Gendered and Racial Nostalgia in the Protection of Topographies | Progressive Era Rhetoric in the Conservation and Preservation Efforts of the Hetch Hetchy Valley

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Gendered and Racial Nostalgia in the Protection of Topographies | Progressive Era Rhetoric in the Conservation and Preservation Efforts of the Hetch Hetchy Valley

Submitted in Partial Completion of the Master of Arts Degree at Sarah Lawrence College, May 2017.

Gabriela Phend
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Gender and Women’s History MA Thesis
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The images in the foreword, at the beginning of each chapter, and in the afterword, are my own. They are remnants of an attempt to explore as many protected places in the contiguous United States as possible.
In the spring of 2014, I took a class titled the Environmental History of Protected Landscapes. Enrolled in the class was only me and a best friend of mine. We came from entirely different landscapes.

Born in rural Montana, she grew up hunting, hiking, foraging, and exploring the mountain she lived on. I grew up at first, in rural San Diego, but after my parents divorced, I moved to more urban landscapes. My mother made it a priority to take advantage of the National Parks in our vicinity. My experiences with nature were with the National Parks: Yosemite, Sequoia, Grand Canyon, Joshua Tree, and Yellowstone. Based upon our lived experiences, we came to the class with different expectations on the proper usage of land. I leaned for more federal regulation, she towards less. And our professor instilled in the both of us that land rights and regulation are complicated, messy, and inextricable from sociopolitical circumstance. There are no correct answers.

On a class trip to Yellowstone National Park, a few miles from my school, we spent the day exploring and discussing the importance of National Parks. At one point during the day, my professor made a comment that has stayed with me ever since. He said, “I haven’t seen one black person the whole day.”

His comment made me question the inclusivity of the National Parks I grew up loving. Landscapes that I felt were for me to enjoy and wonder at the beauty of dark caverns, deep ravines, majestic waterfalls, and cold deserts. How inclusive are these parks? What do they reflect about the goals of their protection? How has the context behind the idea of protecting land influenced the way they are protected today? What are protected landscapes really reflecting about the ideologies of the United States? Do we really think nature has intrinsic value outside of ourselves? Will its protection always have a racial or gendered motivation?

This thesis is an attempt, a beginning at exploring these not so easy questions. They are questions I hope to try to answer for the rest of my life.

September 2008 | Glacier Point, Yosemite National Park
I am grateful to my professors at Brigham Young University Idaho who initially showed me the possible intersections of research in protected places and gender. To Brother Josephson for letting the National Parks be our classroom and teaching me invaluable lessons in landscape protection. To Sister Radke Moss for illuminating my mind through the study of women’s history and for showing me how to be an activist from within academia.

I am grateful for my professors at Sarah Lawrence College for allowing me to continue this research. To Lyde, who has constantly been supportive of me, pushing my interpretations of gender, race, and rhetoric through the lens of environmental history. Thank you for teaching me what it means to be truly selfless. To Mary, for helping me push the boundaries of my research to discover my future niche as a historian.

I am grateful to all those who have put up with my procrastination during this writing process and have read my work even when it was submitted late. To my classmates, thank you.

I am grateful to my family who has housed me, fed me, clothed me, and supported me as a poor student, to my friends who have supported me from and far.

I am grateful to the Chipotle at Cross County for letting me cry when writing was hard and giving me extra guacamole when I needed it.

I am grateful for the opportunity to study history and amplify the historically ignored voices of the past. To the classrooms of landscape, thank you.
introduction.

The Past is a Cartographer | A Historiography of the Hetch Hetchy Dispute

March 2015 | Bitterroot National Forest

It is for you to keep this treasure intact for the future, to pass it on, like a crown jewel, to the generations who shall know and love it. It is my good fortune to be one of those few happy hundreds who have camped in this valley. Through days of sunshine and nights of moonlight I wandered through its flowery meadows, along the swift Tuolumne, and slept under its mighty trees, with the growing moon tipping the great granite shoulder of the Kolana Peak above me, that bold knight in silver armor who guards this valley as El Capitan does the Yosemite… This is our Vale of Cashmere; ours forever from despoiling hands within the sacred boundaries of a national park, and therefore indestructible, inviolable.

Committee on Public Lands, United States Senate
Wednesday, February 10, 1909.

Statement of Miss Harriet Monroe, of Chicago, ILL

The past is a cartographer. The transposed lines of landscape reflect not only the geomorphological processes that create and continually shape it, but also history's inextricable relationship to it. The borders and boundaries drawn on a map reveal the visceral connections between humans and nature and the constant re-canvasing of landscape. The map is tendential to its history.
In northern California, the complex and multi layered relationships between nature and humans are personified in a tract of land called the Hetch Hetchy valley. A landscape carved by an ancient river and subsequent glacier, it formed a flat alluvial floodplain brimming with meadows of pine forest, oak trees, streams, and rock spires. Yet today, the valley is submerged at the bottom of a water reservoir, providing public water for drinking and irrigation.

The Hetch Hetchy valley’s proximity to San Francisco and the supply of water it receives from Sierra Nevada snowfall each year made it a prime location for the city’s municipal water needs. The construction of a hydroelectric dam would supply the city with a power source for its burgeoning population and end a private monopoly held by the Spring Valley Water Company.¹ However, in 1890, the Hetch Hetchy valley was included within the newly established boundaries of Yosemite National Park and was therefore, federally protected land. Despite National Park status, San Francisco officials were not deterred from considering the Hetch Hetchy as a water source and appealed to the Interior Department in 1901, 1903, and 1905. Under the premise of the Right of Way Act passed in 1901, Mayor Phelan of San Francisco applied for a permit for water storage in the valley. This Act allowed the Secretary of the Interior to grant rights to local and state governments to reserve federal lands containing possible water supplies for the public. In response to the appeals, both Secretaries of the Interior under the Taft administration denied the requests because of their preservationist belief that Yosemite National Park, specifically the Hetch Hetchy valley, should be removed from development.²

After a massive earthquake in 1906, San Francisco experienced one of the most

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¹ Ray Taylor, *Hetch Hetchy: the story of San Francisco's struggle to provide a water supply for her future needs* (San Francisco: R.J. Orozco, 1926), 97-102 and 165-172.
devastating fires in its history. Because of broken water lines and a limited water supply, the city’s structures and residents were left with little defense from the flames. As a result, San Francisco city officials again appealed to the Secretary of the Interior to approve of a plan to dam the Tuolumne River and create a water reservoir within the Hetch Hetchy valley. Along with providing the public with clean drinking water, it was appealed as a preventative measure against any subsequent disaster the city might face. As Secretary of the Interior from 1907 to 1909, James R. Garfield supported the requests of San Francisco city officials and authorized the construction of a dam. However, in order to solidify San Francisco’s right to build water infrastructure in the valley, the appeal would have to go through the United States Congress. In consequence, a national debate ensued between those who believed San Francisco had a right to dam the valley and those who believed it should be protected from development.

To the valley’s supporters, the Hetch Hetchy was a relic of the ice age, carved out by ancient glaciers: “a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain mansions.” Preservationists under John Muir argued that the reservoir would destroy the valley’s aesthetic beauty and undermine its intrinsic value. Under Muir’s direction, the Sierra Club organized support to oppose the dam in an attempt to convince Congress to deny the plan, arguing that there were thirteen other potential sources available for supplying San Francisco’s water needs. Aside from Muir, Harriet Monroe also solidified her role as one of the most prolific and eloquent defenders of the Hetch Hetchy valley. However, she was not the only one.

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4 Righter, 72.
The women of the Sierra Club called upon the California Federation of Women’s Clubs to gather support from women nationally. Thousands of middle to upper class white women nationwide worked for preservation of the valley either through a club or individually.⁷

Conservationists under Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt argued that damming the valley would be consistent with values of efficient and sustainable use. Pinchot recommended the dam would be a way to serve the interests of thousands of San Francisco residents rather than accommodate the needs of the few who camped and hiked in the area. The Women’s Club of San Francisco also sided with Gifford Pinchot and the conservationist cause. Similarly, they argued that this inaccessible small tract of land would better serve the people of San Francisco as a source for clean drinking water than as a place of nature worship.⁸

These conflicts of interest reveal that constructions of wilderness competed not only with overuse but also against different notions of proper usage. In the end, on December 19th 1913, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Raker Act authorizing the use of the Hetch Hetchy valley as a public water source for San Franciscan residents. Preservationists lost the battle over the valley, but their involvement in the dispute has been historicized as one of the first instances of national environmental activism and set a precedent for future environmental reform.⁹ The Hetch Hetchy dispute marked a transition point in American environmental thought that forced people to reassess the value of protected areas.

Divided chronologically, three themes emerge when studying the historiography of the

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⁸ Conservation and preservation are both beliefs involved in protecting the environment. For this paper, preservation is defined as the belief that nature has intrinsic value and aesthetic beauty that should be preserved in a state of non-human influence. Conservation is defined as the belief that nature has value as a material or economic resource for humans and should be conserved or managed sustainably.
Hetch Hetchy dispute. While providing broad context, the first histories demonstrate the divide between conservationists and preservationists through their own bias on the correct usage of wilderness protection. Infiltrating the text, these first historians tend to be dichotomous: they either support the conservationist or preservationist cause and ignore or devalue the opposition. The second generation of histories began to analyze the rhetoric and political dimensions of the debate and started including the voices of women who had prolific roles in the dispute. The third set of histories continued the revisionist trend and began to focus on the gendered dynamic of the debate. The historiography of the Hetch Hetchy reveals how the complex and intricate relationships between humans and nature can be affirmed, contested, and reevaluated.

There are four examples of historians who illustrate the dogmatic bias prevalent in the first discussions of the Hetch Hetchy. In 1926, Ray Taylor wrote the first history of the dispute titled *Hetch Hetchy: the story of San Francisco’s struggle to provide a water supply for her future*. Based primarily on government documents and a broad historical context of the San Francisco area, it focuses mostly on the political history of the debate. Tracing the history of San Francisco from prehistoric ages to the construction of the O’Shaughnessy dam, Taylor outlines why a municipally owned water company was especially important for San Francisco. In this history, his primary sources are mainly written by prominent conservationists or those who support the conservationist cause.\(^\text{10}\)

Thirty-nine years later, Holway R. Jones wrote *John Muir and the Sierra Club: The Battle for Yosemite*. The book provides a history of the founding of the Sierra Club, their initiatives to preserve the Yosemite region as a national park, and a general outline of the Hetch

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\(^\text{10}\) Ray Taylor, *Hetch Hetchy: the story of San Francisco’s struggle to provide a water supply for her future needs* (San Francisco: R.J. Orozco, 1926).
Hetchy debate from 1894 to 1913. Jones documented the preservationist’s campaign of sending pamphlets opposing the dam and detailed the strategies of Sierra Club member John Muir and Appalachian Mountain Club member Edmund Whitman. Jones attributes the preservationist loss to division amongst Sierra Club members, being unprepared for the Public Lands Committee debate, and disorganization amongst the many groups advocating for the valley.¹¹

In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, published shortly thereafter in 1967, Roderick Nash devotes one chapter to the Hetch Hetchy dispute. Nash focused on the conservationist leaders William Kent and Gifford Pinchot and credited the preservationist opposition to scientists, naturalists, mountain climbers, travelers, and others. Nash believed the difference between conservationists and preservationists were competing claims of wilderness and civilization and stated, “when the preservation of wilderness conflicted with ‘material interest,’ those financially affected cried: ‘that is sentimentalism; that is aestheticism; that is pleasure-loving; that is unnecessary; that is not practical.’”¹² Ultimately, Nash viewed the Hetch Hetchy debate as a positive step forward for national environmental reform, affirming his preference for the conservationists.

Over a dozen years later, historian Kendrick A. Clements in “Engineers and Conservationists,” attributes conservationist success to the experts who argued for the scientific management and the resourceful utilization of nature. He wrote, “For most Americans, the idea of slowing urban industrialization to save a bit of wilderness was inconceivable… having dared to attack the sacred notions of progress and development, they had little to offer in their place

except mystical romanticism.” In general, these first writings of the Hetch Hetchy Debate tend to historicize the conservationist cause as scientific and rational over the preservationist cause.

Between 1984 and 1998, a new trajectory emerged. The second histories focused less on the tensions between conservationists and preservationists, and began interpreting the dispute through more dynamic points of analysis. In her 1984 article, “Conservationism vs. Preservationism: The ‘Public Interest’ in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy”, historian Christine Oravec focused on how different conceptions of the “public,” influenced conservationist and preservationist activism. In Carolyn Merchant’s article the same year, “Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement: 1900-1916,” she writes of the women’s clubs efforts for the preservation of the valley from 1908 to 1913 and of individuals such as Martha Walker, Eva Channing, Martha Haskell, Grace Esther Dattle, Mrs. William Hanson, and many other women who personally visited the valley and advocated for its protection. Merchant showed how the General Federation of Women’s Clubs maintained a conservation committee and how the Audubon societies provided women with avenues for leadership as secretaries and presidents of local environmental chapters. She argues that ultimately, women’s organizations helped the nation see the worth of environmental issues. Michael B. Smith in his 1998 article “The Value of a Tree: Public Debates of John Muir and Gifford Pinchot,” analyzes the intellectual rhetoric of Pinchot and Muir and how they used their views to shape national consciousness in the American Public. Focusing less on their preference for conservation or preservation, these

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historians concentrated on the rhetoric, public perceptions, and women that influenced the debate.

The most recent histories continue this revisionist trend by including more voices of the women involved, critiquing the intentions of wilderness protection and influences of power, and focusing on the gendered dynamic of the debate. In the year 2005 alone, there were three examples of this most recent trajectory. In 2005, *The Battle Over the Hetch Hetchy: America’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism*, Robert Righter critiques nineteenth century ideals of proper land use and argues that the dispute was less about the preservation of wilderness and more about the public and private use of water storage and tourism. To Righter, the ideology of public power fixed the Hetch Hetchy valley between conflicting interests of private and municipal ownership because even defenders of the valley’s aesthetic advocated for development, including roads, hotels, winter sports amenities, and infrastructure to support visitors and San Francisco’s leaders could have built a similar water system elsewhere for less expense. Utilizing the Hetch Hetchy valley became a conquest, a reflection of Progressive era ideals on power.\(^\text{17}\) The same year, in *Dam! Water, Power, Politics, and Preservation in Hetch Hetchy and Yosemite National Park*, John Simpson wrote that complex political maneuvering of the conservationists led to the preservationist defeat. The political influence of the railroads, corrupt politicians, ranching, and development interests sealed the Hetch Hetchy valley’s fate even though there were other less destructive locations that could have satisfied the water needs of San Francisco residents.\(^\text{18}\) Also published in 2005, Susan


Schrepfer published *Nature’s Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism* and focused specifically on the political influence of the preservationist cause. She noted that even women activists were divided on the correct usage of the Hetch Hetchy. Women’s clubs and hiking groups advocated on behalf of the valley, while women’s clubs particularly in the San Francisco vicinity, advocated on behalf of the reservoir.\(^{19}\)

Focusing specifically on women’s involvement, one year later, Polly Welts Kaufman in *National Parks and the Woman’s Voice: A History* suggests that the Hetch Hetchy debate inspired the General Federation of Women’s Clubs to join the preservationist cause after previously being supporters of both conservation and preservation efforts. She writes of Harriet Monroe speaking before the U.S. House Committee and more than fifty women that went on record with letters demanding the preservation of the Hetch Hetchy. According to Kaufman, the defeat of the preservationist cause made the women activists withdraw from their brief incursion with male-run conservation organizations that become more scientific as a consequence of the dispute.\(^{20}\) Also in 2006, Adam Rome in the article “Political Hermaphrodites’: Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America” states that the rhetoric and institutional structure of environmental reform was constructed around men defending their masculinity. As more women advocated for environmental causes, many male reformers were simultaneously accused of being effeminate and sentimental. The gender anxieties and the public prominence of women involved in the Hetch Hetchy Debate allowed supporters of the dam to call men who appealed to preservation for its aesthetic value as “nature fakers.” Rome ultimately argues that it was the

\(^{19}\) Susan Schrepfer, *Nature’s Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 94-95.

gender politics of the Progressive era that shaped the way environmental issues were formed as men tried to deny effeminacy and defend their masculinity.21

Also focusing specifically on women’s influence, in 2012, Susan Unger in Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History writes of the gender dualisms that influenced the Hetch Hetchy dispute. Women and men who identified as preservationists were accused of suffering from effeminacy and caring for nature in a way that was not based in sound science. Concurrently, Theodore Roosevelt’s hyper-masculine identity allowed conservation to thrive on the basis of sustainable use. Unger argues that women were persuaded to believe that the beauty of Hetch Hetchy valley had more intrinsic value than the potential power of the dam. She focuses more on the women who believed that progress was idealized in the scientific values of conservation and not preservation. However, even these scientific women experienced barriers and were discouraged from participating in environmental fields as they became more technical.22

In the same year, Jamie C. Euken in the thesis “Nature Fakers and the Hetch Hetchy Valley: Women in the Early Years of the Environmental Movement” argues that members of Congress delegitimized the political power of preservationists by associating them with women. Because wilderness was believed to be a place of American masculine identity, Congress was able to dismiss the ideological and intellectual validity of the Hetch Hetchy valley with men and women. Adopting rhetoric associating preservationists with a sentimental view of nature led preservationists in the future to appeal to environmental causes with more masculine rhetoric.

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Jamie argues that it was the women who advocated for the Hetch Hetchy valley that helped foster a national discussion on environmental issues. In 2016, Carolyn Merchant also mentions the gender dynamics within the dispute in *Spare the Birds! George Bird Grinnell and the First Audubon Society*. Merchant writes that Roosevelt maintained the role of civic sportsman and hunter that was typical of conservationists, while supporters of the valley were largely nature-loving women and sentimental men. Merchant ends with reflecting on the gender differentiation in women and men’s work in environmental reform during the Progressive era.

In varying degrees, historians provide information on the role of women within the Hetch Hetchy dispute. Jones mentioned how the General Federation of Women’s Clubs handled the administrative work of mailing pamphlets against the dam to the Senate Public Lands Committee, to other clubs, and to other people involved in the debate. Jones also included Harriet Monroe as a witness in the 1909 Senate Public Lands Committee hearings. Robert Righter noted the involvement of Harriet Monroe and devoted a few pages to the contributions of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. He described the San Francisco newspapers efforts to feminize John Muir and devalue his words as sentimental. Clements quotes Marsden Manson, San Francisco’s city engineer, when he referred to opponents of the dam in loosely homophobic terms as “short-haired women and long-haired men.” But most of the time, these political histories either disregarded or essentialized women’s roles and failed to recognize the gendered dynamic to the debate.

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25 Harriet Monroe was an American poet, scholar, member of the Chicago Geographical Society, prolific supporter of the Hetch Hetchy valley, and writer of several narratives of her trips there.
Many of these popular narratives assume that the key actors were men even though a significantly large amount of politically active white middle to upper class women also participated in the dispute. Historians Polly Welts Kaufman and Carolyn Merchant offered a revision to the presumed male dominated narrative of the Hetch Hetchy debate. They introduce the overwhelming numbers of women who had joined the conservationist and preservationist cause but fail to insert gender analysis. Merchant and Kaufman recognized that adding women was an important step in reshaping environmental history but, consequently, this raised other questions regarding gender. Along with the thousands of women who helped the preservationist cause, opponents of preservationists used gender as a way to debase and feminize preservation while emasculating conservation. Considered unmanly and sentimental, Muir became a main target. In the San Francisco Call he was portrayed physically as a woman, clothed in a dress, apron, and flowered bonnet, struggling to keep the waters of the Tuolumne from flooding through the wispy ends of his broom.\(^{27}\) His words were compared to “verbal lingerie” and “frantic shrieks.”\(^{28}\) Contrarily, those promoting conservation masculinized Pinchot and Roosevelt by equating conservation with the manly notions of farming, hunting, and subduing the earth for the benefit of human kind.\(^{29}\)

In the late 2000’s, historians such as Adam Rome and Jamie C. Euken, started to integrate gender analysis of the Hetch Hetchy Debate in their histories. Rome explains the masculine responses to the influx of women involved in the preservationist cause and Euken shows the delegitimizing efforts in Congress toward women and men advocating for preservation. However, these only serve as introductions to potential histories of the debate that

\(^{27}\) See image on page 58.
\(^{28}\) Kline, 67.
\(^{29}\) Unger, 100.
should include gender, race, class, and the women who helped organize under the preservationist and conservationist cause. Based upon the historiography of the Hetch Hetchy Debate, and the need for a more complex gendered and racial analysis of this pivotal moment in United States environmental history, my central question and addition to the discussion is: Using the Hetch Hetchy Debate as a case study, how did the rhetoric in the gender politics of the Progressive era expose the gendered, racial, and classist protection of land in its conservation and preservation initiatives, discourse, and legislation? In order to begin answering this question, I have divided my thesis into five chapters.

Chapter one focuses on the historical context of the early twentieth century. The history of westward expansion, industrialization, and manifest destiny that came at the expense of exploitation, both human and nature. As settlers pushed the boundaries of the frontier, natural resources were being sacrificed for industrialization and Native Americans, Chinese, black people, and Mexican Americans were removed, relocated, and restricted of movement. Consequently, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became a time period fixated on protecting landscapes both from exploitation of natural resources and also to preserve a landscape symbolic of white upper to middle class identity. Out of this fervor for environmental reform, constructions of conservation and preservation helped create numerous types of protected places.

Chapter two frames the history of environmental protection through the different organizations and individuals who advocated for the conservation or preservation of landscapes including the Boone and Crocket, General Federation of Women’s Clubs, Sierra Club, Appalachian Mountain Club, Audubon Society, and other Progressive era organizations.
Establishing networks and often corresponding with each other, these white middle to upper class organizations were successful in inciting a legacy of protection. Contrarily, while black middle class women’s clubs were created upon the same ideologies of civic reform as their white counterpart, there is no research or primary source documentation that I could find linking black women’s clubs to conservation and preservation initiatives in the Progressive era. The absence of race is indicative that the protections of certain landscapes were racially motivated at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapter three concentrates on progressive era conceptualizations of middle to upper class white masculinity and femininity and a study of the acceptable gendered spheres of white men and women. Because both men and women utilized and restructured gender to justify their involvement in environmental reform, wilderness became a proving ground where men could demonstrate their manliness and women could justify their domestic roles in society as nurturers and caretakers. Simultaneously, many white middle class men engaged in the remaking of manhood through civilization, or the combination of male hegemony and white supremacy. As a result of the idealism of separate spheres and the heteronormativity of civilization, conservation and preservation initiatives were pervaded by the conceptualizations of a white wilderness built on the premise of exclusion.

Chapter four focuses on how the rhetoric in the Hetch Hetchy debate nationalized a gendered tension within environmental reform. Nationally, proponents of the dam claimed to support environmental reform that was more rational and practical to appear more masculine, while opponents of the dam were condemned for being sentimental or more feminine. The juxtaposition of the local, state, and national press that mention the debate reveals how
newspapers also used gender, utilitarianism, and aestheticism as a tactic for pushing either a conservationist or preservationist platform. By reducing arguments within the dispute to science versus sentiment, the newspapers also reveal the dichotomous essentialism of the masculinization of conservation and the feminization of preservation. While male preservationists endured charges of effeminacy, women could support either side of the Hetch Hetchy dispute without receiving criticism. Overall, imagery and rhetoric in the newspapers covering the dispute reveal the hierarchal power structures in the heteronormativity of conservation and preservation.

Chapter five begins with a historiography of the inclusion of women’s voices in the Hetch Hetchy dispute. Historians of the dispute have fallen into the trap of reiterating the same lines over and over and relying on the work of other historians to include gender, which creates a habit of providing only secondary comments about the influence of women in the debate. Yet, middle to upper class white women were prolific activists through the pamphlets, letters, official statements, and speeches they wrote and sent during the debate. Even though women did not possess the vote, the letters were read and included in official congressional hearings, which illuminates their political clout. Ultimately, however, it was the patriarchy of a heteronormative wilderness that silenced, and continues to silence women’s activism and justifies a complete absence of race through the assumption of whiteness. Due to limited research, there is no documentation of any diversity within the coverage of the Hetch Hetchy dispute and perhaps there really was no diversity. However, this assumption of whiteness continues to pervade environmental reform efforts today, even when there are diverse actors.

Just as the waters of the Tuolumne had covered the Hetch Hetchy valley, male dominated
narratives also concealed women’s voices. As historians are uncovering their voices, there is now a greater need for environmental histories to integrate them into their broader narratives. However, the inclusion of white women’s influence in the dispute reveals a historical geography of dispossession and displacement, an assumption of whiteness that has pervaded conservation and preservationist initiatives even today. This thesis will not only provide a revisionist history of the Hetch Hetchy debate that integrates women’s voices into the previously male-dominated narrative, but also shows how the study of white women’s influence reveals the gendered, racial, and classist biases at the beginning of the twentieth century and expose how land protection itself can be racially motivated and gendered.
Creative Destruction | Exploitation of the “Great American Desert”

March 2014 | Big Hole National Battlefield

The theory of creative destruction can be defined as the human displacement of one landscape for another more desired one, bringing about the demise of what existed before.¹

In his report of an expedition in 1820, Stephen Long, an explorer and topographical engineer, gave the Great Plains of the United States the title “Great American Desert” and typified this area of land as “wholly unfit for cultivation and of course uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence.” Yet, by 1890, the United States Census Bureau announced that the frontier was closed.² The Superintendent of the Census wrote that the boundary of “unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line.”³ At its end, no area in the contiguous United States had a demographic less than two persons per square mile. The fragmented boundaries of the frontier

had become a reflection of the expansion and conquest that pervaded the nineteenth century United States landscape.

At the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner read his seminal essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” Reflecting on the past century, Turner stated, “Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.” From the end of the Civil War to the close of the nineteenth century, settlers increasingly pushed the boundaries of the western frontier. Innovative steam navigation on western waters and an expanding transcontinental railroad network incentivized the farmer, hunter, rancher, miner, and trader to migrate west and claim part of the presumably endless supply of inexpensive and undeveloped land and natural resources. Settlers believed migrating west was a divine responsibility and destiny, an opportunity to propagate the unique virtues of the American people and their traditions. Because the United States had been established on a presumed freedom and democracy, Americans, specifically white Anglo-Saxons, were obligated to spread these ideals across the continent and ultimately the world. Manifest Destiny, the idea that to “overspread and to possess the whole of the land which Providence has given,” justified the assertions of ownership in the western frontier.

These pushed boundaries and justifications of conquest depended on legislation that incentivized white westward expansion and concurrently, justified the violent removal,

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4 Turner, 1.
7 Brinkley, 344.
restriction, and relocation of Native Americans, Chinese, Mexican Americans, and black people from western landscapes. The 1830 Indian Removal Act forcibly relocated Cherokee, Creeks, and other eastern Native Americans to west of the Mississippi River to accommodate white settlers. As land was claimed and privately settled, arriving settlers began to agitate for expansion within the new boundaries of sovereign Native land. In response, the Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 created a reservation system that compacted Native American territory and forced tribes to land that restricted their mobility to hunt, fish, and gather foods. When white settlers and corporate farmers, ranchers, railroad industries, and land speculators again argued for land within the reservations, the government favored the white settlers and corporate interests, and passed the 1871 Dawes Severalty Act. Under the pretense of assimilation and protection, this Act ended the communal reservation system. Native American tribal land was surveyed and divided into multiple allotments for individuals and the land leftover was sold to white settlers. The last facade of Native American sovereignty from the United States was eradicated.8

The California Gold Rush exponentially increased the numbers of people migrating west. When gold was found in Sacramento California in 1848, thousands of people seeking fortune from elsewhere in the United States and other countries made the journey, whether around the tip of South America, over the Oregon-California Trail, or later with the transcontinental and Panama railroad.9 However, when the most accessible gold had been collected and the mining process became more difficult, white Americans began to discriminate, minimize, and ultimately

8 Limerick, 191-198.
9 Steven E. Woodworth, Manifest Destinies: America’s Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War (Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 321-327.
restrict foreigners from mining and competing with them for jobs and wages. In addition to organized attacks on Latin American and Chinese miners particularly, the California legislature enacted a Foreign Miners Tax Law (1850) of twenty dollars per month in exchange for a license to mine for gold. Discouraged from prospecting, numbers of Chinese laborers increased in the agricultural, factory, garment, and railroad industries, which intensified ethnic discrimination and hostility. As a result, the California government passed a series of laws that required Chinese residents to obtain special licenses, pay specific taxes, and ultimately aimed at preventing Chinese residents from naturalization. In 1879, legislation in Congress limited the number of Chinese arriving to fifteen per ship and in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act suspended immigration of Chinese laborers. Chinese people residing in the United States were required to carry identification certificates, excluded from citizenship, prohibited reentry if they left, and were denied the freedom of movement the west perpetuated.

The Gold Rush also disproportionately affected the Native Americans of California. As settlers brought diseases and claimed land, miners violently organized against Native Americans to impede them from mining or retaliating against their forced homelessness. As a result of the Gold Rush, thousands of Native Americans were killed from disease, starvation, displacement, and violence. Not isolated, the treatment of Native Americans in the context of the Gold Rush can be seen as a microcosm for the legacy of widespread violence, relocation, and extermination of Native Americans throughout the United States.

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11 Limerick, 239.
12 Limerick, 262.
13 Limerick, 268.
Likewise, with the winning of the Mexican-American War in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo validated the United States’ continental claims all the way to the Pacific Ocean. At first, the treaty guaranteed that Mexicans and Native Americans living in the previously known Mexican territories of California, Nevada, Utah and parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming and Colorado were guaranteed to keep their rights, properties, and possessions and become United States citizens after one year. Unfortunately, the rights indicated in the treaty were ignored as Native American and Mexican residents were denied or lost their landownership. In the new court system, white Euro-American settlers, developers, and land speculators were able manipulate the fragile property rights of former Mexican citizens so that few Mexican claimants were successful in retaining their land. Settlers took over the local economies through the railroading industry, lumber mills, mines, and commercial ranching and agriculture, subsequently creating a socially and economically oppressed Mexican-American population denied of their constitutional rights.\textsuperscript{15} The “free enjoyment of their liberty and property” for Mexicans and Native Americans were in actuality, empty claims of citizenship.\textsuperscript{16} Mexican Americans were paid lower wages, denied equal justice and property claims, segregated into poorly funded schools, excluded from politics, and disenfranchised from voting through literacy tests and poll taxes.\textsuperscript{17}

Benefitting from the Homestead Act of 1862, increasing numbers of settlers migrated west to become potential landowners. The Act provided quarter sections of land, 160-acre lots, to a household head, male or female, who could buy it for a subsidized amount at the end of a six

\textsuperscript{15} Limerick, 235-242.
\textsuperscript{16} Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, United States-Republic of Mexico, February 2, 1848, 9 Stat. 922, TS 207, Bevans 791.
\textsuperscript{17} Laura E. Gómez, \textit{Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race}, (New York: New York University, 2007), 152.
months residence or file a claim for ownership after five years of improvements. Although some land speculators took advantage of the Act, its main intention was to transfer land from the public domain to the private ownership of settlers, irrespective of their economic circumstance.\textsuperscript{18} This was intended for those who could not afford to buy land outright or under the Preemption Act of 1841, which provided fiscal subsidies for squatters who had occupied the land for a minimum of 14 months.\textsuperscript{19} As a result, by the beginning of the twentieth century, local land offices had given homesteaders around 270 million acres of settled land.\textsuperscript{20}

Although the majority of homesteaders were white, it was not exclusively so. Some freed people took advantage of the Homestead Act and, between the years 1879 to 1881, participated in the mass western movement referred to as the “Great Exodus.” Black homesteaders called “Exodusters”, migrated specifically to Kansas to claim land and to escape the racial violence of the post-Civil War south.\textsuperscript{21} However, this migration was only possible with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866. In 1862, when the Homestead Act was passed, it was only legal for free blacks, free born, emancipated, or those who purchased freedom before the Civil War, to homestead. The Homestead Act stated “That any person who is the head of a family, or who has arrived at the age of twenty-one years, and is a citizen of the United States, or who shall have filed his declaration to become a citizen…” could become homesteaders.\textsuperscript{22} In 1862, slaves were not allowed to become United States citizens nor was it legally feasible for them to declare the

\textsuperscript{18} Act of May 20, 1862, Homestead Act, 37\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 2d sess., 1862, ch. 75, National Archives and Records Administration.
\textsuperscript{19} The Preemption Act of 1841, 27th Congress, 1 sess., 1841, ch. 16, 5 Stat. 453.
\textsuperscript{22} Act of May 20, 1862, Homestead Act, 37\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 2d sess., 1862, ch. 75, National Archives and Records Administration.
intent to become citizens. Only when citizenship was granted under the Civil Rights Act to those born in the United States regardless of race or color, could freed people become homesteaders.\footnote{Act of April 9, 1866, Civil Rights Act, Public Law, 39th Congress, 1st sess., 1866, Congressional Record 14 stat 27-30, National Archives and Records Administration.} Even when legally allowed to homestead, the post emancipation south still used processes that limited freed peoples’ mobility, making it difficult to take part in westward expansion.

Shortly after the end of the Civil War, municipalities in southern states passed Black Codes to restrict freed people’s economic, civic, and spatial freedom. To counteract the labor shortage produced by the abolition of slavery, most southern states allowed convict leasing, a system where the state prisons could hire out convicts for labor to private parties. This incentivized state prisons to arrest black people to serve as laborers. Unemployment, homelessness, failure to pay certain taxes, failure to show documentation of annual employment contracts, and a variety of other petty crimes including loitering, gambling, and drunkenness were criminalized. If convicted, freed people could be imprisoned and leased to plantations or other facilities seeking labor.\footnote{Alexander Lichtenstein, \textit{Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South} (London: Verso, 1996), 168-170.} Concurrently, the sharecropping system created contracts between landowners and black laborers that didn’t provide wages, but a share of the crop they produced. Bound to a single crop agricultural system, a majority of black farmers faced a life reminiscent of slavery. Without receiving payment, black farmers were forced for generations into debt to the landowners for farming supplies, cabins with sparse furnishing, and other goods.\footnote{Stephanie Camp, \textit{Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 140.} Black laborers either became cyclically bound to the landowner and the land they labored on or trapped in the legal system of convict labor, making migration west exceptionally
difficult.

Westward expansion aided by Manifest Destiny, railroads, steam travel, and the Homestead Act primarily benefited a white Euro-American demographic who endorsed their own superior racial heritage. It constructed systems of violence that cyclically bound emancipated blacks to the landscapes of their oppression, discriminated and excluded the Chinese, perpetuated the forcible removal, relocation, and massacring of Native Americans, justified aggression against Mexico and withheld promised civil liberties for its former citizens, and to an extent ignored contributions of the working class and immigrant homesteaders who faced the exhausting and tedious actuality of westward expansion.²⁶

The West’s romantic imagery, the endless prairie, rolling hills, tall grass, seemingly never-ending reservoirs of land, was idealized for a white demographic. Manifest Destiny encouraged a geographical racism of dispossession, displacement, exclusion, and possible extermination of people of color. As white Euro-Americans pushed the boundaries of the frontier, they created a landscape based on the invisibility of established communities, the justification of aggression, and the commodification of natural environments.

Toward the turn of the century, it became increasingly apparent that material growth of westward expansion came at the exploitation of humans and nature. The abundance of natural resources the west had provided was being overcut by logging companies, killed off by hunters, extracted by miners, and settled by homesteaders. The herds of bison that had once covered the Great Plains had disappeared and the sky no longer darkened from Passenger pigeons in flight.²⁷ The United States was experiencing a tragedy of the commons, a system where individuals

²⁶ Limerick, 124-126.
depleted natural resources out of a collective self-interest. For decades, residents grazed their animals, fished, hunted, and collected resources such as timber, minerals, and coal without embracing collective regulation to avoid overusing the environment. The assumption that the United States had an inexhaustible amount of natural resources was manifesting through its disappearing landscapes.

Creative Destruction | Protection of the “Great American Desert”

As the exploitation of the United States landscape was becoming more obvious, environmentally minded reformers appealed for the federal regulation of the nation’s resources and the preservation of those resources for future generations. Environmental reformers believed that scientific intervention was necessary to slow the rapid, unrestrained industrial and urban expansion that was consuming natural resources and devastating landscapes. As certain wildlife species were becoming extinct or on the verge of extinction, as entire forests were being logged, the lines between settlement and wilderness needed to be redefined. Simultaneously, protecting landscapes also became synonymous with the aggressive relocation, restriction of movement, and exclusion of people of color.

As a result, the two main ideologies that emerged out of the environmental movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the protection of landscapes were conservation and preservation. Conservational ethic supports the controlled, profitable use of landscapes and natural resources to create balanced relationships between humans and nature. Acknowledging economic motives, conservationists believed that sustainable use of nature

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29 Stradling, 6.
through scientific forestry should ultimately provide the maximum benefit for human kind.\textsuperscript{30} Examples of conserved landscapes are National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, and National Recreation Areas. These large areas of land aim to conserve ecosystems and habitats through sustainable resource management while providing opportunities for enjoyment. Low-level, non-industrial use of natural resources are encouraged, including minimal logging, fishing, hunting, and swimming.\textsuperscript{31} Conserved landscapes encourage human interaction that contributes to and promotes sustainable management while concurrently engages with the natural and cultural heritage of the protected space.

Preservationist ethic supports the belief that nature has an intrinsic and aesthetic value outside of human influence. With roots in deep ecology, the philosophy that recognizes an inherent worth of all living beings regardless of their benefit to human needs, preservation seeks to protect buildings, objects, and landscapes from human use.\textsuperscript{32} Examples of preservation include National Parks, National Monuments, Wilderness Areas, and Strict Nature Reserves. National Parks are large natural areas set aside for the protection of their large-scale ecological processes and wildlife. Even though the land is managed to sustain as close to a natural state as possible, scientific, educational, spiritual, and limited recreational activities are encouraged. National Monuments are protected because of their geological or geomorphological features, culturally influenced natural features, or worth as historical or spiritual sites. Similar to National Parks, the incentive for the preservation of National Monuments is through low-scale educational and recreational tourism. Wilderness Areas and Strict Nature Reserves are protected areas largely

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\textsuperscript{30} Stradling, 5. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Stradling, 224.
\end{flushright}
unmodified to preserve their natural environments. Human visitation must follow rules for minimal low-impact educational and scientific research and Strict Nature Reserves tend to restrict all human activity outside of environmental monitoring. Preserved landscapes, protected on the basis of their intrinsic value and worth outside of humans, often have more strict rules regarding the usage and modification of natural processes.\textsuperscript{33}

The first instance of a national federal legislation to preserve land in the United States was the Yosemite Act of 1864 signed by Abraham Lincoln. The Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove was designated as a protected wilderness area for “public use, resort, and recreation.”\textsuperscript{34} The idea of a National Park came a few years later and originates with the explorers on the Washburn Yellowstone Expedition of 1870. Gathered around a campfire in the Yellowstone region, the myth tells of explorers discussing the importance of the unique landscapes they had encountered on their journey.\textsuperscript{35} They believed that the waterfalls, hot springs, and animals of Yellowstone needed to be preserved, “that there ought to be no private ownership of any portion of that region, but that the whole of it ought to be set apart as a great National Park.”\textsuperscript{36} Consequently, the explorers, artists, and photographers of the Folsom-Cook, Washburn, and Hayden expeditions promoted a park bill in Washington in late 1871 and early 1872.\textsuperscript{37}

The National Park idea was recognized on March 1, 1872, when President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Yellowstone National Park Protection Act into law. The Yellowstone National Park Protection Act says, “the headwaters of the Yellowstone River… is hereby reserved and

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\textsuperscript{34} An Act authorizing a Grant to the State of California of the Yo-Semite Valley,” and of the Land embracing the Mariposa Big Tree Grove, Public Law 159, 38\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} sess. (June 30, 1864), 325.
\textsuperscript{35} Nathaniel Pitt Langford, \textit{The Discovery of Yellowstone Park} (University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 117.
\textsuperscript{36} Langford, 117-118.
\end{quotation}
withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale… and dedicated and set apart as a public park or
pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”38 In an era of expansion, the
National Park idea allowed the federal government to set aside land deemed too valuable to
develop and set the precedent for federal environmental protection.

United States environmental reform initially began earlier with the creation of the
Department of the Interior in 1849, one year after the gold rush and the Mexican-American War.
The Department dealt with land and natural resource management, American Indian affairs,
wildlife conservation, and territorial affairs.39 After the protection of Yosemite Valley, the
expeditions and subsequent establishment of Yellowstone National Park, the US Geological
Survey formed in 1879. The scientists of the USGS studied the landscape of the United States for
the “classification of the public lands, and examination of the geological structure, mineral
resources, and products of the national domain.”40

While the United States government was classifying landscapes and establishing
departments that would set the precedent for an era of land protection, simultaneously, people
were excluded from the land through relocation, restriction, and exclusion. Landscape
preservation and conservation was introduced not only to protect natural resources but also to
preserve the semblance of a white frontier, a landscape that represented a legacy of conquest and
protection from settlement. By the late nineteenth century, these landscapes of both protection
and exclusion became a reality.

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38 An Act Establishing Yellowstone National Park, Public Law 392, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess., (March 1, 1872),
32-33.
39 An Act to establish the House Department, and to provide for the Treasury Department an Assistant
Secretary of the Treasury, and a commissioner of the Customs, 30th Cong., 2nd sess., (March 8, 1849), 395.
In 1890, an act of Congress created Yosemite National Park. In 1891, the U.S. Land Forest Reserve Act gave the president the authority to “set aside and reserve…any part of the public lands wholly or partly covered with timber or undergrowth, whether of commercial value or not.” This Act helped to ensure the passing of the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, in which the U.S. President, through the department of the Interior, was granted the ability to set aside acres of unclaimed land for public domain. In 1905, the management of forest reserves was shifted from the General Land Office of the Interior Department to the Bureau of Forestry, also known as the United States Forest Service. The stated mission of the Forest Service is “to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.” The US Forest Service is the principal federal agency in natural resource conservation and ensures the protection, management, and use of the nation’s forest, rangeland, and aquatic ecosystems. In 1906, the passage of the Antiquities Act granted the President the right to reserve “historical landmarks, historical and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historical or scientific interest… confined to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected” without congressional approval.

The trend of landscape protection and management culminated in 1916 with the passage of the National Park Service Organic Act. It stated:

The Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations… which purpose is to conserve

41 An act to set apart certain tracts of land in State of California as forest reservations, Public law 1263, 51st Cong., 1st sess., (October 1, 1890), 650-652.
44 The Transfer Act of 1905, Public Law 34, 58th Congress, 3rd sess., (February 1, 1905), 628
45 The Antiquities Act, Public law 59-209, 54th Congress, 1st sess., (June 8, 1906).
the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.\textsuperscript{46}

The goal of unimpairment in the protection of national parks, monuments, and reservations was indicative of the quest to both save the frontier from settlement and also to justify aggressive removal on the basis of protection. Therefore, environmental protection had to be legislated and couldn’t be taken for granted. The regulation of use and the validity of the statement “enjoyment of future generations,” questions the equality of conserved and preserved landscapes when generations who had been living in those places had been oppressively removed and people with limited mobility were restricted from them. While the conservation and preservation of natural resources is valid, the processes and intent through which land is protected should be questioned.

As the adverse effects of industrialization and settlement became apparent, the federal government claimed the opportunity to preserve its landscapes while they still belonged as public domain. Conservation of the nation’s resources, reclamation of large areas of neglected land, and the creation of monumental scenery was one of the major achievements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the age of Progressivism, concerned white middle to upper class citizens organized behind the conservation and preservation movements to protect landscapes that epitomized the disappearing frontier. Consequently, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became a time period fixated on protecting landscapes both from exploitation of natural resources and also to preserve a landscape symbolic of white upper to middle class identity. Out of this fervor for environmental reform, constructions of conservation and preservation helped create numerous types of protected places.

\textsuperscript{46} National Park Service Organic Act, Public Law 535, 64th Cong., 1st sess., (December 6, 1915), 1.
2.

Deconstructed Map | Privilege in Protecting Landscape

February 2015 | Lamar Valley, Yellowstone National Park

*The deconstructed map is one whose bias, values, aesthetics, politics, and agenda have been revealed. The deconstructed map is the exposed mapmaker.*¹

Rapid growth of urban areas and westward expansion had resulted in overcrowded living conditions, dangerous and unregulated factories, over-pollution in cities, and a diminishing of natural resources through exploitation in logging, hunting, extraction, and over-settlement. In response, between the years 1890 to 1920, Progressive era reformers developed a variety of programs and agendas to attempt to control the social, economic, and environmental instabilities brought on by industrialization and westward expansion. The utilitarian philosophy of Progressivism, a main tenet of the Progressive era, concentrated on improving society through a

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series of reforms, which expanded federal, state, and local power. Primarily white middle to upper class reformers focused on wilderness protection as an escape from the polluted city and as an opportunity to carry on the goals of American exceptionalism.

Theodore Roosevelt, who served as president from 1901 to 1909, participated prolifically in the conservation movement as a result of his fear of diminishing natural resources and cultural decline. Believing the self-discipline and self-reliance of the settlers who moved west was disappearing under the guise of the urban, Roosevelt promoted the ideology of “the strenuous life.” Concerned with the societal and psychological conflicts associated with rapidly expanding urban landscapes and the rising influx of immigrants, Roosevelt believed the frontier was where the urban white man could reclaim himself from the corruptions of civilization. “The strenuous life” was the promotion of a vigorous, active existence that revolved around themes of manliness, civilization, nationalism, imperialism, racism, and could revive society through its connection to wilderness.

Consequently, Roosevelt worked extensively to provide federal protection to landscapes and wildlife. In 1905, he created the United States Forest Service and appointed Gifford Pinchot as its first Chief. Gifford Pinchot was a prominent conservationist who believed in the scientific management of forests for benefit and profit to mankind. After studying forestry in Europe and gaining experience in the United States, Pinchot promoted the idea of efficient use towards

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3 American exceptionalism first referenced by Alexis de Tocqueville, is the idea that the creation of the United States is inherently different from other nations and has the unique ideologies of liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, republicanism, democracy, etc. Because of this, exceptionalism is also the belief that the United States has a unique duty to transform the world because of its superiority over other nations. American exceptionalism is tied with manifest destiny.
4 David Stradling, 7.
resource management. Before the House Committee on Public Lands (HCPL), Pinchot declared, “…. the fundamental principle of the whole conservation policy is that of use, to take every part of the land and its resources and put it to that use in which it will serve the most people.”

Natural resources should be used to benefit the “greatest good of the greatest number in the long run.” Sharing similar beliefs in the utilitarian use of nature, love for the outdoors, and a vigorous life, Pinchot and Roosevelt successfully promoted conservation reform and legislated numerous environmental policies.

Under his presidency, Roosevelt helped create five new national parks, including Oregon’s Crater Lake (1902), South Dakota’s Wind Cave (1903), North Dakota’s Sullys Hill (1904), Colorado’s Mesa Verde (1906), and Oklahoma’s Platt (1906). Under the Antiquities Act, Roosevelt named and protected the Grand Canyon and over seventeen other landmarks, ranging from Wyoming’s Devils Tower to Washington’s Mount Olympia, as National Monuments. He also established 51 bird reserves, 4 game preserves, and 150 National Forests, including Shoshone National Forest. Working with Interior Secretary James Garfield and Chief of the United States Forest Service Gifford Pinchot, Roosevelt safeguarded approximately 230,000,000 acres of United States land under public protection.

Although hunting and fishing clubs had been promoting conservationism since the 1840s, in 1887, Theodore Roosevelt co-founded the national all-male elite Boone and Crocket Club,

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8 Stradling, 8.  
which worked to conserve game animals from extinction from commercial hunters and also promoted ideals of manliness for the elite urban man. The idyllic member of the Boone and Crocket Club was a white middle to upper class urban man who had the stereotypical qualities of a frontiersman: masculine, rugged, and independent. As hunters, they could observe and recognize that overhunting was threatening game animals and as a result, became one of the main proponents of conservation during the Progressive era.\textsuperscript{10} To raise awareness of the potential scarcity and extinction of some game animals in the wilderness, the club authored a “Fair Chase” statement. It read, “Fair Chase… is the ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful pursuit and taking of any free-ranging wild, native North American big game animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper advantage over such animals.”\textsuperscript{11} Although many wealthy white club members were principally concerned with preserving specific species, like bison, which personified the masculine notion of conquering the frontier, the Boone and Crocket club, along with local hunting clubs, protected wildlife by setting aside thousands of acres for habitat and advocating for the sale of hunting licenses, tags, and stamps to provide funding for wildlife conservation efforts. The Club and its members helped reduce commercial market hunting, facilitated in the creation of National Parks, the National Forest Service, National Wildlife Refuge System, Wildlife Reserves, and passed legislation to protect bison herds.\textsuperscript{12}

Aside from hunting organizations, other clubs and societies focused on conservation and preservation efforts in their reform initiatives. George Bird Grinnell, an American naturalist, founded the Audubon Society in 1886 amid concern over the decline of the songbirds, swallows,

\textsuperscript{12} Wellock, 47-48.
orioles, egrets, and plume birds, which were being over hunted all over the United States for the feather market. By the late decades of the nineteenth century, five million birds were killed each year for the feathers and birds nests that would adorn the hats of middle to upper class women.\(^\text{13}\) Grinnell believed the key to saving the wild birds and their eggs was to rally women together to ban bird feathers and nests from decorating women’s hats.\(^\text{14}\) Consequently, the Audubon Society worked together with male and female leadership and collaborated closely with local, state, and national women’s clubs, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the American Ornithologists Union to protect non-game birds from potential extinction.\(^\text{15}\) These organizations worked together not only to advocate for more environmentally friendly beauty standards but also campaigned for state and federal laws to restrict the hunting and selling of nongame birds for fashion. In 1900, their crusade to save the birds was nationally acknowledged when Congress passed the Lacey Act. Directed at the preservation of non-game birds and wildlife, the Act made market poaching, transporting, and selling of nongame birds across state lines and during mating season a federal crime.\(^\text{16}\) Contrarily to the Boone and Crocket Club, which sought to conserve wildlife for their worth as game animals, the Audubon Society sought to preserve animals on the basis of their aesthetic value outside of human benefit.\(^\text{17}\)

The national and legislative success of the Audubon Society is representative of the political clout white women possessed in Progressive era environmental initiatives. At the turn of the century, middle to upper class white women formed local and state women’s clubs through

\(^{13}\) Wellock, 52.
\(^{14}\) Wellock, 52.
\(^{16}\) Lacey Act, Public Law 187, ch. 553, 16\(^{\text{th}}\) Congress, (1900). §§ 3371-3378.
\(^{17}\) Wellock 52-53.
the decades of established charitable work and networks in local self-help and self-education social clubs. With the creation of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1890, local and state white women’s clubs were provided a platform to promote social and political improvement nationally. Concurrently, black women’s clubs also organized and formed national organizations such as the National Federation of Afro-American Women, the National Association of Colored Women, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people. These organizations focused on issues of education for women, moral uplift for the poor, urban reform, women’s suffrage, and fought against the lynching of blacks, both male and female. Black women’s clubs focused more on the issues surrounding the intersections of race and gender while white women’s clubs rarely crossed lines of race, ethnicity, or religion and devoted energy to civic improvement and the environmental issues of conservation and preservation.

While both black and white middle class women’s clubs focused on social and political improvement, there is a lack of research and primary source documentation linking Progressive era middle class black women’s clubs to conservation and preservation initiatives. While Progressive era white women’s clubs were claiming large swaths of land through conservation and preservation, there is no documentation of black women’s clubs claiming land for protection. The absence of race, in both the history and the protection of landscapes itself, is indicative that the protected landscapes at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century were founded upon exclusion.

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19 Buhle, Murphy, and Gerhard, 560-561.
In the age of Progressivism, middle to upper class white women had both the time and financial opportunity to participate in activities such as botanizing, gardening, hiking, bird watching, and camping, allowing them to simultaneously participate in wilderness and witness the over-industrialization of both rural and urban environments. In response, white clubwomen entered the public arena of politics to campaign for the goals of conservation and preservation; to protect natural scenery, historical structures, headwaters of major river systems, and worked from within the urban to create parks, green spaces and advocate for clean air and water. Only a few years after the creation of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, clubwomen were already advocating for the protection of several state and national parks. Still, not until 1902, did the General Federation of Women’s Clubs officially create Forestry Committees at national, state, and local levels. Women familiar with the principles of forestry were selected from each state to manage the club’s forestry committees. Campaigning on behalf of towns and cities, local Forestry Committees emphasized both the aesthetic and the utilitarian uses of nature. They advocated for the beautification of yards, vacant lots, clean air, water, and food, campaigned to save waste paper, and worked to preserve wooded tracts and local scenery. State and local Forestry Committees focused on conservation or preservation issues in their own locality while the national Forestry Committees advocated for legislation that aimed at halting pollution, reforesting watersheds, and preserving endangered species and wilderness.

In 1905, just three years after the creation of Forestry Committees, the Federation Bulletin, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs’ monthly newsletter announced, “thirty-seven State Federations have organized Forestry Committees…” The General Federation’s

forestry and conservation agenda included a state forester position in every State Federation, the “introduction of some instruction of forestry into every school,” “the creation of State Forest Reserves,” and conservation columns in club newsletters. The General Federation introduced guidelines for its forestry program to “nationalize our interests and sympathies until the special work of each state becomes the general work of all States.” At the establishment of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs, Mrs. Burdette, the president of the California Federation, stated:

The preservation of the forests of this state is a matter that should appeal to women… While the women of New Jersey are saving the Palisades of the Hudson from utter destruction by men to whose greedy souls Mount Sinai is only a stone quarry, and the women of Colorado are saving the cliff dwellings and pueblo ruins of their state from vandal destruction, the word comes to the women of California that men whose souls are gang-saws are mediating the turning of our world-famous Sequoias into planks and fencing worth so many dollars.

In her statement, Mrs. Burdette alluded to the overarching goals of the Forestry Committee under the purview of the General Federation. Local and state women’s clubs that initiated in conservation and preservation initiatives were supposed to encourage other women’s clubs nationally to protect landscapes in their vicinity. This encouragement allowed local, state, and national women’s clubs to organize together to support conservation and preservation initiatives across the nation.

The Maine Federation of Women’s Clubs distributed a variety of resolutions supporting the creation of a state forest reserve around Mount Katahdin. The Minnesota Federation of Women’s groups led by Maria Sanford and Mrs. Lydia Phillips Williams organized and testified before congressmen to repeal the “Dead and Down Timber Act” to protect 400,000 acres of

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24 Ibid.
forestland near the headwaters of the Mississippi River, an area that would later become the Chippewa National Forest. The Florida Federation helped create state forest reserves’, the Massachusetts Federation published a directory of historical trees; and Mrs. John Wilkerson of the Louisiana Federation organized a state Forestry Association and later the Federation’s Waterway Committee to promote clean water, waterways, and waterfronts. Louisiana Clubwomen formed the Women’s National Rivers and Harbors Congress to support legislation on waterway development, rivers, and harbors and agitated for the preservation of Niagara Falls. In 1909, Clubwomen helped the passage of the Weeks Bill for the protection of navigable streams in watersheds. Clubwomen in Pennsylvania aided in the creation of the Pennsylvania Department of Forestry and Mira Lloyd Dock became the first woman to work under the Pennsylvania State Government with a position on the State Forest Reservation Commission. In the year 1910 alone, clubwomen from Colorado, Vermont, Maine, and New York worked to save forests; 250 clubs worked on bird and plant protection; 39 states and 619 clubs worked on conservation projects; and 283 clubs wrote letters and petitions for state and national legislation relating to forest fire laws and taxes. The General Federation’s Forestry Committee also helped create national forest reserves in New Hampshire and the Southern Appalachians.

Women’s clubs promoted professional and primary environmental education. In

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26 Lydia Phillips Williams was the president of the Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs and Maria Sanford was a rhetoric professor at the University of Minnesota and a member of the Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs.
27 Mrs. John Wilkerson was the president of the Louisiana Federation of Women’s Clubs.
28 Mira Lloyd Dock studied botany at the University of Michigan, was a founding member of the Civic Club of Harrisburg, and the first woman appointed to a Pennsylvania state government position. She opened a State Forestry Academy in 1903 where she taught and actively campaigned for women’s suffrage and wilderness preservation.
a forestry school at University of California, Berkeley. Mary Eno Pinchot, Gifford Pinchot’s mother, presided over the conservation committee of the Daughters of the American Revolution and promoted forestry and conservation education to school children. The Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for women provided education in horticulture and landscape architecture. In the Fourth Biennial Report of the State Forester of the State of California in 1912, it states, “The primary principles of forestry are taught in many of the public schools throughout the country” and that “forestry in the hands of club women is simply of an educational character…We hope and believe the California Federation of Women’s Clubs is proving itself an important factor in the cause of forestry.” Public campaigns by women’s clubs introduced conservation and preservation education through textbooks, pamphlets, speakers, conferences, and newsletters into the schools.

Through the preeminence of local, state, and national women’s clubs, individual women became nationally notorious for their promotion of landscape protection. Mrs. Lovell White was a particularly significant clubwoman who advocated profusely for conservation and preservation initiatives. She was the founder and president of the California Federation of Women’s Club, president of the Sempervirens Club in 1900, served as the forestry chair for the General Federation of Women’s Clubs from 1910 to 1912, and also helped found the Save the Redwoods League in 1918. Her prolific political influence allowed her to promote nationwide campaigns for the national protection of landscapes. For example, when she found out an eastern

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lumberyard was scheduled to cut down the trees of the Calaveras Groves in the Sierra Nevada, she collected 1,500,000 signatures and petitioned to purchase the Calaveras Grove of Big Trees to create a national park. Endorsed by dozens of national organizations, Mrs. Lovell White was successful in protecting the Groves and many other nature topographies from development.³⁴

Mary King Sherman was also a prominent conservationist of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. She promoted a more nationally oriented conservation agenda earning the nickname “National Park Lady.”³⁵ As the chair of the conservation department of the General Federation, she was responsible for the creation of a number of park areas in the Grand Canyon and parts of the Rocky Mountains. Later, she would be appointed vice-president of the American Forestry Association and a trustee of the National Park Service. Sherman brought women’s work in conservation into the national arena and recognized, that through the purview of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, women had potential power in organizing throughout the United States.³⁶

Sherman’s relationship to nature was similar to John Muir’s. Both pursued conservation initiatives with spiritual motives. For them, protecting wilderness was protecting a national cultural identity and safeguarding people’s access to the sacred and transcendent qualities of nature. John Muir devoted most of his life for the preservation of wilderness in the United States.³⁷ He petitioned the United States Congress for the National Park bill that was passed in 1890, establishing Yosemite National Park and his activism helped preserve the Yosemite Valley, Sequoia National Park, Petrified Forest National Park, General Grant now known as

³⁶ Lewis, 157-159.
³⁷ For more information on John Muir see Donald Worsters comprehensive biography titled A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir.
Kings Canyon National Park, and many other wilderness areas.\textsuperscript{38} He believed in an environmental ethos that opposed the ideology that humans had authority over the natural world. John Muir spoke for many when he wrote “over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as foundations of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.”\textsuperscript{39} As a nature writer, he created a desire in many to protect and preserve wild and natural environments. Sherman, Muir, and their supporters felt the need for places of quiet natural beauty where people could escape the chaos of industrialism.\textsuperscript{40}

This captivation with wilderness became more popular as white middle to upper class citizens began to look for camping, bird watching, and other outdoor recreation retreats. For both men and women, outdoor groups promoted the benefits of being actively involved in both the protecting and enjoyment of nature. The Appalachian Mountain club, founded in 1876, provided men and women the opportunity to encounter nature through outdoor recreation, specifically hiking and backpacking. Initially organized to explore and preserve the White Mountains in New Hampshire, the club expanded throughout the northeastern United States to create twelve chapters. The Appalachian Mountain Club pulled ideologies from the conservation movement and added to its charter the mission of preserving areas of particular scenic or historic importance.\textsuperscript{41} Co-founded in California in 1892 by John Muir and a number of his supporters, the Sierra Club applied the same essential principles as the Appalachian Mountain Club. Serving as president, he said the intent of members in the Sierra Club was to “do something for wildness 

\textsuperscript{40} Lewis, 45.
\textsuperscript{41} Lewis, 161-162.
Sierra Club members worked for the strengthening of public forest policy, advocated against reductions in the boundaries of protected areas, promoted wilderness education and federal management of protected places, and participated in the enjoyment of nature through campouts and wilderness expeditions. Both hiking and wilderness preservation were part of the club’s mission and women were involved from its first outing. Women’s participation in outdoor clubs offered them the same opportunity to experience wilderness as men through hiking, camping and direct contact with nature.

Following the spirit of progressivism, hunting clubs, women’s clubs, and hiking clubs helped the nation to achieve enormous gains in the conservation of natural resources and the preservation of scenic landscapes. However, these protected areas represented a distorted white reality that equated nature’s purity with racial purity. Conservation and preservation initiatives depended on a historical geography of dispossession and displacement, sanitizing landscapes to promote a white national identity. The absence of race in conservation and preservation initiatives during this era of landscape protection is indicative of the removal, restriction, and exclusion of non-white people from those landscapes as mentioned in the previous chapter. The inclusion of gender, however, is indicative of the changing constructions of gender identities for white middle to upper class men and women.

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42 Lewis, 162-163.
43 Wellock, 50-54.
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A Binary in Contour Lines | Separate Spheres and Separate Landscapes

August 2016 | Angels Landing, Zion National Park

*A topographic map with only two contour lines infers a binary, a restrictive gradient and the excluded texture of real landscapes.*¹

The politics of landscape protection were inextricable from gender politics between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The perception, practice, and enjoyment of the wilderness and its protection reflected the dualisms of gender; wilderness could be proof of both a white masculine identity and white middle to upper class women’s domestic roles in society as nurturers and caretakers. Legitimized by the separate spheres ideology of the nineteenth century, the protection of landscapes was also a self-interested enterprise of protecting a white middle class lifestyle. The different environmental organizations of the Progressive era both influenced and were predicated upon the continuous ideological processes of gender.²

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The ideological process of gender is sustained and constructed through the variety of institutions, ideas, and daily performances encouraged by society and culture. Combined, these processes produce a set of social prescriptions about an individual based upon a classification given at birth. Regardless of choice, through the positioning as man or woman, the process of gender assigns social meanings, expectations, and identities to individuals that accept or reject, adopt, or adapt these constructions. The gender norms of the nineteenth century depended on the notion of separate spheres.3

That notion dictated that men, based on their biological makeup, were to inhabit the public sphere of politics, economy, commerce, and law. Concurrently, middle class women’s proper sphere was in the private realm of domestic life, participating in childrearing, housekeeping, and religious education. Women were supposed to adhere to what historians subsequently dubbed the Cult of True Womanhood, which defined ideal femininity as pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. The separate spheres ideology reflected the shift of production from the home to the factory. Because the home was a private, separate sphere, middle class women were excluded from participating directly in the production process of capitalism and delegated to the subordinate domestic sphere.4

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, gender roles shifted as middle to upper class white Americans reaped the benefits of industrialization and enjoyed the luxury of greater disposable income and increased leisure time. Through the woman’s sphere, where the majority of women still continued to work, housekeeping became more consumer

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oriented. In response to a growth in material goods and as primary purchasers of the household, white middle class women used domesticity as an argument for asserting power and establishing an identity as the New Woman outside of the home.\(^5\) New Womanhood enabled upper to middle class women to participate in higher education and work in professional occupations such as teaching and nursing. In consequence, more educated and independent women more visibly agitated for reform on home sanitation, nutrition, educational reform, and domestic science education through women’s clubs and as local community leaders. Although progressive in their roles for civic reform, they upheld traditional gender norms rooted in middle class lifestyles.\(^6\)

Through new womanhood, middle to upper class white women utilized environmental reform to justify public activism. Claiming a position as society’s caretakers, ensuring that future generations would have the resources to sustain society, women became energetic advocates for smokeless skies, clean water, uncontaminated food, spacious parks, and federal regulation of wild places. By utilizing social gender norms, saving wilderness became synonymous with saving the nation’s home.\(^7\) This work was described as municipal housekeeping; public activism as an extension of traditionally feminine responsibilities. One clubwoman wrote, “Since men are more or less closely absorbed in business it has come to pass that the initiative in civic matters has developed largely upon women.”\(^8\) Through domesticity, women justified an entry into politics and civic reform. By adapting the doctrine of separate spheres, white middle-class women merged home and community and expanded their private responsibilities to the public. Accepting and supporting the gender roles assigned to them by the late nineteenth century,

\(^5\) Buhle, Murphy, and Gerhard, 389-392.
\(^6\) Buhle, Murphy, and Gerhard, 466-467.
\(^7\) Buhle, Murphy, and Gerhard, 467-472.
clubwomen became public activists as caretakers of the nation’s home.

To justify their public visibility and political activism, white middle to upper class women used a trilogy of slogans: conservation of true womanhood, conservation of the home, and conservation of the child. Conservation of true womanhood stressed that the universality of domesticity and maternity was appropriate for advancing public reform. Conservation of the home, the domain of true womanhood, emphasized that women’s traditional role as housekeepers of the private justified women’s role as housekeepers of the public. Conservation of the child emphasized woman’s unique role as caretakers to ensure and protect resources for future generations.⁹ Pulling from a social responsibility for the nation, the private concerns of individual women were publically and politically applied to society. Shifting the traditional doctrine of separate spheres and revaluing the relationship between home and community, the private and the public spheres, became a central tenet of women’s activism in Progressive era reform. By framing their activism within the traditional role of housekeeper, they could deflect criticisms that they were acting contrary to their proper sphere.¹⁰

Claiming a public voice through municipal housekeeping was one tactic women used to agitate for suffrage. As well, in order to continue life in their traditional role, as housekeepers of the private and public homes of society, women argued that they needed the vote. Therefore, advocating for environmental reform was a way for white middle to upper class women to construct a public gender identity- New Womanhood- out of the private sphere.¹¹ Within the environmental movement of the Progressive era, the Separate Spheres Ideology was adapted and

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¹¹ Buhle, Murphy, and Gerhard, 467.
modified to advocate for both women’s advancement and also as a way to protect white middle class manliness and create a space for a new masculine identity.

Constructed out of early nineteenth century small-scale competitive capitalism, the emerging middle class established itself according to normalized ideals of gender and “manliness.” The prescribed codes of Victorian manliness valued self-restraint, economic independence, hard work, and control over civic strife and unrest. However, by the last decades of the nineteenth century, white middle-class male power and authority was challenged, which white middle-class men interpreted as a threat to their manhood. The perceived pressures to the conceptualizations of middle class manliness included lower self-employment rates and career expectations, expansions of entry-level clerical work in stores and offices to both men and women, and a growth in a consumer culture that valued indulgence and frivolity, which conflicted with the ideals of self-restraint. As women and immigrant men agitated for a role in city governments, the social authority, male power, and identity of middle class men were also challenged. New Women were claiming the right to participate in activities and positions that had previously been reserved for men, challenging the assumption that education and political power required a male body.¹²

However, white women were not replacing men in society; rather, together with the changing social circumstances, they helped reformulate perceptions of middle class men’s bodies, identities, and access to power. The social, economic, and cultural changes of the turn of the twentieth century were coalescing and making the continuous gender process particularly dynamic for the American middle class. In response to this new positionality, many middle-class men engaged in the remaking of manhood. Some approaches included celebrating maleness.

¹² Bederman, 11-15.
through membership in fraternal orders or participation in muscular sports that idealized the male athletic body; some focused on rejecting excessive femininity and New Womanhood; while others aggressively opposed the women occupying more public roles, insisting that they were subverting nature; some embraced the feminine to take occupations away from women; and some appropriated the code of working class manhood that respected physical strength, aggression, and sexuality. As middle class men began to espouse working class manhood, Victorian manliness was referred to as weak and effeminate. As a result, many white middle class men reformulated manhood out of masculinity to express their new understanding of male power.¹³

This undermining of middle-class manhood encouraged many white middle class men to redefine their identity in the leisure of wilderness, consequently, this also meant participating in environmental activism. Masculinity was linked to wilderness experiences and could be used to counterbalance the effects of a more effeminate modern urban life. The physical strength and endurance needed for contact with the wilderness promoted the ideal male athletic body and men could participate in wilderness activities such as prolonged expeditions, hunting, hiking, backpacking, and fishing to revitalize their masculinity. Protecting wilderness could also be seen as protecting American manhood.¹⁴

Together, middle to upper class white men and women integrated their different justifications for environmental reform to carry out the common goal of protecting landscapes through the constructions of heteronormativity, where men could prove their manliness and

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¹³ Bederman, 16-17.
¹⁴ Lewis, 161-163.
women could justify their domestic roles in society as nurturers and caretakers. The heteronormative wilderness, based upon the masculine and feminine, was not only formed out of constructions of gender, but also race and class. Nature became a construct used to maintain the hegemonic social relations of sexism and racism.

A Binary in Contour Lines | Separate Landscapes

In response to the social, economic, and cultural changes at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, many white middle class men engaged in the remaking of manhood through the discourse of civilization, which revolved around the intersections of gender, race, and social evolution. Although civilization could be claimed and interpreted in a multitude of ways, in the context of environmental protection, civilization was based upon on an idea of male hegemony and white supremacy.

Civilization dictated that men and women had strict notions of sexual differentiation and accordingly performed different roles in society. Reminiscent of the middle class doctrine of separate spheres, men were expected to be the manly providers and protectors for women and children, while women were expected to be submissive and domestic. Conversely, those who were not considered civilized, deemed the “savage,” were perceived to have distorted notions of sexual differentiation. Savage women participated in hard labor, which was presumably reserved for the civilized man, and savage men abandoned their patriarchal duties of providing and protecting. These marked difference between the civilized and the savage were assumed to be a result of evolution. The racial destiny of advanced societies, Anglo-Saxons and other white

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16 Bederman, 23-25
races, to not only advance from the primitive to the civilized, but also to obtain a form of civilized perfection. This inherited racial capacity for civilization was one that others could never achieve on the basis of their primitive and non-evolving racial ancestry. In effect, civilization was the achievement of a perfect race, a natural male supremacy maintained through the Victorian separate spheres ideology and racial superiority.17

This idea and practice of civilization, based upon a system of gendered and racial social stratification, established spatial and institutional barriers. As white middle to upper class men constructed a reality of their civilized racial superiority, they subsequently created a landscape that justified and encouraged a geographical racism of dispossession, displacement, exclusion, and possible extermination of nonwhite people. This system of dominance and subordination reinforced the racially superior status of white middle to upper class manhood, creating invisible and visible boundaries of separateness.18 Within these institutionalized spatial barriers, white middle class men were able to renegotiate the reciprocity between space and status and claim both a “civilized manliness” and “primitive masculinity.”19

The coalescing of both “civilized manliness” and “primitive masculinity,” allowed white middle class men to maintain the authority of Victorian moral manliness and appropriate working class masculinity that respected physical strength and aggression. This identity was typified in the traditional frontier hero, one who could “possess savages’ “natural” strength and vigor” but also retain the “superior manliness of the civilized white man.”20 The frontier of the American West became a proving ground for civilization, a site where masculine racial

17 Bederman, 25-29.
18 Spain, 17.
19 Bederman, 23
20 Bederman, 176.
dominance was tested through conflicts with the “savage races.”\textsuperscript{21} It was within these “savage” activities of primitive masculinity that interest in the cult of wilderness flourished. In the frontier, men could reject the over civilization of the urban and be virile, engaging in vigorous and manly activities of conquest. Protecting wilderness became synonymous with protecting American manhood, while utilizing a violent masculinity to outsavage the savages and to install a higher civilization on the western American landscape.\textsuperscript{22}

Consequently, through the concepts of civilization, conservation and preservation initiatives became rooted in ideologies of white supremacy and eugenics. Conservation became the symbol for preserving a frontier that celebrated white conquest and encouraged the displacement of people of color, referred to as the inferior races. The preservation of the white race and the defense of racial purity was emulated in the manifest destiny of westward expansion. Therefore, preserving supposedly superior natural species, such as the bison, could be seen as preserving an aspect of the white frontier.\textsuperscript{23}

As preservation and conservation initiatives in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century worked to protect large swaths of land, they simultaneously constructed a landscape based upon removal and exclusion. The values of wilderness preservation and conservation proclaimed a freedom of space for white civilization to enjoy while simultaneously restricting, removing, and excluding the movement of those deemed uncivilized. As white Euro-Americans pushed the boundaries of the frontier, they protected landscapes based on the invisibility and justified aggression of established communities.

\textsuperscript{21} Bederman, 178.
\textsuperscript{22} Bederman, 178.
As a result, those who once lived in newly protected federal landscapes were dispossessed of their historical claims to those spaces. When Native Americans were confined to reservations, they were denied the hunting and foraging grounds that had belonged to them for centuries; their movement was restricted to their allotments. Mexican American’s were denied their property claims, segregated into poorly funded schools, excluded from politics, paid lower wages, denied equal justice, and disenfranchised from voting through literacy tests and poll taxes. After the Chinese Exclusion Act, Chinese people residing in the United States were required to carry identification certificates, excluded from citizenship, and prohibited reentry if they left. Black laborers were faced with limited opportunity for mobility in the Jim Crow south, which made migration west exceptionally difficult. The people of western landscapes deemed uncivilized were denied the freedom of movement celebrated in the west.24

The perpetuation of separate and restricted landscapes became structural in the 1896 constitutional case of the United States Supreme Court, Plessy versus Ferguson. This case set the precedent for state racial segregation laws to be upheld under the pretense of “separate but equal.” The ambiguity of “equal” created a system of racially separate institutions that favored the white community, while the separate facilities and institutions for the black community were consistently inferior.25 Public institutions and transportation were segregated along lines of race, as well as public parks. Although accounts of segregation in the National Park Service are limited, planning for segregation did occur which structuralized restriction and racism within

24 For more reading on the subject of restricted movement, citizenship, and dispossession see Mae M Ngai’s Impossible subjects: illegal aliens and the making of modern America, William H. Chafe’s Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans tell about life in the segregated South, Isabel Wilkerson’s The Warmth of other suns: the epic story of America’s great migration, and Scott L Malcomson’s One drop of blood: the American misadventure of race.

25 Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896)
protected landscapes. The National Park system, which was supposedly “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,” actually only meant the benefit of people who were at the top of a racial and gendered social hierarchy.

The gender and race stratification of late nineteenth and early twentieth century landscape protection was reinforced by spatial segregation. The idealism of separate spheres and the heronormativity of civilization created a white wilderness built on the premise of exclusion. For white middle to upper class men and women, protected areas became both an escape from civilization and a representation of a racially pure civilization. Therefore, the legacy of protected places was founded on the human exploitation of racism and male hegemony. Scholars have not adequately critiqued these effects of westward expansion and protection and the socially constructed wilderness. As a result, conceptualizations of race, gender, and cultural ideologies continue to permeate the institutions of environmental reform. In the Hetch Hetchy dispute, both the absence of race and the normalizing of a white heteronormative wilderness are reflected onto the landscape.

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27 Spain, 26.
Vernacular regions are projected mental maps, representations of a people’s emotional attachments and constructions of identity on the landscape.¹

Since both middle to upper class white men and women used wilderness to alter constructions of gender, it also became a space for interrogation. Throughout the early twentieth century, wilderness politics dictated that conservationism be linked with masculine notions of the frontier while preservationism be linked with feminine notions of beauty and aesthetic value. This created a dichotomous essentialization of a feminine preservation and a masculine conservation. Men who sought to preserve landscapes were considered effeminate and women who participated in wilderness activities were considered masculine. As women became more publically involved in environmental protection, their conservationist counterpart often accused male preservationists of being effeminate and sentimental.² In order to protect themselves from

charges of effeminacy, middle class men created a “third sex” or “political hermaphrodite” to stigmatize other reformers as “sentimental, impracticable or sexually suspicious.” These words and associations worked in both delegitimizing women’s influx into the public sphere and creating a gendered environmental discourse.

The imagery and rhetoric used in newspapers during the Hetch Hetchy dispute reveal how the ideological processes of gender during the Progressive era influenced certain aspects of environmental reform. Newspapers such as the San Francisco Call, New York Tribune, and Sacramento Union were especially active in publicizing this tension, and as a result, the Hetch Hetchy Debate became a national platform that used gender as a way to give conservation authority over preservation.

Pictorial Argumentation | John Muir versus Gifford Pinchot

On Monday, December 13th 1909, the San Francisco Call portrayed John Muir, Sierra Club founder, preservationist, and advocate for the Hetch Hetchy valley, as an old woman in a

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political cartoon. Outfitted in a dress, apron, and flowered bonnet, he was struggling to keep the waters of the Tuolumne from flooding through the wispy ends of his broom. A few months earlier on Thursday, September 2nd 1909, the San Francisco Call had published an article on Gifford Pinchot, forester and conservationist, about his support of using the Hetch Hetchy valley as a water reservoir. The image of Pinchot outfitted in a dapper suit, exposed jawline, full mustache, and perhaps ostensibly gazing into a future landscape full of scientific progress, emphasized his masculine public image. Juxtaposing both depictions together reveals how masculine imagery was deployed during the Hetch Hetchy dispute to stigmatize preservationists and diminish their cause as weak and effeminate.

In many ways, Pinchot and Muir represent the institutional chasm between conservationists and preservationists in the twentieth century. Gifford Pinchot was keenly concerned with the perception of the United States Forest Service. He wanted people to see forestry as scientific and practical and sought to distance himself from those who wanted to preserve trees for aesthetic or spiritual reasons. His cause was founded in an understanding of a masculinity of wilderness. Muir actively pursued mountain exploration, studies in geomorphology, and nature writing. He understood nature as having an intrinsic value and purpose outside of human benefit and was strongly devoted to the belief of transcendence in nature. Humanity and nature were so intertwined that the destruction of nature would result in the destruction of human kind. Women in the Sierra Club and in the General Federation of

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Women’s Clubs prominently supported his preservationist initiatives. The divide between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot reveal the fundamental ideological differences between conservation and preservation.

The pictorial comparison between Muir and Pinchot in the *San Francisco Call* personifies the legitimization of environmental reform through gender politics. Proponents of the dam claimed to support a conservationist ethic that was more rational and practical to appear more masculine, while opponents of the dam were condemned for being sentimental or too concerned with a feminine aesthetic. In consequence, the tension between women who used gender to justify their presence in the public sphere and men who were trying to reformulate their manhood, resulted in the portrayal of Muir as a woman and Pinchot as the epitome of Progressive era manhood.

**Pictorial Argumentation | Opposing Views of Utilitarianism**

Environmental utilitarianism espoused the notion that the right use of nature was one that
benefited the greatest number of people for the longest amount of time. It was the balance between use and non-use of nature to provide a sustainable yield at the highest economic benefit. On the left image on page 60, the political cartoon published in *The San Francisco Call* on January 1st, 1910, represents the utilitarian belief that the Hetch Hetchy valley’s greatest contribution to society was as a municipal reservoir that would provide water for the people of San Francisco. It portrays San Francisco’s strong support for creating a water reservoir as well as other utilitarian goals such as replacing the cable cars with a municipally owned electric streetcar line. The baby carrying municipal drinking water, pulling a municipally owned streetcar, and proudly wearing the year 1910 on its sash, can be seen as a rebirth and reclamation of the public from the private. This cartoon represents the utilitarian view that municipal power should use nature for its benefit above national protection and is consistent with conservationist’s views on sustainable use.

The political cartoon on the right was published in the *New York Tribune* on December 20th, 1913 after the Raker Act was passed, which allowed San Francisco to use the Hetch Hetchy valley as a water reservoir. The cartoon depicts a crowd of men, one of whom is holding a sign saying “Land Water to Power Mongers,” charging into the Hetch Hetchy valley. Above them, held up by two trees, is a sign with the words, “Public Domain.” Up until then, the Hetch Hetchy valley was a part of Yosemite National Park, and was therefore considered as belonging to the public. The mob of men running under the “Public Domain” sign gives the impression of a land

San Francisco Call, June 1st, 1910

raid. This symbolizes a national fear in the demise of protected places. Granting San Francisco
the right to use the valley as a reservoir would set a precedent of superseding the national value
of protected areas. The corresponding article states, “Reduced to its elemental terms the
proposition which Congress and the President have established is this, that any part of the
national domain, no matter how rare and precious, may be sacrificed whenever it is coveted by
some municipal corporation.”9 This cartoon suggests that the national perception of protected
landscapes should belong to the people of the nation, regardless of the local municipal needs.

The conflict between conservationists and preservationists over opposing views of
utilitarianism was also religious and philosophical. The baby bringing municipally owned water
and streetcars to the people of San Francisco represented a rebirth from the privatization of the
city. After years at the hands of the Spring Valley Water Company and private railway
companies, the 1906 earthquake gave San Francisco the opportunity to become refined, renewed,
and liberated by the fire. Nationally, supporters believed that San Francisco was breaking a
commandment by coveting a landscape that belonged to everyone, not just the city of San
Francisco. The Hetch Hetchy valley had become a sacrifice, and after the passage of the National
Park Act of 1916 just three years after the Raker Act, could be perceived as the sacrificial lamb.
In this regard, it was viewed as a landscape sacrificed to bring about the protection of more
landscapes.10

Intriguingly, the imagery of the child also alludes to an environmental argument,
commonly advocated by women, that land needs to be used in a certain way to protect future

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10 Numbers 28:8, 13 King James Bible.
generations. The reservoir wasn’t just for the current citizens of San Francisco, but also for future generations. The imagery of the men running into the valley, illustrates a certain type of masculinity that included both a civilized manliness and primitive masculinity. As men were dressed in topcoats and bowler hats, the latest fashion for upper to middle class urban America, they were also aggressively claiming the land. The message of the cartoon made by those in favor of the valley critiqued this masculinity, while the cartoon made by those in favor of the reservoir, appropriated women’s justification for environmental activism.

Environmental utilitarianism embraced a rhetoric that placed nature’s value in its economic potential, its ability to provide for citizens in a material way. Newspapers espoused this environmental utilitarianism when favoring the conservationist side in the debate while preservationists believed it was a threat to the nation’s opportunity for recreation, spiritual renewal, and tourism in its protected places.

National versus Local | Valley versus Water
Newspapers focused on the aestheticism of the valley to declare their support for either the valley or the reservoir. On a local level, newspapers emphasized the value of the Hetch Hetchy as a water source by only including images of when it was flooded. In the top image on page 63, the corresponding article stated, “It would seem that when God Almighty makes an occasional lake of the valley, the Sierra Club should not go into such a spasm over the proposition to make it a permanent lake in the interests of the present and future generations of San Francisco.” The article emphasized that its high glacially carved granite walls and the narrow opening into the valley, which already contributed to its multiple floods per year, was what makes the Hetch Hetchy valley the ideal dam site for a municipal water source. According to local San Francisco newspapers, it was not only in the best interest for the people, but the land’s greatest resource for the people.

On a national level, newspapers highlighted the value of aesthetic beauty and potential tourism in the valley. In the San Francisco Call, an article stated that the Hetch Hetchy’s “crystal river, its sublime cliffs and exquisite waterfalls, combined with its forests, which nowhere could

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be surpassed, and the flowery, grass-covered floor of this valley, make it a perfect paradise.”12 It was portrayed as a second Yosemite, one that would soon be filled with campers and hikers. The construction of a reservoir would be the ultimate destruction for supporters of the valley because it would render it inaccessible for those who wanted to partake in its beauty. In reference to San Francisco, the corresponding article stated, “She would install a monster dam…She would destroy absolutely this second Yosemite, she would not alone claim the floor of the valley, but would have the whole Tuolumne watershed…”13 Turning the valley into a watershed would be in direct violation of the Hetch Hetchy’s National Park status. It would destroy not only a valley, but also a national identity predicated on access to its beautiful places.

Nationally, aestheticism was a dominant argument for the protection of the valley. It was a way for people regardless of location to become supporters of beautiful landscapes even if they would never have a chance to visit them. Locally, utilitarianism in aestheticism was also a powerful argument for turning the valley into a reservoir. Images were used to emphasize the utility of its natural topography and its ability to transfer that utility for the benefit of humans. The images in these two newspapers reflect how aestheticism became an influential tactic for both conservation and preservation and how the valley could be portrayed to support either argument. Its aesthetic could become either an actor, a masculine landscape, and become a powerful resource for the citizens of San Francisco, or its aesthetic could remain beautiful, a feminine landscape, for its viewers to enjoy.

Rhetoric | Gendered Descriptions of Conservationists and Preservationists

13 Shall This Beautiful Valley Be Destroyed,” Los Angeles Herald, October 17, 1909.
Rhetoric used in newspapers covering the Hetch Hetchy dispute reveal dominant constructions of gender appropriate behavior and hierarchical power structures in environmental reform. The dichotomous essentialism in the masculinization of conservation and the feminization of preservation was a result of the gender tensions in the early twentieth century social landscape. The shifting of gender constructions for both men and women and the language of landscape directly affected how individual environmentalists were perceived. As a result of the influx of women who supported the preservationist cause, conservationists were able to use a gendered language that delegitimized men who supported the Hetch Hetchy valley.

On the same date that *The San Francisco Call* portrayed Muir pictorially as a woman in a political cartoon, other articles feminized his words and actions. The first article titled “Misusing the Name of the Sierra Club” calls supporters of the Hetch Hetchy valley in the Sierra Club a “busybody clique.” The socially recognized meaning behind both the words busybody and clique imply a female gender, or specifically, a gossipy group of women. Because the Sierra Club was not unanimous in its decision to protect the valley over support for the reservoir, Sierra Club leaders formed a new organization called "The Society for the Preservation of National Parks." This organization included notable figures across the country to further publicize the campaign against the dam. It was created both in response to the divide in the Sierra Club and also the need to create an organization where, regardless of Sierra Club membership, people could participate for the preservation of the valley. The article aimed to delegitimize both the organization and John Muir’s authority by describing it as a “busybody clique,” portraying the organization and especially Muir, as meddling women.

This feminization of preservationists became a common tactic among biased articles for the conservationist cause. Published by the San Francisco Call on July 6th, 1909, one article stated that preservationists are “admirers of verbal lingerie and frills” that belong to “networkers, veils, fibers, downy feathers, fabrics, textures, patterns, embroideries…” and John Muir was described as “a scenic milliner” and “no serious competitor.”15 By associating the preservationists with a craft specific to women, especially one historically devalued in the hierarchy of art, it implied that preservation was women’s work. The associations with women’s work symbolized the assumption that preservationists advocated for an aestheticism that had no scientific or rational foundation. Muir, and other supporters of the valley, were also often portrayed as misguided and not aware of “the true situation.” Some were portrayed as “mushy esthetics” who scheme against the water reservoir over a “small strip in the mountains visited by very few and which in nowise interferes with anything else.”16 The San Francisco Call portrayed preservationist as interfering and lacking rationality in environmental issues. “All the misinformation with which John Muir is filling the eastern press is about as accurate as the one statement he repeats doddering inanity” saying the Hetch Hetchy reservoir would deny 90,000,000 people their chance to visit the valley.17 “If John Muir were not so old and had not shown such single purposed devotion to nature in his writings he would deserve to be spanked, no more, no less. That punishment would just about suit the mischievous character of his

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works.”

By associating preservationists with gendered language, supporters of the dam created a hierarchal power structure that placed conservation above preservation. Preservationists were portrayed as childlike, nonsensical, lacking a sense or meaning, and their purpose for preserving the valley was seen as misguided and in some cases, conniving. The essentialism of preservation with the feminine and children, created a socially recognized expectation for how preservationists should be treated. In a context where corporal punishment was an accepted feature of schools and women were often infantilized, the punishment for John Muir’s activism to be spanked invoked a submission to the dominant conservationist ethic. The San Francisco Call’s socially constructed landscape of the Hetch Hetchy dispute depended on heteronormative conceptualizations of wilderness that essentialized preservation with the feminine to debase the men who advocated on behalf of the valley.

Rhetoric | Science Versus Sentiment

As the United States entered the twentieth century, railroad tracks, steamships, and people’s commitment to expansion had conquered the frontier. Amidst the social, technological, and scientific changes, a debate emerged on the correct usage of nature and human’s relationship to it. Preservationists believed that humans are joined together with all living things and have direct inextricable relationships with nature. Conservationists believed that human’s relationship with nature originated out of an obligation to use its resources wisely and conserve them for future generations. Environmental responsibility was for the benefit of people, not nature. While calling preservationists sentimental was a result of the influx of women to the preservationist field.

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18 Johnnie Muir’s Postage Bill,” The San Francisco Call, August 10, 1913.
cause, it also alludes to a deeper theological issue that permeated the twentieth century landscape, a divide often reduced as science versus sentiment.

The divide between science and sentiment became especially pronounced as environmental activism was becoming increasingly scientific. There was a new standard of accuracy for those who espoused a transcendental view of nature. One article stated:

They appear to lack the sense of proportion. They attach some peculiar sanctity to stocks and stones and would hold them inviolable no matter what urgency of need might conflict with their amiable idolatry. These nature worshipers bombarded the president with letters protesting against “desecration” of the Yosemite region. They raised a tremendous fuss and made a lot of noise.¹⁹

Preservationists nature religion was criticized as a fetish, an extravagant, irrational devotion, a loud disturbance “not based on knowledge,” their opposition described as a “sacrilegious pervasion of the national inheritance...should not be given any serious consideration.”²⁰ The sentiment of preservationists was perceived as a dramatic heretical religiosity that should not be measured to the same value as the scientific conservationists. Conservationists would argue that the reservoir was “nothing more than the substitution of one kind of scenery for another” and that “people might honestly differ as to the scenic value of these respective features but the conflict of opinion should not be suffered to weigh against the need of a great city population.”²¹ While the conservationists were portrayed as rational, preservationists were dramatized, their words lacking no sense of scientific value. One newspaper even stated that Muir had twisted the words of a “report of the advisory board of army engineers” and “garbles a paragraph to make it appear

²¹ Ibid.
that they support his case, when they do not.” Articles portrayed the preservationist cause as lacking so much knowledge and rationality that they failed to prove any scientific support.

An article titled “Baum Resents Opposition To Hetch Hetchy,” outlined the supposed bitterness members of the Sierra Club felt towards this “show of sentiment for the Hetch Hetchy project.” Baum, a member of the Sierra Club and an esteemed electrical engineer, is described in a manner that accentuates his scientific ability. An earlier article sketches Gifford Pinchot, describes him as a “quiet and unassuming gentlemen,” while then emphasizing his knowledge of natural power and forestry. Both articles on Baum and Pinchot showcased their scientific prowess and thus framed their words authoritatively as scientific fact. Another article in the San Francisco Call states, “there is no more ardent and honorable conservationist than Mr. Gifford Pinchot.” Newspapers emphasized that San Francisco’s “claims to the Hetch Hetchy valley for the development of a Sierra water supply was laid before the federal government” by consulting engineers and the advisory board of army engineers.

These articles make it clear that conservationists were considered the scientific experts on water and power, and therefore, their words should be taken into account more credibly. Preservationists are portrayed as a clique, misrepresenting the knowledgeable conservationists, and gossipy. These responses show how dominant cultural expectations of gender appropriate

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22 Johnnie Muir’s Postage Bill,” The San Francisco Call, August 10, 1913.
behavior shaped the gendered rhetoric and imagery of environmental reform. The institutional chasm between preservationists and conservationists was defined by sentimentality, or defining traits of the female sphere, to delegitimize the authority of men who wrote about preserving nature. Even when newspapers did not emphasize a feminized preservation, there were always undertones of the hegemonic masculinity in conservation. Published in the San Francisco Call, a letter written by Gifford Pinchot stated:

I yield to no man in my appreciation of the great outdoors and of all it can do and should do for the children of man. Nor do I undervalue the power of sentiment in carrying forward great reforms such as that of forestry. At the same time, practical questions of the comfort health safety and convenience of great bodies of people must have the consideration to which they are fairly entitled. In the present case I believe the permanent welfare of San Fran and the cities about the bay is rightly to be considered before such a comparatively slight risk to the pleasure of the tourists who may in the years come to visit Hetch Hetchy.27

Perhaps out of respect to Muir and the women’s clubs who had pushed conservationist reform in the past, Pinchot wasn’t necessarily critiquing sentimental preservation, but the practicality in conservation was held to a higher regard. The esteem of utilitarianism in conservation represented the hierarchal power structures in the rhetoric of conservation and preservation. Newspapers alluded to the gender differences and dynamics in the early twentieth century as a way to create a dichotomous essentialism between those who supported conservation and those who supported preservation. Through political cartoons, pictographic imagery, and rhetoric, conservationism was presented in a more masculine, rational, and scientific way, while preservationism was presented as effeminate, dramatic, sentimental, and misguided. These social constructions of conservation and preservation were a result of the

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reformulation of gender for both men and women in the early twentieth century.

Rhetoric | Representations of Women in Newspapers

While men who supported preservation deflected charges of effeminacy, women were seldom portrayed in gendered language and comparative to the coverage men received in newspapers, women were barely recognized at all despite the fact that they were so prolific within the dispute. When women did appear in newspapers, it was mostly about the women who supported the conservationist cause, or a general statement without critique about women’s club involvement in the dispute.

One woman who got a considerable amount of coverage in newspapers was Mrs. E. L. Baldwin. As a conservationist and retiring director of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs, she put the “best efforts to enlighten the Women’s Clubs and other organizations… as to the true status of San Francisco’s right in the use of the Hetch Hetchy meadows.” Her activism on behalf of the city of San Francisco was considered “one of the important legacies” as she argued against the stance of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs. Before the California Federation, she appealed to the aesthetic argument of preservationists and testified, “The greatest development will mean simply the difference between a meadow and a lake. We are not going to flood it 3,000 feet deep, we will only take a little off the bottom…it will simply be a mirror to reflect the beauty and not one fall will be injured, save one 20 feet high.” This statement is consistent with the belief in aesthetic utilitarianism, that the Hetch Hetchy valley’s beauty should

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represent the land’s greatest resource for the people.

Women’s clubs who supported the conservationist claim to the valley as a municipal water source also received considerable acclaim. One article in the *San Francisco Call* titled “The Women’s Clubs and Hetch Hetchy” states:

It is gratifying to learn that the women’s clubs of San Francisco have undertaken to meet the selfish agitation promoted by the Spring Valley company to influence the sister clubs in other parts of California. It is a useful work that the San Francisco clubs have undertaken to set their sisters right on this matter.\(^{31}\)

The role of women’s clubs who supported the conservation of the valley was to influence other women and women’s clubs with their rational and informed political knowledge. Focusing on the activism of individual women and women’s clubs who were against the preservation of the Hetch Hetchy, the *San Francisco Call* continued to perpetuate its bias towards conservation. However, women’s activism on behalf of San Francisco wasn’t portrayed within the dichotomous essentialism of conservation and preservation as it was perpetuated in male environmental activism. The women’s club of San Francisco supported the construction of a water reservoir in the Hetch Hetchy valley and worked “to counteract the influence of those other members of the State Federation of women’s clubs who are overwhelming Washington with letters and telegrams of opposition.”\(^{32}\) Neither the women’s club of San Francisco nor the State Federation of women’s clubs were delegitimized with gendered language. The letters and telegrams the California Federation sent to Congress weren’t portrayed as dramatic or


misguided; it was simply a state of fact that women would write letters on an issue they opposed, in the same way that women’s clubs who supported the conservation of the valley would try to influence their “sisters.”

The *Sacramento Union* continued this trend when reporting on the activism of women’s clubs who supported preservation. One article mentioned a resolution that was adopted by the San Joaquin Valley Federation of Women’s Improvement clubs that protested “against the use of Hetch Hetchy valley as a water source…on the ground of alleged spoliation of the natural beauty of the park.” Another article title, “Women attack the Hetch Hetchy Scheme” mentions another resolution of protest against the conservationist claims to the Hetch Hetchy valley as a reservoir. Including the resolution in the text, the article demonstrates women’s tenacity to “petition the president, and all representatives to defeat any bill which proposes to confirm any such invasion” into protected landscapes.

Women could support either side of the Hetch Hetchy dispute without receiving criticism. Because middle to upper class white women had already been involved in both conservation and preservation initiatives since the late nineteenth century, involvement in both sides of the dispute was expected and fit within the dominant cultural expectations of gender appropriate behavior. While preservationist men were being described as sentimental and effeminate, women were already perceived to be sentimental. Conservationist women who supported San Francisco’s claims to the Hetch Hetchy valley were welcomed and activism aimed

at convincing other women’s clubs of the water reservoirs validity was perceived as gender appropriate. However, while rhetoric in newspapers didn’t actively work to delegitimize women’s activism through gendered language, women’s role in the dispute was portrayed in a way that allowed for white women to be rendered invisible in future histories. Within the hierarchal power structures of the dispute, women’s widespread activism was considered subordinate to that of men’s and race was completely absent.

The rhetoric and imagery was completely silent on Asian Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans who might have been directly impacted by either the preservation or conservation of the valley. This absence is indicative of an exclusion that depicts those who use and care about the Hetch Hetchy as only white.
Hierarchical or Contagious Diffusion? | (in)Visible Women in the Hetch Hetchy Dispute

December 2014 | Cypress Swamp, First Landing State Park

*It is probably true that contagious diffusion, the widespread dissemination of an idea or concept without specific origin, is often appropriated as hierarchal diffusion, the dissemination of an idea or concept from a person or place of power.*

In “Wimmin is Everywhere,” historian Glenda Riley writes:

Although Gifford Pinchot claimed that the “conservation” idea flashed into his mind as he rode his horse Jim through Washington, DC’s Rock Creek Park one afternoon in 1907, thousands of women had already received similar visions and had acted on them. In addition, despite Pinchot’s claim that President Theodore Roosevelt made what Pinchot called “an as-yet-unnamed program” into “the most significant achievement” of his administration, women’s clubs all over the nation already had in place “conservation programs and divisions.”

White middle to upper class women had been early advocates for environmental reform,

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2 Glenda Riley, ““Wimmin Is Everywhere”: Conserving and Feminizing Western Landscapes, 1870 to 1940”, *The Western Historical Quarterly* 29, no.1, (Utah State University: 1988), 4.
yet histories still perpetuate a narrative dominated by Roosevelt, Pinchot, and Muir. In Carolyn Merchant’s article *Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement: 1900-1906*, published in 1984, she states that although women in the Progressive era played prolific roles as “protectors of the environment,” they have “been rendered all but invisible by conservation historians” even though “women transformed the crusade from an elite male enterprise into a widely based movement.”3 The success of the women’s clubs, which had been working on conservation efforts since the late nineteenth century, has been negated in environmentalist narratives.

Vera Norwood, in *Heroines of Nature: Four Women Respond to the American Landscape*, states that despite their numerous contributions to the conservation movement, women’s voices were silenced as a result of the exclusionary male consciousness of the “cult of wilderness,” that looked down upon any female participation into either conservation or preservation initiatives.4 “They were thus limited to roles as followers, carriers of culture, not themselves offering the lead in new understandings of either scientific ecology or environmental ethics.”5 However, environmental initiatives were dependent on the advocacy of women. In the First Biennial Report of State Foresters by the California State Board of Forestry it states, “…the Women’s Clubs have always listened to all appeals from organizations, and cooperated with them in all measures for the preservation of these National and State playgrounds, not only for today but for their great value to the coming generation.”6 Women’s agitation for the protection

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of landscapes was essential to environmental reform in the early twentieth century, yet ignored in subsequent histories. Although recently historians have aimed to provide a more inclusive history of the Hetch Hetchy dispute by integrating the role of women into their analyses, they still perpetuate a male dominated narrative. Historians have fallen into the trap of relying on older research without providing new analysis.

Using the research of Carolyn Merchant and Polly Welts Kaufman to include gender into their work, the same sentences have been reworked and reiterated throughout the Hetch Hetchy Disputes historiography. Carolyn Merchant’s article “Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement: 1900-1906” has especially become a seminal work in including women into environmental history. Her research, based on the General Federation of Women’s Clubs Bulletins, proceedings of women’s club meetings, addresses to women’s clubs and Congress, proceedings at Conservation Congresses, correspondence, and oral histories, provides a prolific examination of the contributions of women in early twentieth century environmental protection. Merchant argues that, “In addition to keeping 800,000 members informed on the conservation policies and achievements of Roosevelt and Pinchot, the General Federation’s Forestry Committee played an influential role in the passage of legislation to protect forests, waters, and birdlife.” Since the publication of this article, these words have been rewritten multiple times in subsequent environmental histories.

Historian Polly Welts Kaufman in National Parks and the Woman’s Voice: A History wrote that in response to the Hetch Hetchy dispute, “the women of the Sierra Club rallied the California Federation of Women’s Clubs, who in turn garnered support from the General

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Federation of Women’s Clubs, estimated at 800,000 women nationwide.”

Robert Righter in *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* stated, “The defenders of Hetch Hetchy found an effective ally in the General Federation of Women’s Clubs…With a membership of 800,000 women and chapters in every state, the organization was an effective group, with an affinity for conservation issues and the national parks.”

Adam Rome in “‘political hermaphrodites’: Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America” wrote, “Though men accounted for two-thirds of the Sierra Club membership at the time, the club’s women were especially active in the grassroots campaign to save Hetch Hetchy…The General Federation of Women’s Clubs rallied its approximately 800,000 members to oppose “the spoliation of this reserve.”

Susan Schrepfer in *Natures Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American environmentalism* stated, “By the time the Hetch Hetchy battle became its most intense, one-third of the Sierra Club’s members were women. They were also active in single-sex organizations that campaigned to save Hetch Hetchy valley from inundation.”

These reiterated words and statements assume that the women’s clubs were unanimous in their decision to support the preservationist cause and ignores the specificity of their activism. Instead of actively engaging with the letters, pamphlets, speeches, and appeals women initiated, historians only include these few sentences. Portraying women’s contributions in a monolithically repetitious narrative has allowed historians of the Hetch Hetchy dispute to

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minimally include gender. Along with the historians who have yet to recognize women’s contributions within the dispute, by using the same phrases over and over, they also have ironically contributed to the invisibility of women’s activism. Recognizing that women were involved and not engaging with the activism itself, is a form of dismissal and one of the reasons why women’s engagement with conservation and preservation initiatives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have continued to be disregarded in environmental histories. Without engaging with the activism of women, environmental histories dominated by men will continue to overshadow the landscapes of protection.

Contagious Diffusion | Pamphlets, Petitions, Speeches, and Letters

Although women did not yet possess the vote, individuals both within the purview of women’s clubs or acting alone, took initiative to advocate either for or against the use of the valley as a water reservoir. Studying the activism of white middle to upper class women within the Hetch Hetchy dispute alludes to a historical legacy of activism regardless of political stance. When the Hetch Hetchy valley became a contested landscape over the potential construction of a water reservoir, preservationists argued that its greatest value was in its aesthetic and its role in national identity. Through pamphlets, letters, petitions, and speeches, individual women and women’s clubs created a national discourse surrounding the dispute. They argued that the recreational value of the Hetch Hetchy valley, as a source of refuge from urban life, was for the people of the entire nation. The General Federation of Women’s Clubs and various other women’s clubs took the initiative to release statements on their stance. The First Biennial Report of State Foresters by the California State Board of Forestry stated, “at our appeal the eastern club
women sent thousands of letters to our representatives asking them to revoke the grant of the Hetch Hetchy valley to San Francisco.” In order to generate thousands of letters, preservationists circulated a sample letter to help facilitate an analogous platform. The sample letter, printed in several pamphlets including *Let Everyone Help to Save the Famous Hetch Hetchy Valley* and *How to Help to Preserve the Hetch Hetchy Valley and the Yosemite Park*, wrote,

> Our national parks are already too few in number. We are vitally interested in preserving intact those now existing. We earnestly protest against the destruction of any of the wonderful scenery of the Yosemite National Park and urge you to oppose any bill, which will permit San Francisco to use Hetch Hetchy as a municipal water tank. Strengthen our park laws instead of allowing them to be overridden.

Defining the tenets of preservationist activism, upper to middle class white women would use the pamphlets as a platform to advocate on behalf of the valley to preserve its natural beauty, defend other protected places from invasion, and strengthen federal influence on preserved landscapes. The pamphlets also publically recognized the influence of women’s clubs within the dispute. Underneath the article titled “A Brief Statement of the Hetch-Hetchy Case to Date,” is a list of organizations that supported the preservationist cause, including the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and the California and other State Federations of Women’s Clubs, and other organizations that included women such as the Sierra Club and Appalachian Mountain Club. The Federation Courier, the General Federation’s newsletter for the California Women’s Clubs, and the Federations Woman of Today, the newsletter on the east coast, published Muir’s “Brief

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12 Mrs. Foster Elliot, “Club Women and Forestry,” 128.
14 Ibid, 3.
These pamphlets, articles, and especially the sample letter, defined the major strategies employed by preservationists for the protection of the valley, which mostly defended national interest over local interest. Mrs. H.P. Issacs of Portland, Oregon encapsulated it perfectly when she wrote, “Hetch Hetchy destruction unnecessary; country’s needs more than San Francisco.” Preservationists advocated for the national value of the Hetch Hetchy valley as a recreation site, a place where nature’s beauty should be preserved, and the threatening precedent of infringing on a National Park outweighed the needs of San Francisco locally.

Numerous women asserted the national right to the valley through letters and telegrams as indicated in the Hearings held before the Committee on Public Lands of the House of Representatives in 1909. From California, Margaret Munn Wade stated, “When the need of one section of the country is great, the country as a whole is ready to make...great sacrifices for that section, but where there is no need of sacrifice, it should not be demanded by a part from the whole.” Also appealing to the national importance of the Hetch Hetchy, Mary E. Haskall from Boston, indicated, “San Francisco can get water from other lakes, at no unreasonable cost, but the West and East can never get another Hetch Hetchy.”

Lines of argument advocating for the Hetch Hetchy valley’s national value included an emphasis that San Francisco could obtain a water source from numerous other sites. From

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16 Mrs. H.P. Isaacs to Chairman Frank Mondell, January 2, 1909, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 118.
17 “San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir,” Hearings before the Committee on the Public Lands of the House of representatives, January 9 and 12, 1909 on H.J. res. 223.
18 Margaret Munn Wade to Representative S.C. Smith, December 31, 1908, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 197.
19 Mary E. Haskall to Chairman Frank Mondell, January 3, 1909, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 216.
Chicago, Harriet Monroe emphasized, “The sacrifice is unnecessary, as experts note 14 other possible sources of water supply for San Francisco. It is destructive of the people’s property and subversive of the rights under which the Government holds this park in trust for all people forever.”²⁰ (Miss) Anita Compertz from Berkeley California wrote, “I feel sure that if you and others were aware…of the fourteen other places as available in every way as Hetch Hetchy, this 500 square miles of national park would not be ruined to the nation.”²¹ Two of the most powerful arguments for the usage of alternate water sources were written by Miss Tallulah Le Conte and Laura McDermott.

Miss Tallulah Le Conte argued,

I want to protest against such a thing being allowed, and protest as long and loud and hard as I can. They can get all the water they’ll ever need from several other sources; and besides, even if they needed that water, they could spend a little more of their millions and build a dam farther down the river that would serve their every purpose and not infringe on Uncle Sam’s property. What I protest against is the ruining of the Hetch Hetchy Valley, and ruined it will be if such a thing is allowed, as I know very well since I have tramped all through that country and know it.²²

In her letter, Le Conte not only adamantly stands against the damming of the Hetch Hetchy, but also proved the validity of her claims by asserting herself as a regular visitor to the valley. She maintains the platform of preservationists through her advocating for a different water source and defending national claims for National Parks. The tenaciousness of her letter indicates how personal and divided the dispute could be for individuals who have been there.

²⁰ Harriet Monroe to Chairman Frank Mondell, January 2, 1909, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 207.
²¹ (Miss) Anita Compertz to Chairman Frank Mondell, January 15, 1909, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 328.
²² Miss Tallulah Le Conte to Chairman Frank Mondell, December 28, 1908, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 149.
Laura McDermott wrote,

As a daughter of the Sierras… The city of San Francisco is so very favorably situated as to other sources of a water supply that no stone should be left unturned to prevent infringement on Yosemite National Park. Does not the damming Hetch Hetchy for a water supply for San Francisco contravene a national law? Does it not destroy the beauty, impede the tourist, and choke the freedom of the Yosemite National Park? …If the rights of one national park are marked with the destructive hand of exploitation what will be the ultimate fate of all our country’s reserves of wonderland? In this age of exploitation…America’s greatest gift from the Creator is about to be sacrificed …

McDermott also appealed to the usage of different water sources because to her, the invasion of municipal use into the valley would set a dangerous precedent for future incursions into federally protected land. Although she was arguing on behalf of the valley specifically, her argument feeds into the fears preservationists had concerning the fate of protected places in the future. She believed that if the valley were turned into a water reservoir for the city of San Francisco, the exploitation of the past would also become the exploitation of the future.

The emphasis on San Francisco’s alternative water sources asserted that national claim outweighed the local claim to the Hetch Hetchy valley. Therefore, the valley’s ultimate value was not as a potential water source, rather it was its use as a playing ground for the nation’s people, an area where its preservation could provide a spiritual and recreational retreat. Mary Anna Nicholas argued, “It is a place of beauty and should be kept a joy forever. The sacrifice of the beautiful region has not even the excuse of being necessary, since it is the testimony of experts that San Francisco can easily obtain an abundant water supply elsewhere.” According to the multitudes of women who actively advocated for the Hetch Hetchy valley’s preservation, the usage of alternative water sources would save its unique beauty and value as part of

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23 Laura McDermott to Representative S.C. Smith, December 28, 1908, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 153.
24 Mary Anna Nicholas to Chairman Frank Mondell, January 10, 1909, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 237.
Yosemite National Park. Lydia Atterbury from Berkeley California argued, “The whole Tuolumne River region now lying within the national park is of unusual beauty and grandeur, and it should remain the property of the United States and preserved for the use of the whole people.”25 Bertha Payne claimed, “This beautiful valley should be preserved as a national playground and its unnecessary spoliation would be a great deprivation to the people who now enjoy its beauty, and also to those who are to come.”26 These quotes typify the intention of preservationist argumentation, which states nature has an intrinsic value outside of human’s economic benefit. Within nature’s beauty exists its greatest benefit to humankind.

To the preservationist, the invasion of the Hetch Hetchy valley was a grotesque conquest of the private interest of public land. Miss A. Martha Walker wrote, “If we cannot save our best for the whole nation to enjoy, we are doing a great wrong… It would be a glittering example of our “commercial” spirit were we to lose the Hetch Hetchy to our people’s fullest possession.”27 To many who wrote letters opposing San Francisco’s use of the Hetch Hetchy valley, it was not just a desecration of beautiful land but also a precedent for future invasions into national parks. From Cleveland, Ohio, Hannah Minot Weld stated, “I write to beg you to use your influence against the surrender of any public land in any national park, and also to urge the need of extinguishing all private claims through purchase by the Government.”28 Eva Channing, from Boston contended, “I write to protest, not only against the proposed legislation giving authority to flood the Hetch Hetchy valley, but against the surrender of any public land in any national

25 Lydia Atterbury to Chairman Frank Mondell, December 28, 1908, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 147.
27 Miss A. Martha Walker to Representative S.C. Smith, December 29, 1908, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 177.
28 Hannah Minot Weld to Chairman Frank Mondell, December 31, 1908, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 200.
The hearings held before the Committee on Public Lands of the House of Representatives in 1909 illuminate the repository and fervor of women’s individual activism on behalf of the valley and the urgent language indicated a strong passion and legacy in protecting landscapes.

Official petitions were also sent to Congress by women’s organizations from across the country regarding the fate of the valley and the proper use of national park land. These petitions demonstrate the esteem of women’s club’s wide spread national environmental activism. On December 4, 1913, in the Congressional Record containing the proceedings and debates of the Sixty-Third Congress, Senator Poindexter spoke, “As indicating the state of public opinion…I will read another resolution adopted by an influential organization in the city of Boston. This is from the State Federation of Women’s Clubs, and contains a very excellent statement of the issues involved in this bill.” In the official statement signed by the President of the Massachusetts State Federation of Women’s Clubs, Mrs. George W. Perkins, outlined the reasons the Hetch Hetchy valley should not be turned into a water reservoir. Perkins argued that as one of the nation’s most beautiful places, the Hetch Hetchy valley acts as a source of recreation, health, and beauty for United States citizens. The construction of a municipal water reservoir would destroy it and set the precedent for the invasion of other National Parks.

She stated,

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29 Eva Channing to Chairman Frank Mondell, December 31, 1908, House Committee on Public Lands, San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, 201.
30 Hearing before Congress on the San Francisco Water Supply, 63rd Cong, 2nd sess., December, 4 1916, 196.
Resolved, that we, the Massachusetts State Federation of Women’s Clubs… representing 262 Clubs, earnestly oppose this needless and irrevocable sacrifice by the whole Nation of an invaluable possession, and we petition the President and urge Senators to defeat any bill which has for its object any such invasion of Hetch Hetchy or the cession of any public land.\textsuperscript{31}

Similar to the Massachusetts State Federation of Women’s Clubs, other state and regional women’s clubs advocating on behalf of the valley, came together and released an official statement regarding their stance in the dispute. In the Congressional hearing it was also mentioned that on November 22, 1913 the Southern District Federation of Women’s Clubs in California met and according to the \textit{San Diego Union}, “one of the features of the convention was the almost unanimous sentiment against the proposed use of the Hetch Hetchy valley by San Francisco for water purposes.”\textsuperscript{32} On a national level, in the General Federation of Women’s Clubs Tenth Biennial Convention, a resolution was passed to endorse the preservation of the Hetch Hetchy valley. “Resolved, That the Federation vigorously opposes the proposed destruction of the Hetch-Hetchy Valley and withdrawal of the finest part of National Park, to be used as a water supply for San Francisco.”\textsuperscript{33} The General Federation, state, and local women’s clubs not only took a stance and wrote petitions, but the proliferation of petitions in the Congressional Record is indicative of the influence of women’s clubs on environmental reform.

However, not all women’s clubs were unanimous in their decision to oppose the construction of a water reservoir. On the east coast and nationally, women’s clubs leaned towards the preservationist cause, while on the local level; they leaned towards the conservationist cause. As a result, when political conservationists were quick to espouse the

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Hearing before Congress on the San Francisco Water Supply}, 196.\
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid}, 194.\
\textsuperscript{33} The General Federation of Women’s Clubs, \textit{Tenth Biennial Convention, Official Report} (Newark, New Jersey, 1910), 535.
support of women’s clubs, they often misappropriated their support. In November of 1913, a
Senator “had incorporated into the Congressional Record a statement that the California State
Federation of Women’s Clubs passed a resolution in favor of the Raker bill” however, according
to the President of the Alameda District of the California Federation, she stated that, “the
California Federation passed…a resolution opposing the use of Hetch Hetchy as a water supply
for San Francisco and this notion” had not been appealed.\footnote{Hearing before Congress on the San Francisco Water Supply, 63rd Cong, 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., December, 4 1916, 194.} This Resolution from the California State Federation of Women’s Clubs stated,

Resolved, that the California Federation of Women’s Clubs, whose members believe that
our state and national parks should be extended instead of destroyed as civilization goes
on protest against the invasion of this grand landscape garden of our national park for
commercial purposes, and pray that our members and senators from California will use
their best endeavor to have this proposed grant of water right in the Hetch Hetchy valley
to the city of San Francisco postponed until a complete and impartial investigation of the
matter is made by Congress to justify such a sacrifice of this valuable asset to local and

Instead of favoring the Raker bill, as the senator had stated, the California Federation
actively denied support for the bill. However, both these statements differ from one written by
Mrs. Foster Elliot, the State chairman of the forestry department of the California Federation. In
a letter to Congress she emphasized, “Because of the marked diversity of opinion in California
on the subject of San Francisco and its desire to secure the Hetch Hetchy, it has been the
steadfast policy of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs to take no action, either for or
against the proposal.”\footnote{Hearing before Congress on the San Francisco Water Supply, 63rd Cong, 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., December, 4 1916, 193.} While one senator believed the California Federation supported the bill,
a president of a local chapter believed the California Federation had issued a statement keenly against the Raker bill, and the State chairman of the forestry department stated that the California Federation would never issue a statement for or against the construction of the water reservoir. These conflicting statements indicate the diversity of opinions individual women and women’s clubs had on the dispute and the assumption of women’s activism. The words of women could be twisted to fit the claim of another’s platform or completely ignored.

The Senator’s mistakenly adopted petition in favor of the Raker bill had actually been “a resolution of only one of the six districts comprising the State federation and was the district, of which the membership was mostly San Franciscan.” The telegram to the Senate of the United States from the Executive Board of the San Francisco District of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs, stated that “this resolution should be given the utmost weight among all the mass of endorsements and protests against the Hetch Hetchy bill” because “the women of this district have been left to face the water problems,” the lack “of fire protection,” and those “whose health is endangered through the necessity of making domestic use of water coming from questionable sources.” The San Francisco District of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs supported the Raker bill on the basis that a municipal water source would benefit the health and wellness of the residents of San Francisco.

Similarly, most of the support for the construction of a water reservoir came from organizations in San Francisco. On February 5, 1910, the Hypatia Women’s Club of San Francisco wrote to Senator Frank Flint, stating that the Government should grant San Francisco permission to use the Hetch Hetchy as a water reservoir. Their reasoning: that there were no

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37 Hearing before Congress on the San Francisco Water Supply, 193.
38 Executive Board of the San Francisco California Federation of Women’s Clubs to The Senate of the United States, telegram, December 2, 1913, RG 46, Records of the U.S. Senate.
other options and as long as Lake Eleanor was first developed, the “very small space” that “is often flooded for long periods during storms and high water and the making the same as a permanent reservoir rather beautifies than injures this small piece of land.” These organizations that supported the conservationist cause considered preservationists “irrational and unjust” because the valley “never will be visited by large numbers of people at any one time.” Overall, nationally women and women’s clubs were more actively engaged in the preservationist cause, while locally they were more involved in the preservationist cause.

Therefore, when statements are made by scholars which allude to the 800,000 women who supported John Muir and the preservationist cause, the historiography of the Hetch Hetchy dispute perpetuates the essentialism of women’s club activism instead of recognizing the diversity of opinion and the dynamism of their writing. It disregards the work of individuals who advocated for and against the preservation of the valley. Harriet Monroe, a representative of the Chicago Geographical Society, prolific supporter of the Hetch Hetchy valley, and writer of several narratives of her trips there, spoke before the Committee of Public Lands and said, “Gentlemen, in the name of the societies I represent; in the name of the people of the United States, who are more concerned in this matter than they realize; in the name of future generations who will hold you to account, I beg you to reject this proposition.”

Even though Harriet Monroe, along with other women, did not have the right to vote, her political clout and influence allowed her to testify before the Committee of Public Lands. The

39 Hypatia Women’s Club of San Francisco to Senator Frank Flint, Letter, February 5, 1910, RG 46, Records of the U.S. Senate.
40 Ibid.
proliferation of women activists allowed their voices to become a repository for Progressive era environmental reform. The upper to middle class white women who labored for either the preservation or conservation of the Hetch Hetchy had become integral campaigners within the dispute and helped spur a national discourse on environmental issues with circulated pamphlets, letters, petitions, and speeches. Even with their visibility during the dispute, their invisibility has been perpetuated through the monolithically repetitious narrative that has allowed historians to minimally include gender and ignore race completely.

Although the General Federation of Women’s Clubs was not explicitly racially exclusive, the majority of members were white. When Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a prolific African American civil rights leader, suffragist, American publisher, and journalist, established a black women’s club that was admitted into the General Federation in 1900, the current Federation members assumed the club was white. Consequently, when Ruffin attempted to attend the 1900 convention as a representative, her attempts were denied. With Ruffin’s political clout, the assumption of whiteness within the newly included club is indicative of how little the General Federation crossed lines of race. As a result, similar to the decision set by Plessy versus Ferguson, the General Federation left the issue of membership with the local and state chapters. By not taking a stance and setting a national precedence of racial inclusivity, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs continued to promote a white dominated space regardless if local chapters were more inclusive. 42 Through this construction of whiteness, national Federation members subsequently had access to other white spaces, such as Congress, even if in limited ways. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is no mention of black women’s clubs or

individual black women within the historiography of the Hetch Hetchy dispute. The invisibility of women’s activism within the Hetch Hetchy dispute is not just a result of a minimally inclusive historiography, but also a gendered and raced projection onto the landscape.
Imaginative Geographies | Nostalgia in Reservoirs Reflection

January 2016 | Statue of Liberty National Monument

*Imaginative geographies are value placed constructions that rarely represent reality but rather reflect a focality of inclusion and exclusion.*

On May 24, 1923, the flat alluvial floodplain of the Hetch Hetchy, brimming with meadows of pine forest, oak trees, streams, and rock spires, was submerged. The narrow entrance of the valley now obstructed with a concrete wall of 430 feet tall, diverted the Tuolumne River and created a reservoir housed in the valley’s high glacially carved granite walls. The reservoir’s water, historically choppy, reflected a distorted reality, an impression of a male dominated narrative that unevenly gives credit to three men, Pinchot, Muir, and Roosevelt. With the inclusion of women’s historically ignored voices, its reflection only slightly blurs becoming a softened distortion of half-truths. Historically unquestioned, an assumption of whiteness and maleness that has pervaded conservation and preservation initiatives even today.

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Only with the inclusion of race, gender, and class can the reservoir reflect a mirrored image, water without a ripple.

Our topographies are not only shaped by geomorphological processes, but also by the geopolitical circumstances of history. The Hetch Hetchy dispute was the first time that a protected area was contested between conservationists and preservationists. Although these two types of environmental reform often work conjointly, the differences between the two were here a direct reflection of the gender and societal norms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As both white middle to upper class men and women used wilderness to alter constructions of gender, protected places became a nostalgic anthropomorphic attribution of the nineteenth century separate spheres ideology. The definitions of femininity and masculinity created spatial hierarchies of power and value inextricably formed through the ideological processes of gender. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the geographic ordering of protected landscapes dictated that conservationism be linked with the masculine while preservationism be linked with the feminine.

Therefore, the perceived dominant cultural expectations of gender appropriate behavior were projected onto the landscapes themselves. Preservation protects land based upon its aesthetic value. Under the pretense of a gaze, the viewer’s look measures its aesthetic worth, and resolves that its greatest value remains in its appearance. Preserved land acts as an object, its power in its aesthetic like a wilderness museum. Conservation protects land under the pretense of sustainable use. Conserved land should be used, it should age, it should contribute to society, and therefore, is an actor. It provides for humankind through the masculine performance of hunting, fishing, and logging and became the reflection of Theodore Roosevelt’s strenuous life.

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Although both men and women espoused conservation and preservation initiatives simultaneously, the way land was protected was a consequence of a nostalgia for the separate spheres binary. Exposed during the Hetch Hetchy dispute, environmental reform created not only a gendered space, but also a heteronormative wilderness. Through this spatial dimension of separate gendered landscapes, more value was attributed to conservation. This was indicative during the Hetch Hetchy dispute as preservationist men were delegitimized through the gender associations of femininity and conservationist men were legitimized through the gender associations of masculinity.

Therefore, the patriarchy of a heteronormative wilderness silenced, and continues to silence women’s activism. Simultaneously, it also justifies a complete absence of race and an assumption of whiteness in conservation and preservation initiatives. Through early twentieth century conceptualizations of civilization, conservation and preservation initiatives became rooted in the ideologies of white supremacy. The gender and race stratification of protected areas were structurally reinforced by spatial segregation. Therefore, the idealism of separate spheres and the heteronormativity of civilization, created a white wilderness built on the premise of exclusion. It could be possible that there was no diversity within the Hetch Hetchy dispute because the Hetch Hetchy was a protected landscape founded upon removal, relocation, restriction, and exclusion. Consequently, since the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been a pervasive assumption that conservation and preservation initiatives are and continue to be white dominated.

These gendered reflections exposed hierarchies of power that excluded or restricted large demographics of people from these areas that many called home. Protected landscapes became
the distorted reflections of gender, a dualism that perpetuated a legacy of racial exclusion through the ideologies of preservation and conservation. The monumental scenery of protected places had become and continues to be today, a visible symbol of national identity and consequently, a representation of the United States’ obsession with the pretense of equality.

In 1983, Wallace Stegner wrote, “National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst.”

Today, the National Park System has become typified as the preservation of a contiguous United States before exploitation, a nostalgia for a white frontier free of its previous inhabitants. This presumption of national parks as absolutely democratic is indicative of the fallacy of American exceptionalism. Protected places are historically white places because of the violent removal and relocation of those who were living there before or the exclusion of those with limited mobility. This presumption that the National Park idea is America’s most egalitarian creates a structural absence, a spatialization of racial difference in protected landscapes that creates a geographical imaginary of white normativity. The powers of racialization and representation have controlled who gets to participate in what types of environmental protection, whose voices are heard and whose are not, and which stories are told. In order to study a history of mirrored reflection, one must deconstruct the map; historically contextualize the wilderness to reveal the explicit exclusionary, gendered, or racial connotations of its protection.

In order to dispel the assumptions of whiteness in landscape protection, one only needs to look as far back as the last United States President, Barack Obama. As the first black president,

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he protected more land than any president in American history. He conserved and preserved 548 million acres of Arctic tundra, mountain woodland, coral reefs, the two largest marine reserves on earth, and the world’s second largest desert reserve under protection. During his eight years in office, he added 22 new parks to the United States National Park System protecting 258 million more acres of protected land than Roosevelt.5

Diversifying the history and reality of protected landscapes should start with the awareness of historic invisibility, aggression, and exclusion. It should begin with a recognition that diversity has not been recognized but has always been there, whether through exclusion or through alternative histories. It should begin with the recognition that people of color have been working to protect land, alongside their more visually recognized counterparts. We just have to find them, to recover the voices submerged under the pretense of gender and race by looking at local communities of color rather than relying on the activism of national environmental groups. We should look for those who have worked for protections of landscapes that have historically denied them entrance, at activism that might not be preservationist or conservationist in intent, but protect landscapes nonetheless. It can be protecting landscapes under the pretense of health activism or standing up against noxious facilities in local communities. It could be the work of one individual within larger environmental agencies or perhaps a president of a local urban community garden.

The Hetch Hetchy Debate exposes the historical tension of erasure. The reservoirs waters reflect a history ignored and restricted, but waiting to be reclaimed.

afterword.

At the north entrance of Yellowstone National Park is the triumphal Roosevelt Arch. Inscribed with a quote from the Organic Act it states, “For the benefit and enjoyment of the people.”

Three miles from the arch, at the edge of the Gardner River, there is a place called the Boiling River. A confluence where a large run off of hot spring water mixes with the freezing, very cold river water. This confluence is supposed to, and sometimes does, create a pool of perfectly hot water that is enjoyable to soak in, but most of the time it rotates bursts of scalding with bursts of frigid. Soaking up the natural beauty of Yellowstone is a beautiful experience, but sometimes the extreme oscillation between hot and cold hurts.

Let’s embrace the oscillation, the pain and beauty that comes from recovering the reservoirs of voices that have been historically drowned, concealed because of their gender or race and recover the denied voices of our past, those who worked for the protection of landscapes and those excluded from them.

It’s important to feel the burn of these earth monuments and to feel the coldness of the words “of the people,” knowing the displacement, violence, and exclusion that came with its protection.

When my professor said “I haven’t seen one black person the whole day,” he didn’t mean that there are no people of color interested in National Parks; he meant we should constantly be critiquing our landscapes, especially those that allege to be equal and democratic but are founded in removal and restriction.

February 2015 | Roosevelt Arch, Yellowstone National Park
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