

**Heritage in the Outdoors—
Creating a Cultural Bridge Between the Latino Community and Parks:**

A Case Study in Sonoma County, California

By

Irma L. Cuevas

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Committee Members:

Dr. John Wingard, Ph.D., Chair

Dr. Margaret Purse, Ph.D.

Dr. Laura Watt, Ph.D.

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**HERITAGE IN THE OUTDOORS—
CREATING A CULTURAL BRIDGE BETWEEN THE LATINO COMMUNITY
AND PARKS: A CASE STUDY IN SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Latinos comprise almost a quarter of the population in Sonoma County, yet local, state, and national parks struggle to increase diversity among park users by promoting participation of Latinos in their park programming and gaining their community support. Maintaining cultural and ethnic diversity in parks is important to park management. This case study seeks to determine if becoming aware and informed of different perceptions of nature and the role of heritage in the experience of the outdoors increases diversity and inclusivity in parks. This study focuses on the Latino community of Sonoma County and their use of Sonoma County Regional Parks. By becoming aware of different perceptions of nature and the various ways in which heritage is expressed through socializing in the outdoors and incorporating this knowledge into park programs and outreach, Sonoma County Regional Parks will not only increase usage of parks by Latinos, it will also increase the quality of park experiences at Sonoma County Regional Parks for the Latino community. In addition, Sonoma County Regional Parks will become a role model for other park organizations seeking to increase diversity among park users and greater inclusion of the Latino community. This research is significant to the discipline of cultural resource management (CRM), whose practitioners are responsible for interpreting and managing cultural resources.

Procedure: In this case study, I observed the usage of Sonoma County Regional Parks by Latinos. Based on my observations and needs of Sonoma County Regional Parks, I conducted a survey to help determine how Latinos prefer to use parks, what parks are popular among the Latino community, and if parks are important to this community. I surveyed 253 individuals. In addition, I interviewed ten individuals from the Latino community who did not grow up in the United States about their perceptions of nature and asked if those perceptions had changed since adapting to the American culture. I also conducted a review of relevant literature regarding historical usage and beliefs about the nature of parks.

Findings: The results of the current study indicate that Latinos' perceptions of nature do not align with the dominant environmental narrative, in which Western perceptions of nature exclude humans from nature.

Results of my research, observations, surveys, and interviews also indicate that Sonoma County Regional Parks, unlike national parks, are not lacking in diversity of users. Sonoma County Parks are used by various ethnic communities and for various recreational activities. Yet, much like national, state, and city parks, Sonoma County

Regional Parks do not take into account different perceptions of nature and heritage practices such as socializing, perpetuating traditions, speaking traditional language, and melding past traditions with the present. In the surveys that I conducted, 51.98% of the participants responded that they would be more likely to use Sonoma County Regional Parks more if there were more group picnic areas.

Heritage plays an important role in how parks are used and understood. Parks that are developed based on the dominant environmental narrative do not provide facilities for heritage practices to take place. Dr. Laura Jane Smith has identified socializing as part of the heritage process (Smith 2006:41). Providing spaces for heritage practices in parks increases diversity, inclusivity, and support for parks among park users.

Conclusions: Sonoma County Regional Parks, state parks and national parks management, staff, and park planners need to re-examine their perceptions of nature and take into account cultural heritage when developing park programs, creating new parks, and/or updating existing parks. To Latinos and other ethnic communities, parks are locations that facilitate heritage practices. Providing programs that are culturally relevant and facilities that provide spaces for heritage practices to take place and establishing meaningful and lasting relationships with diverse communities will increase the following: quality of park experience, diversity, inclusivity, community support, and financial and political support

This case study adds to the growing body of research in heritage studies and environmental anthropology, exploring and analyzing the various ways in which ethnic communities use public parks, issues of diversity in various public parks (national, state, and local parks) and how to create culturally competent park organizations. This research also explores and analyzes different perceptions of nature and can be used as a guide on how to increase diversity and inclusivity in various park organizations and environmental non-profits.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

While leading an environmental field trip at Spring Lake Park, I explained to a group of enthusiastic, squirmy first-graders that we would be going on a brief hike down to Spring Lake. We meandered down the narrow trail from the Environmental Discovery Center to Spring Lake to look for animals and their habitats. We stopped occasionally to smell bay leaves, and to point out potential habitats and poison oak. Upon arriving at placid Spring Lake on that sunny day, I looked over to see a frazzled and confused group of first graders. They frantically began to ask, “Where are the playgrounds, I thought this was a park!”

Various types of parks provide visitors with different experiences, from urban parks with playgrounds and playing fields to remote state and national parks with historically significant sites and idealized representations of wilderness and nature. The common purpose of various types of parks has been to provide park visitors with an opportunity to experience nature and/or wilderness, learn how to be “American,” and avail themselves of opportunities for recreation and health. Nature in parks can be experienced either at the outskirts of a city, far from developed areas, or right smack in the middle of an urban setting. Parks are unique spaces that attempt to capture our society’s love of nature and combine this love with our heritage.

Yet, nature and parks are experienced and defined differently by various individuals depending on the individual’s cultural understanding of them. Hence, the meanings of nature and parks are subjective and change over time. “Our society’s ideas of what parks are ultimately for evolve over time along with the landscapes themselves”

(Watt 2011:2). Experiencing nature has been a dynamic cultural phenomenon that has evolved over the course of American history and was based on one dominant perception of nature, that of pristine wilderness.

Nature is a culturally and socially constructed concept. This culturally constructed concept has been based on what historian Frederick Nash terms “the wilderness cult,” a love for an untamed environment and all that is wild, a love “for an unkempt forest” (Nash 1967:47). Nature and/or wilderness have not always been praised for their beauty or as things to be experienced. Before industrialization, people feared nature. Nature was “a place of mischief, evil and the unknown.” With the expansion of industrial cities, and a desire to retreat from the daily grind, the elite turned to nature and the wild lands for an escape (Cronon 1995:72-75).

The Enlightenment mind turned to the “unkempt forest” as representative of true wilderness (Nash 1967:47). “By the mid-19th century, men began to praise what they had once found terrifying, wild and evil” (Nash 1967:47). This love was fueled by romanticized writings. According to Nash, romanticism in general implies an enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary, and mysterious. In regards to nature, Romantics preferred the wild, rejecting the fine, well-manicured gardens of places like Versailles, in favor of more unkempt places where they believed the landscapes to be the result of nature rather than man. Nature, of course, is “natural”; empty of humans and exempt from human impact, or-so the myth goes. “The cult of pristine wilderness is a cultural construction, and a relatively new one. It was born, like so many new creeds, in America” (Marris 2011:15).

The “wilderness cult” and “the Yellowstone model,” a model that is based on “setting aside pristine wilderness areas and banning all human use therein, apart from tourism” (Marris 2011:18), continue to influence the development of urban parks. This continues despite the change in demographics and a new generation of park visitors who may not seek a wilderness experience, but a playground.

Going outdoors and experiencing nature is an American passion, a passion that has been woven into our diverse and complex heritage tapestry. Parks are part of America’s cultural heritage. The citizens of the U.S. have inherited national parks as part of their heritage and national parks are often the molds upon which various types of parks are based.

Parks As Cultural Resources

The value of cultural resources is bestowed upon them by various societies, communities, scholars, tribes, neighborhoods, and ethnic communities. According to Thomas King (King 2013:3), cultural resources should be understood

as those aspects of the environment —both the physical and intangible, both natural and built —that have cultural value to a group of people [and] include those nonmaterial human social institution that help make up the environment in our heads —our social institutions, our beliefs, our accustomed practices, and our perceptions of what makes the environment culturally comfortable.

As cultural resources, all state, national, and county parks enrich their communities and contribute to the American heritage mosaic.

Parks are cultural resources; they are part of our nation’s heritage as well as places in which heritage and history are intertwined with the landscape. Parks are the stage on which layers of history, sacred spaces, and living heritage intertwine and mold into a diverse mosaic of values. The cultural values, various cultural usages of parks, and

the various layers of history in local, state, and national parks can be overlooked due to the romanticization of nature and wilderness.

National parks, California state parks, and Sonoma County parks are byproducts of the romanticization of nature and those running them have a sincere desire to increase diversity and inclusivity in parks. For the purpose of this thesis, inclusivity refers to a parks agency's ability to provide programs that resonate with various audiences, provide infrastructure to accommodate various cultural uses of the park, and provide interpretive programs and signs in various languages. Yet, various studies show that national and state parks are predominantly used by Caucasians (Johnson 2013; Le 2012:15; Lovitt 2011; Peterson 2014). Lovitt (2011) reviewed *The National Park System Comprehensive Survey of the American Public*, conducted by the national parks system and the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center at the University of Wyoming, and quoted them as follows: “Despite efforts by the National Park Service and its partners to engage underserved populations,” wrote the researchers, “visitation differences by race/ethnic group seem not to have changed much over the past decade.” Parks that do have facilities to engage underserved populations are not keeping up with demand, e.g., Ragle Ranch and Spring Lake Park in Sonoma County. (See maps, Appendix C.) Ragle Ranch is one of Sonoma County Regional Parks’ most popular parks. Although it does have group picnic areas, as an employee I often saw Latino families move tables to create larger picnic areas to accommodate their groups. At Spring Lake Park, different South East Asian families often approached me to settle disputes about who got to picnic area first. New parks are not being designed to accommodate and/or address the need to provide sufficiently large spaces for socializing and celebrating.

Using nature as a setting to celebrate and socialize is not a new cultural phenomenon. Planning that includes how various communities use and experience nature requires a new and holistic perspective on park usage by ethnic communities. In an effort to create an inclusive and diverse environment that helps park organizations achieve their goals of increasing their use by people of color, it is important to understand those communities' cultural heritage, perceptions of nature, and use of the outdoors. Marketing the parks and incorporating programs that are culturally relevant to these communities helps foster appreciation and a sense of place in parks, that is, a sense of familiarity associated with memories of time spent there. This cannot be done unless organizations have an understanding of the communities' heritage. Dialogue about diversity and inclusivity can be difficult due to cultural differences between park management and park users, institutionalized expectations of park usage, and fragmented relationships between ethnic communities and park management.

In order for national, state, and local parks to stay open and receive financial, political, and community support, park management must become aware of different perceptions of nature and different uses of parks by various communities and begin to cultivate a culture of inclusivity within their park agencies. In order to be culturally competent, park organizations need to collaborate, engage with, and establish long-lasting relationship with communities of color. Taking into account peoples' cultural heritage increases success when attempting to become a diverse organization. Park management needs to be aware of the cultural differences that exist among ethnic communities and develop management plans that incorporate visitors' cultural heritage.

Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of my thesis is to improve communication and conduct a two-way dialogue between Sonoma County Regional Parks and the Latino community. I do this by providing information based on my research that will inform management and staff about the Latino community's perceptions of nature, use of parks, and cultural heritage. This information will provide tools and resources to facilitate the ability to be more effective and inclusive as a park agency. I also provide recommendations on how to engage the Latino community through community outreach, establishing and fostering relationships, connecting with Latino community leaders (formal and informal), and partnering with local environmental organizations, social services, and health services. In my thesis, I explore and discuss how common perceptions of nature have historically morphed, and how cultural heritage is expressed in the outdoors and links communities to parks. Some examples of cultural heritage are socializing, celebrations, creating memories, eating together, and linking past memories with the outdoors. Marketing the parks and incorporating programs that are culturally relevant helps foster appreciation and sense of place in parks among ethnic communities.

This thesis adds to the existing research on the park usage preferences of ethnic communities and provides examples of the value of acknowledging the importance of heritage expressions in the outdoors that are not science or conservation based, and provides an opportunity for park organizations to see parks through the lens of the Latino community of Sonoma County. This conversation will provide insight into the importance of heritage expression in the outdoors. This thesis focuses on the Latino community of Sonoma County and I provide examples on how the expression of Latino

heritage is perpetuated and maintained in parks. I also discuss the importance of creating a cultural bridge between the Latino community and Sonoma County Regional Parks (SCRP). A cultural bridge in this thesis refers to the intention to reconcile and/or form a connection between two communities and/or organizations, in this case, Sonoma County Regional Parks and the Latino community. Although I predominantly focus on the Latino community, my research and methods can be used to reach out to other ethnic communities and used by other park organizations and/or environmental non-profits that wish to increase the diversity of their visitors and provide quality outdoor experiences. I draw on interviews, observations that I have made while working in Sonoma County parks, observations of Spanish-language outdoor programs, and the efforts of Sonoma County Regional Parks to engage with the Latino Community. One quarter of our population is Latino, and this segment of the population uses and values Sonoma County Regional Parks, a fact that should not go unrecognized by park planners and managers.

I begin with a literature review exploring how traditional perceptions of nature have been constructed, commodified, understood, and romanticized in America. I discuss how Americans' perceptions and cultural understandings of nature influenced and were woven into the development and management of national parks. Parks are the byproduct of America's love of nature. Parks fueled the conservation movement by protecting land to create national and state parks. Some urban parks were also tools for social reform, for example, Central Park in New York. In discussing the issues and social norms that were broken in the nineteenth century with the establishment of Central Park, we begin to see that a hundred years later, some of the same issues remain. These are examples of how

cultural understandings about how to experience and use parks conflict among certain segments of a population.

I compare the usage of parks by Latinos, African Americans, and Asians based on research done in Chicago at Lincoln Park. In addition, I discuss some of the cultural barriers to using the outdoors among the Latino community and other people of color and how this affects the lack of diversity in national parks, which I believe can be resolved by understanding a community's heritage and how they enjoy the outdoors. In this section, I describe a case study in Australia as an example of how western perceptions of nature, using the Yellowstone model, have ignited the development of national parks in foreign countries with lots of land where the local people have limited rights.

I also provide examples of heritage, how it is expressed, and how the places and/or parks where it is expressed are tools that facilitate heritage practices. In this section, I draw upon a case study on the Waayni women of Australia to provide insight on how socializing is part of heritage (Smith 2006). I also provide a case study that explores heritage in parks and how national park rangers collaborate with a Hindu community at Gateway National Park in Queens, New York, to sustain heritage expression in parks and maintain a sensitive ocean habitat. This is a great example of what happens when heritage and conservation collide and how park staff can respond with outreach and community engagement. I also begin to discuss how to create a cultural bridge between the Latino community and Sonoma County Regional Parks, what this means, and what it looks like.

In Chapter Three, I introduce Andy's Unity Park as an example of many of the issues I am addressing in this thesis as they manifest here in Sonoma County. In this

chapter I provide background information as to why, after the tragic death of Andy Lopez, this space is now a park. Andy's Unity Park serves as an example of the importance of community engagement and emphasizes the importance of two-way dialogue between the Moorland neighborhood residents and Sonoma County Regional Parks.

Chapter Four, Methods, describes how I conducted my research in order to gather information to inform management and staff of Sonoma County Regional Parks about the Latino community's perceptions of nature, use of parks, and cultural heritage. This information will provide tools and resources to facilitate the ability to be more effective and inclusive as a park agency

Chapter Five, Findings and Discussion, presents the results of my participant observations survey and interviews with various Latino/as on their perceptions of nature and how this influences how they use parks, and an analysis of these findings; I also compare the data I gathered with similar research conducted in Chicago regarding Lincoln Park.

In Chapter Six, I present recommendations for a Community Engagement Plan. This plan can be used by various park and environmental organizations serving different under-represented communities.

In my final chapter, Conclusions, I present an overview of what I learned and make suggestions for future research.

Parks and other natural landscapes have implicit values and history to those who use them. These values are not unique or specific to the Latino community. My research is relevant to other under-represented communities but my focus is the Latino

community. As a Mexican-American, I have cultural membership in this community and have cultural insights that facilitate my research. My thesis will contribute to ongoing discussions of diversity and inclusivity in parks, Latinos in the outdoors, and understanding how the expression of heritage is a bridge between community and nature.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Creating the Dominant Environmental Narrative

The purpose of parks and the history of parks are influenced by our cultural understanding of nature. Parks are more than beautiful landscapes, places to escape the hustle and bustle of cities, and places to recreate. They contain layers of natural history, human history, sacred spaces, and heritage. These fluid places continue to be part of a continuum of cultural resources for various communities. Parks provide a place for communities to sustain and perpetuate cultural traditions.

There has been a growing movement within park and environmental organizations to increase diversity in their establishments. This includes park visitors and staff. However, this incorporation “has in the past resulted in the sometime unintentional desecration of sacred sites, a situation of non-cooperation, and, at times, outright confrontation” (Mulvaney 1999:38). This, I believe, is due to the fact that many environmental organizations promote an antiquated perspective of nature, a perspective that values a landscape devoid of humans and cherished for its bucolic qualities. These confrontations are also due to a lack of accord on various understandings of nature, enforcement of regulations that dictate how individuals should use these spaces, and the unintentional creation of cultural barriers that deny minority communities opportunities to create a sense of place within them. In order to stay relevant, parks must provide a space for various communities to create a sense of place.

Parks are physical spaces; generally, they are considered to have no meaning until they are valued by people and the surrounding communities. To think of parks as places

with intrinsic value, “an area in the world [with] a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment—as a place—is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures” (Cresswell 2004:11).

To create park management plans that perpetuate inclusivity and diversity and accommodate living heritage, park organizations must redefine their understanding of nature and re-think their traditional approach to “appropriate recreation” by being mindful of the various cultural uses of parks. Currently state parks, national parks, and local environmental organizations in Sonoma County have not been successful in creating a diverse and inclusive environment that attracts the use of their spaces by ethnic communities. This is due to an incomplete cultural understanding of ethnic communities and their cultural perceptions of nature. This concept and cultural understanding of pristine wilderness is also a byproduct of the dominant environmental narrative and support for natural heritage over cultural heritage. Support for a pristine wilderness began with the removal of Native Americans to develop what are now national parks, and according to Ken Burns (2009), “America’s best idea.” Western views and understanding of wilderness are so influential that they have spread globally and led to the displacement of indigenous communities around the world for the sake of bio-diversity and wilderness.

When one perceives humanity to be something separate from nature it becomes easier to regard landscapes in the “natural state” as landscapes without human inhabitants and aspire to preserve wilderness by encouraging the existence of survival in landscape of as many species as possible, minus one –humans [Dowie 2009:21].

Eighteenth-Century Understanding of Wilderness. A popular understanding in the dominant environmental narrative of what wilderness is, and how nature is perceived to be, is constructed and influenced by the views of eighteenth-century Western men

(Finney 2014:3). These Western views place a higher value on the conservation of a perceived wilderness than on human-made landscapes and the creation of place in nature. In “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” (Cronon 1995), environmental historian William Cronon describes wilderness as a byproduct of civilization. In early European and American history, wilderness was not an experience. Wilderness was described as space outside of cities, devoid of human impact. It was a hostile, scary, “barren” place where evil spirits roamed and individuals could lose their good judgment (Cronon 1995:70). In its raw state, wilderness had nothing to offer society (Cronon 1995:70). Wilderness had to be molded and tamed into land suitable for farming and inhabiting. Wilderness “has implied chaos, Eros, the unknown, realms of taboo, the habitat of both the ecstatic and the demonic [and] is a place of archetypal power, teaching, and challenge” (Snyder 1990:16).

In the eighteenth century, wilderness had very negative associations attached to it. “To be wilderness then was to be ‘deserted,’ ‘savage,’ ‘barren’—in short, a ‘waste,’ the word’s nearest synonym. Its connotations were anything but positive, and the emotion one was most likely to feel in its presence was . . . ‘terror’” (Cronon 1995:70). Being outside the realms of society, wilderness was a place to be tamed via civilization and settlement.

Wilderness has been seen both as a source of never-ending natural resources and a fearsome place.

Wilderness has been seen throughout Western history as a source both of inexhaustible resources and real peril, a domain of mushrooms and monsters, timber and timber wolves. . . . European colonizers preferred towns and fields, where things were altogether safer, and they thought it progress when the land claimed for civilization expanded and savage nature shrunk [Marris 2011:18].

Wilderness and the Industrial Era. With the expansion of industrialization and agriculture, city dwellers began romanticize nature as a place to get away from dirty, grimy cities as well as people. “By fleeing to the outer margins of settled land and society—so the story ran—an individual could escape the confining strictures of civilized life” (Cronon 1995:77). Wilderness became more and more docile with the development of industrial cities. Nostalgia for less developed spaces and slow-paced days led to a change in our cultural views of wilderness and nature. Society began to view nature as pure, sublime, and romantic: “It wasn’t until societies attained a little safety, prosperity, and leisure that nature in its wildest forms began to be seen rather romantic” (Marris 2011:18).

Creating the Dominant Environmental Narrative. Romanticized writings by John Muir came to influence Americans’ cultural views of nature as a place to connect to God, rather than to fellow humans. Wilderness was understood as natural, untouched by people, aesthetically pleasing, sublime; hence associated with God (Nash 2001). Wilderness was permeated with Judeo-Christian tradition. “Moreover, they accorded wilderness, as pure nature, special importance as the clearest medium through which God showed His power and Excellency” (Nash 2001:46). The ideology of wilderness as sublime and associated with God was at the foundation of pioneer conservationist John Muir’s beliefs.

Muir, a forefather of the American conservation movement, argued that “wilderness” should be cleared of all inhabitants and set aside to satisfy the urban human’s need for recreation and spiritual renewal. It was a sentiment that eventually became national policy in the language of the 1964 Wilderness Act, which defined

wilderness as a place “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain, completely ignoring centuries of benign human presence” (Dowie 2005:177). Muir’s ideology of nature as a sublime place implores individuals to behave as though in a church, quiet, attentive, and respectful. Yet other traditions see these spaces as places to dance, sing, socialize, and connect with other people, places to perpetuate their culture, and reinforce their heritage. These attitudes and activities contradict the original historical intent for parks and or other green spaces.

Muir did encounter Native Americans in his travels and found them to be “dirty” and out of place:

Muir continually contrasted Indians with wilderness, writing of them as polar opposites of the pristine lands in which he found them. Indian women, writing of one, particularly appalled him: “Her dress was calico rags, far from clean. In every way she seemed sadly unlike Nature’s neat well-dressed animal, though living like them on the bounty of the wilderness” [Merchant 2003:382].

Artists have also helped spread the myth of a pristine landscape in Yosemite National Park. The famous photographer Ansel Adams purposely avoided taking pictures of Miwok in Yosemite to give the impression of a “pristine nature” (Dowie 2009:16). Adams’s photography is still used today to represent the beauty of a “pristine nature,” uninhabited by humans. This myth of an authentic landscape without humans justified the removal of Native Americans from some of America’s most iconic national parks such as Yosemite and Yellowstone. “The removal of Indians to create an ‘uninhabited wilderness’—uninhabited as never before in human history of the place—reminds us just how invented, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is” (Merchant 2003:282). Although there is Native American interpretation at these parks, the history of

Native Americans is not the draw to these parks. It's the charismatic mega fauna, the mind-blowing geology of these parks, and the sense of an untouched wilderness.

In the course of 'preserving the commons for all of the people,' a frequently stated mission of national parks and protected areas, one class or culture of people, one philosophy of nature, one world view, and one creation myth has almost always been preferred over all others [Dowie 2009:15].

Emphasizing nature and wilderness among parks and environmental organizations also perpetuates the notion of Native Americans as extinct beings.

California Indians are commonly perceived by the denizens of the Golden State to be historical anachronisms . . . this perception is fueled by the widespread untruth that most, if not all, of the "real" Indians suffered extinction in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries following the entanglements of the Franciscan missionaries, Russian fur traders, Mexican ranchers, and Anglo-American settlers [Lightfoot and Parrish 2009:2].

However, the creation of these landscapes "reminds us just how constructed, the American wilderness really is . . . a product of the very history it seeks to deny" (Cronon 1996:79).

Frederick Olmsted, recognized as the founder of American landscape architecture and renowned for the design of famous city and national parks such as Central Park, and Yosemite, designed trails and parks for people with the notion of physical and mental health in mind. Olmsted designed Yosemite's Valley Trail to enhance visitor's nature experience and gave the illusion of an un-manicured landscape (<http://www.nps.gov/frla.index.htm>). He was renowned for his acute attention to nature and hiding human impact on the landscape; "he [Olmsted] proposed paths and prospects to shape visitors' experience of Yosemite by directing their movement and gaze" (Whiston-Spirn 1996:93). The tailoring of trails to intensify visitors' experience with

nature rejects the notion of visiting beautiful parks and spaces to socialize with others. Parks and preserves were not designed to inspire people to socialize with one another, but rather to connect with nature and, according to Muir, God. However, Olmsted wanted parks to offer more than a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of cities. Parks also enhanced the health of individuals: “Olmsted was convinced that the benefits of parks were physical, mental, and moral effects, particularly if it occurred in connection with relief from ordinary cares, change of air and change of habits” (Whiston-Spirm 1996:93).

Whose habits and moral behavior was Olmsted trying to modify? One answer lies in the creation of one of his most famous parks, Central Park in New York. Exploring the history of what took place in nineteenth-century Central Park reinforces two things: first, the notion that parks are a byproduct of the romantic era, and second, that the romanticization of nature permeates park policies, rules, and regulations. Examples of the latter include requirements for sitting in designated areas and quietly experiencing nature. In addition, the romanticization of nature and the various regulations that reinforce the dominant environmental narrative are subtle forms of banning the practice of heritage expression in parks.

Social Reform through Parks: Reinforcing “the Dominant Environmental Narrative”. The creation of Central Park displaced various communities living in the space it came to occupy.

The eviction of New Yorkers in the 1850s also foreshadowed the later dispossession of Native Americans from wilderness areas that became Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Parks. It also anticipated the removal of local people from long-settled African, Latin American, and Asian landscapes now reclassified as wild [Fisher 2011:28].

In the mid- to late 1800s, New York City was a very industrial city that was inhabited largely by the elite, the poor, and recent and older immigrants. Romanticized notions of nature fueled the idea that nature was healing. “It was wide spread belief in the nineteenth century that sending slum children to the country would improve their souls” (Starr 2004:72).

New York City needed social order and the lower class needed role models to teach them how to behave (Starr 1984:68). This was reflected in Olmsted’s very Victorian created spaces. According to author Roger Starr (Starr 1984:68), the motives behind Olmsted’s creation of Central Park were to bring order among the lower classes, and to bring a sense of joy and relaxation among the middle and upper classes. Central Park was “the crucial instrument, in the imposition of moral order on the city’s disorganized poor” (Starr 1984:68). Olmsted believed that to gain the benefits of nature, you must enjoy it quietly. The cultural notion that experiencing nature quietly is the most appropriate way to experience it echoes Muir’s glorification of nature as a sublime place. “Olmsted believed that nature was most regenerative if experienced quietly, contemplatively, and through the eye” (Fischer 2011:29). When Central Park opened and attempted to create an environment that represented Olmsted’s vision of experiencing nature, Central Park became a contested place.

In order for visitors to properly enjoy nature, rules were posted: “No walking or grazing of animals on the grass, no fishing or swimming in the park, no picking flowers, no sports and no music on the Christian Sabbath: these rules were enforced by ‘sparrow cops’” (Fisher 2011:29). Not everyone enjoyed the park after it was opened. This newly created landscape was too far from the areas reachable by certain sections of the working

class. The working class and immigrant communities who did begin to use this space treated Central park like the rest of the city—as a public space. “Despite the distance and the rules, during the last third of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of rank-and-file New Yorkers appropriated Central park, making it their *own*... working-class and immigrant New Yorkers transformed their park into a public space more like the rest of the city” (Fisher 2011:290.)

Immigrant communities in nineteenth century New York used the park in a fashion that contradicted Olmsted’s intentions for his very Victorian created space.

The difference is that marginalized New Yorkers often enjoyed nature in ways that Olmsted and his contemporaries found unfamiliar and to some it was offensive: they drank lager in beer gardens, they swam and played outdoor sports, they spoke foreign languages, they picnicked on the grass, they listened to music-and they did all of this on Sunday, a day that Americans felt should be devoted to indoor prayer and *quite* leisure befitting he the Lords Day” [Fisher 2011:29].

Controversy of over the activities that took place in large urban parks was not unique to Central Park. In 1895, German polkas were banned in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The banning of polka music was based

on the grounds that they were undignified, overly stimulating, and associated with dancing. By contrast classical music was edifying, though the demand for popular music led to a compromise: light music composed of popular version of more classical tunes” [The *San Francisco Examiner*, as cited in Cranz 1992:10].

Perpetuating the Dominant Environmental Narrative. Both Central Park and Golden Gate Park in San Francisco provide us with a historical perspective of how various communities’ heritage practices were banned in the nineteenth century. Over a century later, how we behave in nature and our choice of recreational activities continue to be topics of discussion and at times controversial issues among local, state, and

national parks. Can, or should, the rules be bent to make parks more culturally inclusive? How people behave and how people recreate culturally is a continuous issue because it continues to create barriers among park organizations, conservationists, scientists, and communities. The creation of Central Park not only reinforced traditional understandings of nature, but also attempted to reform and/or assimilate poor and immigrant communities so that they would practice what was then understood as the appropriate manner to enjoy parks. In the case of nineteenth century Central Park and Golden Gate National Park, German, Italian, and other groups' heritage expressions were banned and or restricted in these parks. Such regulations denied those communities a sense of place and of inclusivity. Singing, playing polka music, and enjoying parks on a Sunday are all example of how communities sustain their heritage and pass down traditions outdoors in parks. Perpetuating the "dominant environmental narrative" and lacking awareness of the cultural heritage practices that take place in parks also contribute to the lack of diversity in parks.

National parks have been the most vocal about their lack of diversity among park-goers. In 1962, The National Park Service first began to worry about diversity "when the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission realized that minorities visited national parks and forests at much lower rates than did whites" (Peterson 2014:12-13). Unfortunately for national parks, this continues to be the case. In a survey conducted by the National Park Service in 2011, "Hispanics accounted for fewer than 10 percent, of American visitors. Black made up just seven percent, Asian-Americans three percent and Natives one percent" (Peterson 2014:12).

When discussing diversity, it should be noted that inclusivity is part of diversity. If an organization wants to be diverse, it must be inclusive. In the case of national parks, inclusivity requires representing the history of various communities, accommodating various age groups, and providing different experiences in nature in addition to hiking and camping. As one national park employee expressed it, “The agency needs to figure out how to appeal to what people need, more deeply than just what kind of facilities (it provides)” (in Peterson 2014:15). In efforts to promote inclusivity, parks are providing visitors with “interpretive programs that encourage people to participate and that describe historical events from the perspective of all involved, instead of solely presenting Anglo-centric stories” (Peterson 2014:15).

Representing the stories of various communities, engaging different communities, and providing access to national parks is just the beginning. An employee at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area who works with youth stated, “If you think about why park visitors aren’t diverse, awareness and transportation are small factors. We’re missing the big stuff —why is a national park important to me, my family, my future? Go out and listen to what matters to community members then connect those concerns back to the park” (in Peterson 2014:17) Understanding the importance of heritage and the role it plays in engaging various communities to parks will also contribute to a more diverse park organization.

Social Values versus Biological Values. Perpetuating the dominant environmental narrative has helped the conservation movement and attempts to re-create wilderness in national parks (Marris 2011:24) and/or restore nature. Restoring nature “is an attempt to bring these human dimensions of restoration to the forefront” (Gobster 2000:1). The

conservation movement focuses on restoring and/or conserving nature but fails to see the social value of creating inclusive spaces in parks. As a long-time employee of Sonoma County Parks, I have often heard well-intended colleagues discuss ways to teach the public to use the parks in order to provide a “natural experience” and have very little impact on the wildlife. The problem is that not everyone experiences or perceives nature in the same fashion. Providing the public with scientific facts will not change the way people use parks and/or experience nature.

In the early 1900s in Central Park, there were issues revolving around the way immigrants and/or poor folk used the park (Fischer 2011). How people use parks is still an issue, but there is also controversy about the conservation of nature for the sake of natural resources. In 1997 there was controversy over the management of a 7,000-acre prairie in Chicago. The National Forest Service was going to cut down existing eucalyptus trees and plant native grasses in an attempt to recreate the “oak savannah and tall grass prairie conditions that existed in Chicago region before European settlement” (Gobster 2000:3). This, however, did not go well with local residents who enjoyed the shade of the trees in the summer and had strong emotional and social ties to the landscape, and felt that the restoration was destructive (Gobster 2000). The National Forest Service felt that once the public was informed and educated it would understand the benefits of the restoration and favor the change; “Informed people will not resist” (Gobster 2000:9). They learned that informed people *will* resist! “Although the controversy has raised important biological and ecological issues, the pivotal issues have been social ones, exposing questions that are usually ignored or downplayed by researchers and managers dealing with ecological restoration and natural area

management” (Gobster 2000:1). Park staff, natural resources managers, and park rangers may all attempt to enforce rules and teach the public how to use the parks, experience nature, and value the biodiversity found in parks, but they are often failing at recognizing the multiple ways to experience nature and how other communities value natural resources. Part of diversity is recognizing our differences and finding ways to work together to achieve a common goal. In this case, that goal would be to experience nature as we culturally understand nature.

America’s Natural Heritage: National Parks. Historian Alfred Runte said, “Cultural insecurity was the motivation behind the creation of National Parks (Runte 1987:28).” Parks are part of America’s heritage and national parks solidify and perpetuate the love of nature as part of our past and present heritage. The United States of America is a very young nation. In its infancy, America had very little culture to compare and praise to other European nations. According to Runte, the development of national parks and the conservation of scenic beauty were to America what the castles and ancient cities in Europe were to Europeans.

For the first time in almost a century, Americans argued with confidence that the United States had something of value in its own right to contribute to world culture. Although Europe’s castles, ruins and abbeys, would never be eclipsed, the United States had ‘earth monuments’ and giant redwoods that had stood long before the birth of Christ [Runte 1987:22].

Hence, Americas natural wonders of the west compensated for the lack of “old cities, aristocratic traditions, and similar reminders of Old World accomplishments” (Runte 1987:22). The scenic beauty of what are now Yosemite, Yellowstone, Glacier, Olympia, and other national parks came to represent America’s cultural heritage.

Conclusion. In an effort to preserve nature, park policies often dismiss thousands of years of human history, perpetuating the myth of pristine nature and ignoring hundreds of years of complex human history that occurred on the landscapes. Park management unintentionally ignores how humans and our heritage are intricately woven in with nature. In addition, the myth of a pristine nature neglects how humans contribute to biodiversity. Nature and culture are not stagnant. Nature and culture change due to natural processes or socio-cultural shifts. Our cultural understanding of nature has been influenced by different cultural ideologies throughout American history. In some cases, various ethnic communities' use of parks and the outdoors contradicts or is not represented within the dominant environmental narrative.

The dominant environmental narrative in the United States is primarily constructed and informed by white, Western European, or European American, voices. This narrative not only shapes the way the natural environment is represented, constructed and perceived in our everyday lives, but informs our national identity as well [Finney 2014:3].

Wealthy stakeholders who have both financial and political influence on how nature may be culturally experienced hold these Western European perceptions of nature.

To understand how perceptions of nature have changed, how nature became something to be experienced and consumed, we must look at the how our cultural understandings of nature have shifted throughout history. Environmental historians have discussed the popular understanding of pristine nature as a socially and culturally constructed concept (Cronon 1996). This popular belief about nature influences how parks and green spaces are planned and managed. The management and planning of parks and preserves, in turn, influences how we recreate and how we behave in these created landscapes. Various communities view, understand, and experience nature differently

than is preferred within the dominant environmental narrative. State and national parks have been successful at catering to the dominant environmental narrative, and this in turn influences how we think other communities *should* recreate, experience, and value the outdoors. Various ethnic communities value parks, but also seek a social experience in nature. Different communities have different relationships with the outdoor environment and use parks in a manner that accommodates their cultural values.

John Muir and Frederick Olmsted were influential twentieth century men who have influenced Americans' behavior in nature, promoting the notion that understanding that people were separate from nature and creating a sense of exclusion among minorities who had different understandings of the relationship between humans and nature/parks. Olmsted's parks attempted to bring social order to urban areas and Muir's glorification of Yosemite and the Sierras reflects the notion of pristine wilderness. Geographically, Yosemite and the Sierra Mountains fulfilled the characteristics of wilderness. Past understandings of wilderness held that it was remote, unsettled, hard to get to, away from people, away from civilization, and beautiful. "Their scenery was sublime or beautiful, their geology unique, their wild condition a fragment of the past" (Miles 2009:3). These perceptions of wilderness are still common among park management and promote getting away from cities to experience a wilderness that does not exist. In addition, many of our iconic national parks, which were created on the notion of pristine wilderness, are outside of the city limits or on the outskirts of cities, often far away from people, hence limiting access to segments of the population who live in barrios near the centers of cities. In addition, past perceptions of nature and/or wilderness fail to recognize the social value

that parks have, social values that can be manifested in various forms of cultural heritage expression.

Heritage Expression in the Outdoors: A Socio-Cultural Process

Natural Heritage versus Cultural Heritage. Politically and financially, Western nations like Australia and the United States give priority to natural or “wild” landscapes over the cultural activities or the layers of cultural values that exist within parks or conserved landscapes (Dowie 2009). The political and financial movements that take place to keep these landscapes, parks, and wildlife refuges as free as possible from human intervention reflect the valuation of one type of heritage: natural heritage, as expressed through conservation. Even though park organizations may strive for a balance between accommodating cultural heritage and conservation, conservation always comes out ahead. Lowenthal, a well-known environmental historian and geographer known for his work in heritage and landscapes, stated, “There is a marked sense that nature is superior to culture . . . even though the idea of the possibility of ‘pristine wilderness’ is understood to be non-existent, there still exist the implication that ‘nature is perfect and culture is a nuisance” (Lowenthal as cited in Smith 2006:49). This is what fuels the prioritization of natural heritage. According to Lowenthal, natural heritage “compromises the lands and seas we inhabit and exploit, the soil, plants and animals that constitute the world’s ecosystems, the water we drink, the very air we breath” (Lowenthal 2005:82). Valuing both cultural heritage and natural heritage has the effect of maintaining and perpetuating legacies; both cultural and natural heritage are based on moral merit and are dependent on a communal values, yet they are supported differently—culturally, politically, and

financially. Therefore, nature and culture are often treated as two separate issues even though they depend on one another for their prosperity.

Parks provide a unique perspective that helps our understanding of society. “[Parks] are an excellent example of how social forces shape and are shaped by the physical world. Social, economic, political, and psychological processes influenced park location, size, shape and composition, equipment and landscaping” (Cranz 1992:xii). All of these factors and characteristics go into developing parks that reinforce the dominant environmental narrative. As park organizations attempt to become more inclusive and diverse, they need to begin to take into account the significance of heritage and how heritage links communities to parks. Nineteenth-century parks or “pleasure grounds,” as referred to by Cranz, provided city dwellers with “pieces of the country, with fresh air, meadows, lakes, and sunshine in the city” (Cranz 1992:5). Currently, parks provide a slice of the country and much more. Parks also provide a space where heritage practices can take place.

Forms of Heritage. For the purpose of my thesis, I define heritage as a socio-cultural process that includes learned and shared behaviors that perpetuate communities’ culture and cultural practices. It includes, but is not limited to, socializing, language, memories, music, dance and place making, i.e., connecting with a place that makes individuals feel welcome and safe and part of a community associated with that place. My definition derives from archaeologist Dr. Smith, who suggests that heritage “is a cultural process that engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and the sites themselves are cultural tools that can facilitate, but are not necessarily vital for, this process” (Smith 2006:44). One

individual does not carry out heritage. Therefore, heritage is a social process where communities and sub-groups are the key instruments that link the past to the present via tangible and intangible elements. Examples of tangible and intangible heritage are all things that are valuable to communities and/or ethnic groups that are experienced, believed, held sacred, and practiced. Intangible heritage includes passing on of memories, celebrations, song, dance, rituals, prayers, and socializing. It is the use of the sites and places that assist in the maintaining and perpetuation of heritage, not the mere fact that the place or site exists. According to Smith, socializing is “knitting together a sense of community” and without community we cannot have heritage (Smith 2006:47).

Tangible heritage includes places and things that have historical, national, and/or cultural value. Tangible heritage has commonly been determined by the “authorized heritage discourse.” The authorized heritage discourse (AHD) focuses attention on aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, place, and/or landscapes that current generation “must” care for, protect, and revere so that they may be passed on to future generations for their “education,” and to forge a sense of common identity based on the past (Smith 2006:29). The AHD is upheld by museum curators and/or professionals who have gone to school to learn to conserve and protect heritage. The issue with authorized heritage discourse is that history is subjective, and in the case of indigenous people in parks, represented and defined by the dominant culture. Historical buildings, structures, and places can also be determined by AHD.

Heritage: Melding Past and Present. Many traditions change and the ways in which they are carried out change, yet some do not. Here is where the complexity lies, in the melding of past and present. Communities can allow for adaptation while maintaining

significant cultural practices of the past. Heritage changes from generation to generation. Heritage practices may also be changed due to changes in social paradigms and the physical environment. These changes influence accessibility to space and place. These factors, therefore, make culture and the intangible aspects of heritage (memories, songs, language and dances) dynamic and complex, morphing with time and with each new generation. Heritage incorporates the interplay and role of traditions and is something that happens over time and changes with different generations. The passing down of traditions also reinforces cultural identity. Heritage is “an essential dimension in the formation of various forms of socio-political identity” (Jackson 2008:372).

Heritage as a Socio-Cultural Process: The Case Study of the Waanyi Women's History Project. The Waanyi Women's History Project (TWWHP) is a great example of heritage as a socio-cultural process and how valuable place making can be in places that are becoming national parks. TWWHP took place in Queensland, Australia, along the borders of Boodjamulla National Park when the park was moving towards joint management between the Waanyi community and the Queensland Parks. Many of the Waanyi cultural heritage sites were within the Boodjamulla park boundaries. The goal of this project was to incorporate the Waanyi's women's voice into the land management agenda. “The women considered that as women, their concerns had not been given adequate attention or legitimacy by governmental land management agencies” (Smith 2006:45). Smith and her colleague were trained heritage archaeologists and as archaeologists they were going to record Waanyi women's sites (Smith 2006:45). Much of the time was spent “recording oral histories and these [oral histories], rather than the site recordings, became a central feature of the project” (Smith 2006:46). To Smith's

surprise, as the project unfolded it became evident that telling and recording these stories in what the Waanyi women identified as their cultural territory rather than over a table “was for the women, an act of heritage management, as this heritage was being recorded and preserved as recordings” (Smith 2006:46). The practice of perpetuating heritage was also being conducted; by “passing on histories and traditions to the younger Waanyi women who were present, the project itself became an act of heritage” (Smith 2006:45). Although the sites were “intrinsically important to the women, it was the *use of* these sites that made them heritage, not the mere fact of their existence” (Smith 2006:46).

Many of the women involved in the project did not live near the Boodjamuylla National park and had to be flown in. Hence, just being in their cultural landscape provided a sense of heritage. “For the women, simply being in their cultural landscape, being ‘in country’ was to experience a sense of heritage” (Smith 2006:47). The women got to socialize, fish, and tell stories with women whom they had known since they were girls, but had not seen for a long time. Socializing is as much a part of heritage as is the site itself where the socializing takes place. Socializing with friends is an example of heritage, and an example of knitting together a sense of community (Smith 2006). Although sometimes frayed by geographical separation, being in a place that symbolized certain cultural values and meaning was politically charged and important to the Waanyi women.

According to Smith, heritage is understood as “something that is done”; heritage encompasses “a range of activities that include remembering, commemorating, communicating and passing on knowledge and memories, asserting and expressing identity and social and cultural values and meanings” (Smith 2006:83). In focusing on the

intangible aspects of heritage, management is better when it comes from within the community itself rather than from an outside agency. Cultural heritage is such a powerful part of ethnic communities that it manages to stay alive through intangible heritage, although it may not be equally represented in museums and/or by those authorized to do so. Instead, it is the landscape that is conserved as heritage rather than the cultural practices that take place or are retained by using the land.

Challenging Western Perceptions of Nature. There has been a large movement for the incorporation of indigenous people in the management of national parks. However, this incorporation “has in the past resulted in the sometime unintentional desecration of sacred sites, a situation of non-cooperation, and, at times, outright confrontation” (Mulvaney 1999:38). The cultural understanding of a landscape being most desirable in its natural state without humans is fueled by the romanticization of nature and is still common among some environmentalists and park managers. It is institutionalized in the development of national parks and designation of areas for conservation purposes. Although environmentalists are now incorporating traditional environmental knowledge into their work, there is still the belief that in order for our environment to *heal* and *prosper* and be bio-diverse, no human should inhabit land that has been defined as bio-diverse. “In the course of ‘preserving the commons for all of the people,’ a frequently stated mission of national parks and protected areas, one class or culture of people, one philosophy of nature, one world view, and one creation myth has almost always been preferred over all others” (Dowie 2009:15). Americans and Europeans have focused on conserving land in areas where certain stakeholders’ values are observed to perpetuate the dominant environmental narrative. “Americans and Europeans from the very beginning

of the “wilderness cult” days made it their business to push for nature preservation in other countries, [based] on the Yellowstone model. Countries with lots of land inhabited by few people—or by people with few rights—begin their own national parks” (Marris 2011:25). With much scientific support showing the benefit of conserving land for its biodiversity and sparing it from human development, Westerners opened up parks in Canada, New Zealand, several African countries, and Australia (Marris 2011:25). Since the 1980s, science and biodiversity have been used to justify removing the people that made the landscape diverse in the first place.

Natural Heritage Versus Cultural Heritage: A Case Study In Kakadu National Park, Australia. In an article about the involvement in site management within Northern Territory National Parks, Australia, Mulvaney discusses and analyzes social and cultural circumstance of Aboriginal sacred sites and the cultural gap between Aboriginal understanding of land and park management’s understanding of nature in Kakadu National Park, Australia (Mulvaney1999).

Western ideologies of nature exclude humans and history from the romanticized ideology of a “pristine nature.” Kakadu National Park oozes with history and intrinsic values that can be invisible to the non-Aborigine. Among Aborigines, and various other indigenous communities, land is not understood as a privately owned property. Landscapes hold implicit values and cultural significance that extend beyond aesthetics; “people clearly identify with particular tracts of country, associate with certain features and places within landscape, and hold to a notion of inheritance of cultural knowledge and estates” (Mulvaney 1999:41). Within Kakadu National Parks there are sacred sites that are religiously significant and are contiguous with Aboriginal Dreaming sites. Sacred

sites as understood by Mulvaney are Dreaming sites and other places of cultural significance (Mulvaney 1999:41. “For Aboriginal Australians, the landscape is viewed as an amalgam of events acted out on the topography” (Mulvaney 1999:41); hence the acquisition of cultural knowledge and traditions are dependent on ceremonies that materialize on the landscape. Religious significant areas include, but are not limited to, caves, springs, water holes, and crags (Mulvaney 1999). With the acquisition of knowledge come the rights to “land” and the responsibility to “maintain (physically and spiritually) and protect Dreaming sites and other places of cultural significance” (Mulvaney 1999:41). The spiritual maintenance of a particular place of cultural significance is not fully comprehensible to western understandings of land management. Here lies the gap between park management and Aboriginal land management.

The Heritage Conservation Act of 1991 protects the sacred sites within Kakadu National Park. This act is a “system for the identification, assessment, recording, conservation, and protection of place and objects of prehistoric, proto-historic, historical, social, aesthetic, or scientific value” (Mulvaney 1999:42). In addition to the heritage act there is the Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act of 1989, which states the need for “access to sacred sites in accordance with Aboriginal tradition, regardless of the underlying land tenure” (Mulvaney 1999:42). These acts come into conflict with the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1975, which recognizes the interest of the traditional Aborigines but protects the preservation of the park “in its natural condition and the protection of its special features” (Mulvaney 1999:46). Nature and culture are not static; hence to attempt to “preserve nature” conflicts with the fluidity of natural phenomena and Aboriginal sacred sites. In addition, what is accessible to the

public via parks regulations infringes on Aboriginal sacred sites. Occasionally, Aborigine communal living areas within the parks conflict with park management's ideology of nature without people. "The park management raised much opposition to these settlements, with attempts made to restrict traditional practices such as hunting and foraging and burning of country" (Mulvaney 46:46).

Laws and regulations to protect western ideologies of nature had been in place prior to the protection of heritage and sacred sites. The concept of people and religion interfacing in parks can be viewed as an anomaly and "primitive." Heritage manifests in many forms and it is crucial that park management, in all parks, comprehend the stratum of values that exists in national parks like Kakadu.

Heritage is a link to the outdoors. Natural landscapes are often used as a space to carry out heritage practices and in some cases this takes place in lands other than the participants' countries of birth. There are many examples of controversial displacement of indigenous communities for the development of national parks all over the world. There is also current controversy surrounding heritage in America's national parks. Parks are changing landscapes, not just biologically, and they continue to be part of a continuum of cultural traditions for ethnic communities.

The Ganges in Queens: Cultural Heritage Practices in Gateway National Park, a Case Study in Queens, NY. Anyone who has worked with biologists, environmentalists, and or environmental educators has witnessed their infectious passion and love for the environment. Their horror, dismay, and concern come as no surprise when litter, the destruction of plants, and pollution threatens fragile habitats. In the case of Gateway

National Park in Queens, New York, biologists and park rangers in Queens New York are working with Hindu communities to clean up Hindu ritual debris along the bay.

The Hindu population in Queens has grown and they have retained their traditional practices that took place in the home country. Hindus gather along Jamaica Bay for ceremonies, births, to mark festivals, deaths and “everything in between” (Dolnick 2011:1). To Hindu immigrants, Jamaica Bay is a substitute for their beloved Ganges River; “We call it the Ganges,” one pilgrim, Madan Padarat, said as he finished his prayers. “She takes away your sickness, your pain, your suffering” (Dolnick 2011:2). The banks of the bay are lined with ritual debris- clothing, statues, coconuts, flags, bamboo sticks, and even cremation ashes (Dolnick 2011:2).



Figure1. Ricky Kanhai and his wife, Asha, offered milk colored with turmeric and prayed they would soon have a child. Credit: Chang W. Lee/*The New York Times*. (Dolnick 2011).

The bay is considered by ranger staff to be a “fragile ecosystem” and unlike the Ganges, the bay does not wash away the debris. “To the park rangers who patrol the

beach, the holy waters are a fragile habitat, the offerings are trash and the littered shores are a federal preserve that must be kept clean for picnickers, fishermen and kayakers” (Dolnick 2011:2). The Hindu traditions and place making at Jamaica Bay are a great example of heritage in parks based on Smith’s definition of heritage. However, this has led to a standoff between “two camps that regard the site as sacrosanct for very different reasons, and have spent years in a quiet tug of war between ancient traditions and modern regulations” (Dolnick 2011:2). Diplomacy on behalf of park staff and the Hindu community has alleviated some tension but traditions like these are very much engrained in the Hindu community and are difficult to change despite their practitioners living in a completely different country. “I can’t stop the people and say, ‘You can’t come to the water and make offerings,’ ” said Pandit Chunelall Narine, the priest at a thriving Ozone Park temple, Shri Trimurti Bhavan, who sometimes performs services by the bay. “We are at a dead end right now” (Dolnick 2011:2). Volunteer and retired Park Ranger John Zuzworsky has become a liaison between the Hindu community and Gateway National Park. He has started to speak at Hindu temples and ceremonies to discuss the health of this fragile ecosystem,

He visited dozens of Hindu temples to discuss the area’s fragile ecosystem—how saris could strangle the sea grass, flowers could choke the birds, and fruit could disrupt the food chain. Since Mr. Zuzworsky left the park in 2008, rangers have become even more creative in spreading the word, joining a panel of priests on a local television channel. Ms. Krause discussed litter before more than 1,000 Hindus at an outdoor reading of the Ramayana [Dolnick 2011:2].

It has taken time, but the Hindu community and the National Park Service are finding ways of “adapting ancient tradition to modern environmental regulations” (Semple 2015:2). For example, now instead of leaving their ritual debris in the water or

on the beach, people take what they used for prayer or ceremony home (Semple 2015:2). The success of adapting ancient traditions to modern environmental regulations is due to outreach, working with leaders in the Hindu community, and creating culturally relevant initiatives and programs. Members of the group and other volunteers have gathered once a month “to clean the beaches lining Cross Bay Boulevard, popular places for Hindus to perform the rituals. The group’s leaders have also visited Hindu temples to speak with priests and their congregations about adapting ancient traditions to modern environmental regulations” (Semple 2015:2).



Figure 2. Traditional Hindu ceremony in Gateway Park, Queens, New York. (Dolnik 2011)

Challenging cultural conventions has caused friction within the Hindu population. However, according to officials with the National Park Service, which manages the bay as part of the Gateway National Recreation, it has also contributed to a significant reduction in the amount of debris left by Hindus in the past couple of years (Semple 2015:3).

Conclusion. Cultural heritage practices in the outdoors are not a new occurrence. Communities around the world have been perpetuating heritage in the outdoors for generations. As immigrant communities continue to populate the U.S., more and more communities will use parks as places carry out cultural practices. These cultural practices may not fall within park rules, regulations, and or traditional uses of parks. As the case study conducted at Jamaica Bay demonstrates, it is important to be aware of cultural differences, respect traditions, and find ways to communicate with a community and collaborate to address these conflicts. Finding ways to link heritage and environmentalism is a constant project not only for national parks, but also for local parks such as Sonoma County Regional Parks. In the next chapter I discuss my research and explore the various ways in which the Latino community links their heritage to the outdoors, specifically at Sonoma County Regional Parks.

Chapter 3

Creating a Cultural Bridge Between the Latino Community and Sonoma County Regional Parks

Sonoma County, California

Sonoma County is located approximately 60 miles north of San Francisco, California. Sonoma County has a diverse and rich landscape that includes lush valleys and mountains to the east, the historical Russian River, and fifty-five miles of scenic coastline and beaches to the west. Sonoma County is beautiful and its residents have a great appreciation for their natural landscape. The opportunity for citizens to engage in nature and participate in environmental education workshops is high in Sonoma County due to thousands of acres of open space. Sonoma County is the home of numerous regional and state parks as well as a plethora of conservation and environmental organizations that strive to educate the public on the benefits of a healthy environment.

Conservation and environmental organizations strive to create sustainable areas for people and nature. These organizations manage over 6,000 acres of land all over the county and also host guided hikes, field trips for schools, and environmental seminars. Participation by Latinos is sorely lacking in environmental events (A Portrait of Sonoma County: Sonoma County Human Development Report 2014). In order to save our environment, foster a love of the land, and continue to conserve Sonoma County's environment and parks, everybody must participate, including the Latino community.

The outdoor culture is perpetuated by the investment in parks and the conservation of land. Sonoma County residents politically and financially support efforts to conserve land and provide public access. A great example of this is the Sonoma

County Agriculture and Open Space District, also known as Sonoma County Open Space. The Sonoma County Open Space District was developed in 1990 to provide residents access to protected land. As its website explains, this organization “protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource, and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations” (Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District 2016). Sonoma County voters approved measures in 1990 to create the district and enable a quarter-cent sales tax to fund district operations until 2011. “In 2006, with 76% of the vote, Sonoma County residents approved Measure F to extend the quarter-cent sales tax through 2031” ((Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District 2016).

Demographics in Sonoma County. According to *A Portrait of Sonoma County*, 24.9 % of the population is Latino in Sonoma County (*Portrait of Sonoma County* May 2014:19). The Latino population is the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, but the least likely to visit national parks and natural areas. As in the rest of our nation, the Latino population in Sonoma County is growing. According to a 2011 Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends Report, Hispanics will rise from 14% of the population in 2005 to 29% in 2050 (Pew Research Center 2011). Like many other ethnic minorities, Latinos in the United States have lived on the fringes of society, having to overcome stereotypes, low economic status, and language and cultural barriers. These obstacles have contributed to the lack of awareness about environmental issues, programs, and events, as well as served to widen the gap between Latinos and natural areas. Although large economic disparities exist among Sonoma County demographics and Latinos in Sonoma County, this has not been barrier to Latino use of Sonoma County Regional Parks.

Sonoma County Regional Parks. The mission of Sonoma County Regional Parks is as follows: “To create healthy communities and contribute to the economic vitality of Sonoma County by acquiring, developing, managing and maintaining parks and trails countywide. Regional Parks preserves irreplaceable natural and cultural resources, and offers opportunities for recreation and education to enhance the quality of life and well-being of residents and visitors to Sonoma County” (Sonoma County Regional Parks 2016).

In Sonoma County, many non-profits struggle with diversity and creating a culturally competent environment within their organizations. However, at Sonoma County Parks we serve all the residents of Sonoma County. We have developed and deliver Spanish-language programs and other programs that are informative and culturally relative to the residents of Sonoma County. For the purpose of my thesis, I focus on the use of Sonoma County Parks by the Latino Community in Sonoma County. *Andy’s Unity Park (AUP): An Example of Heritage in Parks and Creating a Cultural Bridge*

In October of 2013, 13-year-old Andy Lopez was shot and killed by Sheriff Deputy Erick Gelhaus after Gelhaus mistook Andy’s toy gun for a real AK47. The death of Andy Lopez opened unattended wounds between Sonoma County law enforcement and the Latino Community, creating an “us versus them” strife between the Sheriff’s Department and the Latino community, in particular Latino youth. Andy was shot in a vacant lot that was destined to become a park years before this tragedy occurred. The open lot is located on the corner of Moorland Avenue and West Robles in what is

commonly known as the Moorland Neighborhood. Moorland is known among law enforcement as a place with high gang and criminal activity.



Figure 3. Andy's Unity Park, Santa Rosa, Sonoma County, California. Courtesy of Dr. Margie Purser.



Figure 4. Area of shooting of Andy Lopez. Courtesy of *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* (Espinoza 2013).

After the death of Andy Lopez, the county acquired this property after it went into tax default with the goal of developing a neighborhood park. This was part of a larger list of county initiatives managed by a task force set up by the county. In 2015, Sonoma County Regional Parks formed a steering committee (SC) to develop the soon-to-be park.

The steering committee is a group of approximately 20 individuals who agreed to commit to being involved in the master planning process. The group is comprised of neighborhood residents and other stakeholders including activists representing the justice for Andy Lopez coalition. The role of the SC is to be the decision-making body for the project, representing the group consciousness of the neighborhood. The group played an

important role in helping plan the larger public workshops and debrief after each workshop –struggling with decisions that could not be made in the larger workshop context. Various organizations helped with outreach in the Moorland community and contracted Royston Hanamoto Alley and Abbey (RHAA) and a firm called Shared Spaces.

According to Scott Wilkinson, the Project Manager for Andy’s Unity Park that I interviewed for this thesis, “RHAA is a landscape architecture and planning firm. They have a history of successful partnerships on park projects with Steve Cancian and his firm, Shared Spaces. RHAA put together a team and their proposal for the park master-planning contract won them the job.” Steve Cancian led the workshops.

Moorland Workshops: Examples of Community Engagement. The workshops were held every other Thursday over the period of three months. The goal of the steering committee was to design a park within a given budget. At the first workshop the steering committee brainstormed what facilities they wanted at the park, dog-park, basketball court, etc. At the second workshop they walked the area and drew up a park map with the desired facilities and recreational spaces. The workshops were followed by meetings where RHAA showed digital images of their designs that represented the majority of the steering committee requests. However, these meeting also became spaces where Moorland residents, Latino youth, neighbors and other county residents who did not live in the neighborhood came to express their personal frustration with the system and anger over the death of Andy Lopez.

Re-creating Place after Tragedy. The death of Andy carries different emotional significance for various sectors of the community. Attending the steering committee

workshops provided perspective and insight on the impact that Andy's death had on various members of the steering committee. The most vocal members were Latino/a youth, Moorland residents, and Latino/a parents who lived in the neighborhood, and the most contested topic among all the sectors was the naming of the park.

Young Latino/as repeatedly expressed that the park should be named after Andy; "There would be no park if Andy was not killed here!" said one young Latina. However, long-time residents of Moorland who were Caucasian argue that the space had been planned to become a park prior to his death and therefore should be named "Moorland Park." At one particular workshop, Ruben, a father of four and longtime resident of Moorland, stood up and said, "I don't want the name of this park to carry Andy's name. Why does this park have to be associated with a tragedy? We will never forget what happened to Andy. I want this to be a positive place for my kids to play." Another father, Victor, and longtime resident stood up and responded by saying, "I also have kids, and I think this park should carry Andy's name. If it were not for his death we would not have a park. This is an opportunity for us to learn from—how can we prevent this happening again, how can we as parents become more informed about laws, how can we protect our kids?" This father went on to say that he wanted a learning center at the park, where kids could get help with their homework, a community garden where parents and their kids could learn about healthy eating. The board of supervisors decided the name of this park in March of 2016, choosing between Andy's Unity Park and Andy Lopez Unity Park and selecting Andy's Unity Park.

After the workshops, three things became apparent. One, it became clear that in the Moorland neighborhood community there was not an "us versus them mentality." In

fact, this community is aware of the lack of communication with law enforcement and the need for information regarding laws and regulations in Sonoma County. Two, the death of Andy contributed to the feelings of oppression among the Latino community—especially the youth—but also allowed for opportunities for learning and healing. Three, there are very strong heritage practices being carried out at AUP. For example, the altar and vigils for Andy, the creation of place via socializing, the speaking of Spanish, and the melding past traditions and religion with new practices.

“Saint Andy”: *Creating Place at AUP*. Maria is a Mexican woman who immigrated to the U.S. at a young age. She is the mother of three, always attended the Sonoma County meetings and workshops regarding the park, and was highly involved with the Justice for Andy youth group. I met Maria while doing outreach at Moorland. The purpose of our outreach was to encourage and invite neighbors to attend steering committee meetings and provide information about Sonoma County Parks. Like the father at the workshop, Maria too believed that this tragedy presented an opportunity from which to learn. “We need to be more engaged in the life of our youth,” she told me one day while I was working. She sighed and began telling me that when she met Andy Lopez’s mom and listened to her talk about Andy, she felt like she was hearing a different version of herself and her son. “Andy was a troubled boy, my son too has had problems with the law. I want to help the youth in any way I can. We need to all work together, the Sheriff’s Department, the community and parks, to help our youth. When I come here I always say a prayer first. The other day I came and there was a woman who was also praying, she told me that she was praying to Andy to help her with her nephew.” Maria giggled and said, “We are all praying to Saint Andy! The saint of troubled youth.”

A place becomes a landscape when we no longer have emotional attachments or a sense of belonging to the place. Even if Andy was still with us, the vacant lot on the corner of Moorland and West Robles would still be a place to kids who grew up there. It was where they played as kids, where they walk their dogs and/or go for walks with their family. But place is also where meanings are contested and negotiated (Cresswell 2004), and this is what has become of “Andy’s Park.” Andy’s Unity Park has become a reminder of the continued feelings of injustice among Latino youth, a place to re-build a community, and a place that united a community. Andy’s Unity Park is also a park where the past and present meld to create community and to carry out heritage practices, as seen in Figure 3.

Chapter 4

Methods

In order to develop information that can inform management and staff of Sonoma County Regional Parks about the Latino community's perceptions of nature, use of parks, and cultural heritage, I reviewed literature relevant to the topic, conducted a survey, interviewed people who identified as Latino about their usage of parks, and drew upon my own experiences as a Sonoma County Regional Parks staff member and as a Latina living in Sonoma County. This allowed me to identify the preferred uses of Sonoma County Regional Parks by Latinos/as, discover information about Latino/as' perceptions of nature, and provide examples of Latino heritage that take place in Sonoma County Regional Parks. The goal of my research was to provide insight to help create a cultural bridge between the Latino Community and Sonoma County Regional Parks. Although my research is specific to Sonoma County Regional Parks, the recommendations based on my research will be a resource for insight for other park organization.

I chose Sonoma County Regional Parks as the subject of my case study for several reasons. One, I have been an employee at Sonoma County Regional Parks for fourteen years. This has allowed me to witness an increase in efforts to develop culturally relevant programs that engage the Latino community. Two, I have personally experienced the challenges the parks and park visitors have encountered due to varying cultural uses of the parks. Three, my cultural background as a Latina provides insight and understanding to the cultural barriers and diversity that exist within the Latino community.

In order to present a broad and in-depth understanding of the use of parks by the Latino community, their perceptions of nature, and examples of heritage in the parks, I observed people using various county parks, conducting a survey filled out by 235 participants, and conducted interviews of individuals from the Latino community.

Survey: Latino Communities' Use of Sonoma County Parks

I conducted a twelve-question survey on behalf of Sonoma County Regional Parks over the spring and summer of 2013, asking Latinos/as what parks in the county they are using, what activities they enjoy the most at parks, how often they visit the parks, what would encourage them to visit the parks, and what deters them from frequenting the parks. Participants in the survey were given the option to fill out the survey in English or Spanish. A total of 235 individuals took the survey. In order to reach my intended survey participants, I set up and attended tables at places that I knew had high Latino/a traffic, such as Mexican markets. These included Rancho Mendoza on Piner Road in Santa Rosa, and Lola's Markets in both Petaluma and Healdsburg. I chose locations in different cities in the county to get a different perspective on the parks they visited and also to encompass various Latino communities in Sonoma County. After receiving permission from the market managers to conduct my research, I asked what time and day of the week had the highest traffic, and where I could set up my information table. As an encouragement to get folks to fill out the survey, I offered a free green water bottle with the Sonoma County Regional Parks logo in Spanish. Please see Appendix A for survey questions.

Interviews: Perceptions of Nature and the Enjoyment of the Outdoors

The results of the survey led me to ask other questions about the enjoyment of parks and perceptions of nature. As discussed in Chapter One, nature is a socially constructed concept. Our understandings of nature and wilderness influence how we enjoy and experience the outdoors. Hence, I began to conduct interviews with individuals who identified as Latino/a, Hispanic, or Mexican, selecting them from organizations with large Latino/a participation, friends of friends, and colleagues. I interviewed thirteen individuals face-to-face, via email, and via the Latino Outdoors Face Book page, and extracted themes after reviewing the data. Please see Appendix B for Interview Guide.

The results of my survey and interviews, and an analysis of my observations during my career with Sonoma County Regional Parks are presented in the following chapter, along with discussion of how this information can be applied.

Chapter 5

Findings and Discussion

Survey Results

The following tables present the survey results:

Figure 5. Percentage of respondents who visited various parks.

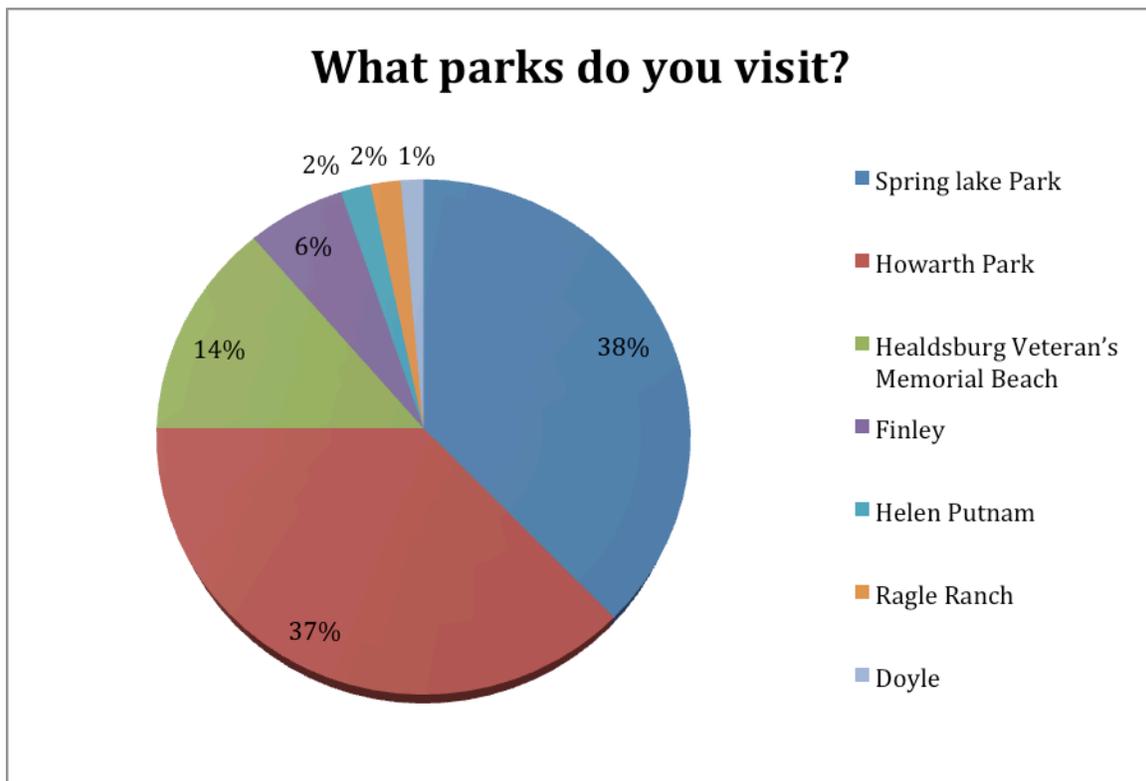


Figure 6. Percentage of respondents with frequency of visits.

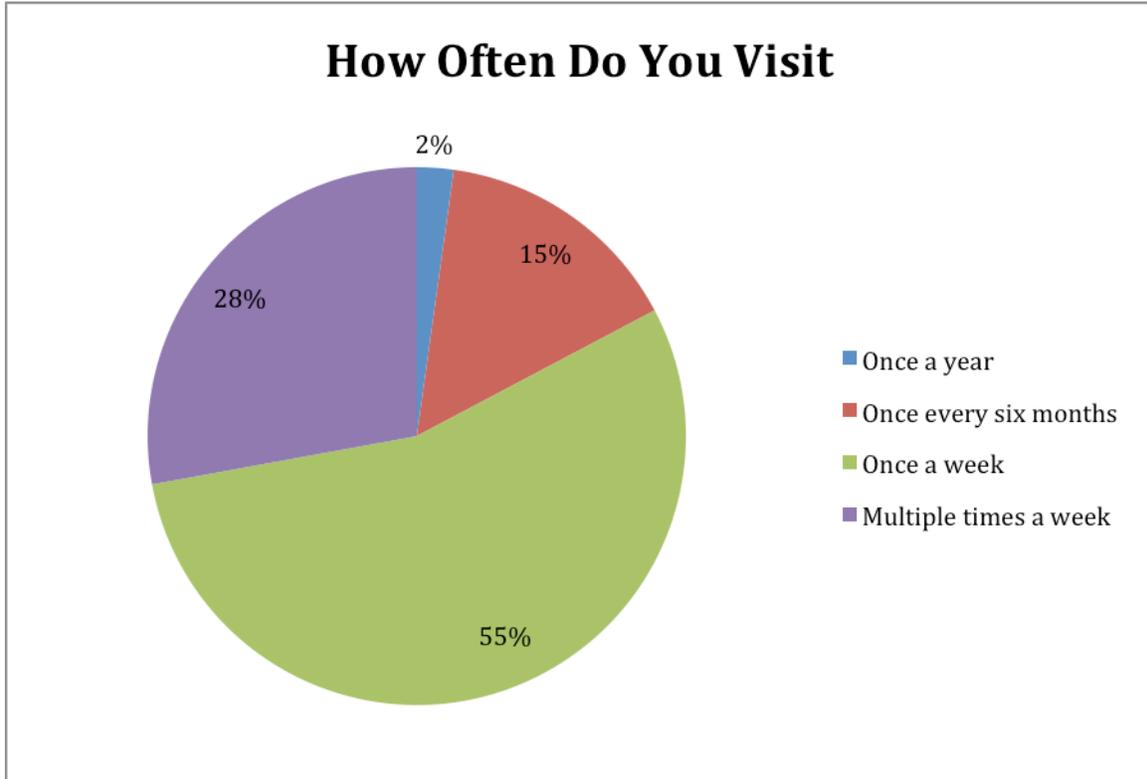
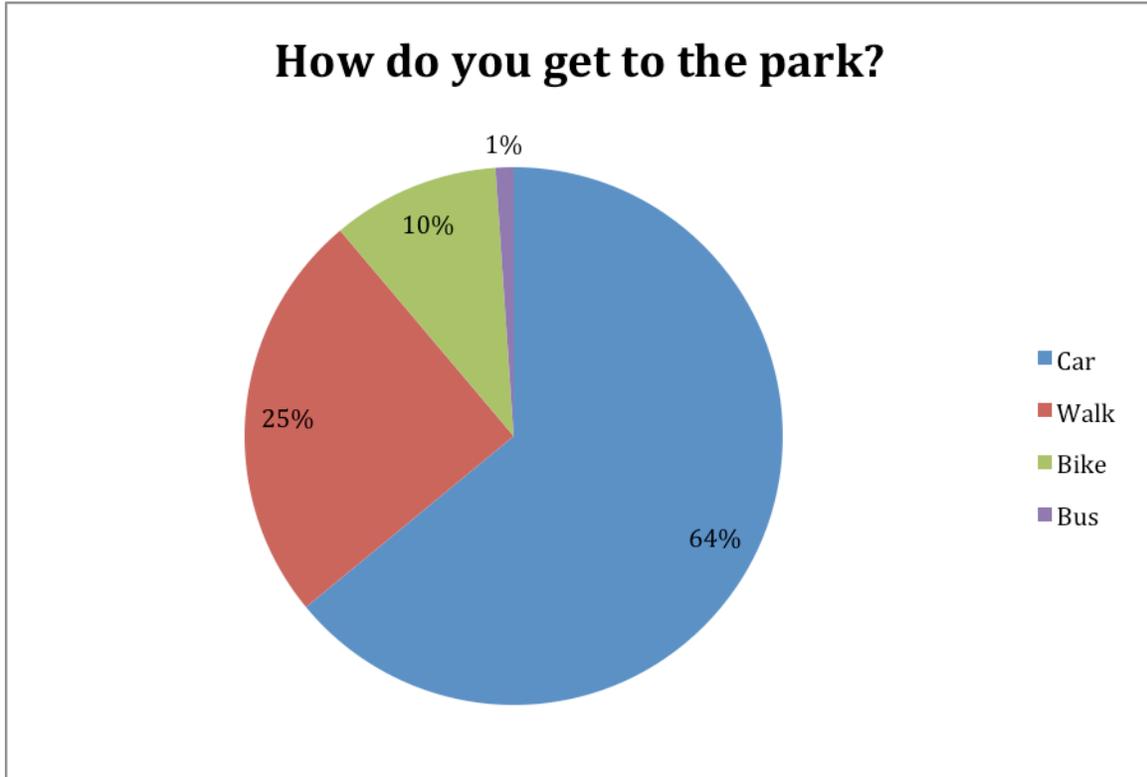


Figure 7. Percentage of respondents with means of transportation.



The narrative results of the survey are as follows:

Q1: 35.87% checked SLP to be the park they visit the most, followed by Howarth Park (35.4%).

Q2: Howarth Park was the most visited .

Q3: 55. 6% responded that they visit the park once a week.

Q4: 75.74% responded that they get to parks via car.

Q5: 80.3% responded that walking was activity of choice at parks.

Q6: 51.98% responded that they would be encouraged to use parks more if there were more group picnic areas.

Q7: 38.03% responded that lack of time was main factor for not visiting parks.

Q8: 68.38% responded that clean facilities make their visit to the park more comfortable.

Q9: 54.59% responded that they knew very little of Sonoma County Regional Parks.

Q10: 53.98% responded that parks are important, and 39.38% responded that parks are extremely important.

Q11: 68.15 % of survey participants identified as Mexican.

Q12: 44.7% responded that they would not be interested in volunteering.

Discussion of Survey Results. Based on my survey results, lack of knowledge of parks in the communities in which they reside and lack of time are the largest barriers to visiting Sonoma County Regional Parks among members of the Latino community. This information does not indicate that Latinos do not visit Sonoma County Regional Parks. Some members of the Latino community do not know the official names of the various parks. For example, Howarth Park is a city park whose main trail connects to Spring Lake Park, a county park. I found that the Latino community refers to Howarth Park as “el parquet de los patos,” the duck park, due to all the ducks found at Lake Ralphine (located in Howarth Park.) Many Latino/as referred to SLP as “the park behind the duck park” or the park where you can go swimming. This information was important to me for two reasons. First, if I wanted to conduct further research about park use, I could set up survey tables at Howarth and Spring Lake. Second, many Latino/as do not know which parks are county parks or City of Santa Rosa parks. Hence, Sonoma County Regional Parks need to do more outreach and community engagement in Latino communities and events. Sonoma County Regional Parks need to get to know the community and the community needs to get to know Sonoma County Regional Parks and all the various recreational opportunities they have.

Based on my survey, I can conclude that Latino/as use parks predominantly as places to socialize and go for walks, and they feel more comfortable where there are facilities and the facilities are clean. I also found that 35.47% would feel more comfortable if employees spoke Spanish.

After analyzing the results of the survey, I saw the need to focus on how Latino/as enjoy the outdoors and their perceptions of nature. In order to gather this cultural information I conducted a series of interviews.

Interview Results

I found five common threads among my interviewees:

First, their first experiences in nature were associated with memories of growing up in their villages, playing in creeks, and/or working on ranches. Second, respondents came to associate nature with parks after immigrating to the United States, had lived in the United States for more than five years and/or grew up in the United States. Third, I found that there are cultural barriers to use of parks and the outdoors based on perceptions of nature. Fourth, socializing and group activities as favored as outdoor pastimes. Fifth, perceptions of nature varied depending on whether the individual grew up in an urban or rural area.

Memories. When I asked the founder and director of Latino Outdoors, Jose Gonzales, about his first experience in nature, he said, “I remember walking in the corn fields with my grandpa, playing in the river and running in the hills.” Hugo, who came to the U.S. at the age of ten, said, “We use to live in a house and three blocks down there was a small hill or mountain and it was filled with boulders, flowers, and we use to play hide and seek there. I think it was a canyon area. I remember water running through it—

you could follow it for miles! I use to think it was huge but I was a little boy. Now that my cousins have been there they said it was pretty small. I would also hike and rock climb around the creek.”

Associating Parks with Nature. Paula came to the U.S. at the age of 18 from Mexico City. She said that she frequents the parks more now that she lives in the U.S. “Here I go to parks more frequently. They are better-protected and taken care of. I like that parks are taken care of and encourage the community to take care of them.”

Cultural Barriers Based on Perceptions of Nature. Carmen was learning English in Mexico. To increase her vocabulary she would watch the Hallmark channel in English. Often the movies were about family adventures in the outdoors. “The movie was about an Anglo family who lived in a mansion, but would go camping. They would almost drown and got attacked by bears! I would get so frustrated and ask myself, why would they want to sleep outside having such a great home?”

Socializing and Group Activities as Favored Outdoor Activities. Many interviews described their experiences in nature as family and or group activities. “Socializing and being with family is part of Mexican culture,” said Lupe. This continues to be true among Latino/as even if they are participating in bilingual hikes led by non-profits like Landpaths. As Lupe stated, “With friends it’s better.”

Carmen explained, “Sometimes people don’t go to outings because their friends are not going. The first thing we ask is ‘Who’s going’? The circle of friends is smaller than that of Americans and people feel comfortable with people they know. This is why socializing is so important because our circle of friends is so small. There are certain

people who are 'jaladoras' (ladies who motivate and encourage people to go), the ralliers is what I call them.”

Influences of Perceptions of Nature. Luis grew up in Mexico City, and to him nature was outside the city along the roads to Puebla, Mexico. “When I lived in Mexico, we would go with my brother-in-law, he had a bus, and we would all go on a trip with him. It was like 30 of us! We would take tortas [Mexican sandwich], fruit, and boiled eggs to eat. It was not like here where there are designated BBQ areas. We would just pull off the side of the road in the countryside.”

Lupe grew up in a medium sized town in the state of Jalisco. To her, nature was going to “el rancho,” the ranch. “To me, nature was something out of town.”

Informal Participant Observation

As a park employee, I noticed that many of my observations reiterated what was said during the interviews: socializing, family celebrations and large groups were common among Latino families. In my job, I was often asked by Latinos if they could move tables to accommodate their large groups. Some families would rent the reserveable group areas but would more commonly show up early and save group areas that were not reserveable by putting a hand-written sign or a sheet on the table, or a family member would hang out until folks showed up to set up. This happens at various county parks: Spring Lake (SLP), Ragle, Steel Head Beach, Riverfront, any park that has group areas. This was also common among other ethnic groups. At Spring Lake Park there are large Cambodian and Laotian families that go to the Oak Knolls group picnic areas almost every weekend. Many of them have park memberships. Socializing and large family gatherings are prevalent in Latino culture and are part of their traditions.

According to Lupe, “Spending time and eating with family and friends is part of my Mexican culture. Sometimes our apartments or houses are too small to accommodate our guests so going to the park is a great option.”

Although Sonoma County Regional Parks do have group areas that accommodate up to 100 guests, many Latino families are unaware of that these group areas exist, don’t know how to make a reservation, or prefer to just show up and reserve an area on their own and skip the reservation fee. If no group area is available I have often seen Latino families move picnic tables to accommodate their parties. For example, Ragle Park in Sebastopol has three very large group picnic areas; it is also a very busy and popular park. At times the group areas were already reserved. Latina moms would ask me if they could move the tables to create their own group areas. If the tables were not being occupied, I would say yes.

Parallels to the Literature

My survey results, interviews, and informal participant observations parallel other survey results and research that was conducted at Lincoln Park in Chicago. Lincoln Park is Chicago’s largest park and the park visitors are just as diverse as the activities that take place in Lincoln Park (Gobster 2002; Cronon et al. 2008). For example, I found that Latinos/as’ activities of choice were walking and socializing. “On the whole, results showed that minority park users [Latino, Asian, Black] more often came by car . . . were more likely to visit in large, family-oriented groups than White park users” (Gobster 2002:146). Cronon et al. also conducted a survey at Lincoln Park in Chicago to “examine Latinos’ [and Latinas’] use of parks, sports complexes, and trail systems for active recreation” (Cronon et al. 2008:62). Cronon et al. observed that “Latino visitors spent

time in large, multi-generational, family-oriented groups. Each group brought their own BBQs, camping tables, folding chairs and other gear and gathered in location along the trail under the shade of trees” (Cronon et al. 2008:77).

Latino Heritage in the Parks. Soccer is large component of Mexican culture. Ragle Park has six large soccer fields, many of which are used for soccer tournaments and soccer practice, and used by the Latino Soccer Association. When I worked there we would call Sundays “soccer Sundays,” because from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. there would be non-stop soccer games. Sunday was the day that the Latino leagues would come out. The soccer fields were in full use and outlined with cheering families from grandparents to the children of the players. Although the selling of food was prohibited, many people came with coolers filled with fruit salads, chicharones, and other street food to sell. At a distance it looked like folks were just sharing food, but as you walked by you could see the exchange of money for food and alcohol. Selling street food on the sidelines at soccer games reminds me of when I lived in Mexico; there were always street vendor around. Cronon et al. found similar results in their research. “Food, plastic toys, balloons, and even alcohol were sold illegally in the park. People selling, candy, and even beer hidden in baby strollers would travel from one group of visitors to another offering their products” (Cronon et al. 2008:77).

Chapter 6
Recommendations for Accommodating Heritage Processes
at Sonoma County Regional Parks

Parks are multifaceted spaces with various cultural significances and layers of heritage in them. Going to parks, the ceremonies, activities, and the parks themselves are all components of heritage. There is a strong desire at Sonoma County Regional Parks and other park organizations to become more diverse. However, being diverse and ethnically inclusive is very different.

There are over 123 parks in Sonoma County and they are integral part of various communities' heritage and contribute to healthy communities. In order for Sonoma County Regional Parks to maintain political and financial support, they must continue to finance and support programming that is culturally relevant and provide infrastructure that supports the use of parks by various ethnic communities. Tangible aspects of Latino heritage like piñatas, dancing, and mariachi music are not allowed at Sonoma County Regional Parks. The banning of particular aspects of communities' heritage has been an issue since the nineteenth century in American parks.

Maribel Manning, in addressing racism in Martha's Vineyard, said,

Part of what racism does in the U.S. is deny black folk the notion of celebration, of leisure, of created cultural space, to do your own thing. I think what black folk for several generations have tried to do is carve out those niches, where they can find their own voice, where they can celebrate with their friends and you don't have to explain a damn thing [in Nelson 2004].

This form of racism encompasses multiple communities that experience and recreate in a manner that does not adhere to the dominant environmental narrative. In

addition, we have the problem that our parks are not developed to accommodate the various cultural uses of parks, particularly socializing. Hence, the moving of picnic tables to accommodate family groups.

Smith referred to socializing as “knitting together a sense of community” (Smith 2006:47). To deeply engage and sustain a relationship with the Latino community, Sonoma County Regional Parks must accommodate heritage practices in parks, provide spaces for socializing, and incorporate the Spanish language and aspects of Latino culture into recreational and environmental programs that Sonoma County Regional Parks creates and delivers. In my experience, speaking Spanish, providing time and space for socializing, and allowing for Latino families to create place are key to creating an inclusive environment at Sonoma County Regional Parks; this is how people create a sense of community.

Recommended Latino Community Outreach Program

In collaboration with Sonoma County Regional Parks, a Community Engagement Committee led by Marketing and Programs Manager Mary Clemens has addressed the need to reach out to the Latino community. The mission of the Sonoma County Regional Parks outreach program is to inform and increase involvement of new constituencies from the Latino community in activities, programs, and festivities developed and hosted by Sonoma County Regional Parks. Increasing the Latino community involvement will provide new constituencies a service and a tangible, long-lasting product that builds a solid foundation for social and economic prosperity; in addition we are bridging cultural gaps within our communities.

Based on the findings of this committee and on my research and observations, the following steps need to be carried out in order to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with the Latino community. These steps will help Sonoma County Regional Parks in continuing to remain relevant, and gain political and financial support among the largest, still-growing ethnic demographic.

Recognize Need to Reach Latino Audiences. In order to develop successful programs that will provide a quality experience for Latino park users, the Sonoma County Regional Parks and its employees must be conscious of cultural differences and informed of cultural groups' heritage and the diversity that exists within Latino communities. This includes cultural diversity, socio-economic ranges, educational levels, and assimilation. Reflecting cultural traditions and beliefs, speaking Spanish, and knowing and understanding the routines, values, income, and general level of education are all important when developing quality programming and establishing meaningful and lasting relationships. Connecting to the Latino community is a high priority, beginning from the top decision maker, the director, and continuing through all Sonoma County Regional Parks staff.

Get to Know the Community. The Sonoma County Regional Parks Community Engagement Department, which includes outreach, education, and recreational programs staff, needs to learn about Latino residents. This includes the following key characteristics: where they live, work and congregate; how they communicate; what language(s) are spoken; what levels of education they have; through what family or community structures effective communication takes place.

Knowledge of the community also includes knowing who and what are the trusted

sources of information in the Latino community. This includes informal leaders. Informal leaders are individuals who do not have political connections or connections with high economic standing, yet have dynamic and charismatic personalities, and make other community members feel welcomed and safe in unfamiliar settings. Informal leaders are trusted in the Latino community.

It is equally important to get to know formal community leaders that are trusted and able to communicate important information including what types of individuals, community groups or associations, and/or government organizations or representatives the residents trusts.

Another part of building a deep understanding of the Latino community is learning about what they value, including how they spend their time, who they spend it with, and why they make those choices. This is the part where we begin to understand their culture. Getting to know this community also includes institutionalizing community feedback. This can be done by creating avenues for residents to speak honestly to county parks through surveys, focus groups, community forums, liaisons, community member boards, and/or community organization groups. This could be done in the following ways:

- Hold 6-8 focus groups (informal “listening sessions”) in Latino communities in twelve months create a Latino advisory committee.
- Conduct frequent surveys within the Latino community to gain knowledge or what is currently important within the community and how Sonoma County Parks can be a resource to the community. This includes but is not limited to interviews and listening sessions.

Community Engagement and Outreach. Once park staff and management have an understanding about the Latino community's culture, diversity that exists within the community, what they value and where they can be reached, park staff can begin to conduct community engagement and outreach. In short, community engagement and outreach requires park staff to reach people in locations where they already live, work shop, congregate, or receive services, through people and organization with whom the community already has a relationship.

Sonoma County Regional Parks may be able to sell park memberships at the outreach location depending on the event type or outreach location and purpose. Community engagement and outreach may or may not increase memberships, which increase profits and park visitors. Yet, it is important that management and staff value community currency, that is, all the intangible and tangible benefits that come with fostering relationships with ethnic communities. Community currency may not increase profits in the short term, but in the long term, community engagement and outreach provide avenues for the community to get to know the staff and establish a meaningful relationship with them. This in turn increases appreciation for parks, park visitors, and the potential for future financial and political support.

Examples of community engagement and outreach include but are not limited to the following:

- Staff participation in community-driven events. For example, Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations, Roseland's Cinco de Mayo festival and Dia de Los Ninos (Day of the Children), health fairs and local on-campus school programs.

- Working with youth sports groups to build connections to parks
- Creating mini-events during park promotional periods to engage the Latino community.
- Sustaining regular programming, such as the already existing family hikes once a month, family campouts planned for every six months and mini cultural events at parks such as Dia de los Ninos and Cinco de Mayo three times a year.

Marketing is also part of community engagement and outreach. Marketing within the right sources helps increase the participation of Latino constituencies in the community. The following are a few examples of venues in Sonoma County for marketing:

- Purchase advertising in Spanish media sources such as *La Voz*, *La Luz*, and/or other Spanish/bi-lingual newspapers
- Identify opportunities for special interview and radio programs
- Market park memberships at Latino markets and businesses

Partnerships. Partnering with organizations that already have a large Latino constituency will foster communication. Potential partners include health care providers, local, state, and federal government agencies (emphasis on local), schools and other educational institutions, advocates, faith-based organizations, and local business and business networks. Partnering with organizations with a large Latino base guarantees an audience. Once a partnering organization has been identified, see if you can partner on events, conduct outreach and/or disseminate park information using their media sources, or present park information at their gatherings. For example, I partnered with local non-profit Landpaths in order to conduct my research and interviews. I was also able to invite

Landpaths Latino members to Sonoma County Regional Parks events and present park information at Landpaths outings and volunteer days.

Establishing strong partnerships means being known and accepted as a partner in collaboration by building and maintaining authentic relationships both in the Latino community, across county departments, other non-profits and park organizations. For example, I had to establish a partnership with local environmental non-profit Landpaths in order to conduct my research and interviews. In turn, I delivered Spanish-language environmental programs at Landpaths Spanish campouts.

Another way to formalize partnerships is to collaborate with other public agencies and non-profit organizations on community engagement through issue-based, population-based, and/or activity-based programs.

Commit to Becoming a Culturally Competent Park Organization. In order to become a culturally competent park organization, management must provide funding for culturally relevant programming and provide staff with the appropriate resources to carry out culturally relevant programming. Culturally relevant programming is programming that is facilitated and delivered in Spanish and/or bi-lingual programming. Programs are based on the community's cultural values and practices, the circumstances of whole households, and/or in participation with other family members. For example, based on the survey I conducted, socializing and group picnic areas were of high importance. Hence, allocating time during programming for families and youth to socialize and eat as a group is important. Park organizations are culturally competent if what they do and how they do it is relevant to their audiences.

Create a Cultural Bridge between the Latino Community and Parks. The same way a bridge connects one land mass to another, a cultural bridge connects different communities to each other. Such cultural bridges also inform each community about their cultural differences and serve as a means to transfer this information and incorporate it into parks and the community in a way that is culturally relevant and will resonate with both parks and the community.

Continue Investing in Current Latino-based Programming at Sonoma County Regional Parks. Invest in ongoing authentic relationships through consistent Spanish programming such as Nuestros Parques and the River Safety Program. Nuestros Parques is a once-a-month Spanish family hike held at various county parks over the course of a year. Much of its success was based on providing a time for coffee and socializing before the hike and a time for potluck and kid play after the hike, and coordinating a caravan for participants.

The River Safety program was initiated after several drownings took place along the Russian River. Some of the drownings were in Sonoma County Regional Parks and the majority of individuals who drowned were Latino. Sonoma County Regional Parks staffs this program with a Spanish-speaking ranger who patrols various county river parks with another lifeguard. Sonoma County Regional Parks provides life vests for loan to visitors at river parks.

Also, part of investing in current Latino-based programs is hiring more Latinos. Currently the majority of Sonoma County Regional Parks employees are Caucasian.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The term “nature deficit disorder” was coined in 2005 by Dr. Louv and is used by various environmental organizations to encourage families to get their kids outdoors. The term “nature deficit disorder” is also used to promote environmental education programs for children and their families (Louv 2005). Despite the increase of ethnic minorities in the general population, people of color have often been ignored within the environmental world. According to a study done by Center for Diversity and the Environment, the environmental movement is doing a “poor job of connecting them [non-Anglo] to our cause even through numerous polls and surveys show that people of color support environmental issues, in many cases, at higher level than the general public” (Bonnta and Jordan 2007:14). According to a 2002 California exit poll for a \$2.6 billion bond issue for water quality enhancement and open space protection, “77 percent of Blacks, 74 percent of Latinos, and 60 percent of Asian (as opposed to 56 percent of Whites) voted ‘yes’” (Bonnta and Marcelo 2007:17). According to the 2015 US Census report, “the minority population is expected to rise to 56 percent of the total population in 2060, compared with 38 percent last year [2014]” (Noor 2015 usnews.com July 6,2015). Nation Park and environmental agencies are becoming conscious of the changing demographics in America. Diversity has become the buzzword among parks and other environmental agencies. Lack of community engagement will result in the loss park visitors, which will result in loss of political and financial support

As a woman of color working for Sonoma County Regional Parks and other environmental organizations, I often hear, “We need to get Latinos’ kids in nature.”

Latinos/as do experience nature and do go to parks. They don't always "experience nature" in a manner that is visible to predominant park users who prefer to hike or camp. Olmsted and Muir's implied rules of conduct in parks do not apply to America's current demographics. Yet, parks and environmental organizations are implicitly imposing the dominant environmental narrative's understanding of nature, as devoid of humans, and depriving the public of the cultural richness that exists within parks and preserves. The next generation is here and it is not predominantly Caucasian. Sonoma County Regional Parks must reexamine past perceptions of nature and allow for new relationships with nature to flourish within their park parameters. Providing spaces for various types of recreational activities, interpreting the history of various communities, having bilingual signs and or apps, being inclusive of various forms of experiencing nature and cultural heritage are all part of diversity. Diversity is a theme that seems to be on the top of the lists of nature preserves and national, state, and local parks. However, implementing culturally proficient policies and defining diversity within environmental organizations is more complex than putting the word on the top of a list or hiring someone who is not Caucasian. I believe it is important for park organizations to ask themselves why diversity in the outdoors matters to them and what do specific parks have to offer that is culturally appealing to ethnic communities. If parks continue to ignore different perceptions of nature and various cultural uses of parks, they will lose visitors and financial and political support, all of which may lead to the privatization of the park and/or closure. Increasing community engagement among growing ethnic communities will provide park organizations with political, financial, and community support for existing and future parks.

The bottom line is that park visitors equal park supporters. Providing a sense of ownership is key in achieving continued park support. According to Yosemite Park Ranger Shelton Johnson, parks must provide a sense of ownership for people of color. He said that this “sense of ownership” can be acquired by knowing “your cultural roots” in national parks. “If you don’t know you have cultural roots in the parks, then you’re not going to feel a sense of ownership” (cited in Lovitt 2011). In order to establish a sense of ownership for parks, park organizations must recognize the various histories within the parks and implement interactive and culturally relevant programs that acknowledge various communities’ history and provide a sense of place. A sense of ownership cannot be established without providing a sense of place where heritage practices can be carried out.

Providing a sense of place involves the recognition of ethnic and cultural differences, as does diversity. At one of her speeches at a state parks conference in 2014, I asked Rue Mapp, the founder and director of Outdoor Afro, how she responded to individuals who felt that engaging with the Latino Community was in a sense “coddling” a community that already visited parks. Rue responded by telling me that “we are all part of a large cultural quilt and each ethnicity represents a patch on this large quilt.” Although various environmental agencies recognize the demographic changes and acknowledge the importance of diversity within their agencies, they fail to implement policies and programs that ensure and exemplify cultural competency.

Colorblindness is blindness to the plethora of cultural and ethnic differences that exist in our society. Part of the lack of diversity that is visible to me is the lack of recognition of ethnic communities and the continued use of the word *race* and classifying

individuals by race and not ethnicity. Ethnicity encompasses more than the cultural and social differences of a particular group, it also encompasses traditions, cultural practices and values; ethnicity encompasses heritage. When we take into account an individual's ethnicity, we are acknowledging cultural differences. Having an awareness of cultural differences allows park organizations to create more diverse and inclusive programs and plan for parks that incorporate various cultural uses.

For example, piñatas are an iconic part of Mexican heritage. In a culture that embraces family, piñatas are essential at children's birthday parties. As piñatas have been embraced by other cultures and incorporated into children's celebrations at parks and homes, piñatas have become a nuisance and an environmental issue. "They just leave so much litter behind and those little pieces are hard to clean up." I hear this a lot among park employees. In addition to increasing the amount of litter in a park, piñatas have become an environmental nuisance to some park employees. "The plastic is non-degradable and they harm trees while they are hanging them," some have said to me. Fellow park employees have also mentioned to me that the plastic is dangerous to birds if they mistake it for food. Environmental concerns are not unreasonable. Yet, there are ways that parks can invest in creating a space to accommodate piñatas and mitigate environmental concerns, as was demonstrated by the National Park Service, which successfully worked with Hindu users of Gateway National Park in Queens to mitigate problems caused by religious use of Jamaica Bay. By accommodating different cultural practices in parks, we create an inclusive environment at parks.

Another example of Latino heritage in parks is socializing. According to Smith, socializing is an example of heritage, "a cultural process that engages with actors of

remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and the sites themselves are cultural tools that can facilitate, but are not necessarily vital for, this process” (Smith 2006:41). For Latinos (and other ethnic groups), socializing and socializing in large groups with friends and family is an important component of their cultural usage of parks. Parks are the “tools that facilitate the heritage process” for the Latino culture.

I have seen examples of Latino heritage in parks other than Sonoma County Regional Parks. At Coffee Park in Santa Rosa, I often saw young Latinas and their “chambelanes” (male dance partners) rehearsing their quinceañera dances. Quinceañeras are a traditional rite of passage for 15-year-old girls. This is an elaborate Mexican tradition that incorporates a religious ceremony and a formal dance followed by a large party with live music or a D.J. Younger generations are now incorporating a dance to one of their favorite songs/artist in addition to the formal dance. Unfortunately, parks do not allow loud music; hence quinceañera ceremonies are not allowed in parks. However, the scenic views in parks provide a place for many individuals to take pictures for formal engagements and celebrations. Families celebrating baptisms, school graduations, quinceañeras, weddings, and other various forms of social cultural passages come to parks for pictures. Parks provide communities with so much more than access to nature, natural resources and habitat for flora and fauna. Parks “are tools that facilitate heritage” (Smith 2006) and a place to perpetuate culture. This is important because it is the younger generations who will influence how parks are used, developed and valued.

Maintaining cultural and ethnic diversity in parks is a priority not only for Sonoma County Regional Parks, but also for national parks and California state parks. In

order to do so, park organizations need to make various changes within their organization and begin to think in ethnic terms rather than racial.

In regards to the Latino community, socializing and family are part of their ethnicity. In order for park organizations to be relevant to this community they need first to start by changing the existing culture within their system that perpetuates romanticized versions of nature. Second, they need to get to know their surrounding communities through outreach and community engagement. Third, they need to establish a relationship with their community and strive to maintain it. After getting to know their community, they can provide infrastructure that accommodates various cultural usages of parks by different ethnic communities. An example of this would be creating piñata patios at existing group areas that can also be rented with the group area. One colleague mentioned that cost would be a barrier; our intern who happened to be Mexican chimed in and said, “Now kids have up to two piñatas! Otherwise it's not a party, Mexicans spend a lot of money on parties.” There you have it—money is not an issue. There is still a paternalistic view among Sonoma County Regional Parks employees that to be Latino is to be low income.

Sonoma County Regional Parks are still on a journey to become a culturally competent park organization. Yet its commitment is evident in the outreach and Spanish-language program development that has occurred within the last two years. At Sonoma County Regional there needs to be more of an understanding that parks are resources, which have cultural and community value and also provide a space for natural and cultural heritage to be perpetuated.

Suggestions for Further Research

Specific Site Studies. There are various ethnic communities that use Sonoma County Regional Parks and Doran Regional Park is Sonoma County Regional Parks' most highly visited and has the most diverse clientele in the county park system. In July of 2015, Doran Regional Park made over 100,000 dollars in camping and day use fees. Families from the valley have been camping at Doran for generations. I believe that Sonoma County Regional Parks would benefit from conducting surveys by having outreach/information booths once a month at Doran and interviewing campers as to why they keep coming back. Why is Doran special to their family? How does Doran sustain and perpetuate their traditions?

Another park that deserves research is Gualala Regional Park (GRP). In 2014, Siberian ceremonial hitching posts were erected in one of the meadows at GRP. This would be a great park in which to continue the discussion of heritage in parks.

Overall, I believe that it is important for all park organizations to take an anthropological perspective on the development of new parks and programs, to invest in community engagement and community outreach, to hire people of color who have cultural membership within an underserved community, and to sustain meaningful relationships with park users.

Appendix A

Survey Questions and Responses

Survey on the Use of Sonoma County Regional P by the Latino Community

1. What parks do you visit? (35.87% responded Spring Lake Park, 35.43% responded Howarth Park (known by the Latino Community as “el parque de los patos” - the duck park)

Spring Lake
 Finley
 Howarth
 Doyle
 Ragle
 Healdsburg Memorial Beach
 Other (please specify)

2. Which park do you visit the most? (55.6% responded once a week)

3. How often do you visit this park? (55.6% responded once a week)

Once a year
 Once every 6 months
 Once a week
 Multiple times a week
 Other (please specify)

4. How do you get to the park? (75.74 % responded by car)

Walk
 Bike
 Bus
 Car
 Other (please specify)

5. What do you like to do at the park/s? (80.34% responded to walk, 46.15% responded to use playgrounds, 50% responded carne azada/BBQ)

Hike
 Walk
 BBQ
 Run
 Use playground
 Play soccer
 Play volleyball

Other (please specify)

6. What would encourage you to visit the park/s more? (51.98 responded more group picnic areas)

Closer to home
 More group picnic areas
 More soccer fields
 Spanish led programs
 Other (please specify)

7. What are some factors that influence you not coming to the parks? (38.03% more time, only 9.39% said cost)

Cost
 Not clean g
 Don't feel safe
 Don't have time
 Too far
 Don't know about the parks
 Other (please specify)

8. What makes you feel comfortable at the parks? (68.38% responded that the facilities be clean)

Visible staff
 Spanish speaking Staff
 Spanish signs
 Clean facilities
 Other (please specify)

9. How much do you know about Sonoma County Regional Parks? (54.59 responded knowing very little about Sonoma County Regional Parks)

Expert
 A lot
 A little
 Some
 Nothing
 I don't know

10. How important are parks to you? (53.98% responded very important, 39.38% responded extremely important)

Very Important
 Important

Some what important
Not very important
Other (please specify)

11. Please tell us about yourself. (Optional)

Age:

Ethnicity: (68.15% responded to this questions and the majority identified as Mexican, Mexican-American and or Latino)

Name:

City/Town: Email Address:

12. Would you be interested in volunteering? (44.7 % said no)

Yes

No

Appendix B
Interview Question Guide

- 1) Where did you grow up?
- 2) How long have you lived in the United States?
- 3) When you think of nature what comes to mind?
- 4) When you lived in Mexico (or country of origin) did you do any outdoor activities similar to hiking, kayaking, etc.?
- 5) Can you describe your first experience in nature?
- 6) Were you ever scared of nature?
- 7) Do you see nature or experience nature in your neighborhood?
- 8) What do you like to do in parks?
- 9) Have you visited in National Parks?
- 10) What do you enjoy doing in parks and or outdoors?

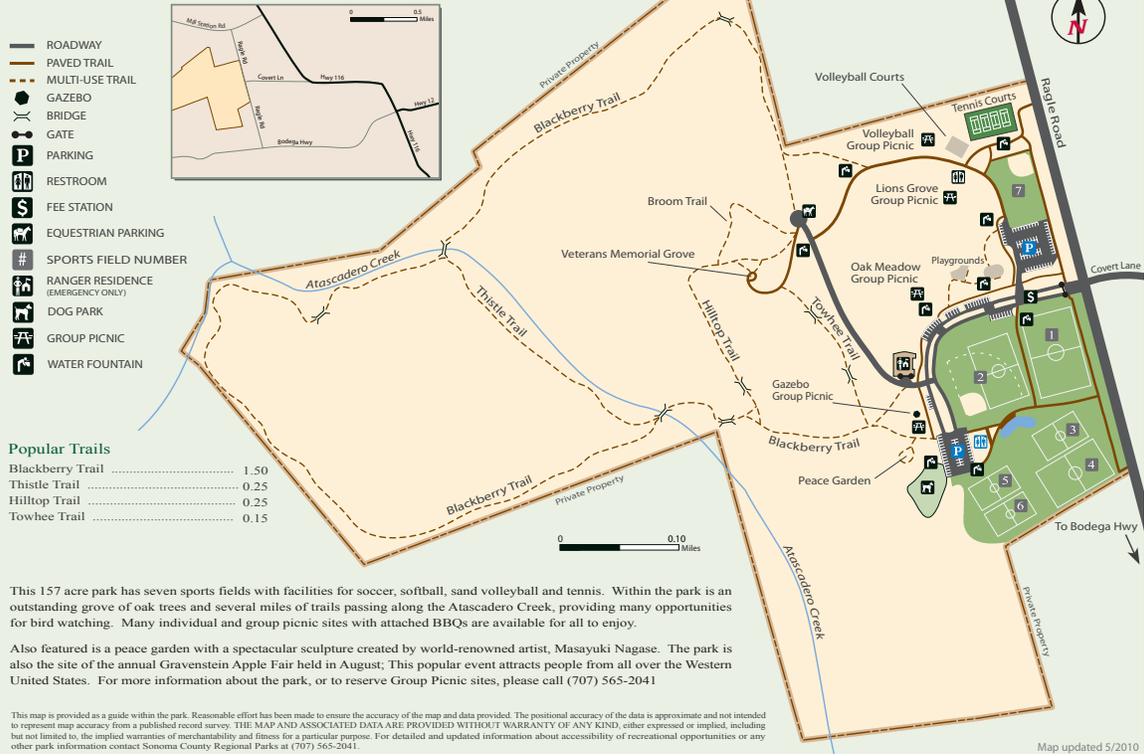
Appendix C

Spring Lake Park Map, Ragle Ranch Park Map





Ragle Ranch Regional Park



This 157 acre park has seven sports fields with facilities for soccer, softball, sand volleyball and tennis. Within the park is an outstanding grove of oak trees and several miles of trails passing along the Atascadero Creek, providing many opportunities for bird watching. Many individual and group picnic sites with attached BBQs are available for all to enjoy.

Also featured is a peace garden with a spectacular sculpture created by world-renowned artist, Masayuki Nagase. The park is also the site of the annual Gravenstein Apple Fair held in August; This popular event attracts people from all over the Western United States. For more information about the park, or to reserve Group Picnic sites, please call (707) 565-2041

This map is provided as a guide within the park. Reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the map and data provided. The positional accuracy of the data is approximate and not intended to represent map accuracy from a published record survey. THE MAP AND ASSOCIATED DATA ARE PROVIDED WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, either expressed or implied, including but not limited to, the implied warranties of merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose. For detailed and updated information about accessibility of recreational opportunities or any other park information contact Sonoma County Regional Parks at (707) 565-2041.

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