yes, the woods was not a safe place and that mentality has been passed down from*
>
> *generation to generation. Some parts may be changing, and Black people had certain*

jobs where they were sharecroppers so that was passed down, but they may have

previously been slaves so that is passed down generationally. — (#39)

Even though racism is not just a Southern occurrence, it has pervaded and impacted Black Americans that are of other nationalities. Another interview participant seconds the notion of the woods being unsafe, while adding that some Black Americans are inured to the effects of racism to the point where they become unknowingly desensitized to their trauma:

I will preface this by saying my family doesn't have lineage here, they are from the

Caribbean. So, we had the rice and sugarcane fields but seeing it here and interacting

with the other Black Americans here I do see that because of that thing called

generational trauma they may not want to be outside all the time. For one, you had to be

forced to leave those areas to go to urban areas in the first place so that kind of

contributed to that in a geographical way. Not being able to access because you are in a

city you're not in those rural areas, and maybe you don't want to because something in

you is like oh my family used to have to be on the field by force and in nature not because

they wanted to but because they were working, and I really don't see a need to be out

there. They don't have a defined answer for it, sometimes it's innate, like "I just don't

want to be." I've seen that in other people when I talk to them, and it's like "oh, I don't

do those things." And it's not just in the culture, I think it's also going back to family

history it's just kind of built-in there I don't want to do this I don't want to be out into the

field or in nature. — (#2)

Another participant, a Jamaican immigrant, answered,

Yes, the stigma won't go away…400 years ago this was happening, but it's fresh in our

memory every time a Black person is killed by a White person or by a White policeman it

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brings us right back to that place where people are lynched and dragged behind cars just

for being Black. White people take over the state parks knowing that if we go into those

places we could be hurt or killed, knowing you could lose your life just trying to enjoy

nature. — (#20)

Although some participants did not use the exact words "generational trauma," some pointed to

"culture" as to why they either feel excluded or exclude themselves from nature. One study

participant stated,

Black people do not own a lot of land and do not have that relationship. They may not

think of the benefits of going out in nature. You don't know what you don't know. If our

culture is avoiding White spaces, it makes sense we would never explore those settings.

— (#33)

According to Allen et al. (2019), there are places or sites of memory where the construction of

remembrance, identity, and resistance occur. Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome and cultural

trauma have arguably altered the perception of a Black sense of place in wilderness areas. Due to

the history of racial violence and the recollection of said violence, Black Americans have a

complicated relationship and understanding of wilderness. Another interview participant

elaborates on the idea of cultural memory and how that plays a role in the lack of environmental

participation from Black Americans,

I think it's a part of our cultural memory, just like my parents and grandparents and

great-grandparents were like stay away from dark places don't do this, don't do that. I

really think it's part of our cultural history to be fearful of violence from White people in

places where you feel like you may have less control over the environment…it definitely

feels that way. I think it's rooted in that for sure I feel like that's where the stories like

from my great-grandparents and stuff that's where it comes from, they were like you

cannot be in these types of places at all. I even have a colleague who's in charge of like a

tri-state environmental education program at the field museum for 3rd through 5th

graders, and we take part in it, and she was telling me like here in the city, so Chicago

has like 500 parks and lakefront and all that it also has a forest preserve district that's

also here. There's a few that are actually inside of Chicago…so she's like I grew up

literally 10 minutes from one and really never went there, had never been there, and she

was in college when it became an interest. She said the main reason was that her

grandmother told "you're not going over there, all kinds of terrible things have happened

there." So yeah I think it's definitely rooted in slavery and definitely Jim Crow it's like

don't put yourself out there, like that. — (#6)

As prior literature suggests (Johnson & Bowker, 2004), Black Americans have seemingly formed

a collective identity around the social construct of wilderness through their collective memory.

Some participants point to this collective trauma as a barrier to outdoor recreation. Another

participant, a 28-year-old male, states, *"I think things happened back then that affect us now. It's*

like PTSD, it follows us for years. It's built-in, so there is a connection there." — (#40). When

asked, "what do you think could be done to get more Black Americans engaged?" one Black

woman stated,

Trauma is real…even if we didn't experience the trauma we learn from watching and

hearing…we need to put a positive spin on it being in nature…it seems more like therapy,

but it's gonna take a while…even up to today we are still looking at nature the same

way…not erase the trauma but identify why we are afraid or not interested in nature…if

we put a more positive light on it, and it has to be specific to Black people…we need to

find the root of the problem as to why we don't first…we feel it's not safe…hiking in the

daytime, yeah, but at night it's not safe…so putting a more positive spin on it would help

that… — (#15)

Another participant, a fraud investigator, made the following remark: "*We have to get rid of the*

trauma that goes back to slavery and racism. Get rid of the trauma associated with it…it would

have to become a safe place for Black people." — (#19). When asked about their upbringings

and stories that they were told about the woods as an adolescent, one participant stated,

I was told basically the woods are not a place for black people to hang out with it's not

safe for a black person we could get killed in the woods KKK…especially not for us going

alone… I was also told that was for White people… Black people don't do that. — (#26)

When asked, "what connection do you think Black Americans have with the outdoors? The same

participant also added context to the sentiment of feeling traumatized by stating,

With Black people in America the connection is twofold because of our African diaspora

we are in tune with farming, and we grew the land. We knew the ecology and were able

to produce the food that sustain the country and products that sustained the economy. We

had a very close relationship, but with the increase of violence and racism, the outdoors

became dangerous. They were lynched and hunted by dogs, homes were firebombed,

there was a lot of domestic terrorism and many groups like the KKK practiced their

torture and rallies in the woods. There is a dichotomy of nature being a place to grow,

and then we were traumatized. Black people were removed from farming. The woods

became a dangerous place. You didn't want to be a Black person where bad things

happened. — (#26)

The memories of these past horrors have infringed upon the will of contemporary Black Americans to partake in activities such as hiking and camping due to the terrorism their ancestors endured in these spaces. Under the guise of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, there are Black people who are traumatized by the brutalities of slavery in various ways (DeGruy, 2005). This is not limited to environmentalism and outdoor recreation. Black Americans in this study identified as being traumatized and said trauma has an impact on their perceptions of and engagement with wilderness.

5.4 Dangerous, unsafe, and dirty. Not for Black Folks.

5.4.1. Survey Findings

Based on this study's findings, some Black Americans experience a sense of fear when thinking about wilderness exploration. Although not statistically significant, the following data present help explain why Black Americans do not participate in outdoor recreation as much as their White counterparts. Some survey participants reported being fearful of the woods (see figure 25) below. Out of 176 survey respondents, 81 (46%) reported having fears of the outdoors, while 95 (54%) reported having no fears of the outdoors. Of the participants who reported being fearful, nearly 84% of the participants identified as female, and 79% were between the ages of 25 and 54. Nearly 40% of these survey respondents reported earning a Bachelor's degree. Almost half of these participants (49%) reported living in a city, while the remaining reported living in a rural area, small town, or the suburbs. This survey presented participants with the question, "what are your fears of the woods?" Of these 81 respondents who reported having fears of the woods, over half (67 or 83%) reported they fear wild animals and bugs, 59 (73%) reported they fear getting lost, 41 (50.6%) feared getting abducted, and 40 (49%) reported being fearful of negative racial encounters.

Figure 25. Survey Responses on Fear.

Q28 - What are your fears of the woods? (Please select all that apply).　　Page Options ∨
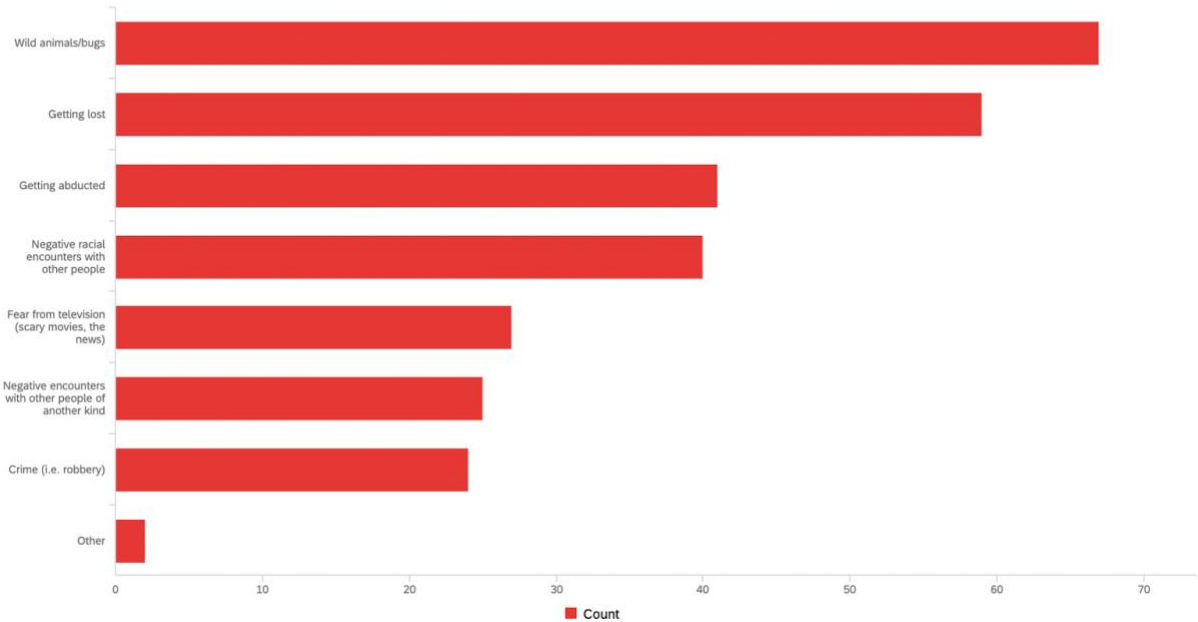
Of these 81 participants, only 5 (less than 1%) reported that they have never been to a national or state park, with stated reasons that included a lack of interest, lack of knowledge, lack of time, and not enough visual representation. However, when asked, "why don't you visit any green spaces?" 18 out of 81 (22%) participants responded with answers such as it was not of interest, there were no green spaces nearby their residence, or they were not knowledgeable of any green spaces.

In exploring Black Americans' perceptions of the environment, this study asked participants to elaborate on how they were raised to perceive nature when they answered "yes" to the question of having any fears of the outdoors. The essence of asking this question was to determine whether the participant's upbringing impacted their behaviors in participating in nature. Table 3, below, lists the text responses to the aforementioned survey question. The table

is organized from negative to positive sentiments. Each participant's response has been labeled with either "negative", "neutral", or "positive". Most participants that answered this question identified as African American females, ranging between the ages of 25-54, living in the city, having a bachelor's degree, and earning an annual income of at least $50K or more. Out of these 22 respondents, 18 of them indicated a notion of apprehension or fear related to outdoor exploration that has become a part of their ontology as Black people. This subset of survey respondents shares that they were raised to perceive the outdoors as dangerous, whether it was revolving around racism, crime, or wild animals. Or some participants were not raised to think much about the outdoors. Therefore, some of these respondents indicated that they have a fear of the outdoors as a result of their family members not discussing outdoor recreation in their homes as an adolescent. Only 2 survey participants left positive remarks about how they were raised to perceive nature. For instance, one participant, a Haitian woman between the ages of 18-24, stated that "nature is beautiful nothing more or nothing less." Another woman, a 35-44 year old, reports being raised to perceive nature as life and something to "respect".

Table 3. Nurtured Perceptions of Wilderness.

Attitudes	Q: Please elaborate on how you were raised to perceive nature.	Demographics
Negative	We went to Starved Rock in Illinois once when I was little. It was beautiful. We never did anything else like that. At some point (12yrs or so), It occurred to me that people were lynched on rural trees, and maybe they were fertilized by their bodies. As I got older, I knew that wasn't true, but it could be true for any individual tree…. In my early 20s, I walked through	45-54 years old Female $50K or above Terminal degree African American Suburban

	the forest in Portland, OR and I felt alive. But I have only got through wooded areas a few times since, usually in a group, or with my husband (a marine and sharp-shooter). I don't let my kids go. I am terrified of encountering white men that will use the solitude to do something horrible to us.	
Negative	My parents thought I should be well-rounded and exposed to experiences, so they put me in Girl Scouts. But the outings to the woods or camping overnights made them nervous. Also, my dad is Panamanian and the concept of sleepovers—much less sleepovers in the woods with white people, was too much for them. Also, they feared with racist white people. Also, white people were not the friendliest if they came across us in woodsy parks. We spent a lot of time outdoors, but not the way the outdoor industry would define it.	45-54 years old Female $50K or above Bachelor's degree African American City
Negative	Going camping was not an option, equipment is expensive and state parks were not considered safe as recreation.	25-34 years old Female $30-39K Bachelor's degree African American Rural
	There was no real nature or access to nature growing up, really. The city park was not maintained, and dangerous.	35-44 years old Male

Negative	The closest thing to "nature" was Central Park, and I used it primarily to bike ride.	$50K or above Some college, but no degree African American City
Negative	Watching scary movies when people would get killed or lost in the woods. Makes me have fear about wildlife.	45-54 years old Female $20-29K Bachelor's degree African American Small town
Negative	That you can be raped or killed and to be careful because you could go missing.	35-44 years old Female $40-49K Some college, but no degree African American City
Negative	Not for my family and not safe because we weren't prepared.	25-34 years old Female $30-39K Bachelor's degree African American Small town
Negative	Through television, it seemed that crime activities would happen to children and women in 'nature.' There is also the potential to come across bears and other	25-34 years old Female $50K or above

	animals. Growing up, I didn't feel secure at the thought of being isolated in the woods, but that is because I did not grow up going on camping trips or visiting parks.	Master's degree Dominican City
Negative	Dangerous. Unsafe. Dirty. Not for Black folks.	25-34 years old Male $50K or above Bachelor's degree Aboriginal American Suburban
Negative	I did not grow up visiting state/national parks, and did not do so (that I recall) until college. Family generally wary of visiting wild/rural areas, although some family members gardened.	35-44 years old Female $50K or above Bachelor's degree African American City
Negative	Animals and crime.	45-54 years old Female Less than $19K High school or GED African American Small town
Negative	Not to be afraid, but I am afraid of wildlife.	35-44 years old Female $40-49K High school or GED

		African American
		City
Negative	I was taught that they bite.	45-54 years old
		Female
		$50K or above
		Master's degree
		African American
		Suburban
Neutral	Taught that being outside is good, but as far as going into woods and stuff like that, only white people do it.	25-34 years old
		Female
		Less than $19K
		Bachelor's degree
		African American
		City
Neutral	Nature in a general sense was not often if ever spoken of. School spoke of gardens and fresh foods, but it was not available in my city neighborhoods, so it was not on our radar.	25-34 years old
		Female
		$50K or above
		Master's degree
		Black
		City
Neutral	I wasn't really raised in the nature, but I had visited from time to time with my family. We would stay there at least 2-3 weeks in the nature of Mississippi. It was different because it wasn't a lot of activities what we would do	18-24 years old
		Female
		Less than $19,000K
		Some college but no degree
		African American

	in a city area compare to a nature area.	Small town
Neutral	Was not allowed to do much.	45-54 years old Female $50K or above Bachelor's degree African American City
Neutral	Nature wasn't discussed often in my family. We saw and understood it as it was.	35-44 years old Female $50K or above Master's degree African American Suburban
Neutral	It's not for people, just for animals.	34-44 years old Female $50K or above High school or GED American City
Neutral	I was raised to respect all of God's creations, big and small. I was also raised to admire from a safe distance and not to wander off from the group/trail.	35-44 years old Female $30-39K Some college, but no degree Bahamian City

		18-24 years old
Positive	It's nature it's beautiful nothing more nothing less.	Female
		Less than $19K
		Some college but no degree
		Haitian
		City
Positive	I was raised to perceive nature as life. To respect the life of the wild. Not to litter, pollute, or careless destroy the outdoors.	35-44 years old
		Female
		$50K or above
		Some college, but no degree
		Other
		Suburban

In corroboration with the survey findings above, some studies (Davis, 2019; Dietsch et al., 2021) and news articles (Pires, 2018; Machado, 2020) have acknowledged that Black Americans may be fearful of the woods. For instance, a news article on the "anxiety of hiking while Black" (Pires, 2018, n.p) includes an interview with a man by the name of Aaron Jones, who stated,

A few years ago, a white friend suggested we go on a hike. All the fears I had about being in nature hit me in the face. It's a very real fear for black people, especially those from urban communities, that bad things happen to black people in the woods, like lynching. It's something that you see again and again when you look at the history of the civil rights movement and slavery: black people going into the woods and not coming back.

In this study, some interview participants also mentioned how Black Americans in general or themselves personally can be fearful of venturing out into the natural environment. One participant, a 55-year-old male, stated,

> *Black people have other forms of entertainment. They like more family-oriented functions. They would rather have a party or barbecue than go in the woods where they could be in danger. They find other alternatives because they are scared to venture in the woods. They get comfortable in doing other things than go to the woods and that becomes the norm. In a sense, Black people do go to the woods but in a way that they go to barbecue in a local park where there is less wildlife and crazy people who think that it's their space. They think they own the national parks and use scare tactics, so they can enjoy it. — (#20)*

A 70-year-old retiree adds to this sentiment by stating,

> *There is a culture of Black people not doing dangerous things, and we stay in safe places. If I try to ask people, it would be "why are you doing things Black people don't do?" I don't feel safe traveling to places or going to national or state parks where there are sundown towns. It is not safe or smart to go there. — (#33)*

An African American woman from Nevada made the following remark:

> *It's a weird dual experience. Bad things happen in the wilderness that we see through social media or the TV, but at the same time we farmed, cultivated, and built present day America. I was told it was dangerous, but at the same time we could thrive in it. We are connected, but also told it's a dangerous place. — (#13)*

An associate director talks about her experience growing up and how her parents influenced her perception of wilderness:

I never saw Black people on TV. I saw a Barney camping episode, and it scared me. Both

of my parents didn't understand the concept of camping. It was dangerous in their eyes

and not something they were into. It was a daunting activity unless it was with someone I

knew in a safe area. — (#37)

In summary, some Black Americans in this study identified racial tension as a deterrent

from wilderness exploration and express being fearful of negative racial encounters. This chapter

began with a conceptualization of the American South having negative connotations due to the

ramifications of slavery and lynching. This chapter then addressed issues of inequities in green

spaces and the domineering fear instilled into Black people from their White counterparts. The

second part of this chapter disclosed the cultural trauma and memory discussed by the survey

and interview participants. Some mentioned that they are fearful of these spaces due to historical

patterns of racial violence.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

6.1 Concluding Remarks

This dissertation attempts to answer the overarching question of "how does a history of racial trauma impact Black Americans' perceptions of place and engagement with wilderness?" from an environmental justice lens. This dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first chapter of this dissertation provides an overview of the research study and background information on the research topic. Chapter two provides a historical analysis of slavery and the Jim Crow Era and how those moments in time have shaped the Black American perspective on nature. While not comprehensive this chapter serves to highlight key aspects of history that play a role in contemporary Black epistemologies and ontologies of wilderness. Chapter three discloses the methods utilized in this study which consisted of a mixed-methods approach that included a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The survey and interview design included methods of recruitment and data analysis are also included in chapter three. Chapter 4 examined the perceptions and behaviors of wilderness of contemporary Black Americans through survey and interview findings. This study found that Black Americans relate to nature in ways that are not necessarily conventional in the mainstream environmental industry. Chapter 5 examined the implications of cultural trauma on Black American wilderness perspectives. This study found that the ramifications of slavery and lynching has left an onerous toll on the Black American psyche that creates a barrier to their participation in wilderness exploration.

This study has contributed to the body of literature that explores the relationship Black Americans have with wilderness at national parks and other natural landscapes. The findings of these methods were analyzed using Critical Race Theory and Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. This study implies that a history of racial violence is a factor in the lack of participation from

Black Americans in outdoor exploration. This study also implies that Black Americans have a unique definition of what they consider to be their environment, that Black Americans are spiritually connected to nature, and that Black Americans participate in outdoor recreation in unconventional ways. Overall, this dissertation has offered a historical analysis of how race in particular has influenced Black Americans' visitation to green spaces and has provided a deeper understanding of Black environmental perspectives.

This dissertation contributes to the discussions on race and place, and more specifically to the conversations surrounding Black epistemologies of wilderness. Davis (2019) states that research shows that Black Americans continue to experience a range of barriers to participation, including financial constraints, fear of venturing outside one's own sense of ethnic space stemming from the brutalities Black people were subjected to during the Jim Crow Era, perceptions of outdoor recreation as a "white people thing," a lack of natural landscapes in urban areas and formal exposure to nature, an absence of relevant cultural attractions in wilderness settings, fear of wildlands, and perceptions of racial discrimination. The results of this study coincide with these previously reported perceptions of wilderness from Black Americans. I have explained from an environmental justice perspective how the historic racial violence impedes Black rights to wilderness areas. I further demonstrate how these acts of violence shaped contemporary ideas, beliefs, actions, and identities of Black Americans encompassing wilderness exploration. Thus, I have reinforced the prevailing notion that Black people living in the United States have a complex relationship with the land. Additionally, this dissertation adds to the literature on cultural trauma in relation to environmental activities and participation. This study found that some Black Americans are apprehensive about wilderness exploration due to the negative associations of the woods formed by the history of racial violence and oppression.

6.1 Future Research and Next Steps

6.1.1. Future Research

There were many trends that were evident from the survey and interview data, even given its limitations. Future studies should include more survey participants to accrue more data so that I could more effectively compare gender, income, and other factors. The current data, however, presented some prominent themes worthy of future research. One of these is Black eco-spirituality; from my analysis, Black people have a spiritual connection with the Earth, and it would be an intriguing topic to explore in more depth. In future studies, I would also like to explore more regional differences of opinion to see if there are any trends; for instance, do Black Americans in the West have different opinions on nature, living closer to national parks than Black Americans from the North or South? Additionally, I would like to research the sustainability practices of Caribbean islands such as Jamaica; I am interested to see if their sustainability efforts were more widely broadcasted and if Black Americans would gravitate towards contributing to the mitigation of climate change based on such stories.

6.1.2. Next Steps for NPS and Other Entities

Various environmental organizations have acknowledged their lack of diversity with staff and audience members. Based on my study's findings, I have suggestions on how to increase diversity at nature-based entities. Advertising and marketing are integral ways that the NPS and other relevant institutions can reverse the lack of Black attendance in natural spaces or corporate positions. To be more inclusive, environmental organizations and companies should revamp their publications and diversify their marketing team to consider other narratives and avenues of versatility. Interview participants also mentioned integrative nature programs to build rapport with Black communities and individuals. Although this is important to consider, I believe it is

even more crucial to acknowledge personal values and the "unconventional" nature practices that Black Americans engage in on a local and familial scale. It may also be worthwhile for environmental entities to collaborate with grassroots organizations and POC outdoor groups that are on the front line of the climate crisis and combat these issues of environmental racism within that context. Furthermore, national parks are prime real estate for confederate flags, symbols, and memorabilia. If the NPS wants to adhere to diversity initiatives and make Black Americans feel welcome in their parks, then these artifacts should be removed or renamed to honor those who were oppressed.

6.1.3. Policy Recommendations

The past views on diversity and inclusion in the environmental and geography sectors have been myopic and performative. Environmental organizations disavow their lack of diversity, and it has been reported that since 2014 many environmental entities have stopped disseminating their statistics on race (Love, 2019). Racism has structured institutions in these fields. One way to abjure both overt and covert acts of racism and discrimination within the industry would be for the government to enforce reporting of race from all environmental entities to ensure they are complying with legislation on diversity. Additionally, mainstream and commercial environmental companies and organizations should have a diversity board with at least one community member and one member from a local grassroots organization.

6.2 Final Thoughts

Slavery and the Jim Crow Era has left a legacy of pain and turmoil that has left Black people with the feeling of trepidation towards American wilderness landscapes. This dissertation serves to tell these narratives of disdain in order to amend those phlegmatic sentiments concerning nature. Including these stories within the environmental and geographical fields is

imperative for addressing the climate crisis. Sharing these narratives are critical for climate adaptation because we cannot make the necessary adjustments without the inclusion of the communities that are the most vulnerable. We cannot be resilient against the incoming threats to humanity with the same Westernized perspectives that contributed to the climate crisis to start with. Additionally, throughout history, the NPS has made sustainability efforts to ensure the survivability of natural resources and green spaces for a select few to enjoy and experience. It is time to shift the narrative of the whitewashed wilderness and expand the potential of sustainability with the inclusion of diverse members.

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Sample Survey Questions

      Past Behavior

I have been to a national park in the past 5 years.
         How frequently have you visited national parks?
What activities did you engage in during your visit(s)?
Have them select out of a list
Hiking, camping, fishing, walking, jogging, running, cycling, zip-lining, attending an event, sight-seeing/nature-watching, cave excursions.
I have been to a state park in the past 5 years.
         How frequently?
What activities did you engage in during your visit(s)?
Have them select out of a list
Hiking, camping, fishing, walking, jogging, running, cycling, zip-lining, attending an event, sight-seeing/nature-watching, cave excursions.
I have been to a local/community park in my lifetime.
         How frequently?
   What activities did you engage in?
Picnic, swimming, basketball, cookout
I have belonged to an outdoor group such as the Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts
I have went gone hunting in my lifetime.
I have worked at a national/state park before.
How frequently have you visited national parks?
How frequently have you visited state parks?
How frequently have you visited local parks?

    Behavioral Control
1. I can get public transportation to a national/state park. (access)
2. I have the time to visit a national/state park. (access)
3. I have the resources to visit a national/state park. (access)
4. I have the physical ability to participate in outdoor recreational activities such as …
     0. Or my physical fitness limits my ability to partake in …
5. I partake in recycling.
     0. I make it a priority to…agree or disagree…
6. I conserve energy at home.
7. I conserve water at home.
8. I have the skills to go camping.
9. I have the skills to go hiking.
10. I have the skills to do a cave excursion.
11. I have the skills to go hunting.
12. I would go water-rafting or tubing.

13. I am knowledgeable about the location of my nearest national/state park.
14. I am knowledgeable about the equipment I need in order to go camping and/or hiking.
15. I have the resources to purchase the equipment I need in order to go camping and/or hiking.
16. I have the time to purchase the equipment I need in order to go camping and/or hiking.
17. I am knowledgeable about the native plants and animals in my state.
18. I am knowledgeable about the plants and animals that reside in my national/state park.
19. I am currently a member of an outdoor group.
20. I currently work at a national/state park.

Behavioral Intentions
1. I would like to visit a national/state park.
2. I would like to take my family to a national/state park.
3. I plan on visiting a national state park in the future.
4. I would like to go camping.
5. I would like to go hiking.
6. I would enjoy fishing.
7. I would enjoy zip-lining.
8. I would like to do a cave excursion.
9. I would enjoy nature trails.
10. I would like to go water-rafting or tubing.
11. I would enjoy a wilderness class.
12. I would enjoy taking a walk in a national/state park.
13. Comparing to community/local parks, I would prefer to visit national/state parks.
14. I would feel safe visiting a national/state park.
15. I would feel bored visiting a national/state park.
16. I would feel excited visiting a national/state park.
17. I would like to work at a national/state park in the future.

Attitudes (NEP scale)
1. National parks/state are available to all Americans.
2. National/state parks are a good use of government funding.
3. National/state parks are intimidating.
4. Visiting a national or state park would be safe.
5. National/state parks are interesting.
6. Visiting national/state parks is personally gratifying.
7. I gain a lot from visiting national/state parks.
8. National/State parks are a waste of my time.
9. National/State parks have people, items, and things worthy of exploration.
10. Visiting a national/state park would reflect the real me.
11. I would recommend visiting a national/state park.
12. National Parks are inviting to all Americans.
13. I think visiting national/state parks would be visually pleasing.
14. I think visiting a national/state parks would be relaxing.

15. Visiting a National/state parks would offer a unique experience.
16. Visiting a national/state park would help me to perceive good feelings.
17. I have positive thoughts when thinking about of national/state parks.

Norms
1. My friends would encourage me to go a national and/or state park.
2. My family would encourage me to go to a national/state park.
3. In general, going to a national/state park is cool.
4. People like me go to national/state parks.
5. All Americans go to national/state parks.
6. I enjoy sharing my experiences of going to national/state parks with friends and family.
7. My friends would enjoy hearing about a trip to a national/state park.
8. If I were to travel to a national/state park my friends and family would … (approve or disapprove)

Demographics:
1. Age?
2. Race?
3. Income?
4. Occupation?
5. Children? How many?
6. What city do you reside?

Sample 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. Do you participate in any environmental conservation or outdoor recreation activities? If so, what activities specifically?
5. Have you ever been to a national park?
   0. If yes, what was it like?
   1. Have you ever been to the Smoky Mountains?
6. Are you knowledgeable ofabout any Black/African American Outdoor groups?
   0. If you could join one of these groups, would you?
7. Have you noticed other Black Americans participating in outdoor recreational activities?
8. Are there any racial or ethnic issues that you can think of involving the environment?
9. What kind of connection do you think Blacks have with the Great Outdoors?
10. Are you knowledgeable of any Black/African American Outdoor groups?
    0. If you could join one of these groups, would you?
11. Do you believe that everyone has fair access to green spaces?
12. What connection do you have with nature?
13. Have you noticed other Black Americans participating in outdoor recreational activities?
14. Do you think there are any factors that prevent Black Americans from engaging in outdoor activities?
15. What were you told about the woods when you were a child?
    0. Did these "stories" have any impact on your perception of the woods?
    1. Did these stories have any impact on your exploration of the woods?
    2. Do trees symbolize anything to you?
    3. What do you think about camping in the woods overnight?
    4. Are there any perceived dangers associated with the woods?
16. Have you ever been to a national park?
    0. If yes, what was it like?
    1. Have you ever been to the Smoky Mountains?
17. Do you think it is important for Black people to have a relationship with nature? Why or why not?

Interview Consent

My name is T'Shari White, and I am a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

I am interested in learning more about how the cultural trauma of slavery and discrimination has impacted Black Americans' perception of nature. You will be asked to sit with me in an 30-60 minute interview to answer some questions about how you feel about the misconception that Black people have little to no relationship with the environment and what can be done to better acknowledge the kinship between African Americans and the Great Outdoors.

I am inviting you to participate in this study. Involvement in this study is completely voluntary. This means that you can choose whether or not to participate in this research and you can withdraw from this study at any time.

All information will be kept confidential. This means that your name will not appear anywhere in the resulted publication of this study. Your specific answers will not be linked to your name in any way. I will assign a number to your responses, and only I will have the key to indicate which number belongs to which participant. None of your identifying information will be shared. The interview will be audio recorded in order to ensure that transcripts of the session are accurate for the purposes of data analysis. Recordings will be destroyed following the transcription of the interview responses. Interview recordings will be stored in a password protected computer, accessible only to myself. Any recordings will be kept for up to 2 years from the date of your interview and then erased.

The benefit of this research is that it will help us to better understand what role racism has played in manipulating Black perceptions and participation in regard to nature. This will then assist in avoiding racial exclusionary practices of national parks, motivating people of color, particularly Blacks to engage in outdoor recreational activities. There will be no direct financial or other benefit for you taking part in this study.

The risks to you associated with participating in this study are minimal and are no greater than risks ordinarily encountered in everyday life. However, whenever one works with email or the internet, there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality in this circumstance will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties. If you do not wish to take part in this study, you have the right to refuse to take part without penalty. If you decided to

participate and no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, also without penalty.

Contact information:

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, contact T'Shari White at tlwhite5@uncg.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the university's institutional review board at 336.256.0253.

All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____ I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Signature of participant	Date

Printed name of participant

Signature of researcher	Date

Printed name of researcher

Sample Recruitment Flyer

Participate in the Great Outdoors?

If you have, and you would like to talk about your experiences, I would like to interview you. I am presently engaged in a research project through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro that seeks to understand the motivators of engagement in the nature. As a part of my project, I am interested in speaking with people who have participated in these initiatives/behaviors.

Generally, interviews will be approximately 30 minutes in duration and will allow you to talk about your experiences participating in these initiatives. Your information will remain completely confidential , and your responses will be used exclusively for the purposes of this UNCG study. You will also have access to a publicly available paper addressing the study results following completion of the research.

If you would like to participate, please contact T'Shari White at tlwhite5@uncg.edu to set up an interview time.

Table 4. Interview Demographics.

Participant Number	Age	Gender	Occupation	Ethnicity	Education	Location
1	29	M	Business Owner/IT/Military	Black African American	BA	NC
2	26	F	Tutor	Afro Caribbean	BA	NY
3	29	F	EPA—Budget Analyst	African American	MA	VA
4	63	M	Park Ranger	Black African American	BA	CA
5	30-40	F	Accounting	Black African American	Some college	TX
6	45-55	F	Center Director for Nature Center	African American	BA	IL
7	56	F	Sr. Clinical Operations Manager-Regulatory	Black	BA	GA
8	25-34	F	Business Development Consultant	Black	MA	MD
9	25-34	M	EPA—Finances	African American	MA	WA
10	35-44	F	Student	Trinidadian	Associate	NY
11	25-34	F	Insurance Claims	African American	BA	NC
12	55 or older	F	Consultant	Black	MA	IL
13	18-24	F	Retention Specialist	African American	BA	NV
14	55 or older	F	Self-employed	African American	BA	IL
15	49	F	Nurse	Jamaican	MA	NC
16	21	F	Student	Jamaican	BA	NC
17	28	M	Manager/Sales	African American	High School	TX
18	20	M	Student	American	High School	NC
19	48	F	Fraud Investigation	Jamaican American	MA	NC
20	53	M	Repairman	Jamaican	High School	NC

21	73	M	Retired	Jamaican	High School	NY
22	28	F	Customer Service	Jamaican/African American	MA	NC
23	28	M	Medical Lab	Black	MA	NY
24	53	F	Financial Director	African American	BA	NC
25	32	F	High School Teacher	Black	MA	CT
26	22	F	Student	African American	High School	NC
27	49	F	Photographer/Author	Jamaican American	MA	NC
28	52	M	Repairman	Jamaican	High School	NC
29	29	F	Customer Service	African American	BA	NC
30	55+	M		African American	High School	FL
31	35-44	M		African (Liberian)	MA	NY
32	60	M	Driver	African American	High School	NC
33	70+	F	Retired	Jamaican	BA	NY
34	25-34	F	Doctoral Candidate	African American	MA	TX
35	25-34	M	Student	Black & Native American	BA	NC
36	25-34	F	Environmental Emergency Specialist	Black	BA	NC
37	35-44	F	Associate Director	African American	BA	NC
38	18-24	F	Environmental Consultant	North African	BA	OR
39	55+	M	Natural Resources Professor	Black	Doctorate	SC
40	28	M	Criminal Justice	Black	MA	NC

Figure 26. Perceptions and Experiences with National and State Parks.

Perceptions and Experiences with National and State Parks

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
National/state parks are available to all Americans.	O	O	O
National/state parks are welcoming to all Americans.	O	O	O
National/state parks are inviting to people like me.	O	O	O
National/state parks are a good use of government funding.	O	O	O
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
National/state parks are not for me.	O	O	O
National/state parks are worthy of my time.	O	O	O
Going to a national or state park is a positive experience.	O	O	O

Figure 27. National and State Park Behaviors.

National and State Park Behaviors

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I have or would like to take my family or friends to a national/state park.	O	O	O
I would recommend visiting a national/state park.	O	O	O
I would feel safe visiting a national/state park.	O	O	O
I would feel bored visiting a national/state park.	O	O	O
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I would feel excited to visit a national/state park.	O	O	O
It is easy for me to get to a national/state park.	O	O	O
I am knowledgeable about what to bring to a national/state park.	O	O	O

Figure 28. Perceptions of Wilderness and Nature.

Perceptions of Wilderness and Nature

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I enjoy being outdoors.	O	O	O
I feel comfortable camping in the woods.	O	O	O
I feel comfortable walking through the woods.	O	O	O
I have or would be interested in learning outdoor activities/survival skills.	O	O	O

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I consider myself experienced in outdoor recreation.	O	O	O
I believe in the protection of wildlife.	O	O	O
Enjoying nature is a part of my cultural upbringing.	O	O	O
Enjoying nature is how my family raised me.	O	O	O