

DECOLONIZING THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE: A PROPOSAL  
TO INCORPORATE INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES  
INTO NATIONAL PARK NARRATIVES<sup>1</sup>

By

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In memory of Richard Dayyat

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“To me no picture of the national parks is complete unless it includes the rangers, the ‘Dudes’, the ‘Sage-brushers’, and the ‘Savages.’”<sup>1</sup> Written by Horace Albright, the first head of the National Park Service in his book *Oh, Ranger!*, distills a few of the important stakeholders of the National Park System (hereafter NPS). However, as implied by their inclusion at the very end, and their description as “savages,” those stakeholders were not viewed equally by the early National Park Service. Due to its formation during World War I, and its unique mission to protect exceptional American landscapes while promoting patriotism, the NPS focused on creating propagandized, ultra-American narratives designed to unite the American people and create a cohesive sense of pride in the protected lands entrusted to the NPS. Thus, the history of Indigenous groups, many of whom have long standing ties to lands now protected as national parks, were largely ignored or erased to create Anglocentric narratives of progress and protection of unspoiled wilderness.

Many national parks have geographic features, trails, or lodges bearing Indigenous place names or tribal names. However, little interpretation is generally provided to solidify visitors’ understandings of why these names were chosen, what they mean, or their importance. Until very recently, these names were the only real inclusion of Indigenous history within the national parks. The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was passed by the United States Congress in 1990. NAGPRA ensured that federally recognized tribal groups who had been excluded from historical narratives were incorporated into official back-end processes of consultation

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<sup>1</sup> Horace Albright and Frank J. Taylor, *Oh, Ranger!* 1972 Centennial, reprint of original 1928 edition, (New York: The Chatham Press, Inc., 1972), ix.

within the park system. NAGPRA was the first major federal level effort to mandate consultation with Indigenous groups to repatriate Indigenous remains and cultural artifacts held by the parks. This law is notable for being the first attempt by the Federal government in addressing the theft of native bodies and cultural artifacts for Western museums. Whether or not NAGPRA has been successful is a matter of debate, but it remains notable as a first step.

In any case, the NPS should be more inclusive of Native peoples, their history, and their culture, and I hope that this thesis contributes to make it possible. In this thesis, I analyze the degree to which the National Park Service has incorporated Native history and culture and considered native voices and perspectives. To keep the project manageable, I will focus on two national parks: Yellowstone, in Wyoming, and Big Bend, in Texas. These parks were incorporated during different eras, and therefore reflect different attitudes towards Native Americans by NPS directors and personnel. I argue that, despite increasing attention to Native American histories and cultures at the parks in recent times, Native Americans must be allowed to tell their own history and describe their own culture within the park system. To make this possible, the NPS needs to form stronger bonds with Indigenous peoples to achieve a more balanced partnership.

There is no shortage of sources on Yellowstone National Park. As America's first national park it has long been a topic of study for academics. Yellowstone serves as a pertinent starting point for our analysis. The initial treatment of Native Americans in Yellowstone National Park was totally exclusionary, in no small part due to the park's formation during the Indian Wars period. The region's Indigenous groups were exoticized and seen as non-White "others" who detracted from what the park had to offer

Anglo visitors. Because the NPS was formed during World War I, it was tasked with crafting historical narratives that would unify the American citizenry and promote domestic travel to visit captivating American landscapes, at a time when travel to Europe was unavailable to Americans. These early myths were Anglo-centric and promoted the rugged individualism of American values, highlighting the importance of protecting these untouched lands as the birthright of future Americans, while ignoring the Indigenous stewards of the lands entirely.

Conversely, Big Bend National Park was founded much later, during the 1940s. There are far fewer scholarly monographs written about Big Bend than Yellowstone. Discussion of Big Bend serves as an important frame of reference, showcasing the continuous marginalization of native communities into the twentieth century. The establishment of this park, well after the Indian Wars period inevitably meant a difference in ideas regarding Native peoples. Unlike Yellowstone, no tribal groups occupied Big Bend at the time, but the region had a long history of aboriginal occupation. Numerous tribes had utilized the land on raids or migrations for millennia, and many held important religious and cultural ceremonies there. Perhaps because the park was created many decades after Indigenous dispossession, tribal ties to the land were generally ignored or glossed over.

The NPS has a reputation as a trustworthy source of historical and cultural information and plays an important role in educating Americans that visit the parks every year. The erasure of Native presence on these lands has had an insidious impact on how the history of the United States is perceived by visitors who implicitly trust the historical narratives promoted by the NPS. The erasure of Indigenous voices continues the harmful



trend of excluding Native Americans from the crafting of historical narratives on their country, ignoring Native American ties to the land and the spiritual and cultural importance it holds for Indigenous peoples while simultaneously withholding rights to the land and invalidating their history. Without acceptable levels of partnership with Indigenous stakeholders, the historical narratives promoted by the NPS are missing important context and only serve to distort visitors' understandings of American history through omissions that are inherently harmful to Native Americans.

The historiography regarding the historical narratives forwarded by the NPS began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 and the inception of the NPS in 1916, employees and advocates of the national park ideal began to explain the history and geography of the parks, while advertising the newly protected lands to potential visitors. Most early works were written by park personnel or directors, such as Horace Albright and Miner Tillotson, whose views reflect the predominant Anglocentric beliefs of their time, namely about Anglo superiority and Indigenous backwardness and inability to develop the land.<sup>2</sup>

One of the earliest works was a comprehensive overview of Yellowstone National Park and a brief introduction to its history by military engineer Hiram M. Chittenden, who oversaw road construction in the park. His *The Yellowstone National Park Historical and Descriptive*, first published in 1895, was created as a comprehensive guide that explained to potential visitors the history, topography, and scenic features of the park. The book's chapter on the Natives opens by stating "It is a singular fact in the history of the Yellowstone National Park that very little knowledge of that country seems

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<sup>2</sup> Albright and Taylor, *Oh, Ranger!:* Miner R. Tillotson & Frank J. Taylor, *Grand Canyon Country* (California: Stanford University Press, 1935).

to have been derived from the Indians.”<sup>3</sup> It spends an extraordinarily brief eight pages explaining incorrectly that Indigenous groups largely ignored the Yellowstone area due to superstitious beliefs and a supposed inability to appreciate the scenery the way White visitors could.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of the three-hundred-page book, Indians are only mentioned again in regard to raiding and depicted as threatening to the park and its visitors. This early account illustrates how the biases, inaccuracies, and disregard for Indigenous history in the initial narratives about the nascent national park framed visitors’ experiences and understandings.

Horace Albright was a monumental figure within the National Park Service. He was director of Yellowstone National Park from 1919-1929, and then served as the second director of the NPS.<sup>5</sup> His ideas and policies fundamentally shaped the early NPS and the narratives they produced. His 1928 book *Oh, Ranger!* was written to serve as a guide to the nascent NPS and educate the public on the role of park rangers. This book has a relatively short chapter dedicated to the Native people which disregards their ties to the land, and is filled with inaccurate and racist information that displaces Indigenous history. Albright writes: “Indirectly, they [the Indigenous] were the cause of its [Yellowstone’s] discovery, and more directly they were responsible for its isolation...travelers and explorers hesitated to make the trip to Yellowstone for fear of annihilation by hostile Indians.” Even though this quote implicitly acknowledges the Indigenous presence at the park, it suggests that Anglo-Americans “discovered” the park

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<sup>3</sup> Hiram M. Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park Historical and Descriptive*, 1895, reprint (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2005), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 14. [Throughout the notes, use the short format for already mentioned works (as per Turabian!)]

<sup>5</sup> Albright and Taylor, *Oh, Ranger!*, vi-vii.

through perseverance in the face of Indigenous hostility. The remainder of the book serves to promote the foundational park narratives –namely Anglo discovery and desire to protect the unspoiled and uninhabited wilderness.<sup>6</sup>

Miner Tillotson was the director of the Grand Canyon National Park from 1927 to 1938. He wrote another early NPS work, *Grand Canyon Country*, that served as a foil to *Oh, Ranger!* by striving to introduce would-be visitors to the Grand Canyon and its history. Because Indigenous groups such as the Havasupai still inhabit the Grand Canyon area, Tillotson had more firsthand experience with Indigenous groups, and painted them in a more sympathetic, albeit paternalistic, light. Tillotson spends more time discussing the various tribal groups within the park, differentiating between those like the Havasupai whom he considered industrious and susceptible of civilization, and more “warlike” tribes like the Apaches.<sup>7</sup> However, Indigenous history is still overlooked in this work, as Tillotson, echoing Albright’s claims, states that the Grand Canyon was discovered by European conquistadors in 1540, entirely ignoring the timeline he gives for Indigenous occupation of the area in the following chapter.<sup>8</sup>

Later publications written or sponsored by the National Park Service attempt to address Indigenous histories and correct the marginalization of Natives through analyzing and discussing the history of tribal groups with regards to specific parks. Lee Whittlesey, who served as the official historian for Yellowstone from 2000 to 2018 wrote numerous articles on Indigenous history within Yellowstone. These articles address a wide range of historical issues, including some that discuss the foundational myths of Anglo discovery,

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<sup>6</sup> Albright and Taylor, *Oh, Ranger!*, citation from p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> Tillotson and Taylor, *Grand Canyon Country*, 27-34.

<sup>8</sup> Tillotson and Taylor, *Grand Canyon Country*, 13.

and Indigenous traditions and legends regarding Yellowstone. Whittlesey's articles, mostly published in the early 2000s reflect a post-NAGPRA era in which the NPS was more cognizant of Native Americans and their ties to the land and were taking steps to analyze and interpret their history.<sup>9</sup>

The NPS continues to publish park histories, such as Michael Welsch's 2002 *Landscape of Ghosts, River of Dreams: An Administrative History of Big Bend National Park*. This work is an incredibly deep look at the creation, curation, and protection of Big Bend from around 1930 to 2001. Welsch highlights the NPS's unwillingness or inability to grapple with Indigenous peoples and their ties to the land. The first chapter notes that human use of the Big Bend area dates back nine-thousand years and that Apaches, Comanches, and Chisos frequented the area.<sup>10</sup> However, after this admission, the focus remains elsewhere, and these groups are only discussed collectively and briefly in Chapter 1. The use of Indigenous names for trails and features is addressed here, showing at least the beginning steps of analysis and inclusion of Indigenous history within NPS literature. However, he ignores important issues such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, enacted in 1990, which had already become part of the administrative duties of Big Bend management when his book was published.

Outside of the NPS, professional historians and anthropologists have addressed the connection between national parks and indigenous peoples in varying ways. Some

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<sup>9</sup> Lee H. Whittlesey, "Loss of a Sacred Shrine: How the National Park Service Anguished over Yellowstone's Campfire Myth, 1960-1980," *The George Wright Forum* 27, no. 1 (2010): 94-120; Lee H. Whittlesey, "Native Americans, the Earliest Interpreters: What Is Known About Their Legends and Stories of Yellowstone National Park and the Complexities of Interpreting Them," *The George Wright Forum* 19, no. 3 (2002): 40-51.; Lee H. Whittlesey, "Yellowstone: From Last Place Discovered to International Fame," *SiteLINES: A Journal of Place* 5, no. 1 (2009): 8-10.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Welsch, *Landscape of Ghosts, River of Dreams: An Administrative History of Big Bend National Park*, (National Park Service: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2002, E-book, Chapter 1.

historians such as Robert Keller, Michael Turek and Mark David Spence, take a broader approach in their analysis and address the National Park System as a whole, while analyzing its interpretation of the Indigenous. Others, such as anthropologist Peter Nabokov and archaeologist Lawrence Loendorf analyze the interpretation and inclusion of Indigenous populations at specific parks. These works are important because, unlike the sources from the NPS, which only seek to document Native history, they analyze the interpretation of this history while providing scholarly informed frameworks for incorporating Native peoples into more inclusive historical narratives about the parks.

Published in 1998, Robert Keller and Michael Turek's *American Indians and National Parks* takes a broad approach, analyzing numerous national parks, from Yosemite to the Everglades. Keller and Turek discuss federal policies regarding the Indigenous groups tied to land incorporated by each specific park to facilitate more informed policies and inclusion. The authors note that historical analysis of the link between the Indigenous populations and national parks were severely lacking, and rarely mentioned, let alone properly explored, as "park rangers and superintendents could be oblivious to native history and culture." They also point out the mutual distrust between the NPS and Native Americans as the Park Service "often reacted in a patronizing or defensive manner. Indians on the other hand, usually identified the NPS as just another cog in the federal bureaucracy."<sup>11</sup> This work was one of the earliest historical monographs to address this linkage and explore the Indigenous ties to the national parks. It is disconcerting that the earliest narratives exploring this topic began less than thirty years ago.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Keller, and Michael F. Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), xiii.

Historian Mark David Spence's 1999 monograph *Dispossessing the Wilderness: The Preservationist Ideal, Indian Removal and National Parks* seeks to analyze native dispossession and park policies in Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Glacier national parks. He argues that the idea of an uninhabited wilderness had to be created through dispossession before it could be promoted by the NPS, and it has had numerous negative impacts on native populations that were relegated to the margins of park history.<sup>12</sup> This work moves beyond Keller and Turek's by examining specific policies at the three parks mentioned above, both from a federal perspective and through the viewpoint of the Natives, while discussing the importance of indigenous cultural sites and continuing ties to the land. Spence's work is perhaps the first to address the foundational history behind the NPS as it applies to Native Americans and explain how early policies tied into the prevailing racial beliefs such as the "Vanishing Indian" theory. *Dispossessing the Wilderness* follows through to the exclusion and historical marginalization of indigenous peoples from the parks today.

Nabokov and Loendorf's 2004 scholarly monograph *Restoring a Presence: American Indians and Yellowstone National Park* was one of the first to discuss in detail the Indigenous groups with ties to Yellowstone, providing abundant anthropological and historical evidence. Nabokov is an anthropologist and professor at UCLA, Lawrence Loendorf is an archaeologist and now retired professor at New Mexico State University.<sup>13</sup> They relied partly on ethnographic data, studies on Indigenous populations conducted in the 1990s by the NPS, and tribal records to form a cohesive narrative and reinterpret the

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<sup>12</sup> Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: The Preservationist Ideal, Indian Removal, and National Parks*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Nabokov, and Lawrence Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence: American Indians and Yellowstone National Park*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004, paperback published 2016), back cover.

Indigenous place within Yellowstone.<sup>14</sup> Highlighting the lasting impact of the NPS's harmful erasure of native communities from its historical narratives, Nabokov and Loendorf discuss accounts like the 2001 *National Geographic* article about the history of Yellowstone, according to which, "While most national parks would come into existence already impacted by American Indians, Yellowstone was an exception."<sup>15</sup> This erroneous account relies on the earliest of park narratives about Yellowstone's history, and its inclusion in such a popular magazine as *National Geographic* in 2001 exemplifies the lasting impact of the denial of Indigenous history in earlier park narratives.

Apart from the extant literature, I have used a variety of NPS-produced materials, including, guides and park websites. I will analyze NPS's historical accounts closely to show how the construction and dissemination of specific narratives inherently privileges some groups and histories over others. In the case of the NPS, to the detriment of Indigenous groups and to the benefit of Anglo-Americans. More importantly, I have conducted oral interviews with NPS personnel and professional historians specializing in Indigenous outreach and inclusion familiar with some interpretive changes currently underway, as well as with Native Americans themselves, namely Comanches, and Lipan Apaches.<sup>16</sup> My hope is to add to the existing dialogue with a viewpoint favoring a Public History approach. This means that while attempting to document the Indigenous history of Yellowstone and Big Bend, I will look at concepts such as shared authority and the privileging of specific narratives over others.

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<sup>14</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, xi-xii.

<sup>15</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, xv.

<sup>16</sup> I also reached out to the Mescalero Apache to incorporate their point of view in this project, but they never responded to my requests for meetings.

This thesis consists of three chapters. In the first two chapters, I discuss Native American ties to Yellowstone and Big Bend respectively. Then, I discuss the development of each park, as well as administrative decisions and interpretations about the parks' histories at varying times. I continue the discussion into the present using the oral histories I have conducted to complement the other sources. The third chapter provides a discussion of more recent public history theory in light of my oral interviews, encompassing recent work by Indigenous historians and academics to highlight a more recent broadening of methodology and inclusion in historic interpretation at the parks.

Over the course of American history, Indigenous groups were systematically dispossessed of their lands and their cultures by Anglo-Americans. They are denied an authoritative voice and have had their history taken from them in the service of purportedly patriotic myths that place them as the foil for the ideal "civilized" American. To this day, Indigenous distrust of scholars and governmental employees runs deep in our country. Overcoming that distrust, forming meaningful connections with indigenous groups, and restoring their agency through collaboration with the National Park Service to craft a more inclusive narrative about the parks' histories and the indigenous legacy in them is a necessary and long overdue rectification so that they no longer feel like outsiders on a land that is their own.

I faced numerous difficulties while undertaking this project. I wrote this thesis during the Covid-19 pandemic, and as such many archives were closed to visitors. The pandemic also made travel to Yellowstone and Big Bend less safe, on top of the pre-existing financial limitations of a graduate student. In addition, not all Native Americans responded to my requests for an interview. Despite repeated requests, I have received no



response from the Mescalero Apache Reservation. . Because of these challenges, I had to conduct my interviews in a very short span of time. Nevertheless, I have been able to interview members of the Comanche Nation and the Lipan Band of Texas, as well as present and past members of the NPS. I am very grateful to those who responded and gave their time to enhance my research and ensure that I was more informed on the issues that matter most to them.

## II. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

“Even so, about the easiest place for city folks to see the Indian in his natural state is in a national park. The Indians have been closely associated with the parks since their discovery. The Indian knew the natural wonders that are the basis for the parks long before the white men discovered them.”<sup>1</sup> These words, written by Horace Albright, second director of the National Park Service, in his 1928 book *Oh, Ranger!* highlight the inextricable link between lands that are now national parks, and Native American tribes. As Albright alludes, the lands that would eventually encompass Yellowstone National Park were integral to the lifestyles of numerous Native American tribes, and their history as caretakers of the lands stretches much farther back than the American ideal of protected national parks. Indigenous peoples were almost completely removed from the official accounts of the history of Yellowstone after the formation of the park.

Early Park officials, like Albright and Miner Tillotson, may have demonstrated some personal respect for Native Americans in their writings but professionally forwarded new historical narratives about Anglo superiority and their domination of previously savage, untamed land. The creation of the National Park System led to the development of historical education within the parks themselves. Often this education was delivered through landscape-based interpretation and historic interpretation, and these narratives were often forwarded by newly developed and centralized museums within these parks. However, the initial historical focuses of National Park Service leaders completely ignored the prolonged presence of Indigenous peoples and their impact on the landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Albright and Taylor, *Oh, Ranger!*, 124.

This chapter is organized around four themes: early occupation of the land by Indigenous peoples to Indian removal in the area, Anglo-American exploration, creation of the park in the context of the Indian Wars and the ensuing erasure of the Native past during the formative years of the park, and finally a discussion and analysis of the development of historic interpretation at the Yellowstone.

The removal of Native Americans from Yellowstone was the continuation of a process that began much earlier. The removal process commenced in a systematic U.S. campaign of ethnic cleansing dating back to the 1830s. The Indian Removal Act passed by the United States Congress in 1830 allowed for the removal of the so-called five civilized tribes: Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles. During this process, they were forcibly dispossessed of their traditional territories and placed in reservations. Contrary to the often violent and coercive measures taken to remove the Natives, the act itself only authorized President Andrew Jackson to negotiate land exchanges, and for the United States Government to assess and fairly compensate native peoples for improvements made upon their land.<sup>2</sup> In arguing for the passage of this act, Congressman Willie Lumpkin assured other Congressmen that “no man entertains kinder feelings towards Indians than Andrew Jackson.” When the act formally passed, it included a clause that maintained the integrity of all current existing treaties between the indigenous tribes and the United States government.<sup>3</sup>

Once the Indian Removal Act formally passed and began to be carried out, the nature of removal differed drastically from the language of the legislation. Government

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<sup>2</sup> Cave, Alfred A., “Abuse of Power: Andrew Jackson and the Indian Removal Act of 1830.” *Historian* 65 (6): 1333.

<sup>3</sup> Cave, “Abuse of Power”, 1334.

agents under the Jackson administration resorted to bribing tribal officials, threatening those opposed to relocation, and denying anti-relocation tribal groups the right to vote on the issue within their tribe.<sup>4</sup> The most infamous example of forced displacement, the removal of the Cherokees in what came to be known as the Trail of Tears, highlights the reality of Indian removal despite its supposed voluntary nature as written in the law. Between August 1838 and March 1839, thirteen thousand Cherokees and enslaved peoples travelled from Tennessee, Georgia, and neighboring states to Oklahoma in a forced march that cost the lives of four thousand Cherokees.<sup>5</sup> This event shows the true nature of Indian Removal, one in which the United States Government disregarded previous treaties with indigenous populations, as well as stipulations mandating proper compensation for voluntary removal to reservations.

The displacement of Native populations from Yellowstone National Park occurred in this post-removal era, beginning in the late 1870s. By this time, the precedent of Anglo-American claims to land superseding any Native rights had been firmly established. Removal of Native American groups in the Yellowstone area occurred amid the rampant anti-Indigenous sentiment of the Indian Wars of the 1870s. Initial acts of displacement from the park began as a reaction to this instability, as removal was intended to highlight the safety of the park and prevent a decline of tourism.<sup>6</sup> Early Park infrastructure in the late nineteenth century resembled military encampments designed to resist indigenous attacks, not the typical amenities that have come to be expected by travelers. Superintendent Philetus Norris stated his goal to convince the Indigenous

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<sup>4</sup> Cave, "Abuse of Power", 1337.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer L. Bertolet, "Trail of Tears." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 55.

populations in the surrounding area that they could “visit the park only at the peril of conflict with...the civil and military officers in the government.” Norris also successfully petitioned the Army to create camps on the western border of the park to keep any Indians that might escape from the nearby reservations from entering the park.<sup>7</sup> It was this precedent set in the militaristic tradition of Andrew Jackson’s forced removal and the ensuing Indian Wars that influenced early park officials, leading to policies of indigenous dispossession and the erasure of native habitation of Yellowstone from official park narratives.

### **Native American History of Yellowstone**

Prior to becoming a national park, the Yellowstone area was utilized by numerous Native American tribes-Crows, Blackfoot, and different Shoshonean speaking groups such as the Bannocks, part of the Northern Shoshone, and the Sheepeaters.<sup>8</sup> The Crows’ occupation of the Yellowstone area can be traced back to 1620. Crows occupied land stretching from northern Wyoming to southern Montana.<sup>9</sup> The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 noted that the Crows inhabited around 38 million acres, including almost three quarters of what would become Yellowstone National Park.<sup>10</sup> Crows received horses in trade with Comanches by 1730, which drastically altered Crow lifestyles.<sup>11</sup> They were organized across bands and tribes, which included kinship units and group associations, such as military and religious affiliations. These units were matrilineal, and Crows had no

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<sup>7</sup> Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Hiram M. Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park Historical and Descriptive*, 1895, reprint (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2005), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Nabokov and Lawrence Loendorf. *Restoring a Presence: American Indians and Yellowstone National Park*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 41.

<sup>10</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring A Presence*, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Fred W. Voget, "Crow." In *Handbook of North American Indians*, edited by William C. Sturtevant, Vol. 13, *Plains*, ed. by Raymond J. DeMallie, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001.) 695-696.

social classes.<sup>12</sup> Hiram Martin Chittenden, historian and Captain in the Army Corps of Engineers, wrote in his 1895 book *The Yellowstone National Park Historical and Descriptive* that the Crow were characterized by their “insatiable love of horse stealing and a wandering and predatory habit...” He also states that they were physically strong, and daring hunters, who were generally feared more because of their penchant for thievery than for any threat to personal safety.<sup>13</sup> Echoing Chittenden’s remarks, Albright described the Crows in Yellowstone as nomadic horse thieves, however he made it clear that they “were regarded as the friends of the whites, and never went to war against the settlers.”<sup>14</sup>

The Crows had much more complex interactions with Anglo-Americans and other tribes than their short descriptions in either Albright’s or Chittenden’s short biographies acknowledge. The horse became essential to Crow lifestyles, as the ease of travel increased Crows’ ability to trade and raid. Crows were famous for ceremonial dress and elaborate decorations for their horses. While they typically allied themselves with Nez Percés, Flathead and Eastern Shoshone trading partners, skirmishes would commonly erupt over trading disputes.<sup>15</sup> Crows also allied with the United States military at times, Albright specifically mentions that Crow scouts were assisting Custer’s army when his army was destroyed at the Battle of Little Bighorn.<sup>16</sup>

The Blackfoot were another of the four major groups associated with Yellowstone. The Blackfoot inhabited the watershed of the Missouri River to the east of

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<sup>12</sup> Voget, “Crow,” 701.

<sup>13</sup> Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park Historical and Descriptive*, 6-7

<sup>14</sup> Albright, *Oh, Ranger!*, 135.

<sup>15</sup> Voget, “Crow”, 697-698.

<sup>16</sup> Albright, *Oh, Ranger!*, 135-6.

the park and were said to be “the terror of the trapper and miner, and hundreds of the pioneers perished at their hands.”<sup>17</sup> Albright noted that the Blackfoot were usually victorious when they went to battle against the Crows and were regarded as enemies to the Anglo-Americans. According to him, they were not known for going on the warpath, like other tribes, however Albright states that they probably killed more settlers than any tribe by attacking them whenever the opportunity arose.<sup>18</sup> Chittenden notes that they were not openly militant, but reliant on strategy and subterfuge to fight for their goals.<sup>19</sup>

The Blackfoot consisted of three divisions, the *Kainai*, *Piikani*, and *Siksika*. Their traditional territory stretched North to South from the North Saskatchewan River to the Missouri River and spanned from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Plains.<sup>20</sup> Blackfoots refer to themselves as *Niitsitapi*, or Real People. They only began to collectively refer to themselves as Blackfoot after European colonists mistook the translation of Siksika for the name of the collective.<sup>21</sup> A fourth tribe mentioned by Chittenden, the Gros Ventres were at one point affiliated with the Blackfoot because they resettled in Blackfoot territory and were allied but they were not incorporated by the Blackfoot.<sup>22</sup> Blackfoots travelled often and split into small bands consisting of between 80 and 160 individuals. Each band chose their own Chief, and while they typically remained independent, each Blackfoot was aware they were part of a cultural group consisting of many other bands<sup>23</sup>. Much like the Crows, Blackfoot society was transformed after they discovered horses and

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<sup>17</sup> Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park Historical and Descriptive*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Albright, *Oh, Ranger!*, 136.

<sup>19</sup> Chittenden, *The Yellowstone National Park Historical and Descriptive* 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ryan Hall, *Beneath the Backbone of the World: Blackfoot People and the North American Borderlands, 1720–1877*, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press), 2020, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Hall, *Beneath the Backbone of the World*, 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 7

<sup>23</sup> Hall, *Beneath the Backbone of the World*, 21-22.

became adept at using them in the mid-1700s. Horses transformed Blackfoot society, bringing in more opportunities for trade, creating new wealth, and making long distance travel much more feasible.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, the Shoshones, who occupied the southern, eastern, and western area of the park were seen as peaceful, but inferior Native populations by NPS officials. The Eastern Shoshone in particular had occupied Western Wyoming since at least the year 1500.<sup>25</sup> From 1700-1780 the Eastern Shoshone adopted the horse into their lifestyle, became militaristic, and centered around hunting buffalo. Shoshone bands were centered around a chief who gave orders regarding hunting and tribal decisions. The chief did not have sole authority but was aided by two militaristic sub-societies within the tribe or bands.<sup>26</sup> Chittenden describes these groups as unfortunate and lowly, and states they are often held in contempt by other tribes. However, he does make a distinction with the Bannock, whom, he says, became elevated when they acquired horses, and began openly warring with violent tribes to defend themselves.<sup>27</sup> Albright states that the Bannock were the most mobile tribe, and that they had most likely seen most of the lands that would become Yellowstone. He states that the Bannock “crossed the Yellowstone every summer to get to the buffalo country.” They made this crossing to avoid their enemies, the Crows and Blackfoot.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Hall, *Beneath the Backbone of the World*, 31-33

<sup>25</sup> Shimkin, Demitri B. Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," In *Handbook of North American Indians*, edited by William C. Sturtevant. Vol. 11, *Great Basin*, edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 308.

<sup>26</sup> Shimkin, "Eastern Shoshone," 309-310.

<sup>27</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Albright, *Oh, Ranger!*, 137.



The Bannock are a Paiute-speaking group. Their self-designation is *Bana 'kwut*, or “Water People,” a remnant of their origination as a Northern Paiute tribe.<sup>29</sup> Although they are considered part of the Northern Shoshone today, this is a modern categorization.<sup>30</sup> They were seminomadic, gathering with other groups every year for buffalo hunts, as Albright mentions in his description, or to defend against enemy tribes. Blackfoots often preyed upon the Bannock and other Shoshones. The Bannock first acquired horses in the late 1600s, making them one of the first groups in the area to become nomadic.<sup>31</sup>

Lastly, Chittenden details the *Tukuarika*, or Sheep Eaters, otherwise known as the Mountain Shoshones, a division of the Eastern Shoshones. The Sheep Eaters dwelt in the mountains, “destitute of even savage comforts”, who were so named because their primary source of food was sheep. Chittenden describes them as “feeble in mind, diminutive in stature, and are always described as a ‘timid, harmless race.’”<sup>32</sup> Albright, supporting Chittenden’s earlier views, stated that Sheep Eaters were “a timid people, small in stature and lacking in brains and initiative.”<sup>33</sup> However, the Sheep Eaters were distinct in that they continually inhabited land within Yellowstone. Chittenden noted that they were present at the time the park area was “discovered” by Anglo-Americans and cites anecdotal evidence for a Sheep Eater legend that detailed the destruction of most of their tribe by geologic upheaval.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the preceding three groups, Chittenden and Albright spoke only very briefly about the Sheep Eaters, marginalizing them due to a sparsity of information caused by the Sheep Eater’s isolation, and their own contempt for

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<sup>29</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 210

<sup>30</sup> Barry M. Pritzker, "Northern Shoshone." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*.

<sup>31</sup> Barry M. Pritzker, "Northern Shoshone." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*.

<sup>32</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 8-9

<sup>33</sup> Albright, *Oh, Ranger!*, 137.

<sup>34</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 8-9

their way of life. Shoshone groups were friendly with Anglo-Americans, Sacagawea, who aided the Lewis and Clark expedition, was a Shoshone Indian.<sup>35</sup>

The Sheep Eaters were a semi-nomadic tribe who followed bighorn sheep migratory patterns throughout Yellowstone. The earliest written record of this tribe is from Washington Irving's 1811 journal, which documents an encounter with them. In this account, Sheep Eaters are referred to as elusive hermits who "have been looked down upon by the creole trappers, who have given them the appellation of '*les dignes de pitie*' or, 'the objects of pity'."<sup>36</sup> Due to these accounts, the Sheep Eaters acquired a reputation for being timid and destitute that would remain unchallenged until very recently. Uniquely, Sheep Eaters relied on a close relationship with dogs as pack animals, they would utilize harnesses and have their dogs transport baskets of food or goods needed for daily life. The bond between Sheep Eater and canine was so strong, that the only human burials reported in Yellowstone were buried with their dogs. Far from their portrayal as ignorant and elusive, the Sheep Eaters adeptly followed the migratory patterns of their primary food source and utilized natural resources to survive in areas others deemed inhospitable.<sup>37</sup>

While these four groups had the most impactful ties to the Yellowstone area, they were not the only indigenous groups to utilize the land. The Kiowa had close ties to the Crow population within Yellowstone. In 1805, Lewis and Clark reported that the "Kiawa" were located on the headwaters of the Platte River, near the Yellowstone Valley. The Kiowa's homeland, as relayed by Kiowa warriors in 1889, was described as

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<sup>35</sup> Barry M. Pritzker, "Northern Shoshone." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*.

<sup>36</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 130-132.

<sup>37</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 149-151.

laying near where the “Kiowa Mountains are (possibly the Gallatin or Madison Mountains today) and the geysers of the Yellowstone Park.” The Kiowa became friendly with the Crows and frequently traded with them, and eventually, some Kiowa intermarried with the Crows.<sup>38</sup>

The Nez Percé also utilized the area.<sup>39</sup> The Nez Percé, or *nee-me-poo* or *nimipu*, meaning “the people”, were a nomadic plains group that relied heavily on horses.<sup>40</sup> While the Nez Percé did not inhabit Yellowstone, their territory was mostly in western Idaho, they were extremely familiar with the Yellowstone area. A Nez Percé warrior, Yellow Wolf, wrote in his autobiography that they were intimately familiar with the park, listing specific trails, hot springs and park features that he knew personally, and from where he was told his family members had died within park grounds.<sup>41</sup> This familiarity with the land that would become Yellowstone National Park played a pivotal role in the attempted escape of the Nez Percé during the Nez Percé War in 1877, which will be discussed later in this paper.

### **Early Narratives and Yellowstone National Park**

These early narratives by park officials on the four main tribes showcase some interesting disparities. Indigenous tribes that were nomadic, with horse-based societies such as the Crow, Blackfeet, and to a lesser extent the Bannock, were seen as superior to the more sedentary Native populations. While these groups were the most militaristic, they were given the most respect by park officials, possibly because they often allied with

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<sup>38</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 67.

<sup>39</sup> Robert H. Keller, and Michael F. Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>40</sup> Barry M. Pritzker, "Nez Percé." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*.

<sup>41</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 219.

the United States against other Native Americans, although they were still largely derided and treated as inferior to the Anglo-American. Surprisingly, it was the most peaceful and isolated Native group that was held in the most contempt and frequently derided. Despite avoiding Anglo-Americans and keeping to themselves while living a peaceful existence, the Sheep Eaters were seen as the absolute lowest form of Indigenous life, almost to the point where they were completely disregarded by early park officials. It may be that groups such as Crows and Blackfoots were a more common sight in the park, and as such were more familiar and present on the minds of park officials. The fact that some Crows served as guides for the military also allowed for a deeper understanding of Crow culture, or at the very least a more robust familiarity with the tribe. While still viewed at this time as inferior, these tribes' mastery of horses may have created some commonalities between them and the Anglo-Americans, even if this was never overtly stated or admitted. However, even this nebulous common ground could not bridge the racial divide in the minds of early park officials, and every tribe was seen as a primitive nuisance not fit to inhabit the area of the park.

Early Anglo myths of the region forwarded the notion that Native American groups never informed Anglo-Americans about the Yellowstone landscape. They remained secretive about the area, refusing to pass on legends or myths.<sup>42</sup> Chittenden himself notes that "It is a singular fact in the history of the Yellowstone National Park that very little knowledge of that country seems to have been derived from the Indians."<sup>43</sup> Yellowstone was not officially discovered, or at least not officially recorded by Anglo-

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<sup>42</sup> Lee H. Whittlesey, "Yellowstone: From Last Place Discovered to International Fame." *SiteLINES: A Journal of Place* 5, no. 1 (2009): 8.

<sup>43</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 6.

Americans until the advent of three expeditions that occurred on park grounds in 1869, 1870, and 1871.<sup>44</sup> The expedition of 1869 was an amateur expedition undertaken by David E. Folsom, C.W. Cook, and William Peterson. Initially a larger group had planned to embark on this trip, but after failing to secure a military escort, only these three men decided to stay the course. The men followed the Yellowstone River to the Falls, eventually travelling to the Lower Geyser Basin. On their thirty-six-day expedition, they discovered many natural wonders such as geysers and hot springs. They were so shocked by what they saw that the men were unwilling to risk their reputations by recounting the truth of what they had seen.<sup>45</sup>

The Expedition of 1870, or Washburn-Doane Expedition was the first official, professional expedition of Yellowstone. This expedition had the most far-ranging implications for the future national park. It was led by Surveyor General of Montana Henry Washburn, although it is worth noting that Nathaniel P. Langford, who would become the first superintendent of Yellowstone National Park was also a member of this party. This expedition lasted thirty-seven days, with the party discovering geysers, and numerous hot springs and falls, including what is now known as Old Faithful. Lt. Gustavus C. Doane completed the first official report covering the Upper Yellowstone area on December 15, 1870, which made its way to Congress in February of 1871.<sup>46</sup> In his report, Doane stated that the land “as a country for sight-seers it is without parallel.

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<sup>44</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 69.

<sup>45</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 70-71.

<sup>46</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 72-81.

As a field for scientific research, it promises great results...It is probably the greatest laboratory that nature furnishes on the surface of the globe.”<sup>47</sup>

Unfortunately, even similar reports from multiple members of this expedition were met with incredulity. When Nathaniel Langford wrote an article about his experiences, the *New York Times* stated that it “reads like the realization of a child’s fairy tale.”<sup>48</sup> Despite the public’s skepticism, Chittenden notes that this expedition was one of the most remarkable in American history. These men covered almost three hundred miles of territory, while “danger from hostile Indians was a constant and formidable menace”, Chittenden notes that the party was frequently reminded of the presence of Indians around the party, that the success of this expedition was extremely noteworthy.<sup>49</sup> Accounts from this expedition ultimately resulted in growing awareness and curiosity regarding the wonders of the park, and the reports written by those who had undertaken this trip were presented before Congress.

The final expedition in 1871 was a direct result of the previous expedition. The Army Corps of Engineers led this outing, and as a result the expedition received a full military escort. This expedition was far more scientific in its methodology, as they traveled, they mapped the topography of the region, including Yellowstone Lake and the headwaters of the Snake River. What proved especially notable was this expedition’s photography of the region.<sup>50</sup> Whereas the second expedition had been ridiculed for

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<sup>47</sup> Lorraine Bonnie and Orin H. *Battle Drums and Geysers* (Excerpt). “Lieutenant G. C. Doane: His Yellowstone Exploration Journal.” 1970. *Journal of the West* 9 (2): 236.

<sup>48</sup> Whittlesey, “Yellowstone: From Last Place Discovered to International Fame,” 9.

<sup>49</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 81-82.

<sup>50</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 82-83.

supposedly grossly exaggerating the wonders of the area, these photographs provided hard evidence that validated earlier reports.

While Anglo-Americans were beginning to explore and understand the wonders encapsulated in the Yellowstone area, efforts to dispossess Native groups of their lands were simultaneously undertaken. While the first unratified 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie did little but codify the extent of Crow territory, it created instability within Yellowstone. Other tribes refused to acknowledge Crow borders, leading Indian Agent Vaughan to write in 1854 that “Scarcely a day passes but the Crow country is invested with more or less parties of Blackfeet, who murder indiscriminately any one [*sic*] that comes within their reach.” The area eventually became so unstable that the American Fur Company closed its major outpost on the Yellowstone border due to the violence. The additional instability caused by the settling of pioneers and miners in the area concerned the federal government and pushed it into taking more drastic action to address what they viewed as the threat caused by indigenous groups.<sup>51</sup>

The United States Indian Peace Commission formed in 1867 in response to the increasingly frequent aggression by Native American groups. The commission specifically worked to “end hostilities and accelerate the ‘concentration’ and ‘domestication’ of Native Americans through a reborn civilization program.”<sup>52</sup> With these goals in mind, the commission met with numerous Native American groups and ratified the second Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868. It was this treaty that led to the forced assimilation and re-education of native children in the area that concerns us. For the Crow, this treaty marked the first significant loss of tribal land. Out of the original 39

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<sup>51</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 61.

<sup>52</sup> John P. Bowes, "Treaty of Fort Laramie." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*.

million acres, the Crow were reduced to inhabiting only 8 million acres. The treaty also irresponsibly placed the Blackfeet on their border, just across the Yellowstone River.<sup>53</sup> Concurrently the Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868 required the Shoshone tribes, Bannocks and Sheep Eaters to move to three reservations in Idaho and Montana.<sup>54</sup> By 1879 the Crow were largely confined to their reservation just off the grounds of the park, due both to the boundaries of their reservation, and to the fact that increasing number of Anglo-American visitors or settlers in the area were rapidly over hunting animals the Crow relied upon for their way of life.<sup>55</sup>

On March 3, 1871, the Federal Government passed the Indian Appropriations Act, which outlawed the viewing of Native tribes as independent nations and forbid the negotiating of any treaties with them. This was a marked shift from earlier views on federal treatment of Native tribes and was due in no small part to President Ulysses Grant's policy of pacification and assimilation of Native Americans.<sup>56</sup> This new policy eroded traditional native authority vis-à-vis the federal government and paved the way for the dismissal of older treaties and the dispossession of native lands. Anti-Native sentiment was prevalent at this time, highlighted by James Michael Cavanaugh, a senator from Montana who stated openly "I have never in my life seen a good Indian (and I have seen thousands), except when I have seen a dead Indian."<sup>57</sup> Echoing these remarks, although in a marginally less violent manner, was Ferdinand V. Hayden, first surveyor of Yellowstone, who stated "Unless they [Native groups] are localized and made to enter

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<sup>53</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *American Indians and Yellowstone National Park*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 64-65.

<sup>56</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 34-35.

<sup>57</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 35-38.



pastoral pursuits they must ultimately be exterminated...if extermination is the result of non-compliance, then compulsion is an act of mercy.”<sup>58</sup> So, in the era leading up to the creation of the first national park, prevailing attitudes of indigenous racial inferiority and the Anglo-American “need” to civilize these cultures paved the way for an exclusionary national park system.

Even among those who were more sympathetic to the plight of Native Americans, the belief that Native inhabitants would soon die off was prevalent. These more sympathetic individuals ascribed to the Vanishing Indian theory. This was the belief that due to factors such as relocation, rampant alcohol use on reservations, and warfare, Native populations were rapidly dying out. While calling for the humane treatment of these Native peoples, this theory still held that these populations would rapidly disappear and cease to be an issue. The Vanishing Indian theory was seen as an inevitable result of Anglo-American taming of the west, and their overall supremacy to Native Americans.<sup>59</sup> Despite a belief in treating Native populations in a humane manner, even this point of view was firmly steeped in views of Anglo-American racial superiority and included rampant stereotypes of alcoholic Native Americans who were powerless to save themselves.

On March 1, 1872, Yellowstone National Park was officially created by the United States Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant. The law that created the park stated that all persons not specifically mentioned in it as residents were to be considered trespassers and removed from the park grounds.<sup>60</sup> The law fails to explicitly mention

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<sup>58</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 38.

<sup>59</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 38.

<sup>60</sup> United States Government, *Statutes at large, 42<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session*, Library of Congress (Washington D.C., 1872), 32.

anything about Native Americans already on park land, creating legal permissibility for further dispossession of Indigenous peoples. The Sheep Eaters were soon relocated to the Wind River and Fort Hall reservations outside of the park by superintendent Philetus Norris. Norris soon decreed that all Native Americans must leave the boundaries of the park, claiming at this time that “Yellowstone is not Indian country and no natives lived within the park...”<sup>61</sup> This statement was a blatant self-serving attempt at the justification of complete dispossession of Indigenous ancestral lands. It would not be the last utilized by Park Service personnel.

What caused Norris to enact final dispossession of Indigenous land in Yellowstone was the Nez Percé War. In 1877 the Nez Percé, led by Chief Joseph, fled their reservation in Idaho and attempted to cross the Canadian border. The tribe was pursued by two thousand members of the United States Army. On their unsuccessful 1,100-mile journey, the Nez Percé spent thirteen days crossing Yellowstone National Park. The Nez Percé were intimately familiar with Yellowstone and were unsurprised by the geysers and other natural phenomena that occur in the park. They spent most of their time in the park resting, but they also raided park tourists when the opportunity arose, although Yellowstone at this time still did not draw large crowds. The Nez Percé War was one of the final major conflicts of the Indian Wars, and the accosting of visitors the newly created National Park greatly alarmed those, including Norris, who oversaw Yellowstone. Because the war occurred soon after the creation of the park, while Norris and other NPS officials were trying to raise awareness and visitation to the park, the headlines this conflict generated were counterproductive. This final act of desperation by

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<sup>61</sup> Keller and Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, 23.

a tribe fleeing the reservation system provided the impetus for the justification for Native dispossession of Yellowstone.<sup>62</sup>

After the flight of the Nez Percé, Norris still was not satisfied with stopping at the physical removal of the groups who had once occupied Yellowstone. He sought a way to ensure that the Crows, Blackfoot, Sheep-Eaters, Bannocks and Kiowa, who did not participate in the Nez Percé conflict, would never again travel within the park and disturb his visitors. In 1880 he travelled to the reservations of the Bannock, Crow, Sheep Eaters and Blackfeet to create an explicit agreement that these groups would not travel to Yellowstone in the future. The Native peoples kept their word, and Norris reported to the Secretary of the Interior the next year that Native hunting trips into the park had stopped. Oddly, despite the effort expended to prevent Native Americans from returning to the park, Norris believed that these Native peoples rarely visited the park because of their superstitious fear of natural park phenomena such as geysers. He justified the Nez Percé incursion by stating the Nez Percé had “acquired sufficient civilization and Christianity to at least overpower their pagan superstition of *earthly* fire-hole basins and brimstone pits.”<sup>63</sup>

Anecdotal evidence and paternalistic viewpoints were utilized to promote the idea that Native populations were superstitious and deathly afraid of many of the natural phenomena in the park. These in turn were disseminated to de-legitimize native occupancy of the area. In 1880, Norris recorded a conversation he had with a Shoshone guide. The guide, We-Saw, relayed that he had no knowledge of any permanent occupants of the Yellowstone area save for the Sheep Eaters. When asked about the

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<sup>62</sup> Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 56.

<sup>63</sup> Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 59-60.

geyser area of the park, We-Saw replied that they were “heap, heap, bad.”<sup>64</sup> Additionally, Norris stated that the other groups stayed away from geysers because they imagined the hissing of the sulfur and its fumes “to be the wails and groans of departed Indian warriors who were suffering punishment for their early sins.”<sup>65</sup> This recounting simultaneously portrays Native Americans as ignorant and superstitious. It also builds upon the report of Doane from 1870 that stated that “the larger tribes never enter the basin, restrained by superstitious ideas in connection with the thermal springs.”<sup>66</sup>

Chittenden offers a more practical explanation in his 1891 monograph, showing a slightly more nuanced view of the issue. He questions the veracity of the superstition claim, stating that if that was the case there should be an abundance of Native American traditions or oral histories regarding the natural phenomenon. He noted that the geyser area was remote, and inaccessible due to snow for most of the year. He also mentions that game was much more abundant in the lower valleys, leaving Native Americans no real reason to visit the geysers. However, he still closes this argument by presupposing that Anglo-Americans are better suited to enjoy the wonders of nature, by saying “Even those sentimental influences, such as a love of sublime scenery...evidently had less weight with them than with their pale-face brethren.”<sup>67</sup>

These claims allowed early park personnel to create false narratives of unspoiled land that erased the presence of Native American populations in the area. This tactic was not exclusive to Yellowstone. Claims of superstition were used to justify Anglo-American caretaking of Mt. Rainer, Anasazi ruins, and parts of Zion National Park, to the

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<sup>64</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 12.

<sup>65</sup> Keller and Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 13-14.

detriment of Pacific tribes, Navajos, and various other indigenous populations.<sup>68</sup> This highlights the prevailing attitudes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that led to variations of policy in the National Park Service espousing anecdotal evidence against Indigenous populations viewed as inferior in order to justify the Indigenous dispossession and to legitimate assertions of control over the land by Anglo-Americans.

These assumptions about native fears of natural phenomena are proven incorrect through an analysis of native traditions regarding the park. Some of the natural wonders such as geysers were not a place of evil spirits for the Crows, but rather sites of heroic triumph. The Mud Volcano area in the park for example, is relayed in a story about a Crow warrior who defeats a supernatural buffalo bull that had been terrorizing the tribe. Peter Nabokov recounts a story told to him by his consultant of Crow descent at Yellowstone, who had received it in turn from his great-grandfather. The Crow warrior defeated multiple large beasts, turning each into a mountain. The warrior turned the buffalo into a geyser. When the geyser still proved too strong, the hero turned a mountain lion into a geyser adjacent to the buffalo, and this geyser “roars all the time. It just makes a sound...to keep the buffalo bull in check. From coming back to life and terrorizing the Crow.”<sup>69</sup> While admittedly lacking in specific detail, the relaying of this Crow myth has important implications. Based on this myth, the Crow were aware of the geyser region of Yellowstone and held them in high esteem. Far from being sites full of evil spirits, this region was seen as a site of Crow triumph over nature. This story also provides a mythological explanation for change over time and the waning power of natural

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<sup>68</sup> Keller and Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, 24.

<sup>69</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 81.

phenomena within the park. So far from being afraid of these park features, they factored heavily into Crow oral traditions and were an important aspect of Crow identity.

The Crows were not the only tribe to incorporate these landscapes into their mythologies. The Kiowas, who shared a border with the Crows, traced their origin back to the Dragon's Mouth Spring in the Mud Volcano region. In this story, the Great Spirit took the Kiowa to this area and proclaimed that if any member of the tribe would jump into a pool of steaming water, the land would belong to the tribe for the rest of time. The Kiowa warrior Kahn Hayn jumped into the pool and soon lost consciousness. When he awoke, other Kiowa had pulled him from the pool and saved his life, and the Great Spirit had disappeared. As the Great Spirit left, the land was transformed with abundant game, forests, and streams. The Kiowa were rewarded for Hayn's bravery with the most beautiful and abundant land on earth.<sup>70</sup> As this myth shows, for some Native Americans the geysers and hot springs were the genesis of tribal life, not a source of evil or something to be feared.

### **Formation of the National Park Service**

From 1872 to the early 1910's the administration of the few existing national parks was ineffective and disparate. There was no overarching connectivity or effective bureaucratic oversight for these newly protected lands. This began to change with the beginning of a movement to create a federal bureau with the necessary power and authority to oversee the newly protected lands. In 1914 Adolph Miller, staff to the secretary of the interior, created the National Parks Field Office. The goal of this office was to provide coherent administrative support to the 12 national parks that existed at the

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<sup>70</sup> Lee H. Whittlesey, "Loss of a Sacred Shrine: How the National Park Service Anguished over Yellowstone's Campfire Myth, 1960-1980," *The George Wright Forum* 27, no. 1, (2010), 46-47.

time.<sup>71</sup> Miller stated that “unless there is some more efficient agency for administering these parks than exists at the present time the Government had almost better go out of the business of attempting to handle these reservations... We have about as ineffective and clumsy and awkward a method as could be devised.”<sup>72</sup> To remedy this, Miller appointed Mark Daniels, a landscape architect and urban planner, as the first General Superintendent of the National Parks.<sup>73</sup>

Daniels has largely been overshadowed by his successors. Horace Albright was not fond of him, stating that he was an “erratic, poor administrator, [with] no financial sense.”<sup>74</sup> Despite these presumed shortcomings, Daniels set many precedents for the newly created National Park Service. In his first report to the Secretary of the Interior, he enumerated the functions of National Parks when he stated they should stimulate national patriotism, encourage education and health, and stimulate travel. While he acknowledged the recreational value of the protected lands, the importance of these parks went much further for Daniels. He stated that these parks should be an “instrument by which the people shall be lured into the far corners of their land that they may learn to love it.”<sup>75</sup> These statements, issued while World War I was raging, offer an important insight both to the inherent value of national parks, but also to the cognizance of early park administrators and staff of the propaganda value of these lands.

On August 25, 1916, the National Park Service Organic Act was signed into law. This act formally created the National Park Service, under the jurisdiction of the

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<sup>71</sup> Dietmar Schneider-Hector, "Forging a National Park Service: "The Necessity for Cooperation", " *Journal of the Southwest* 56, no. 4 (2014): 660.

<sup>72</sup> Schneider-Hector, "Forging a National Park Service," 660.

<sup>73</sup> Schneider-Hector, "Forging a National Park Service," 660.

<sup>74</sup> Schneider-Hector, "Forging a National Park Service," 662.

<sup>75</sup> Schneider-Hector, "Forging a National Park Service," 662.

Department of the Interior. It also explicitly stated that the purpose of the National Park Service was to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein...leav[ing] them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”<sup>76</sup> By this time, Daniels had been replaced by Robert Marshall. However, Daniels’s influence was still prevalent, as Marshall maintained the idea that the National Park Service should first and foremost promote patriotism.<sup>77</sup> As evidenced by earlier park officials and governmental policies of dispossession and civilization, indigenous populations did not appear to fit into this patriotic ideal.

In the early 1920s the National Park Service began refining their mandate and working out exactly how the parks themselves could best be utilized for their educational value. After World War I there was an emphasis on overt patriotism and teaching Americans to value the natural beauty of their country. Park personnel also tried to find ways to reach students in classrooms across the country to introduce them to the natural sciences. Funding at this time was restricted, and the NPS focused more on the expansion of protected land, and its own jurisdiction, meaning that education remained a marginal focus at this time.<sup>78</sup> Despite its marginality, successive directors for the National Park Service recognized the value of these landscapes for educational purposes, and pursued avenues to disseminate that education however they could.

In 1923 the Committee on Museums in National Parks was formed, raising awareness for the need for a historical component to be added to the educational focus of

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<sup>76</sup> National Parks Service. “Organic Act of 1916.” U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>77</sup> Schneider-Hector, “Forging a National Park Service,” 665-68.

<sup>78</sup> Denise D. Meringolo, “Ignorant and Local-Minded Influences: Historic Sites and the Expansion of the National Park Service,” In *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History*, 84-108. (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 87-88.



the NPS. The report they created convinced the NPS to implement a formal museum program, marking the first time the NPS dedicated significant resources to its educational goals. Stephen Mather, then director of the National Park Service, established a Committee on Education to examine how best to fulfill these educational goals. The committee recommended the establishment of a permanent Park Services education division in Washington D.C. headed by educational professionals, not politicians.<sup>79</sup>

It was during this shift within the National Park Service that Horace Albright became the director of the agency on January 12, 1929. Albright had a much more complex ideology for the National Park system, including the protection of historic battlefields and national monuments. He achieved his goals and was granted permission to centralize these attractions under the aegis of the national park system. Albright personally wrote the reorganization plan which broadly expanded the reach of the NPS, by focusing on incorporating many disparate historically significant sites under his authority. Albright's goals were much broader than his predecessors'. In his reorganization plan he stated that the main responsibilities of the National Park Service were the "protection of public lands, development of natural resources, and implementation of educational initiatives."<sup>80</sup>

To enact worthwhile educational measures, Albright hired Dr. Verne Chatelain in 1931 to head the historical division of the National Park Service. Chatelain was one of the first professional historians hired by the park service and having received his PhD in the field, brought much needed historical insight and professionalism to this burgeoning

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<sup>79</sup> Meringolo, "Ignorant and Local-Minded Influences," In *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 90-92.

<sup>80</sup> Meringolo, 92-98

attempt at educating the American public. Chatelain's vision for the history division was to create a cohesive historical thread among the disparate holdings of the National Park Service, and bring a sense of excitement to the average park attendee, by recreating the past in a way that enthralled visitors.<sup>81</sup> Essentially, as one of the first park historians and the first professional historian at the head of a department, Chatelain had the herculean task of creating cohesive narratives that interwove the history of all national parks into a narrative about American progress.

These efforts at creating cohesive narratives often ignored Native populations or were overly reliant on racial ideologies and stereotypes as opposed to historical evidence. While Native Americans had been barred from inhabiting or traveling through the Yellowstone area, their mythos was utilized at various times to attract tourists. A Crow descendant named Max Big Man often demonstrated Native culture for tourists at Yellowstone from 1927 until at least 1932. Big Man was an acceptable and safe option for tourists, having been educated in a Crow boarding school and supposedly being fully civilized. Big Man would travel to Yellowstone and reenact Native dances and games, specifically tailored to capture the interest of a White audience. However, when Big Man became involved in a pageant that portrayed aspects of Crow history, Horace Albright declined to allow it to be held at the park. In a confidential memo about the pageant, park officials stated that the project "doesn't seem to be suited for presentation in a National Park. I really can't see the connection it has to the Yellowstone, and of course, the Indian problem is going to be a hard one to solve in case they want to use real Indians."<sup>82</sup> Albright's promotion of commonly held racial views of the time remain problematic.

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<sup>81</sup> Meringolo, 98-106.

<sup>82</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 78-79.

This event highlights an inherent bias within the early park service against the promotion of both Native American histories, and in combating the propagandized notions of Yellowstone as a vast, uninhabited wilderness prior to 1872.

More apt for the bias of the National Park Service in its early years was a play centering around the Iroquois leader Hiawatha that was produced by employees at the Old Faithful camp in 1927. This play was composed of only white actors, portraying Native peoples. The crux of the play consisted of Hiawatha introducing his tribe to a Jesuit missionary, and then literally walking off into the sunset.<sup>83</sup> The cultural insensitivity in the complete omission of Indigenous actors exemplifies how unimportant the accurate portrayal of native history was to the park service at this time. The plotline revolving around the introduction of Christianity leading to the so-called civilization and eventual disappearance of native populations stood in stark contrast to systemic policies of removal and attempted destruction of tribal norms. Although this predates Albright's career as director of the National Park Service, this play was held while he was the superintendent of Yellowstone National Park. Albright's permissiveness over portrayals of Native culture in a manner that glorified Anglo-Americans, highlight the problematic exclusion of historical accuracy in the promotion of the history of the national park system that he would continue to promote as director.

Despite accepting and disseminating prevailing racial theories of his time, Albright was by no means self-consciously anti-Indigenous. He was in fact an honorary member of the Salish-Kootenai tribe and collected native crafts. While he understood the close ties Native Americans had to many national parks, the accurate portrayal of that

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<sup>83</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring a Presence*, 79-80.

significance came secondary to the promotion of tourism and creating entertaining stories for tourists. Often, tourists to the parks were looking to indulge historic stereotypes. Due to this, Albright proved hesitant to do away with the founding myths that drew so many to these places.<sup>84</sup>

Miner Tillotson, superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park from 1927 to 1938, was as personally sympathetic to the plight of the indigenous as Albright. Tillotson's 1935 book *Grand Canyon Country* has an entire chapter devoted to discussing the Indigenous populations of the Grand Canyon. While he opens by describing these populations as "primitive but happy, contented, unchanged by the white man's civilization." He also acknowledges that these populations have inhabited the area for far longer than Anglo-Americans.<sup>85</sup> Tillotson states that many of the cliff dwellings found in the region have existed since "long before America was dreamed of!"<sup>86</sup> At times Tillotson foregoes prevailing stereotypes of the era and describes the native Havasupai Indians as honest and industrious workers that were frequently utilized by the National Park Service in the construction of trails and roads for the park.<sup>87</sup> This admission of native habitation of park land predating the park, and even America itself, as well as Native people's contribution to the park system, contrasts starkly with Yellowstone's outright omission of Native American history and contributions to the area.

By the end of the 1910s Mather and Albright began pushing heavily for the development of educational components for national parks. In the 1919 NPS annual report, Mather stated that universities, schools, and scholars were underutilizing the

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<sup>84</sup> Keller and Turek, *American Indians and Yellowstone National Park*, 28.

<sup>85</sup> Tillotson and Taylor, *Grand Canyon Country*, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Tillotson and Taylor, *Grand Canyon Country*, 28.

<sup>87</sup> Tillotson and Taylor, *Grand Canyon Country*, 31.

unique study opportunities the parks presented. He was keenly aware of a burgeoning push for educational use of the parks, noting the practicality of campfire talks, park museums, publications on natural history at the parks, and a new program at Columbia University that offered a national parks study course.<sup>88</sup> However the National Park Service was careful not to overeducate visitors, attempting to walk a fine line between education and entertainment so as not to garner the impression of being overly obtuse and scaring away casual visitors. The education division was established in 1925, in one of its early general plans of administration, the division noted that they:

Are engaged in a specialized field of education in which our main objective is not primarily to raise the intellectual standard of our visitors in the academic sense...Our function lies rather in the inspirational enthusiasm which we can develop among our visitors—and enthusiasm based upon a sympathetic interpretation of the main things that the parks represent, whether these be the wonder of animate things living in natural communities, or the story of creation as written in the rocks, or the history of forgotten races as recorded by their picturesque dwellings.<sup>89</sup>

This emphasis here heavily suggests the inculcation of a nationalistic ideal. The mention of an inspirational enthusiasm based upon carefully curated interpretation highlights the forwarding of narratives designed to showcase history from an Anglo perspective. The phrasing relating to the history of forgotten races and picturesque dwellings serves to forward the theory of the vanishing Indian while marginalizing the extensive historical occupation of Indigenous groups in Yellowstone and placing value only upon the novelty of their structures.

To further engage audiences and better fulfill this newfound mission to educate, the National Park Service began construction of multiple museums within Yellowstone in

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<sup>88</sup> Kiki Leigh Rydell, and Mary Shivers Culpin. *Managing the Matchless Wonders: A History of Administrative Development in Yellowstone National Park, 1872-1965*. National Park Service, 2006. 89.

<sup>89</sup> Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the Matchless Wonders*, 99-100.

the 1920s and 1930s. The first historical museum was constructed in Yellowstone in 1928 near the Old Faithful Geyser. A second museum was soon constructed at Madison Junction, near the site of the fabled Washburn-Doane expedition of 1870. This site marked the symbolic creation of the national park idea. It was here, at least in legend, where Yellowstone was discovered by Anglo-Americans who then sought to protect its untouched wilderness. A third museum was constructed in the Norris Geyser Basin.<sup>90</sup> By 1931 a fourth had been constructed at Fishing Bridge.<sup>91</sup> The museum at the Madison Junction is the most relevant to the discussion of Indigenous representation, as its focus was on telling the history behind the national park idea. The largest draw at this museum was a panoramic photograph of a recreation of the 1870 expedition sitting around a campfire. This photograph encapsulated the rugged individualism and Anglo-Americanism that the National Park Service promoted. This story eventually proved to be a fabrication. Of the seventeen written accounts by members of the 1870 expedition, not one so much as hinted at any campfire conversation about a national park system or protected land. This suggests that the campfire myth was created and disseminated to claim Anglo-American discovery of the area, while simultaneously overlooking the role of Native peoples as aboriginal inhabitants of it.<sup>92</sup>

The creation of these museums marked the end of the initial interpretive phase of the National Park Service. By this time, the park service had begun in earnest to professionalize both their caretaking of national parks, and its historic interpretation. What had begun as the efforts of a few men to centralize the protection of federally

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<sup>90</sup> Ralph H. Lewis, *Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service, 1904-1982*, (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Washington D.C., 1993), 42-43.

<sup>91</sup> Whittlesey, "Loss of a Sacred Shrine", 95.

<sup>92</sup> Whittlesey, "Loss of a Sacred Shrine", 98-101.

protected land in 1914 emerged as an adequately funded and rapidly expanding federal agency that was becoming increasingly popular with Americans. By the 1930s the National Park Service had begun fulfilling its mandate, as envisioned by Mark Daniels. Through the creation of cohesive narratives that focused on Anglo-American progress, the National Park Service connected Anglo-Americans to their natural wonders in a way that promoted patriotism and instilled a love of nature, making the National Park Service popular with the average American.

### **Administrative History of Yellowstone**

As the first federally recognized national park, Yellowstone's interpretation evolved alongside the National Park Service. Despite a long history of Native habitation of the area, the narrative surrounding Yellowstone became about Anglo-American protection of a seemingly uninhabited, pristine wilderness. Systematic attempts at dispossession gradually removed Native groups from their historical territories within and around Yellowstone prior to its creation as a national park. Pre-National Park Service superintendents such as Philetus Norris were hostile to the interests of Native Americans and made further efforts to ensure they would never return to the park to bother visitors, thereby destroying even more historical linkage between the indigenous and the Yellowstone area. While some early park officials such as Albright held Native populations in some respect, the overriding racial stereotypes and patriotic visions that were disseminated within Yellowstone between its creation as a national park in 1872 through to the nascent National Park Service era in the 1930s erased the indigenous from park memory.

By the end of the 1920s the administration at Yellowstone was focused on park infrastructure, and changing interpretation to cater to an increasingly mobile, automobile-centric visitor. The 1930s led to a severe decrease in both visitation and appropriations for the National Park Service, due to the ongoing economic depression. By 1933 Yellowstone suffered from a 29 percent decrease in visitation, and a 15 percent decrease in appropriations.<sup>93</sup> Despite these setbacks, vital infrastructure was constructed throughout the 1930s due to the efforts of the Civilian Conservation Corps, who spearheaded fire suppression landscaping and the construction of visitor facilities, planted trees, and both improved and created new trails throughout the park.<sup>94</sup> This work proved vital when visitation to the park eventually returned to normal. Interpretation also changed with the introduction of guided auto caravan tours and brochures designed to guide motorists through the scenic areas of the park. By 1939 two versions of this guide had been created, and while they explained some of the park's history and biology, they focused mostly on the geology and landscape that were easily visible from the roadside.<sup>95</sup> This focus maintains the standards and ideology set by the educational divisions, focusing on interpreting and guiding visitors to the unique scenery, and treating historical interpretation as a less-important side issue.

The 1940s saw the reaffirming of Yellowstone's overt patriotic interpretation. The outbreak of World War II cut visitation sharply due to gasoline and rubber rationing, dropping Yellowstone's visitation levels from 581,761 visitors in 1941 to a mere 64,144 by 1943. However, National Park Service Director Newton Drury mandated that the

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<sup>93</sup> Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the Matchless Wonders*, 111.

<sup>94</sup> Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the Matchless Wonders*, 111-112.

<sup>95</sup> Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the Matchless Wonders*, 131-132.



parks would remain open to allow both members of the military on leave a place for recreation, and any guest that could make it to the parks despite the rationing a place to unwind. Plainly reaffirming one of the core goals of the National Park Services educational curriculum, the Advisory Board on National Parks stated in 1940 that all national parks played a vital role "in promoting patriotism, in maintaining morale and understanding of the fundamental principles of American democracy, and in inspiring love of our country."<sup>96</sup> The promotion of patriotism, and an inherently Anglo-American history remained paramount for the National Park Service.

Following the end of the war, visitation rebounded in 1946 to 814,907 people. Because the Civilian Conservation Corps had been disbanded, this massive increase in visitation led to Yellowstone focusing heavily on hiring staff to meet the needs of park visitors.<sup>97</sup> Historic interpretation did not change much, if at all in the 1940s, but there were still important internal developments. The National Park Service began to reevaluate how it wanted to educate the public and began changing its terminology. By 1941 the NPS had renamed the Branch of Research and Information into the Branch of Interpretation. This shift in terminology is important, as the NPS stated at the time that interpretation was "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."<sup>98</sup> This shift in tone and use of language marks both the maturing of park service historical educational programming. It also marks the first time the NPS had explicitly stated the way they were

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<sup>96</sup> Ralph H. Lewis, *Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service, 1904-1982*, (Washington D.C., National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. 1993.) 108.

<sup>97</sup> Rydell & Culpin, *Managing the Matchless Wonders*, 137-139.

<sup>98</sup> Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the Matchless Wonders*, 152.

approaching historical education. They had interpreted history based on nationalistic ideals and forwarding uniquely American, and Anglo-centric histories, but now they were explicitly stating that their overt goal was the creation of these specific unifying narratives.

While the 1950s saw the advent of Mission 66 infrastructure buildup, little changed for historic interpretation at Yellowstone. The park interpretation was overseen by two chief naturalists, C. Max Bauer from 1932-1946 and David Condon from 1946-1959. The long careers of these men led to stagnation with the result of very few changes in educational programming schedules in the park from 1933 to 1958. Those new programs that were developed during this time were “conservation oriented, stressing wilderness values and ecological relationships wherever possible.”<sup>99</sup> The National Park Service continued its entrenchment of narratives favoring natural history. However, a few academics at this time began studying the relationship of specific Native groups to Yellowstone. Specifically, the Swedish ethnographer Åke Hultkrantz wrote numerous articles on the Shoshone and Sheep Eaters. From June 1955 to January 1956 Hultkrantz worked in Wyoming conducting some of the first ethnographic research on the tribe. Hultkrantz interpreted Sheep Eater oral traditions, religion, and relationship to the park itself, focusing on the geyser area of the park.<sup>100</sup> The 1950s saw an increase in research on the Indigenous relationship to park lands, to varied effect.

Hultkrantz’s work coincided with archaeological surveys carried out by the National Park Service in Yellowstone around the same time. In 1958 over forty Indigenous occupation sites were identified at thermal areas near the park. This study led

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<sup>99</sup> Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the Matchless Wonders*, 152-153.

<sup>100</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring A Presence*, 271-272.

to the reversal of earlier park interpretation that the Indigenous were afraid of the geyser region. By 1961 park management at Yellowstone officially stated in a press release that “The National Park Service now believes that the Yellowstone Park Area may not have been taboo to the nomadic Indian tribes which frequented the Northwest in prehistoric times.”<sup>101</sup> This statement is significant because it reverses almost one hundred years of the propagation of an incorrect stereotype that served to minimize Indigenous use of park lands. Coinciding with this, the park service was in the process of professionalizing historic interpretation. Historian Freeman Tilden pioneered historic interpretation as a discipline in the 1950s and wrote about its application to the National Park Service. The premise of Tilden’s work was that interpretation fosters an understanding among visitors that connects them to historic narratives, essentially making them stakeholders in the development of the parks leading to appreciation and protection for the land.<sup>102</sup>

While the groundwork for the development of historic interpretation was being examined by academics like Tilden, the National Park Service once again faced interpretive stagnation. Budgetary constraints during the 1960s and 1970s led to the inability of the park service to hire new historic interpreters.<sup>103</sup> More than just the inability to hire new interpreters, this period also saw the active dismantling of plans by the Park Service to incorporate more inclusive histories. George Hartzog, Director of the NPS from 1964 to 1972, detailed a plan for a Native administered park. Under this plan, the NPS would serve as partners with the Zuni Tribe in New Mexico to interpret Zuni history. The NPS staff and Zuni appointed to work the site would work as equal partners,

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<sup>101</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring A Presence*, 284.

<sup>102</sup> National Park Service, “Episode Seven: The Evolution of Interpretation in the NPS,” (Washington D.C., U.S. Department of the Interior, 2020.)

<sup>103</sup> National Park Service, “Episode Seven: The Evolution of Interpretation in the NPS.”

with the Zuni learning professional historical techniques from the Park Service. The plan was to eventually withdraw the National Park Service employees after the Zuni had gained what the NPS considered professional competence, and the site would be staffed entirely by the Zuni. This plan was never enacted, allocations for the NPS under the Nixon administration had been cut so severely, that funding for this opportunity was never appropriated.<sup>104</sup> This proposal was radical for its time and marks a distinct shift in the interpretive focus of the National Park Service towards the Indigenous. While the idea of Native run parks, or partial control over areas of national parks failed in the 1970s, it would reappear in more recent NPS initiatives.

The 1980s and 1990s saw continual shifts in the Park Service's interpretive methods and focus. By the 1980s the NPS had a formal class on interpretive skills. However, this early program was still very much a top-down instructional method, with the interpreter seen as the unquestioned expert and sole authority.<sup>105</sup> In 1987 the NPS formally incorporated the study of ethnography into its platform and commissioned ethnographic studies centering around Indigenous communities located near national parks. Given the historical marginalization of the Indigenous by the Park Service, it is more than a little ironic that these studies were undertaken with the explicit goal of strengthening the "long standing spirit of cooperation between the Service and Native American communities." This overly optimistic view belies the fact that Native communities continue to complain that their important cultural and religious sites on park grounds have remained firmly the property of the National Park Service, and they have

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<sup>104</sup> Janet A. McDonnell, "National Park Service: Interview with George B. Hartzog," (Washington, DC: National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 2007.) transcript page 16.

<sup>105</sup> National Park Service, "Episode Seven: The Evolution of Interpretation in the NPS."

been historically excluded from these sites, now run by the park service in an authoritative manner.<sup>106</sup>

In the late 1980s the National Park Service began to broaden the interpretation of the landscapes under its care. This was brought about by a new method of analyzing historical impact through the study of cultural landscapes. Cultural landscapes take both the importance of the land itself, and of the human actions upon the land. The NPS first began considering and analyzing cultural landscapes in 1979, and after the initial pilot program explored the concept, it became a more widespread tool for analysis within the park service. This led to a new understanding of cultural pathways and allowed for a broader analysis of the human history of the national park lands, especially regarding Native Americans. This method of analysis considered more than just stagnant structures, but also repeated significant patterns of land use, boundary lines and spatial organizations within extant territories. Changing patterns of land use, and changing cultures fundamentally challenged the entrenched NPS methodology of interpreting the land based upon one period of significance, typically Anglo period of occupation.<sup>107</sup> Despite this challenge, the incorporation of cultural landscapes in turn made Indigenous history more visible, and more quantifiable from the perspective of the National Park Service. This way of thinking proved slow to catch on, despite being advocated for by some NPS historians, and traditional ways of thinking about land use and the focus on historically significant structures prevailed for much of the 1980s.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Jim Igoe, *Conservation and Globalization: A Study of National Parks and Indigenous Communities from East Africa to South Dakota*. (California, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2004), 135-136.

<sup>107</sup> Melody Webb, "Cultural Landscapes in the National Park Service," *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (1987), 83-84.

<sup>108</sup> Webb, "Cultural Landscapes in the National Park Service," 86.

The United States Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990. This act mandates that institutions that receive federal funding must repatriate Indigenous human remains and objects of cultural importance held by the institution to the appropriate tribal groups through a consultation process that focuses solely on lineal descendants or direct relations of federally recognized tribes. NAGPRA necessitated institutions that received federal funding to carry out in depth inventories of any Indigenous bodies and artifacts they held, and their holdings were required to be reported under the law so that the correct action could be taken during consultation regarding repatriation.<sup>109</sup>

The National Park Service is directly connected to NAGPRA, being bound by its policies as a federal agency, and because the NPS runs the national NAGPRA Program where all itemized inventories of Indigenous property are stored. The NPS then publishes reports on inventory completion in the *Federal Register*, the federal government's journal for publishing its rules and regulations. Once an agency or institution decides to repatriate items, they send a notice to the NPS, who also publishes this Notice of Intent to Repatriate. This notice gives anyone thirty days to claim a competing interest with the item or artifact, and if no competing claims are filed, repatriation occurs on the thirty-first day. Any remains that are not culturally identifiable are inventoried as "culturally unidentifiable", and the remains are entered into a public access database to assist with identification. The law does not require scientific tests to be undertaken to identify remains, but, as of 2010, culturally unidentifiable remains could be repatriated to an

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<sup>109</sup> National Parks Service. "Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Getting Started." U.S. Department of the Interior.

existing tribe with historic or contemporary claims to the lands where the remains were found. NAGPRA also outlawed the trafficking of Native American remains and cultural artifacts.<sup>110</sup> This law marked an important step in the recognition of Indigenous history and their ability to reclaim both the bodies of their ancestors and vital cultural items from museums and federal institutions across the country. The efficacy and impact of NAGPRA on the NPS will be discussed in the conclusion.

Additionally, May 1990 saw the publication of a National Park Service study entitled *Keepers of the Treasures: Protecting Historic Properties and Cultural Traditions on Indian Lands*, aimed to quantify funding needs for Tribal Historic Preservation. This study marked a shift in Native American representation in the NPS as a whole and addressed the complex issues with shared authority and an equal partnership with Indigenous peoples. For the first time, the park service recognized that for the Indigenous, the preservation of “languages, traditions, lifeways” were equally important to Native Americans. The report also called for treating the Indigenous as equal partners, a marked shift from traditional, top-down approaches previously held. The report acknowledges the damage done to Native communities due to dispossession and assimilationist policies, and as treating the Indigenous as curious objects of study, and not as people.<sup>111</sup> This report, coinciding with NAGPRA, highlight an increasing awareness of the damage done to Indigenous groups through dispossession and historical marginalization, and mark some of the first official attempts to address these issues.

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<sup>110</sup> Sherry Hutt, "Repatriation Process," In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*.

<sup>111</sup> Patricia L Parker, and David Banks. *Keepers of the Treasures: Protecting Historic Properties and Cultural Traditions on Indian Lands*. National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Washington D.C., 1990. i-ii.

With the enactment of NAGPRA in the 1990s, Yellowstone National Park built upon earlier ethnographic work and began reaching out to Indigenous communities for consultation. As the topic of Native ties to national park lands became more widespread, further ethnographic studies also continued at this time. In 1991 Joseph Weixelman, a graduate student working under the direction of Yellowstone Park historian Tom Tankersley began an ethnographic study conducting oral histories with Yellowstone affiliated tribes. This study provided a nuanced understanding of the affiliated tribes, recognizing that each tribe had their own stake in the land, and were unique in their religious beliefs and individual responses to the park and its features. It provided a more complex analysis of the history of the park than had been previously promulgated by the National Park Service.<sup>112</sup> The shift in tone and focus on Indigenous groups as unique, extant peoples with their own motivations and responses to historical events was a major step forward in the interpretation forwarded by the park.

In 1996 Nabokov and Loendorf sponsored a meeting between Yellowstone National Park officials and members of the Fort Hall Shoshone and Bannock, and the Wind River Shoshone communities. They noted that even seemingly innocuous requests could cause inadvertent offense with Native American attendees, such as when everyone was asked to share their names to start the meeting off and found that the Wind River Shoshone were reluctant to share their names, not wishing to divulge their native names to strangers.<sup>113</sup> This event highlights a few important points. It demonstrates the difficulties in bridging cultural divides even if the overall intention is genuine. It also highlights the gap in knowledge the National Park Service had about the Indigenous

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<sup>112</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring A Presence*, 285.

<sup>113</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring A Presence*, 298.



communities. The NPS did not make any overt attempts to incorporate the Indigenous into their historical narratives until the 1990s, and their naivete in dealing with the Indigenous in these initial consults is an unfortunate side effect of a larger pattern of historical marginalization.

After this period Yellowstone made great strides in learning how to cooperate with Indigenous communities and incorporating Indigenous voices into the narrative. In 1998 the park held a three-day workshop attended by six tribal members and taught by an American Indian lawyer entitled “American Indians and Cultural and Natural Resources Management: The Law and Practice Regarding Federal Lands.” Affiliated tribes were also invited to visit four sites in the park earmarked for upcoming archaeological excavation. Furthermore, in 1999 the park invited representatives from twenty-five tribes to attend consultation meetings twice a year and intended to discuss issues such as the park’s tribal heritage program, bison management and archaeological and ethnographic projects. By 2001 the park was allowing affiliated tribal members to visit the park for traditional purposes without paying entrance fees.<sup>114</sup> These measures show that Yellowstone has made an earnest attempt to understand affiliated Indigenous communities by expanding consultation and outreach above and beyond the consultation process mandated under NAGPRA.

The Native American Affairs Liaison for the National Park Service, Dorothy FireCloud, explained recent attempts to accurately represent the Indigenous within Yellowstone. This year, 2022, marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Yellowstone’s founding as a National Park, and the park is hosting a major commemoration event. FireCloud stated

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<sup>114</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring A Presence*, 302.

that for this commemoration, Yellowstone superintendent Cameron Sholly is working closely with affiliated Indigenous communities.<sup>115</sup> The North Entrance to the park will host a Teepee Village event from July to August in partnership with the 27 affiliated tribes. These tribes as listed on the website are: The Assiniboiné and Sioux, Blackfoots, Cheyenne River Sioux, Cour d'Alene, Comanche, Colville Reservation, Crow, Crow Creek Sioux, Eastern Shoshone, Flandreau Santee Sioux, Gros Ventre and Assiniboiné, Kiowa, Little Shell Chippewa, Lower Brule Sioux, Nez Perce, Northern Arapaho, Northern Cheyenne, Oglala Sioux, Rosebud Sioux, Salish and Kootenai, Shoshone-Bannock, Sisseton Wahpeton, Spirit Lake, Standing Rock Sioux, Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa, Umatilla Reservation and Yankton Sioux.<sup>116</sup> Information on Yellowstone's website remains scant as to what this event entails however, noting just that Yellowstone "is working with numerous Tribal Nations to establish a teepee village..." but does not list any specific tribe, despite clearly listing other partners such as the National Parks Conservation Association and local businesses.<sup>117</sup> Details as to exactly how this potentially generic teepee village will represent Native American history is nonexistent on the site.

Interpretation provided on Yellowstone's website also needs to be updated and made more specific. The webpage dedicated to the 27 affiliated tribes is just a list of the tribes with no other information.<sup>118</sup> Additionally the website has a page that lists the historic tribes of the park, with four small paragraphs acknowledging extensive tribal

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<sup>115</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Dorothy FireCloud, Recorded Microsoft Teams Call, (New Braunfels, Texas), March 8, 2022.

<sup>116</sup> National Park Service, "Associated Tribes of Yellowstone," U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>117</sup> National Park Service, "150 Years of Yellowstone," U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>118</sup> National Park Service, "Associated Tribes of Yellowstone," U.S. Department of the Interior.

histories and even explicitly acknowledging the Kiowa, Bannock, Shoshone, and a few other tribes. However, this page only includes general information about their ties to the park, noting that these tribes “visited geysers, conducted ceremonies, hunted, gathered plants and minerals, and engaged in trade.”<sup>119</sup> Specific tribes are only mentioned with regards to their physical presence in specific areas of the park, or regarding a specific resource they would gather.

The only tribe who has their own dedicated page on Yellowstone’s website is the Tukudika, or Sheep Eaters. This page is adequate in its interpretation, it succinctly covers the history of the Tukudika’s name, their culture, misconceptions and early reports from fur trappers about them, the fact that they continued to live in Yellowstone after its founding as a national park, and their eventual dispossession.<sup>120</sup> While not an in-depth academic level study of the tribe, its purpose is clearly to inform visitors about the history of the tribe in a digestible manner, and it performs well enough. However, with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, it is a little puzzling that they are the only tribe that has a dedicated historical page on Yellowstone’s website. This just serves to highlight the continuing lack of adequate representation within the park. This appears to be an issue that is being addressed however, as FireCloud stated that Yellowstone is currently working with the affiliated tribes to create distinct pages for each tribal group and allowing the tribes to determine what information they want represented on the website.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> National Park Service, “Historic Tribes,” U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>120</sup> National Park Service, “The Tukudika Indians,” U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>121</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Dorothy FireCloud, Recorded Microsoft Teams Call, New Braunfels, Texas, March 8, 2022.

Despite the need for updated interpretation on their website, Yellowstone is making strides in representation. Park officials and historians are currently working more closely with the affiliated tribes than they ever have in the past to ensure their stories are told. While FireCloud acknowledged that Indigenous history hasn't been addressed adequately, if at all, until the recent past, she remains hopeful about recent inclusion and praised Superintendent Sholly for his efforts in increasing representation. This new focus on Native American inclusion is shown through the current effort that is underway to rename Mt. Doane in Yellowstone. Originally named for the Washburn-Doane expedition, the goal is to rename the mountain to something dedicated to the legacy of Indigenous peoples. What the name will be is unclear as of now, but consultations between Superintendent Sholly and Indigenous groups are underway as of this writing. This more recent focus on accurate representation for the Indigenous is a great sign, although these efforts took almost 150 years to reach any meaningful awareness, the park service is now taking steps to rectify the marginalization of Indigenous groups.

Habitation at and use of the Yellowstone National Park area by the 27 affiliated tribal groups has been largely ignored, or just marginally acknowledged, often through stereotypes and overtly racist depictions throughout the history of the park. While the National Park Service staff at the park increasingly professionalized during the twentieth century, Anglocentric myths continued to form the backbone of Yellowstone's interpretation until the 1960s. Historic interpretation became increasingly professionalized during the 1970s and 1980s, but there was not much change in how Native Americans were portrayed. Not until the end of the 1980s were comprehensive ethnographic works undertaken by the NPS and did the narrative begin to change, as

inclusion became a more important goal. The 1990s saw Yellowstone come to grips with this historic marginalization through consultations and attempts to form closer relationships with affiliated tribes. In the early 2000s, these attempts remained largely top-down and NPS run, but they show a burgeoning awareness of the importance of Indigenous history to the overall interpretation of the parks. Within the last few years, the NPS and Superintendent Sholly at Yellowstone have made great strides to incorporate Native American historical narratives into the park. While these efforts may yet take some time to be fully realized, the awareness of the traditional neglect and marginalization of native perspectives, and the actions being taken to remedy it are promising signs.

### III. BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

“The National Park Service was not the first landlord within the Big Bend, but we are likely to be the last”.<sup>1</sup> Spoken by Roland Wauer, then chief scientist of the Southwest region of the National Park Service, this statement highlights the NPS’s goal to preserve and protect Big Bend but also hints at the agency’s hubris. Wauer was speaking specifically about the 1975 development plan for Big Bend, but the implications for his point of view as a senior NPS official are far reaching. Unspoken here but tacitly acknowledged is the role of the previous so-called landlords: Spain, Mexico, and Texas, who held at least nominal control over the area over time. However, Native use of the Big Bend area began well before the Spanish claimed the territory and continued until the United States dispossessed and violently removed Native populations onto reservations. Even though various indigenous peoples occupied and utilized the Big Bend region since time immemorial, the Native history of the area is often overshadowed or disregarded in favor of the history of the nations that claimed dominion over the area.

According to Thomas Alex, who worked at Big Bend National Park from 1981 to 2017 as the park’s archaeologist and later Cultural Resources Manager and still resides in the area, the Chisos Basin in Big Bend exhibits archaeologic evidence of human habitation dating back 9,000 years,. As he stated, this is unusual, as “only two or three other sites in west Texas exhibit repeated occupation spanning from the Paleo-Indian to the Historic periods.”<sup>2</sup> Largely due to the efforts of Alex, the Native history of Big Bend has only recently been examined by the NPS. Previously, that history was overshadowed

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts, River of Dreams: A History of Big Bend National Park*, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2002, Chapter 15, paragraph 23.

<sup>2</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 16, paragraph 23.

by a focus on the Anglos' history at Big Bend, with a focus on interpreting sites such as the Mariscal Mine.

### **Native American History of the Big Bend Region**

The first written records we have of the Big Bend area and its Native inhabitants come from the Spanish. In 1581 a Franciscan Friar named Agustín Rodríguez, along with a military detachment was granted permission by the Viceroy of New Spain to enter and explore the territory that is now Big Bend, known to the Spanish as *despoblado* (unsettled). They encountered a Native American people that they referred to as the *Jumanos*, well-established in the area. The Jumanos may have been Pueblos who broke off and migrated, following the Rio Grande. They were described as “very handsome, very spirited, very active and more intelligent than the people previously met” by a member of the expedition.<sup>3</sup>

The term Jumanos was likely used to refer to two groups, one which was Puebloan and centered at La Junta (the region where the Conchos River merges with the Rio Grande, where the modern towns of Presidio, Texas, and Ojinaga, Chihuahua), and a separate nomadic group which lived in the Chisos and Davis mountains. The Spanish interacted regularly with the La Junta Jumanos, but the nomadic group either remained aloof, or were avoided by the Spanish.<sup>4</sup> In 1684 a Jumano Chief from La Junta, Juan de Sabeata petitioned the Franciscan Friars to return to his town, causing the Spanish to send an expedition, organized by Captain Juan Dominguez de Mendoza, notable for creating one of the first detailed reports on the Big Bend area.<sup>5</sup> This cooperation between the

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<sup>3</sup> Ron C. Tyler, *The Big Bend: A History of the Last Texas Frontier*, National Park Service, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 1996), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 25-26.

Spanish and Jumanos led to a greater understanding of the Big Bend area, but this mutual cooperation was predicated on Spanish superiority and ability to get what they wanted from the Natives. Juan de Oñate, the man who colonized New Mexico, remarked about the Jumanos that “we were not disturbed by them, although we were in their land, nor did any Indian become impertinent.”<sup>6</sup> With prevailing attitudes such as this view, it was only a matter of time before conflict arose.

This time of relative peace and cooperation between Native Americans in the Big Bend region and the Spanish ended abruptly. The Spanish began capturing the Jumanos and selling them into slavery to mine owners further south. Despite resistance, the Spanish continued to encroach on Native territory, eventually routing the Chisos Jumanos from their camps in 1693 and forcibly returning them to La Junta, ending their resistance. It was not long before other Native American peoples moved in to fill the Chisos’ territory, and the Spanish continued to have an unstable grasp on the Big Bend region.<sup>7</sup>

The first major group to fill the void left by the Chisos was the Mescalero Apache. The Mescalero were first considered a distinct tribe in the seventeenth century, and they traditionally inhabited lands between the Pecos and Rio Grande Rivers.<sup>8</sup> The Mescalero may have been in this region since before the period of Spanish occupation, a group of Apaches Father Alonso de Benavides referred to as *Apaches de Perrillo* may have been Mescalero.<sup>9</sup> Mescalero Apaches were united in a common language, belief system and cultural values, without reliance on a leader. Smaller units of Mescalero were

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<sup>6</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> Morris E. Opler, “Mescalero Apache”, In *Handbook of North American Indians*, edited by William C. Sturtevant, Vol. 10, *Southwest*, edited by Alfonso L. Ortiz, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1983), 419.

<sup>9</sup> Opler, “Mescalero Apache”, 420.



only loosely affiliated with the whole.<sup>10</sup> Frequent attacks by the Comanche forced the Mescalero to migrate into the Big Bend region, and they soon became adept at travelling in the desolate area.<sup>11</sup>

The nomadic Mescaleros never established permanent settlement in the Big Bend region, but they located *rancherías* (encampments) in the mountains, where they occasionally raised crops. The Mescalero were extremely familiar with the location of the seasonal water sources and knew when and how to traverse the land to best utilize these water sources for survival and safe passage. They were also able to subsist off the land, utilizing the edible plants in their travels through the area. The tribe utilized this knowledge adeptly to evade pursuers both as a means of defense, and as a means of disappearing after carrying out raids on the Spanish or nearby settlements, ensuring that those seeking retribution could not follow.<sup>12</sup>

Lipan Apaches are also intimately connected to the Big Bend region. The first record of the Lipan come from a Spanish document that records a Lipan attack on San Antonio in 1718. Records from 1830 state that they travelled to the southern region of Texas before either the Comanche or Wichita. Through the eighteenth-century Lipan territory encompassed an area spanning between the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers.<sup>13</sup> The Lipan consisted of bands that were virtually independent from one another, with little overall cohesion or central authority. However, each local group had a leader who had

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<sup>10</sup> Opler, "Mescalero Apache", 428.

<sup>11</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> Morris E. Opler, "Lipan Apache", In *Handbook of North American Indians*, edited by William C. Sturtevant, Vol. 13, *Plains*, ed. by Raymond J. DeMallie, part 2, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 941.

risen to power based on their ability, but this position only lasted until this person fell out of favor with the group.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, Comanches also moved into the Big Bend area, often in pursuit of the Apache. Comanches, who self-designate as *Nnumnnuu* or “the People,” were originally part of the Eastern Shoshones. By the late seventeenth century, Comanche ancestors had acquired horses, and adopted the lifestyle of Indigenous groups on the Plains. Like the Apaches, they hunted buffalo and lived nomadic lifestyles.<sup>15</sup> Comanche encroachments into Apache territory led the Apache to relocate to the Big Bend region.

The Comanche Cultural Specialist at the Comanche Museum in Oklahoma, Carney Saupitty Jr., discussed the Comanche’s ability to navigate the area. Comanche ability to navigate and find water sources was inextricably linked to their language. Comanche named specific geographic landmarks after their proximity to vital resources, like water sources. Saupitty Jr., described a mountain in Lincoln County, New Mexico near the Pecos River named “thirsty mountain” by the Comanche because the Pecos was close by. This system of navigation through both oral tradition and landmarks pre-dates any form of map created by either Hispanics or Anglos in Big Bend. Naming practices like this, combined with their skill on horseback, allowed the Comanches to successfully navigate the harsh environment long before Americans could.<sup>16</sup>

The interplay between Mescalero Apaches, Comanches, and Spaniards led to numerous treaties and sectional alliances. In the later era of Spanish control, the Spaniards signed treaties with several Mescalero bands. In these treaties they agreed to

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<sup>14</sup> Opler, “Lipan Apache”, 949.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Carney Saupitty Jr, Recorded Phone Call. New Braunfels, Texas, March 17, 2022.; Barry M. Pritzker, "Comanche." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Carney Saupitty Jr., March 17, 2022.

protect them from the Comanche in exchange for the safety of Spanish towns and settlers. One notable example involved the Spanish defending the Apache from a Comanche attack while the Apache were hunting buffalo in 1787.<sup>17</sup> After numerous failed incursions against Native Americans, and facing waning power in the new world, Spaniards focused more on keeping the peace in their territory than in rooting out what they deemed to be Native threats to their settlements. Nominal control of the region changed hands from the Spanish to the Mexicans to the Americans, but Native groups continued to use the land, and similar interethnic dynamics, alternating hostility and peace continued.

### **American Development of the Big Bend Region**

The United States of America incorporated the Big Bend region into its territory when Texas was inducted as a state in 1845. Americans struggled with the desolation of the region and sought to accurately map it for the purpose of finding lucrative trade routes between Mexico and the United States. Due to the isolated and rugged terrain, the process of developing the region was slow. The first American settlement in the region was not constructed until 1848 by Mexican American War veterans Ben Leaton, John W. Spencer, and John D. Burgess who established a mercantile post near Presidio, speculating on the hopes of a lucrative trade route cutting through their business.<sup>18</sup>

Texas Ranger Jack Hays led the first major American expedition into the Big Bend on August 27, 1848.<sup>19</sup> Hays was escorted by thirty-five Texas Rangers under the command of Captain Samuel Highsmith. The purpose of the Hays-Highsmith expedition was to find a practical trade route from San Antonio to Chihuahua, Mexico via El Paso.

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<sup>17</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 54.

The expedition returned to San Antonio 107 days later, successful in their mission, having created the first major trade route that would bring travelers through the Big Bend region.<sup>20</sup> The success of this expedition led to the funding and carrying out of many more, with the goals of trade and exploration in mind.

The exploration of this region by increasing numbers of traders, ranchers and settlers inevitably led to conflict with the Indigenous groups that inhabited the Big Bend region. Travelers from La Grange remarked that Apaches were “almost daily committing depredations...plundering the inhabitants and driving off their stock.” What these travelers failed to realize was that Comanches and Apaches were protecting the Big Bend region, which the latter had claimed for over a century. The opportunity for supplies presented by these trading caravans and ranches in the Big Bend area proved to improve Comanche quality of life in the arid region, and both groups carried out frequent raids on settlers.<sup>21</sup>

Trails, some still visible today, cemented the importance of the Big Bend region to Comanches and Apaches, and highlight a sophisticated degree of landscape transformation that neither the Spanish nor the Americans had yet to reach in the area. In particular, the Comanche had several war trails that crossed into Mexico through what would become Big Bend National Park. A major portion of this trail crossed the Rio Grande at the Chisos Ford, near today’s boundary between Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Texas, and continued in between Santa Elena and Mariscal Canyon. It was noted by Anglo explorers who saw this road that was wider than any of the remnant Spanish royal

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<sup>20</sup> A. B. Bender, “Opening Routes across West Texas, 1848-1850,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1933): 117-19.

<sup>21</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 63-64.

roads and was exceedingly well maintained. The Comanche took such care of this trail as to carry out prescribed burns to keep it accessible. They would utilize this and other trails in the area to raid into Mexico, and then quickly retreat back to evade pursuers, in order to sell their newly acquired horses, mules, and captives north of the border for rifles, ammunition, whiskey, and other valuable resources.<sup>22</sup>

The first American expedition to attempt to explore the Big Bend region was due to a stipulation in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, after the Mexican American war. The treaty required an accurate mapping of the new territorial boundaries of Mexico and the United States. This expedition was led by the surveyor Marine Tyler Wickham Chandler in the late summer and early fall of 1852.<sup>23</sup> This expedition took a little over two months, the surveying crew mapped 209 miles of the Rio Grande under the Presidio Del Norte that were previously unexplored by Anglo-Americans. However, during the exploration the expedition team ran into numerous trails utilized by Native Americans in Big Bend. These trails saved the expedition on the return trip after they decided they could no longer continue. Once they began travelling back to Fort Duncan, they utilized trails as they came across them to stay oriented and pointed in the correct direction. As a result of Chandler's leadership and the use of those Native trails, every member of the expedition survived.<sup>24</sup>

One notable interaction with Comanches during the Chandler expedition occurred near the appropriately named Comanche Crossing. On September 23 the expedition group encountered a group of Comanche across the river from them. After some

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<sup>22</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 66-67.

<sup>23</sup> Orville B. Shelburne, *From Presidio to the Pecos River: Surveying the United States-Mexico Boundary Along the Rio Grande 1852 and 1853*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020), 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> Shelburne, *From Presidio to the Pecos River*, 152-153.

negotiating, the chief of this band, reported by Chandler to be named Mano, included both women and two captives. They told the expedition they were peaceful, and that they were on a foraging excursion, although they were heavily armed. The groups exchanged gifts, and the Comanche reported that they were returning to their home in Upper Texas, hinting that they were perhaps of the *Kotsotekas*, or Buffalo Eaters group of Comanche in the Texas Panhandle.<sup>25</sup> The presence of the Comanche in the area was no secret to the surveyors, as they were aware of three major Native trails in the region: the Comanche Trail at the Lajitas crossing that spanned from San Carlos into Durango, Mexico, the Chisos Crossing near the Chisos Mountains, and the Las Moras Crossing that was more than three hundred miles down from the Chisos crossing.<sup>26</sup> The expedition's precautions regarding encounters with the Comanche, and the multiple well known trails created and utilized by both Comanches and Apaches show that, even in the mid-nineteenth century, Native groups were familiar with the land and able to traverse it in a way other groups were not capable of.

The second major expedition of the Big Bend region occurred in 1853 under the command of Lieutenant Nathaniel Michler, a Topographical Engineer and graduate of West Point. Michler was essentially tasked with completing the Chandler expedition, by finding the point where Chandler stopped mapping the Rio Grande and connecting it to the mouth of the Pecos River.<sup>27</sup> Like Chandler's expedition, this group came upon at least three separate Native trails, which they noted the approximate locations of during their mapping of the area and were most likely utilized by the Apache. Unlike the Chandler

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<sup>25</sup> Shelburne, *From Presidio to the Pecos River*, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Shelburne, *From Presidio to the Pecos River*, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Shelburne, *From Presidio to the Pecos River*, 157-159.

expedition, this group did not encounter any Comanches or Apaches.<sup>28</sup> Michler succeeded in mapping ninety-four miles above the Pecos River, although he misjudged the point at where Chandler ended his survey by thirty-four miles. With the completion of this expedition, most of the Rio Grande in the Big Bend region had been successfully mapped, providing an important resource for Anglo expansion into the area.<sup>29</sup>

As Americans began to expand into this newly mapped territory, Native Americans found themselves surrounded by settlers. While Indigenous dispossession in the latter half of the nineteenth century has been discussed in the previous chapter, it is worth examining Texas specific policies of dispossession and removal, as well as Indigenous resistance in the Big Bend region. Mirroring the debate across the United States, many in Texas were bitterly divided over the issue of Native dispossession. Some Texans sought to coerce Native Americans into adopting Anglo cultural and behavioral norms in the process they referred to as “civilizing,” yet others sought the complete expulsion of all Native peoples from the state as a humane alternative to eradication. Monumental figures in Texan politics such as Sam Houston espoused the idea of civilizing Natives, stating in Congress in 1854 that Native Americans should be dissuaded from “their passion for hunting...give them [Natives] a place for agriculture, and the means to pursue it; for no man can become civilized unless he cultivates the agricultural and social arts.”<sup>30</sup> With proponents like Sam Houston, this viewpoint carried serious consideration for Texans, and while it was less overtly violent than the alternate view, it nonetheless forwarded the necessity of stripping the Indigenous of their history,

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<sup>28</sup> Shelburne, *From Presidio to the Pecos River*, 188-189.

<sup>29</sup> Shelburne, *From Presidio to the Pecos River*, 193-194.

<sup>30</sup> George Klos, "Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe from Another": The 1859 Expulsion of the Reserve Indians from Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (1994): 600.

cultural norms and religious practices, essentially erasing their identity and beliefs in service of a homogenous American idyll.

The alternate view focused on complete expulsion quickly gained support in Texas. In the late nineteenth century many in Texas, referred to Native populations merely as “Indians” and saw them as a singular homogenous group of individuals sharing the same culture and belief systems. This lack of attention to cultural nuances enabled the Texans to demonize Native Americans wholesale. It also allowed Texans to engage in bad-faith arguments against a Native straw man who stood in the way of Anglo progress. The advocates for expulsion saw Native Americans as completely irredeemable and unassimilable into American society, and so they argued what they believed was the merciful choice, expulsion instead of eradication. An editor in Austin Texas remarked about Natives and the failure of civilizing efforts that “An Indian has not one redeemable quality in his composition: the whole race are thieves and murderers...Lying, stealing, and murdering are in their nature, and it cannot be eradicated.”<sup>31</sup> As Anglo migration and settlement in Texas steadily increased, this more trenchant perspective became a convenient viewpoint to hide behind to justify hostility towards the Indigenous.

In 1854 Texas created two reservations for Indigenous peoples within the state: the Clear Fork Reserve designated for the Comanche, and the Brazos River Reservation that housed the Choctaw, Cherokee, Tonkawa, and other smaller tribal groups.<sup>32</sup> The Brazos Reservation housed around two thousand Native peoples and was the most

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<sup>31</sup> Klos, “Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe from Another,” 600.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Beauchamp, “Texas Timeline,” In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*, 2021.



successful of the two reservations within Texas.<sup>33</sup> The Clear Fork Reserve housed around 450 Penateka Comanche by contrast.<sup>34</sup> This number made up only about half of the Penateka Comanche, and even those on the reservation tended to live nomadic lives, staying on the reserve long enough to receive government rations and then moving on.<sup>35</sup> As such, the presence of a small number of Comanches at the Clear Fork Reserve did not mean that by this time, Comanches had been forcibly subdued, their resistance continued for some years.

These reservations were quickly shut down due to increasing pressure from Texan settlers for land, and outbreaks of racially motivated violence and increasingly polarizing anti-Native American views. Texas was being settled so quickly, that by 1856 the Brazos River Reservation was surrounded by Anglo settlements and newly created counties.<sup>36</sup> Native groups on these reservations were often blamed for any theft of cattle or horses in the surrounding areas. While the Native groups on these reservations would occasionally steal cattle, and were known to wander from the reservations, they were often a convenient excuse for ranchers looking to place blame for the loss of cattle. A commission formed by the governor to address the growing issues plaguing these reservations commented “The removal of the Indians out of this state, is our only hope for restoring a permanent quiet to our frontier citizens...and once removed, every Indian found south of the Red River should be regarded as hostile.”<sup>37</sup> In August 1859 the two reservations were closed and Native Americans within them relocated to Indian territory

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<sup>33</sup> Carrie J. Crouch, “Brazos Indian Reservation,” Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>34</sup> W.E.S Dickerson, “Comanche Indian Reservation,” Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>35</sup> Klos, “Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe from Another,” 604.

<sup>36</sup> Klos, “Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe from Another,” 604-606.

<sup>37</sup> Klos, “Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe from Another,” 611.

in Oklahoma.<sup>38</sup> While the closing of these two reservations marked the official end of many Indigenous group's habitation of Texas, disparate isolated groups remained. It would take years and concerted forcible efforts to displace the Comanche and Apache from the Big Bend Region.

The Mescalero Apache and Comanche remained active in the Big Bend Region until well after the American Civil War. Federal troops did not return to the area until 1867, leaving the Native Americans there unmolested and free despite the general nature of federal and state dispossession years before.<sup>39</sup> However, the military buildup and increasing pressure on Native groups in the region slowly began to change the power dynamic in the region in favor of the United States. In 1871 many Mescalero Apaches agreed to a truce that lasted four years, until raiding resumed due to a lack of food. Due to Texan refusal to house Native Americans on state lands, many Apache were moved to their current day reservations in New Mexico.<sup>40</sup>

The Comanche held on to their territory in West Texas in the early part of the 1870s but doing so meant enduring frequent attacks by the United States military. Comanche theft of cattle was so successful that it seriously hampered Texas ability to meet demand for beef across the United States, causing the market to expand into New Mexico instead. Comanche territory was prime land for raising cattle, and Texan ranchers felt increasingly entitled to this land on the merits of profitability. This led ranchers and settlers across the state to petition the military detachments already in Texas to forcibly

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<sup>38</sup> Klos, "Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe from Another," 615.

<sup>39</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 115.

eradicate or remove the Comanche from their land. This began a series of military encounters that would eventually displace the last vestiges of Comanche resistance.<sup>41</sup>

Sustained efforts by the United States Army to flush out the Comanche had their intended effect. The Comanches numbered between four or five thousand in 1870. By 1875 their number had dropped to about fifteen hundred due largely to drought, poverty, and malnutrition. They suffered only a few hundred casualties in battle with the Army during those five years, but their way of life had been systematically endangered. After their final military defeat at Palo Duro Canyon in September of 1874, most of the remaining Comanche chose to accept life on the reservation rather than face starvation. Even those few bands that initially refused and ran made their way to the Comanche reservation in Oklahoma after barely surviving a harsh winter.<sup>42</sup> For the Comanche, 1875 marked the beginning of the end of their traditional way of life. They had become almost entirely dispossessed. Ultimately this marked an end to any significant involvement with the Big Bend region, paving the way for the growth of ranching in the area and allowing Anglo settlers to settle the region in droves.

The Apache that remained outside of the reservation system continued to resist the United States, fighting to remain in their land. In 1878 the Apache Chief Victorio led eighty followers out of the New Mexico reservation and by 1879 travelled back to the Big Bend region. As the Apache carried out raids, traders utilizing trade routes through Big Bend panicked. Victorio and his band were joined by other Apaches at Big Bend, eventually totaling between two and three hundred people. To combat this growing threat to their newfound sovereignty of the region, the United States began coordinating with

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<sup>41</sup> Pekka Hämmäläinen, "Collapse," In *The Comanche Empire*. (Yale University Press, 2008), 333-335.

<sup>42</sup> Hämmäläinen, "Collapse," In *The Comanche Empire*, 339-341.

Mexico in a cross-border military agreement to flush out and eradicate Victorio. After surviving a few ambushes and skirmishes, Victorio was killed in battle in Mexico in October 1880. This marked the end of the last major Apache resistance in the Big Bend region. There remained a few disparate bands in isolated pockets of land, but as Anglo settlement of the region increased and the abundance of game and resources decreased, these groups were slowly forced onto reservations.<sup>43</sup>

### **Creation of Big Bend National Park**

With the completion of Native defeat and removal, the Big Bend region was quickly developed. By January 12, 1882, a railroad route linking Big Bend to the rest of Texas was completed, and the ensuing ease of travel led to prospective ranchers and miners to flock to the area to seek their fortune. Ranchers quickly found the springs in the region to contain adequate water for grazing cattle, and the mild winters perfect for their needs. While some ranchers had been in the Big Bend area beginning in 1854, they struggled to turn a profit. By 1886, however, the region contained some 60,000 head of cattle.<sup>44</sup> By 1900 the region was almost entirely fenced off with barbed wire, and cattle proliferated the region, vastly overgrazing it.<sup>45</sup>

Due to its abundance of certain types of natural resources, miners also travelled to Big Bend searching for a profit. The mining of mercury was the most widespread, and in the opening years of the twentieth century numerous companies laid claim to parts of Terlingua. While successful for a time, producing around 150,000 flasks of mercury, the mines soon exhausted its supply of mercury. However, during this time Mariscal Mine

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<sup>43</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 117-120.

<sup>44</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 120-129.

<sup>45</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 120-129.

was founded. Utilized for mining quicksilver, or mercury, it operated until 1927, when the declining price of mercury necessitated its closure. Mariscal Mine now serves as a point of interest in the National Park site, providing historic interpretation of the mining boom on park lands.<sup>46</sup>

By the 1910s violence and instability along the border became prevalent due to the upheaval caused by the Mexican Revolution. Ranchers, homesteaders, and travelers were being threatened and murdered in cross-border violence. A vicious cycle of retributory violence plagued the area, and the United States Army was called to patrol the region and protect settlers there. Troops stationed in the region in 1916 dealt with boredom in the desolate area by writing about the scenic beauty of the region. One national guardsman, Jodie P. Harris, drew cartoons that were included in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. These cartoons portrayed major landmarks and depicting soldiers admiring the views and stating that the area should become a vast park. While the soldiers were not the first to suggest this, the widespread audience of these comics brought increased awareness in Texas about the scenic beauty of the Big Bend region. This was a boon to those advocating for the region to become a national park, giving them a larger platform to disseminate their views and gather support.<sup>47</sup> In a way, these cartoons which mixed patriotism and promotion of unique American scenery serves as a corollary to Yellowstone's campfire myth, providing the patriotic lessons in a neat, concise story the park service could utilize to point to the origins of Big Bend.

The first major step towards National Park status occurred in 1931, when Texas Legislator R. M Wagstaff became interested in the region and asked the Texas Land

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<sup>46</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 142-145.

<sup>47</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 172-173.

Commissioner to investigate how much of the land the state owned. Wagstaff found that by 1933, large tracts of private land would default to state control in the region, giving the state majority control. Wagstaff worked diligently to prepare legislation allowing the state to gain control of these soon to be defaulted lands and waited for the appropriate time to introduce it. In March of 1933 Wagstaff introduced a bill to the Texas Legislature that paid out an additional five thousand dollars to purchase other private land in the region as well. On May 27 the Texas Governor Miriam Ferguson signed the bill and created Texas Canyons State Park. The state also continued to keep tabs on privately owned land that was in danger of defaulting due to nonpayment by its owners. By the end of October that year, the Legislature approved the acquisition of an additional 150,000 acres greatly increasing the size of the park.<sup>48</sup>

Those responsible for the newly created state park began contacting congressional representatives and urging them to create a bill marking Texas Canyons State Park as the first national park in Texas. The site gained the attention of Congressman R. Ewing Thomason, who after touring the region sponsored a bill to elevate the park to national park status. In January 1935 the National Park Service filed a report on Big Bend, and the Civilian Conservation Corps was working tirelessly to construct wells, barracks, and amenities for visitors to the region. On March 1, 1935, a bill was introduced into Congress by Thomason and Texas Senators Connally and Sheppard to deed park lands to the federal government, and officially designate Big Bend as a national park. The bill was approved and signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, officially granting Texas its first National Park.<sup>49</sup> Big Bend was not officially overseen by the NPS at this time, and

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<sup>48</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 190-193.

<sup>49</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 193-196.

did not open until July 12, 1944, after the state of Texas officially deeded its lands to the federal government. Park interpretation since this time has tended to focus on the unique landscape, as well as the flora and fauna of the park. Big Bend's first superintendent, Ross A. Maxwell, remarked that Big Bend contained "scientific phenomena and scenic beauty mingled with historic incidents along the Texas-Mexico frontier that that give it a charm and color that is not known in any other park."<sup>50</sup>

### **Interpretation at Big Bend**

The first years of the newly minted national park saw park management concerned more with the buildup of infrastructure and amenities for increasing numbers of guests than with historical interpretation of the region. The temporary CCC camp that was utilized in the early years was repurposed as the first park headquarters, employee housing and maintenance buildings necessary for park operation. Superintendent Ross Maxwell also saw the initial job of park personnel to serve as impromptu public relations experts, expecting rangers to canvas park lands and interact with the few ranchers still living on park land. They were also expected to oversee the needs of representatives for local and state agencies and assist civilian explorers. One large concern at this time was the rehabilitation of grasslands that had been destructively over grazed by the ranching boom in the area, and the park had prohibited cattle raising on park grounds within the first year of operation to restore natural vegetation. The local ranchers cooperated with these regulations, and despite Maxwell's observation that the park was "handicapped by a small staff and inadequate equipment", the park began to see some successes in its conservation programs.<sup>51</sup> The limited resources allocated to the remote park would

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<sup>50</sup> Tyler, *The Big Bend*, 205.

<sup>51</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 14, paragraphs 2-6.

become a longstanding theme, hampering available resources and the ability to incorporate and reinvent historic interpretation in the park. The inherent focus on the unique scenery and rehabilitation and conservation of the area necessitated a focus on these issues and proved detrimental to the parks ability to create historical narratives incorporating the Indigenous.

It is also worth noting here the importance of nearby Sul Ross State Teachers College, now known as Sul Ross State University, regarding its partnership with and promotion of Big Bend as a National Park. In 1936 NPS archaeologist Eric Reed had suggested a partnership with the school to serve as a kind of laboratory where research could be done on the local flora and fauna and specimens kept in a specialized facility that wasn't available inside the park. This partnership would lead to one comprehensive site with the entirety of Big Bend's scientific information available for researchers. It would have the added benefits of also protecting the landscape from vandalism, amateur treasure hunters and inadvertent damage. The college went even farther in 1939 when it proposed to design a facility with a laboratory, classrooms and boarding for researchers visiting the Big Bend.<sup>52</sup> However, federal regulations and stipulations regarding the administration of Big Bend resulted in the rejection of any official partnership between the two sites.<sup>53</sup> Despite the absence of official linkages between Sul Ross and Big Bend, faculty at the school continued to add to the interpretation of the new national park once it was established.

In 1948 faculty at Sul Ross Teachers College published a pamphlet entitled "The Big Bend National Park: Descriptive and Historical." In the foreword the faculty note that

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<sup>52</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 12, paragraphs 72-75.

<sup>53</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 12, paragraph 89.



Sul Ross is interested in “rendering distinct and special service to the Big Bend region of Texas,” while also noting that many of their students utilized the park for their research.<sup>54</sup> The first part of the pamphlet was written by Ross A. Maxwell, Big Bend’s first superintendent. This contribution serves to highlight that both institutions collaborated in at least an unofficial capacity, and the administration of Big Bend at least in some way supported and worked with Sul Ross Teachers College. Ostensibly, this report on the new park was one of the first major attempts to condense the regions history and distill its importance to visitors and those curious about the newly protected lands.

Setting the theme for interpretation at Big Bend, this early report briefly mentions Native American use of the lands, noting that the land was traversed “by Indians on hunting and war treks.”<sup>55</sup> Natives were not the focus of that section, but merely a sidenote meant to carry the narrative to the Anglo period. Meaning the focus was mainly on ranching, the settling of the area and the closing of the frontier from an Anglo perspective. When Natives are mentioned, it is usually as a foil for the Texas Rangers or United States Army. This section also does not differentiate among tribal groups but lumps all Native peoples who utilized the area under the moniker “Indian”. Most of this section describes the park and focuses heavily on the geologic and scientific importance of the region, devoting much more time to discussing the plant life than Indigenous culture and impact in the region.<sup>56</sup>

The historical section of this document fares only a slightly better in its representation of Native Americans. The section begins by noting that “Primitive peoples

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<sup>54</sup> Ross A Maxwell, and Clifford B Casey, “The Big Bend National Park: Descriptive and Historical,” Park Archives: Big Bend National Park, National Park Service and Sul Ross State Teachers College, 1948. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Maxwell and Casey, “The Big Bend National Park” 6.

<sup>56</sup> Maxwell and Casey, “The Big Bend National Park” “Section I: Descriptive”.

lived in the Big Bend area for thousands of years prior to the coming of the Europeans.” Then the report immediately describes the Comanche, Mescalero Apache, and Kiowa as a more “troublesome type of Indian” that moved into the region. The Jumanos are mentioned, but only as pseudo-wards of the Spanish who were entirely dependent on Spanish protection.<sup>57</sup> This immediately sets the tone of superiority the Europeans vis-a-vis Native Americans and downplays Native survival strategies and navigation of the region, which would not be surpassed until the twentieth century. The remainder of this section of the report covers the creation of the Texas Canyons State Park, the buildup of infrastructure and the creation of the National Park. This document makes clear that from the earliest days of historic interpretation at Big Bend, the tone was set focusing on narratives of progress, the settling of the West, ranching and the scientific resources of the park. Native Americans were merely a sideshow to be explained briefly before moving on to more Anglo-centric narratives.

Management at Big Bend acquiesced to Department of Defense demands during the early 1950s. The outbreak of the Korean War saw federal priorities shift to wartime necessities, and resource allocations for national parks were sidelined. Continuing the theme of the National Park Service promoting American patriotism and nationalism, Maxwell agreed to a request by the Department of Defense that Big Bend make “ample space for the military personnel to set up camp for isolated recreational purposes”, although he stressed the lack of infrastructure and need for prior notification so the park could make ready.<sup>58</sup> The early years of the 1950s saw the management at Big Bend focusing on continuing to build up park resources and infrastructure, modernizing

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<sup>57</sup> Maxwell and Casey, “The Big Bend National Park” 27-28.

<sup>58</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 14, paragraph 21.

buildings and expanding available housing and roads across the park. The park even cooperated with the war effort by allowing the mining of fluorspar, and its transportation through park grounds so that it could be used by the Department of Defense. Trucks carried between 200 to 500 tons of fluorspar out of the park daily, damaging park infrastructure and leaving visitors inconvenienced.<sup>59</sup> These efforts at cooperating with the federal government's wartime requirements tie directly into the NPS's continual furthering of patriotic ideals and American nationalism, but they had the effect of further hampering the park's ability to grow and offer meaningful interpretation to visitors.

By 1955 Big Bend was slowly coming to grips with increased tourism but the focus of the park remained heavily on the construction of infrastructure and amenities. Park visitation had grown astronomically, in 1944 an estimated 850 visitors had toured the park, by 1955 the number had reached 80,990 visitors.<sup>60</sup> The increased recognition and popularity of the park allowed it to celebrate its dedication ceremony in 1955. Forever linking the park with American patriotism, Douglas McKay, Secretary of the Interior, stated during the dedication speech that Big Bend "was formally established on June 12, 1944, while our soldiers were fighting to establish a beachhead in France..." he then went on to say that plans for the dedication had to be pushed back "while sons of Texas joined other American boys on the bloody battlefields of Korea."<sup>61</sup> These statements inextricably tie the founding of Big Bend to the sacrifices made by U.S. soldiers during WWII and Korea, heightening the sense of nationalism and American

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<sup>59</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 14, paragraph 23.

<sup>60</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 14, paragraph 32

<sup>61</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 14, paragraph 33.

exceptionalism in a way that led to the forwarding of Anglo-centric historical narratives and the sidelining of Indigenous history.

In fact, McKay continued his dedication speech by stating that “peace came to this wild country when free men settled down and learned under democracy to live with one another as neighbors.”<sup>62</sup> This inherently privileges Anglo narratives of progress and the so-called civilizing of the West, while once again promoting ideals of Native inferiority. From the official dedication of the park, the interpretive focus was made clear by emphasizing the Anglo history of the area and implying that only the American man could have brought peace to such a wild land, no doubt a reference to the Native American communities that had long occupied the area. This statement highlights the focus of the park as being one espousing the importance of ranching, mining, and settlement in the area, despite those events only occurring in the one hundred years before the dedication.

The latter years of the 1950s saw Big Bend focusing on ecological protection of park land while continuing buildup of infrastructure. It was at this time that Big Bend received a dearth of federal funds for a massive buildup of infrastructure for the Mission 66 program, so named because 1966 would be the official 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service. Big Bend received thirteen million dollars at this time for infrastructure buildup, although they had requested eighteen. This funding allowed the approval of their plan for twenty residences, vital roads, and allocations for the development of the Graham Ranch, a historic ranching site. The park also acquired a 500-acre plot of land that was previously a private ranch on park property, so the park saw

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<sup>62</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 14, paragraph 35.

continued growth in numerous ways at this time.<sup>63</sup> Because the park infrastructure needed expansion so desperately, park personnel were limited in number due to lack of housing. With the focus on the geologic and ecological history of the park, as well as the history of ranching, as shown by the development of the Graham Ranch, historic interpretation regarding Native Americans and their cultural sites within the park were not a priority at the time.

The 1960s saw little change in Big Bend's interpretation and development plan. The park continued construction of Mission 66 infrastructure and developed more complex analysis of park visitation patterns. Based on estimated visitation numbers, the park expected to accommodate around 185,000 visitors by 1968, an increase of more than 100,000 visitors compared to 1955. Because most of these visitors came to Big Bend in private vehicles, the park focused on developing roadside interpretation along the most heavily frequented avenues. Interpretation still focused heavily on the history of ranching and mining within the park, as well as ecological factors such as informing visitors about the history of the Rio Grande floodplain. National Park Service Resource Planner David Jones wrote about historic interpretation in the park at this time, puzzling over how to represent "a vignette of primitive America," and questioned how exactly the park would determine what historically was there in 1880, the year chosen by park staff as the period of historical significance for Big Bend.<sup>64</sup> The selection of 1880 conveniently placed the significant historical events at Big Bend just after the final dispossession of the

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<sup>63</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 14, paragraphs 36-39.

<sup>64</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 15, paragraphs 1-8.

Comanche and Mescalero Apache in the region, and set the interpretation squarely on Anglo development of the land.

The Historic Resources Management Plan for Big Bend that was approved in 1968 made this Anglo centered focus clear. The five primary interpretive resources for the park were: Wilson Ranch, Castolon (an old army barracks), Old Castolon which housed the oldest building and trading post on park lands, Mariscal Mine, and Hot Springs. These sites only cover the American and Mexican development on park lands, and on natural scenery. The plan does mention the difficulties in interpreting the Comanche War Trail, because it had degraded so much without Native maintenance of it. The plan did note that the remaining parts of the trail run into other areas that could be interpreted like the Persimmon Gap and various river crossings.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the “Interpretive Framework” section of the plan begins with the statement that “History is a subordinate but important theme at Big Bend—a natural area.”<sup>66</sup> There is brief mention in this section that Native populations lived and travelled the region, but they are lumped together as “Indians” and no further explanation is given. The most detailed interpretive framework hinted at here involving Native Americans is the Indian Wars period, although that itself is wrapped up into a broader theme of border conflict. The plan then states that “The interpretive framework is largely set by emphasis on natural themes. Human history is a sideline, an added benefit. But it is an added benefit eagerly sought by many visitors.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>William E. Brown, and Roland H. Wauer. “Historic Resources Management Plan: Big Bend National Park.” National Park Service, December 1968, 6-8.

<sup>66</sup> Brown and Wauer, “Historic Resources Management Plan: Big Bend National Park,” 9.

<sup>67</sup> Brown and Wauer, “Historic Resources Management Plan: Big Bend National Park,” 10.

These points hint at a few different issues facing the interpretive team at Big Bend. The first is a distinct lack of resources, personnel, and allocated funds to dedicate to historic interpretation in the park. This undoubtedly led to their categorizing of the five major interpretive areas of the park as the most important, as they fit into the broader themes for the park most easily. Secondly, the sidelining of history for natural history in the park fits the theme of park use by naturalists. Many of whom came from nearby Sul Ross Teachers College or worked in managerial positions within Big Bend itself. Lastly, while there was at least some awareness of Native history in the area, that history was harder to document, thus requiring more resources to do so accurately. Native American history may also have been potentially less interesting to the visitors at the time, who would be mainly interested in areas like the Mariscal Mine and natural beauty of the park. This is confirmed in the interpretive plan when it states that “selected viewpoints and historic sites that are heavily visited because of convenience of access on main park roads...should be developed adequate exhibit and wayside interpretive devices.”<sup>68</sup> This confirms that management at Big Bend had to choose their interpretive battles, so to speak, to reach the largest audience. Persimmon Gap, with a Comanche War Trail theme, was the only suggested site to potentially interpret Native history within the park in the plan.

The suggested interpretation for a few of the major historical sites within the park offer a more detailed and less speculative glimpse into park interpretation. Castolon would serve to introduce “All major historical themes...farming, trade center and day-to-day border exchange, border troubles (U.S. Cavalry, Villa, etc.), and primary examples of

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<sup>68</sup> Brown and Wauer, “Historic Resources Management Plan: Big Bend National Park,” 12.

borderlands architecture.”<sup>69</sup> Despite the admitted limitations the management of Big Bend were facing, these interpretive themes unduly restricted historic interpretation at the park. As noted within this plan, the oldest preserved building on park grounds, dates to 1900.<sup>70</sup> This focus on borderlands architecture would only encompass the previous sixty or so years but was most likely chosen as a theme due to the wide variety of extant buildings on the property. This may have also been an easy addition, as opposed to the inclusion of Native history at this time. The recently passed National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which necessitated an inventory, and the protection of all buildings with historic potential may have allowed the park to utilize this information in newer historic interpretation. Meaning that the groundwork for interpretation of borderlands architecture had been recently carried out and was easily incorporated into the park’s interpretive framework.

The interpretive team at Big Bend reanalyzed the needs of the park in the 1970s. By 1971 visitation to Big Bend had increased to 245,000 visitors a year. The most visited area by travelers was the Chisos Mountains. The team was most impressed with the historic interpretation at Castolon, focusing on those main historical themes discussed previously. However, they seemed most concerned with a living history approach. Living history interpretation involves making an area appear as it did during the period of significance, with employees in period-appropriate clothing and available activities that are historically accurate. The interpretive team noted that the park should make the general store area “look and feel like an old country store,” as they believed early twentieth century architecture was just then starting to interest visitors. The team also

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<sup>69</sup> Brown and Wauer, “Historic Resources Management Plan: Big Bend National Park,” 25.

<sup>70</sup> Brown and Wauer, “Historic Resources Management Plan: Big Bend National Park,” 31.



erroneously declared in their report that “Big Bend is a marginal area, and there are virtually no social histories of that time and place.” Their solution to this was to introduce a Mexican restaurant to detract from the overwhelmingly Anglo interpretation and suggest a need for oral histories by individuals associated with the area in the early twentieth century, while they were still alive.<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, the remainder of the 1970s saw little interpretive change in the park, as superintendent Joe Carithers was investigated by the National Park Service for charges of mismanagement and racism. After a lengthy investigation, he was replaced with superintendent Robert Haraden in 1978. The internal strife at Big Bend caused the degradation of buildings and sites within the park and proved detrimental to ongoing attempts to increase historic interpretation, essentially stagnating the parks interpretation.

The 1990s marked an important turning point in Native American representation and visibility within the park service. With the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in 1990, any agency receiving federal funds was required to inventory their collections and note Indigenous remains or cultural artifacts, and then notify the tribal groups they belong to. If tribal connection could be determined, they would then facilitate the return of these remains or artifacts to their original tribes. The law initially mandated this process for the Smithsonian, but by 1995 the National Park Service was conducting these inventories and beginning the NAGPRA process of repatriation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Welsh, *Landscape of Ghosts*, Chapter 15, paragraphs 17-18.

<sup>72</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Thomas Alex, recorded phone call, San Marcos, Texas, November 18, 2021.

To understand how Big Bend dealt with NAGPRA and Native history, I conducted an interview in November 2021 with Thomas Alex, who until recently has worked at Big Bend since the 1980s. Alex recently retired, but he served for years as the Cultural Resources Manager for the park, although he carried out archaeological, surveying work and many other duties for the park during his tenure. The NAGPRA process is complex, and Alex discussed what it looks like from the NPS perspective at Big Bend. Alex explained that he and other staff members at Big Bend began by looking at historic documentation to narrow down potential Native affiliation with the park. They also examined traditional tribal territories to narrow down which groups resided in the area. Although this method wasn't always sufficient, Alex noted that during the consultation process tribes would often claim areas in which Native presence was not historically documented by Anglo historians. This shows the importance of the consultation process, and cooperation with Native American peoples to fill in gaps left by their historic silencing. Additionally, some groups may not have had explicit affiliation with the park but identified a few culturally important sites within the park grounds that they claimed, further complicating the demarcated lines of affiliation. Many of the groups that had more tenuous connections to the park did not require any further consultations with the NPS. Alex stressed that the Mescalero Apache, Lipan Apache, and Comanche were interested in maintaining ties to the area and continuing to be consulted by the National Park Service at Big Bend. While these are the main interpretive tribes for Big Bend, the National Park Service maintains a list of all affiliated tribes with the park. Alex lists these groups as being the:

Apache tribes of Oklahoma, San Carlos Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Jicarilla Apache Nation, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Tonto Apache, Fort Sill Apache, then there's the Comanche Nation, Kiowa, there's also the Shoshone Tribe of the Wind River Reservation, the Blackfeet claim affiliation with one particular site in the park, Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas, Kickapoo of Oklahoma, Kickapoo of Kansas, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, then up towards El Paso there's the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo that claim affiliation down the Rio Grande as far as Big Bend, and the last one is the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes.

This is a staggeringly large number of Indigenous groups that claim affiliation with Big Bend, some of whom only claim specific areas or one site in the park. This tangled web of association undoubtedly led to challenges with interpretation. However, it also shows just how dismissive the National Park Service has been historically of Native history at Big Bend, with most interpretive documents focusing solely on the Comanche War Trail.<sup>73</sup>

While NAGPRA requirements facilitated this in-depth research into tribal affiliation within Big Bend, the legal requirements of the law can also be restrictive. Alex conveyed that because each tribe is seen as their own independent nation, the National Park Service, and its employees must operate under strict legal frameworks, viewed akin to diplomatic international relations. Marking a shift in cultural sensitivity and inclusion by the NPS, Alex noted that the meetings he's attended have been about presenting NPS projects to the relevant Native groups, listening to their feedback, and "negotiating fairly and openly and taking their [the relevant tribe's] advice to heart on any issue they are sensitive about or any issue they have major concerns about." More specifically, Alex stated the Comanche, Apache and Kiowa are particularly interested in how the NPS represents their history in the Big Bend region. He notes that they are quite active in

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<sup>73</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Thomas Alex, recorded phone call, San Marcos, Texas, November 18, 2021, transcript pgs. 4-5.

examining interpretive documents and analyzing their proposed historical representation in the park.<sup>74</sup> In essence, the introduction of NAGPRA in the 1990s radically changed how the National Park Service addressed Native history and brought about increased awareness of the importance of these tribes to the parks, paving the way for more inclusive interpretation.

By the 2000s, most initial NAGPRA consultations were complete or well-underway, and relationships with Native communities were being fostered, despite NAGPRA not requiring continued cooperation. Big Bend strove to continue consultation with pertinent Native groups and enhance their representation within the park. The General Management Plan adopted by Big Bend in 2004 highlights this growing awareness of Native American history and the formative steps taken by the park to increase their inclusion in a codified way. This document is especially important because it is currently the governing document for the park. In the introductory section, the plan notes that Native American consultation occurred during the planning process for the management plan, and that culturally affiliated tribes were sent letters and invited to participate in the planning process.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Native populations were permitted use of important cultural sites on park grounds, protected by law. Other laws are listed as well here, many of which were passed in the 1990s as well, that protect Indigenous cultural sites within the park and mandate consultation on any projects that could affect or interest pertinent Indigenous groups.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Thomas Alex, recorded phone call, San Marcos, Texas, November 18, 2021. Transcript pgs. 7-8.

<sup>75</sup> National Park Service. "Big Bend National Park: Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement." United States Department of the Interior, 2004, 9.

<sup>76</sup> National Park Service. "Big Bend National Park: Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.", 29.

The interpretation provided in this report is also far improved from the management plan of 1968. An entire section is dedicated to Native history within the park, broken down into the late Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Late Prehistoric, and Historic periods, the latter covering from Spanish occupation to present day. This time, specific tribes like the Chisos, Apaches, and Comanches are mentioned, as well as traditional homelands, lifestyles, and languages.<sup>77</sup> This is a marked shift in awareness, as well as representation, as compared to the late 1960s. While these are promising signs, more work remains for the National Park Service. One of the most important notes on this report states that “Consultation with American Indian groups has revealed that these groups are concerned not only about the preservation of cultural resources and properties, but also about the need to interpret the Big Bend area from American Indian perspectives.”<sup>78</sup> This statement coincides with the findings of my research, that interpretation and protection has improved markedly recently, but that these processes are only the first steps that need to be taken. Much more needs to be done to foster full inclusion and incorporation of Native voices into the NPS.

While the general management plan shows greatly improved awareness of Indigenous history and cultural ties to the land, issues persist. The acceptance of Native Americans as equal shareholders in the history of the lands protected by the National Park Service lend themselves to questions of shared authority and an awareness of the importance of these issues by trained staff. For example, even though the general management plan is a marked improvement, the 2004 interpretive plan for Big Bend

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<sup>77</sup> National Park Service. “Big Bend National Park: Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.” 105-106.

<sup>78</sup> National Park Service. “Big Bend National Park: Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.” 139.

contains some problematic interpretation and exclusionary language. The opening statements of significance for the park list mostly scenic or natural wonders, although it does note the uniqueness of a borderlands culture incorporating American Indians, it does not elaborate on why this is important.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, a section highlighting management goals for the park state absolutely nothing about making Native populations equal shareholders with the autonomy and authority to tell their histories in the park, nor does it mention any goal related to relationship building with Indigenous populations.<sup>80</sup>

While this plan does note that the Comanche, Mescalero Apache, and Lipan Apache have “partnered” with the park, they are lumped together in one line near the bottom of the list. Their inclusion in the list is promising, however lumping the three independent nations together suggest the park groups them similarly and treats them in a uniform manner. Meaning they see them more as a connected group of Native Americans and less as independent and unique tribal groups with their own historical interpretative needs and desires. They are also listed below organizations like Hotels, Tourism Associations, and whitewater rafting associations.<sup>81</sup> This suggests that even after the passage of NAGPRA and growing awareness of problematic representation, Indigenous groups are not prioritized or respected as highly those that presumably have some level of economic partnership with the park.

I spoke with Oscar Rodriguez, tribal administrator for the Lipan Apache, about representation of Lipan history at Big Bend. Rodriguez discussed the three main

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<sup>79</sup> National Park Service. “Big Bend National Park and Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River: Comprehensive Interpretive Plan.” U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington D.C., 2004. 6-7.

<sup>80</sup> National Park Service. “Big Bend National Park and Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River: Comprehensive Interpretive Plan.” 9-10.

<sup>81</sup> National Park Service. “Big Bend National Park and Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River: Comprehensive Interpretive Plan.” 16.

narratives he would like to see changed. The first is the “Vanishing Indian” theory, the narrative that Native Americans have largely disappeared due to disease and the violence of the Indian Wars, and the few remnants are not really a part of modern society, being contained in reservations today. Rodriguez noted that when the average person runs into a Native American, they will often ask what percentage Native American they are, a notion that he finds insulting and likens to being compared to a dog-breed. Rodriguez believes that this narrative is the most destructive for Lipan communities, and especially for Lipan youth, as it promotes stereotypes that reinforce the type of incorrect depictions of Indigenous cultures that many Americans receive while watching Western movies.<sup>82</sup>

The second narrative that Rodriguez would like to see changed is closely related to the previous one: the idea that when Anglo-Americans came to West Texas, the land was “empty,” and, therefore, they had rightful claim to it. This theory allows Anglo-Americans to glorify their use and “development” of the land, sidestepping the problematic and complex issues that arise from dispossession and from denying Native Americans any historic claim to Texas, reducing those still in the region to the status of “recent immigrants.” As he noted with a mix of sarcasm and wrath, “To say ‘native’ today in West Texas means you’re blonde [haired] and blue-eyed and your origins are from North Carolina...those are the ‘native’ Texans.”<sup>83</sup>

The third narrative that Rodriguez discussed is that of the bloodthirsty Apache. He has been told directly that the Lipans and other Apaches are nothing but murderous raiders and violent people. Rodriguez asks “If we were that murderous, if we were that

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<sup>82</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Oscar Rodriguez, Zoom Conference Call, New Braunfels, Texas, March 26, 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Oscar Rodriguez, Zoom Conference Call, New Braunfels, Texas, March 26, 2021.

good... then what explains all these Scotsman walking around these lands today?

Because the murderous raiders and attackers, and killers, scalpers, killers of men, women and children were those guys. That's why they're here today, telling these stories about us." Thus, stories cementing the Anglo-American as the focus of history in this region continue to marginalize and stereotype the Lipans and other Indigenous peoples in an extremely harmful manner.<sup>84</sup>

Rodriguez was acutely aware of the marginalization of Native Americans within the National Park Service. The NPS has a tendency to relegate Native American use of its lands as something that occurred thousands of years ago, only documented through the archaeological record. He stated that this lends itself to inaccurate and problematic interpretations of Lipan cultural artifacts. One specific site he discussed is called Josephine's Cantina, a cave filled with Indigenous rock art. Rodriguez says that this site is interpreted as a sort of waystation for Native Americans, and that the narrative surrounding the cave is told as sort of a joke, that Natives would come to the cave, get high on peyote and paint on the walls. In reality, it was a birthing cave, where women had their children. The art on the walls is an account of the children born there. Rodriguez is deeply troubled by this insincere interpretation, comparing this site to sites such as the Lascaux caves in France, and wondering why one site is considered the epitome of archaic artistic expression, and one site is interpreted as a joke.<sup>85</sup>

These views highlight that despite the passage of NAGPRA over thirty years ago, the National Park Service is still struggling to provide adequate representation and

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<sup>84</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Oscar Rodriguez, Zoom Conference Call, New Braunfels, Texas, March 26, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Oscar Rodriguez, Zoom Conference Call, New Braunfels, Texas, March 26, 2021.



protection for Native American sites within the parks. Thomas Alex briefly described a report he was working on as of 2021 to detail the cultural importance of an Indigenous rock art site within Big Bend. Alex personally researched the archaeologic data, and then worked on his own to interpret the historic importance and tribal affiliation to the site. He personally advocated for inclusion of the pertinent tribes for consultation on the site and stated that rock art is generally considered sacred by tribal groups. However, to understand and protect the site, this information in his report is purely used as an internal management document, as the park plans how best to allocate resources to protect and interpret it later. As of our conversation, the location of the site has been withheld from the public to prevent vandalism or inadvertent damage of the rock art.<sup>86</sup> This highlights the complex nature of the National Park Services responsibilities as both stewards of the land and interpretive institution. They must balance protection of historic sites and artifacts with the dissemination of accurate historical narratives.

Big Bend has an extensive history of Indigenous habitation and use. The written record begins with the Spanish exploration in the 1500s and ends with the dispossession and forced removal of the Natives at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For most of the National Park Service's tenure over Big Bend, the historic interpretation has focused predominately on the Anglo history of ranching, mining, and farming. However, the 1990s saw a marked shift in legislation requiring Indigenous consultation and protection of Indigenous cultural sites and artifacts. With these consultations came an awareness of the desire of groups such as the Comanches, Mescalero Apaches, and Lipan Apaches to have their history represented at the park. While promising work is underway to that

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<sup>86</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Thomas Alex, recorded phone call, San Marcos, Texas, November 18, 2021. Transcript pgs. 11-12.

effect, change in interpretation has been slow to come about. The National Park Service has made great strides to understand and promote more inclusive histories, but much more work remains before Indigenous history is adequately represented in Big Bend.

## IV. ANALYSIS

The National Park Service plays a monumental role in crafting and divulging historical narratives about the United States. With a record 297,115,406 visitors across all parks as of 2021, the opportunity for informed historical interpretation and education has never been more prevalent.<sup>1</sup> With such high visitation rates, the parks serve an important educational role that has important implications. This role has developed continually in tandem with the National Park Service and has become increasingly professionalized. Historic interpretation in the parks only began questioning earlier narratives and the inherent focus on Anglo history in the 1990s. Despite major strides by the NPS to broaden its historical inclusion, Native Americans are continually underrepresented or unrepresented in ways that marginalize or contain their history within frameworks set by the NPS.

### **Analysis: Interpretation**

In an in-house interview with NPS Historic Interpreter Becky Lacome, NPS historian Luann Jones traces the beginnings of the interpretive program to the late 1980s and early 1990s. The first NPS training program, called “Interpretive Skills”, attended by Lacome, began in the 1980s. This program was basic in terms of interpretation, and very top-down focused, with no pretense of shared authority. Lacome shared that the training in this program boiled down to this statement: “Tell them what you’re going to tell them...that’s the body of your presentation. That’s all your facts and information and stories. And then tell them what you told them.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, in this stage the

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service, “Visitation Numbers,” Washington DC: National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> National Park Service, “Episode Seven: The Evolution of Interpretation in the NPS,” (Washington D.C., U.S. Department of the Interior, 2020).

interpreter was the sole authority imparting lessons as the absolute authority on historic matters to visitors.

Interpretation has continued to evolve at the National Park Service. The 1990s brought about meaning-based interpretation by connecting people emotionally to park resources and the history behind them. By the 2000s Lacome became a training specialist at the Interpretive Development Program in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, training many NPS historians to interpret history and connect with the parks. The NPS began working to make interpretation relevant to individual visitors and tried to impart personal meanings in their discussions with guests. This new approach did not professionalize until the 2010s, when the NPS began focusing on sharing agency, or interpretive authority, with visitors. Lacome stated that National Parks are "safe spaces to engage in dialogue, to explore essential questions about the challenging issues of the day-race, immigration, income inequality, climate change, environmental justice, and more."<sup>3</sup>

These are admirable sentiments, but until the National Park Service updates their interpretive methodologies those words ring hollow. The lack of shared authority, and the very recent admission of agency outside of the NPS are problematic. There is absolutely no way to adequately represent Native history in the national parks without at the very least an equal shared authority between the National Park Service and the relevant Native populations. This suggests that up until now, inclusion of Native American historical narratives has been heavily NPS-centric and based upon notions of the park service interpreters as the main authority. Most commonly Native peoples are asked to consult on already formulated, preconceived NPS projects after the fact. This has the result of

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<sup>3</sup> National Park Service, "Episode Seven: The Evolution of Interpretation in the NPS."

marginalizing Native American peoples further, by forcing their historical narratives into an Anglo conceptual framework of progress.

A foundational concept in Public History is that of shared authority, which was coined by Public Historian Michael Frisch. Shared authority describes the process through which a professional historian cedes some amount of professional authority and control over a certain project to participants, whether they be amateur historians, other professionals, or just others involved in the project regardless of experience. This is done to enhance collaboration and ensure participation and effective input on any project. This also enables others working on the project to bring in their points of view that might run contrary to a professional historian. This can be positive and serve to broaden the dialogue and allow consideration of topics and points of view a professional historian might otherwise disregard or overlook.<sup>4</sup> Shared authority is what the National Park Service is attempting to do when it envisions a project and asks relevant Native American groups to consult on that project.

Over the course of interviews I've conducted, it became clear that the National Park Service falls short of its intended goal. What they are in fact practicing is sharing authority, which is an important distinction. The distinction, as Frisch puts it, is that "sharing authority" is an action, a top-down methodology whereby the professional altruistically cedes some authority to receive the input of others. By contrast, the process of "shared authority" recognizes that historians are not the only interpreters, and that meaning and interpretation are forged through collaboration by default. This means that historians do not have sole authority over historical narratives by default, despite claims

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski. eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011,) 127.

to the contrary.<sup>5</sup> This is especially true in situations where historians are collaborating with Native groups about their history, on their land. Consultations by the NPS have been inherently top-down, whereby the NPS conceives a project it wants to carry out, plans it, and only then asks Native Americans for their input.

### **Interview Analysis**

For this project I conducted an interview with Jimmy Arterberry, a Comanche who served the tribe as Historic Preservation Officer from 1999-2019. Arterberry began as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, but also served as the NAGPRA Coordinator, and Environmental Programs Director for Comanches. As a Comanche directly involved in consultation processes, Arterberry described consultations from a Native point of view. He noted that the gathering of different tribes stymies the process, because Comanches, and certainly other tribes, are hesitant to share their history and information around other tribal peoples. This process has improved somewhat over time, as disparate tribal groups have recognized that the issues, they are facing are similar. Arterberry suggested that individual consultations, and forging relationships with the tribal community would lead to a new willingness by Native peoples to share more pertinent information with the NPS, further enhancing interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

This distrust of the consultation process is an issue that still needs to be addressed by the National Park Service. Initial consultations did little to satisfy Comanches. Arterberry recounted a discussion he had early in the NAGPRA process, where he discussed consultations with Comanche elders. The prevailing attitude was that the NPS

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<sup>5</sup> Adair, *Letting Go?*, 127.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Jimmy Arterberry, Zoom Interview, New Braunfels, Texas. March 3, 2022.

was going to do whatever they wanted, so the sharing of protected tribal information was not a risk worth taking. Comanches also felt that sharing knowledge about their sacred sites in the park was a risk, and that half of the time it would lead to the loss of the site due to NPS actions. He stated that “When we [Comanches] tell them how important these things are they would keep it quiet...we’re telling them, so they know how to treat us and the place, with reverence, respect. It’s almost like when we tell them, they would purposefully want to hide or conceal that. It’s a double-edged sword, if we tell them we risk losing the historic properties of the location, and if we do not tell them we risk losing the historic properties because they’ll develop and do what they want anyhow.” This correlates to the report that Tom Alex is working on regarding the Native rock art site at Big Bend. Alex’s report is an internal document meant to prepare the NPS to protect the site, no information about the site is publicly available, and Alex stated they were keeping information on the site quiet until the NPS developed a protection plan. This issue comes down to differing viewpoints, and the mandate of the NPS requiring protection of lands and important sites and features.<sup>7</sup>

To ameliorate these differing viewpoints, Arterberry suggests a closer collaboration with National Park Service officials and historians, beginning with outreach to Native Americans on a personal level and sharing of their worldview. While Comanches have support, and good partnerships in the NPS and government agencies, a deeper connection and understanding of their historical and cultural perspective is missing. For this process to be effective, the NPS, and western historians need to be willing to enact this type of collaborative practice and embrace historical viewpoints that

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<sup>7</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Jimmy Arterberry.

may run contrary to what is taught in universities. Contrary to the NPS requesting consultations with pre-conceived projects, Arterberry suggests that the NPS begin discussions before planning, and listen to how Native groups portray their history, and how they would like it portrayed in these parks. “In my experience they always come and tell us, and in the telling to us, they’re saying they have a spot in here they’d like us to engage. To turn the tables, it would really be ‘what do you want?’...it’s very regulatory...we’re only on the other side being included because they have to talk to us [legally].”<sup>8</sup> A shift in approach by the NPS during these consults, both in terms of sincerity and genuine interest would lead to great strides in increasing Indigenous representation within the national parks.

Another issue facing the National Park Service, is the differing conceptions of history and the historical practice between Native American peoples and academically trained historians, including those at the NPS. Arterberry stated that the academic view of history is unnecessarily rigid and disallows the possibilities of new perspectives if it runs contrary to what an academic has already researched. He noted that among Comanches, history is more fluid and communal. Comanches share what they know about their history when they meet, weaving a cohesive narrative from disparate threads known only to the individual. Because Comanches may be from separate bands, with different languages, they keep a broader understanding of history and recognize differing viewpoints are the result of different life experiences among them. Despite this communal understanding of history, differences among Comanche can impact their

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<sup>8</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Jimmy Arterberry.



historic narratives.<sup>9</sup> Arterberry stressed that Comanches are “all connected, but we aren’t all the same”, and without building worthwhile individual relationships, Comanche history will not be presented correctly. To highlight this, Arterberry discussed a contentious consultation with a State Historic Preservation Officer, a non-Indigenous academic who refused to accommodate Comanche historical views. The Comanche Chairman asked the SHPO sarcastically during a heated discussion what the SHPO knew about Comanches, whereby the SHPO began lecturing the Comanche on their history before realizing his mistake and stopping. The audacity of the SHPO to lecture the Comanche on their own history during an argument highlights the pitfalls of failing to recognize Native historical viewpoints and shows just how easily consultations can be derailed by lack of cultural awareness and an unwillingness or inability to properly share authority and communicate.<sup>10</sup>

Carney Saupitty Jr. discussed the reason for some of the historic misrepresentation of the Comanche by Anglo-Americans. He stated that Comanches are guarded when it comes to their history and culture, and so the information they pass on to outsiders is often incomplete. An example Saupitty Jr. discussed ethnographers and historians in the early 1900s that came to document the history of the Comanches and other Indigenous groups placed on reservations in Oklahoma. If these researchers felt they didn’t receive enough information from the Comanches, they would often go to other tribes in the area and ask them about Comanches. This would satisfy the researchers but provide inaccurate representation of Comanche culture that would be passed off as

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<sup>9</sup> These themes are examined in: Nēpia Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History & Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective*.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Jimmy Arterberry.

firsthand knowledge. To overcome this hesitancy to share their history, Saupitty suggested that academics or non-Indigenous historians should begin with a genuine friendship and trust between individuals.<sup>11</sup>

Saupitty Jr. also highlighted the methodological gap between Native American notions of history, and academic frameworks. “Academics, Ph.D’s, I see them often times when they write they use the words ‘possibly’, ‘presumably’, ‘maybe’, ‘probably’, ‘perhaps’, ‘not confirmed’, ‘not researched’...even with these high degrees, doctorates, they often time disagree...they’re not infallible.” It becomes apparent that to Comanches, the more institutionalized language used in academic discourse is perceived as a weakness in representing historical narratives, and is at odds with Comanches worldview and historic interpretation.<sup>12</sup> This is an issue that can only be rectified by building rapport through regular interactions between Native Americans and culturally aware, open-minded non-Indigenous academics.

Another point of contention between Comanches and the academics who write about them, is the incorrect use of Comanche language. Historic treaties and records often have incorrect translations of Comanche names due to either negligence or unfamiliarity with the Comanche language. Saupitty noted that the 1885 census incorrectly listed his grandfather’s name, which was “many came” as “heap many Mexicans”. The fallibility of census records and government documents, coupled with the fact that Comanche can have up to three different names during varying stages of their lives means that it can become increasingly difficult to ensure a document is

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Carney Saupitty Jr., Recorded Phone Call, New Braunfels, Texas. March 17, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Carney Saupitty Jr.

discussing the correct person. As such, many records that academics would utilize have erroneous information on Comanches. Because the Comanche language is very descriptive, and individual names often reflect historical events, it is doubly important that these names are correctly transcribed and translated. Saupitty Jr. was able to trace tribal affiliation and lineage through the deconstruction of Comanche names from memory due to Comanche oral histories. The incorrect translations can irreparably change the narrative, a mistake that can easily be avoided by consulting with Comanches on any project that involves them.<sup>13</sup>

Understanding how Native groups utilize historical narratives is fundamental to creating adequate representation. Nēpia Mahuika recently discussed the nuances of Indigenous use of oral histories. Mahuika is a member of the Ngata Porou Māori tribe, as well as an academic, so he is well versed in both Indigenous and academic forms of history and methodologies. Mahuika states that for Native populations, oral history is inextricably linked to identity. For them oral history is “a collective enterprise essential to cultural survival, naming the world, asserting power and belonging, and narrating relationships across time and space to land, sea, sky and each other.” Mahuika sees oral history as more than just a western conception designed to empower the voiceless, but as a tool that the Indigenous can use to breathe life back into their knowledge and history.<sup>14</sup>

Academics and scholars have long colonized Native histories for their own gain, labelling Native oral histories about creation, geologic features like the geysers at Yellowstone, and more as nothing more than stories created by uncivilized “others”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Carney Saupitty Jr.

<sup>14</sup> Nēpia Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History & Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History*, 17.

Significant damage has been done to Native groups during this process, leading to an entrenched distrust of academics, even those with decolonizing intentions. Native peoples taking ownership of their own oral histories is integral to the forming of accurate narratives portraying their history. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a professor of Indigenous studies at Waikato notes that “there are numerous oral histories which tell of what it means, what it feels like, to be present while your history is erased before your eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people.”<sup>16</sup> The painful erasure of one’s history mixed with current marginalization has a severely detrimental impact to the wellbeing of any group, with the Indigenous being the prime example of this harmful process.

Allowing Natives to reclaim their history by utilizing their methodologies is key to their reclamation of ownership of their historical narratives.<sup>17</sup> This process of reclaiming ownership can be complicated due to the collectivization of history in Native communities. Jimmy Arterberry noted that even among Comanches, the process of reclaiming ownership is a tribal level effort. Due to disparate languages among bands of Comanches, differing tribal activities and practices preclude any standardized Indigenous understanding of these oral histories. Each band holds an integral piece of the historical puzzle so to speak, and only when they come together and share traditions and oral histories does the full story come to light.<sup>18</sup>

Museum curatorship and the theory behind effective presentation of history is currently undergoing a methodological change, especially regarding the presentation of

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<sup>16</sup> Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Jimmy Arterberry.

Native American history. Amy Lonetree, a member of the Ho-Chunk tribe who is an associate professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, examined the shift in Native representation within museums. Currently, museums are focusing more on shared authority with Native peoples whose history they represent, and tribal groups are increasing the effort they are making to help develop exhibitions that showcase their culture.<sup>19</sup> This shift is incredibly important, as it allows for the reconciliation of Native history with traditional narratives of progress. Lonetree notes that this Native led effort will “assist communities in their efforts to address the legacies of historical unresolved grief by speaking the hard truths of colonialism and thereby creating spaces for healing and understanding.”<sup>20</sup> In essence, this shift allows for the correction of inaccurate history and stereotypes, proper historical representation, while also allowing Indigenous communities space and the opportunity to reflect on their past and grieve communally in a way that has historically been denied them.

Laws such as NAGPRA are only necessary due to the historic marginalization and rampant theft of Native American cultural artifacts, and bodies that was prevalent in the late nineteenth century. Native American skulls were especially favored trophies of the era, being utilized by anthropologists to justify prevailing racial views of Anglo superiority. Soldiers, settlers, and government agents were incentivized by scientists to rob Native burial sites and provide skulls and other body parts utilized to justify views of Native American savagery and backwardness compared to the Anglo-American. This process was so widespread that by the 1890s the Smithsonian held roughly forty-five

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<sup>19</sup> Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012,) 1.

<sup>20</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 5.

hundred Native American skulls.<sup>21</sup> NAGPRA consultations as well as Native American involvement in changing the institutions that marginalized and displayed them, are important steps in addressing deep grievances from the past. Addressing these grievances will shift the narrative and create a path forward for proper representation, as well as ensuring that Native remains will be safe and treated with respect in the future.

To accurately portray Native history, the National Park Service needs to consider how Native groups view and interact with history. The western dichotomy between fact and myth is less important in Native uses of oral history. What academics consider to be myths are essential parts of individual life and family histories among Native peoples. Indigenous historical narratives are often accentuated with stereotyped images, connotations, and frameworks that impart cultural understanding of events or historical subjects. These frameworks are integral to the construction of a collective identity and a shared understanding of their past.<sup>22</sup> The NPS could recognize this fact by including Native oral histories about park features next to signs discussing the geological or historic importance of a specific park feature or area. The incorporation of Native history at pertinent locations throughout National Parks would go a long way towards increasing visibility and raising awareness for the Indigenous and their history.

Marie Archambeault, an archaeologist working for the Texas Historical Commission, spoke to me about proper outreach and representation for Native Americans. Archambeault has centered her career around being an advocate for Native populations within Texas. She increased consultations with Native American groups in Texas and increased outreach and cooperation with them. Archambeault was also

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<sup>21</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History*, 150.

responsible for creating the current Tribal Consultation Guidelines for the THC. Her advice for consultations first and foremost was to stop talking and listen to what Native Americans have to say, and she stressed the importance of humility and sincerity. Academics have a habit of entering consultations and discussions from the viewpoint of an expert, and that has to be curtailed when dealing with Native American peoples. A prime example of this is demonstrated in the story discussed by Jimmy Arterberry about the SHPO who attempted to tell the Comanche their own history. Building relationships with Native Americans entails being an ally and supporting their struggles and seeing things from their perspective and what is important to them, not what is important academically.<sup>23</sup>

Archambeault also discussed a newer methodology of Native inclusion. This process, called “rematriation,” serves as a corollary to repatriation. It is essentially the same process; with a focus on gender, as it involves consultation with female tribal elders instead of men. This can drastically change the items selected as culturally important during consultations with museums and agencies that hold Native American cultural artifacts. In the rematriation case that Archambeault discussed, a museum held a collection of heritage seeds from a reservation that had been collected around 1910 by an ethnographer. This ethnographer had recorded the location of where he gathered the seeds, while simultaneously recording the history of the families that lived on that part of the reservation. These seeds sat in a museum for a hundred years, and when a female elder was brought in for consultation she noticed the seeds when many other elders had overlooked them. Presently, attempts are underway to reintroduce these seeds back into

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Marie Archambeault, Zoom Conference Call, New Braunfels, Texas. November 8, 2021.

the land they were originally from, restoring an aspect of tribal knowledge and culture that would not have been restored without consultation with a woman elder.<sup>24</sup> This new methodology highlights the ever-shifting nature of consultation and reconciliation between institutions and the Indigenous, and shows just how vital differing viewpoints can be to the process.

Dorothy FireCloud also discussed the consultation process between the National Park Service and Native populations affiliated with various parks. She noted that these interactions are considered government-to-government, and that the tribal groups are treated diplomatically as sovereign nations. To that end, the National Park Service always ensures that the Superintendent of the relevant park takes place in the consultation. They also ensure that this duty is not delegated to someone under the Superintendent to send the correct message of sincerity and respect. FireCloud remarked that the new Director of the National Park Service, Charles Sams III has led to an increased focus on Indigenous representation.<sup>25</sup> Sams was appointed as Director of the National Parks Service in December 2021, and he is the first Native American Director of the NPS, being a member of the Cayuse and Walla Walla tribal nations.<sup>26</sup> Under Sams the NPS is currently working on creating their own consultation guidelines to make the consultation process more standardized, previously they had been relying on the Department of Interior's guidelines. FireCloud was personally tasked with creating these guidelines by Director Sams by the end of 2022. This is an important step, as there are inconsistencies between

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<sup>24</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Marie Archambeault.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Dorothy FireCloud, Recorded Microsoft Teams Call, New Braunfels, Texas. March 8, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> National Park Service, "Charles F. Sams III Sworn In as National Park Service Director," Department of the Interior.



parks as to how each location carries out the consultation processes. A fact that creates frustration in Native consultants when they see they are treated differently and compare how effective or ineffective their consults are compared to other parks.<sup>27</sup>

The National Park Service is aware of the disparity in Native historical representation. FireCloud stated the process of decolonizing historic narratives in the park was first considered in the 2010s, about ten years ago, but that the process of decolonizing in earnest and broadening inclusion has only been undertaken about three or four years ago. The first admission of Native ties to the land came in 1978 with the Native American Religious Freedom Act. This law required the NPS to accommodate the practicing of Native American religious ceremonies and traditions in the parks. While it didn't lead to any historic interpretation or changing of traditional NPS narratives, it was the first time the NPS had to incorporate Native culture in their planning. Interpretation remained stagnant after this until the 1990s and the enacting of NAGPRA.<sup>28</sup>

Today the National Park Service is focusing more on increasing the visibility of Native history and culture within the parks. The NPS is looking into initiatives to hire Native American park rangers, either seasonally or permanently so that they can explain their stories in their own ways. These rangers would disseminate traditional tribal knowledge, while also teaching other NPS employees how to interpret and accurately portray Native history within the parks.

In addition to this, the NPS is experimenting with allowing Native communities to run parts of national parks and convey their history. For example, the NPS is discussing creating a Native-administered cultural center on Alcatraz Island in California. This

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<sup>27</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Dorothy FireCloud.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Dorothy FireCloud.

center is to be run by either members of the American Indian Movement who took over Alcatraz as a protest against repressive governmental policies regarding Native Americans in the late 1960s and early 1970s, or their children. Ideas like this are just now being considered, and this late attempt at inclusion is part of the problem.

An initiative at the Grand Canyon has led to the current renovation of the Desert View Tower being renovated and when completed will be run by tribal park rangers, artisans, and tribal members who will convey their history in their words.<sup>29</sup> Initiatives like these are extremely important, and demonstrate a marked shift in NPS methodology and inclusion of Native history within the parks, although it remains to be seen how widespread policies like this will become. It is also worth noting that the NPS seems to be behind the curve in terms of enacting this representation. When I asked FireCloud about repatriation and changing methodologies with consultations, she was surprised and stated she hadn't heard of repatriation.

### **NAGPRA**

Lastly, NAGPRA has a mixed legacy in terms of increasing representations of Native American history and culture within the National Park Service. The law was an important first step mandating contact between institutions and Native peoples and was integral in forging a formalized process of recognition. The protection of Native American remains and cultural artifacts was long overdue and serves to legitimize the importance of these remains and artifacts, and Native history. The NAGPRA process also brought a heightened awareness of working with Native Americans. Tom Alex and Dorothy FireCloud discussed the importance of these consults and stressed the

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<sup>29</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Dorothy FireCloud.

importance and protocol of the government-to-government relations. Both Alex and FireCloud expressed great faith in the consultation process, but also stressed the need for earnest personal relationships with those they were consulting with, a bond that can't be forced, or legally mandated. FireCloud also stressed that NAGPRA should not mandate continued cooperation, as this should be continued at the discretion of each park based on the unique challenges they face. Finally, the repatriation of remains addresses grievances that have lasted for over one hundred years.

However, NAGPRA falls short in a few places. It does little to ensure lasting connections between relevant Indigenous populations and the parks. The process was, initially at least, also legal and authoritative in a manner that favored the federal government, and the NPS. It has become slightly better more recently but is still inherently unbalanced. Both Arterberry and Archambeault discussed the marginalization of Native Americans during consults. Their complaints stemmed around the fact that Native Americans are being treated as resources, and that consultations being held because they must legally, not because government agencies altruistically wanted to carry them out. Arterberry also noted that the NAGPRA processes should not have been needed. NAGPRA is an attempt to deal with the theft and commodification of Native bodies and culture. If Native Americans had been treated with respect in the first place, this complex process would not have been necessary.

NAGPRA also marginalizes Native Americans who belong to tribes that are not federally recognized. For example, the Lipan Apaches are not recognized by the federal government, and therefore not consulted on issues of repatriation. The Lipan are however recognized by the state of Texas, and as such do receive some consideration from the

state on matters of historic representation and repatriation. Oscar Rodriguez stated that if a Lipan burial site is discovered, the National Park Service will contact the Ysleta del Sur, or the Mescalero Apache. Rodriguez stated that the Lipan have to circumvent NAGPRA, and one way they are doing so is through mitochondrial DNA testing. Many Lipans have undergone this testing and created a genetic profile that can be measured against any discovered remains. If they match, the Lipan ask to claim the remains as descendants. Rodriguez told me that, so far, every Indigenous person found in a burial site in West Texas has matched the Lipan DNA profile. This process is not foolproof, but some institutions recently began to honor the DNA match and will work with the Lipans. The lack of federal recognition is detrimental to the Lipan Apache, and it relegates them to having to pursue unofficial methodologies relying on goodwill to repatriate their ancestors.<sup>30</sup>

Despite recent progress in interpretation and representation of Native histories and cultures in the National Park Service, much work remains to be done. The very recent appointment of Director Charles Sams III has led to a focus on Native outreach and enhanced relations with affiliated tribes at national parks.<sup>31</sup> Also, senior NPS staff such as Dorothy FireCloud, Tom Alex and Superintendent Sholly are acutely aware of the importance of accurately representing Native history, and in forming personal connections with Natives to facilitate longstanding relationships. This change in approach is promising, but widespread change among government institutions is often slow, and it

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<sup>30</sup> Patrick Bassett, Interview with Oscar Rodriguez, Zoom Conference Call, New Braunfels, Texas, March 26, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> National Park Service, "Charles F. Sams III Sworn in as National Park Service Director," Department of the Interior.

may be a while before meaningful changes are standardized across the entirety of the NPS.

There is also a stark difference of opinion between NPS staff and Native Americans regarding the efficacy of consultations and inclusion. Some of my interviewees focused on the present strides made in inclusion, while acknowledging that historically representation of Native peoples has been lackluster. Others believed that they had done their due diligence regarding NAGPRA, and while they respected and acknowledged Native Americans, felt that the purpose of NAGPRA had been achieved. Native Americans that I spoke with felt that consultations hadn't improved much over time, and that the process was entirely too bureaucratic, with NPS employees just following legal obligations. Both sides told me they were willing to listen to the other, incorporate the other side and form common bonds from which they could move forward. However, it is apparent that this mutual understanding and smoothing over of past grievances has not happened yet.

The National Park Service is slow to change, they require congressional funding and bureaucratic approval for new interpretive plans. Consequently, interpretation has been prone to stagnation while the parks struggle to keep up with infrastructure needs and interpretation focused on the ecological and natural wonders of the park. Historical interpretation has continually been a subsidiary priority to these factors. The consultation process needs to be restructured in a way that does away with overt NPS control, such as allowing Natives to initiate consultations as opposed to the NPS initiating consultations with preconceived projects. There also needs to be standardization of consulting and outreach methodology across the NPS. As discussed by FireCloud, the current non-

standardization has led to frustration among Native consultants. While changes are coming both from the NPS regarding their creation of internal consultation guidelines, and congressional changes to NAGPRA, it remains to be seen when these are implemented, what they are, and how successful they will be.

It is also disappointing to see the lack of Native representation in the various park websites. Yellowstone is in the process of incorporating adequate information on the affiliated tribes into their website, but the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary is already well underway. While the consultation and interpretation process no doubt takes time, an event as important as park sesquicentennial did not surprise the NPS. Those websites should have been included in time for the entire celebration. It also remains to be seen if the Teepee celebration will be derivative or properly address and incorporate Native Americans, the scant information about the event on Yellowstone's website, incorporating a picture of a single teepee, is not convincing.

The new programs in some national parks incorporating Native-run sections are exciting and showcase an important shift in tone regarding shared authority and acknowledgement. These areas will allow Native Americans to portray their history, on their land, in their own words. They also provide an important opportunity for the instruction of non-Native park rangers and employees in the proper representation of Native history. This increases visibility of Native culture and history for park visitors, widely disseminating underrepresented history to those most likely unaware of just how deep Native American ties to our national parks are. Hopefully these projects prove successful from an engagement and interpretive standpoint, and their use becomes more widespread across the National Park Service.

## V. CONCLUSION

“As an Indian person in a white world, it becomes frustrating to see non-Indians view the past and what happened to Indian people in the abstract, or as a romantic fantasy complete with feathered warriors, galloping ponies and bugles blowing across the plains...Atrocities are still happening, the Indian people are still under siege.”<sup>32</sup> Spoken in 1993 by anthropologist George P. Horse Capture, these words still depict the reality of historic representations for Native Americans. Native history has largely been a footnote in the narratives promoted by the National Park Service. When it is acknowledged, Native history is often used to briefly explain the struggles and victories of Anglo settlers and explorers who lived in or near these parks. This historic marginalization has prevented Native Americans from dealing with these events in a way that promotes healing and incorporates them into the fold of American history as equals.

In this thesis I have argued that the National Park Service must become more inclusive and allow Native Americans the agency and authority to tell their histories in national parks. This is a complex issue, and factors such as the bureaucratic nature of the NPS and the historic marginalization and alienation of Native American populations ensure that solutions will not be easy to implement. The only adequate method of inclusion will be for the enhancement of currently nascent programs where the Indigenous are hired by the park service to portray their history and train other NPS personnel in adequate representation. Every individual that I interviewed relayed an acceptance to bridge the divide and share their point of view with the other side, NPS and Native American. This is a promising sign, and hopefully this holds true for both sides on

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<sup>32</sup> C. Richard King., “Surrounded by Indians: The Exhibition of Comanche and the Predicament of Representing Native American History,” *The Public Historian* 18, no. 4 (1996): 45.

a larger scale. This issue can only be properly addressed when personal bonds between individuals on both sides are formed, and an earnest desire for change is demonstrated.

Yellowstone National Park has an extensive history of Native habitation and use. By contrast, the history of the region as a national park is exceptionally short. The marginalization of Native use is detrimental to the overall narrative. Tribes such as the Blackfeet, Bannock, Eastern Shoshones, Kiowas and Nez Perces have long histories within the park, although the Sheep Eater were the only tribal group known to inhabit the park year-round. These Native peoples were caught up in American dispossession efforts, and early NPS officials went above and beyond to personally ensure they were stripped from their land. Furthermore, NPS officials actively worked to erase Indigenous populations from the historic record at Yellowstone.

After its founding as the first national park in 1872, early NPS officials such as Albright and Tillotson forwarded Anglo notions of progress and marginalized, or actively worked to undermine Native ties to the land. The NPS disseminated ideas about Native superstition of geyser sites and fear of park features that created an unspoiled wilderness ripe for Anglo protection. This was done partly to assure potential visitors and raise visitation to the new park, but it was also done to serve Anglo feelings of superiority and mastery over the land. This began a trend of erasure that would not change for many years.

While Yellowstone grew with the National Park Service throughout the twentieth century, interpretation regarding Native peoples stagnated. The park's focus on geological and natural wonders within the park boundaries were not fleshed out with ethnographic and cultural studies until the 1980s. There was renewed hope with the



passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in 1990 that more inclusion for Native peoples was on the horizon. However, early attempts at inclusion were clumsy and ill informed. Parks focused on Anglo historic documentation to determine affiliation and relied on an overly legalistic framework set up by NAGPRA. Interpretation at Yellowstone still did not fundamentally change until the 2010s. Yellowstone has continued to make great strides in inclusion recently, most specifically to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the park. Issues persist and lot of those efforts are not public facing. It appears that Superintendent Sholly is very aware of Native American marginalization and is trying to rectify this at Yellowstone. While more needs to be done, this renewed focus on Indigenous history is promising.

Big Bend has extensive archaeological evidence of Native habitation. The earliest records from the Spanish detail the Jumanos, who were endemic to the area. The Comanche and Mescalero Apache migrated to the region in the late seventeenth century. They learned how to successfully navigate the harsh environment hundreds of years before Anglo Americans could. The history of Big Bend differs from Yellowstone in that Big Bend was not a national park until 1944. As such, the history of Native dispossession has less to do with efforts from NPS officials, and more to do with prevailing racial attitudes and borderlands violence perpetrated by Texans.

Dispossession at Big Bend differed slightly due to its remoteness. While Texas forced all Native peoples out of the state 1859, some Apaches and Comanches continued to use the Big Bend area until the 1870s. This process was more violent than the one at Yellowstone, with the U.S. Military fighting numerous battles against both peoples until they could not physically resist further and were removed to reservations. Immediately

after this dispossession, Anglo ranchers and miners moved into the area and development rapidly progressed. It was this period that the National Park Service chose as Big Bend's period of significance, further obscuring the history of Native Americans on the land. This made it easier to overlook Native ties to the region in more recent history, while only acknowledging the archaeological presence of Native peoples.

Big Bend's founding as a National Park inextricably linked it with American patriotic idealism. During the park's dedication, McKay's speech espoused the fact that Big Bend was created while Americans were participating in D-Day, and that its dedication was pushed back until after Texan soldiers came home from Korean War, firmly entrenching the park with Anglo history. The additional statement that peace only came to the region once Anglo settlers moved in further served to marginalize and erase the importance of Native American ties to the land. These statements highlight a trend of Indigenous marginalization that would continue until the end of the twentieth century.

As in Yellowstone's case, Indigenous representation at Big Bend only began to improve in the 1990s. The enactment of NAGPRA paved the way for a consultation process that opened dialogue between the National Park Service and Native Americans. The most recent management plan for the park highlights an awareness of the need for Native representation, although some issues persist. While park management has fulfilled their NAGPRA requirements at the park, they are still struggling with adequate inclusion for Indigenous peoples. There is a consultation process and awareness that specific groups like the Mescalero and Lipan Apaches and the Comanches are very interested in how their history is represented. However, Native perspectives remain marginalized, and this consultation process favors federally recognized tribes.

The first major steps towards acknowledgement of Native history within the park service began in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was at this time the NPS began to conduct ethnographic studies that examined Native ties to the myriad parks and in the enactment of NAGPRA. These studies were monumental in forming a baseline for historians to conduct research and examine these issues, and NAGPRA required the NPS to consult with Native groups, hopefully leading to lasting relationships between the two. NAGPRA brought the issue of the protection of Native cultural sites to the NPS's attention and served to heighten awareness of the importance of Native history. NAGPRA also does little to build upon the importance of NARFA and ensure that Native Americans have access to their religious sites within the parks. While NAGPRA remains a first step, and more action is needed to adequately represent Indigenous history within the parks.

While it is lauded for its role in repatriation efforts and attempts at being more inclusive, NAGPRA itself is a restrictive, authoritative law written in the language and viewpoint of the United States government. This means that apart from only considering the Anglo point of view, it is prohibitively restrictive and detrimentally narrow in places. While it mandated official consults regarding repatriation, the law does not stipulate that these consultations have to reoccur, nor does it mandate that any further attempts at inclusion past the initial repatriation efforts.

The National Park Service traces its change in interpretation to the 1980s, as shown by interviews with park staff available on the NPS website. This process began with a class on interpretive skills and has blossomed since then into a more mature methodological approach incorporating visitor agency and greater inclusion. However,

the NPS' efforts still showcase a lack of foundational public history concepts like shared authority, which demonstrates that the NPS is unwilling to cede control over its narratives to others. This is highlighted in the interviews I've conducted with Comanche nation members Jimmy Arterberry and Carney Saupitty Jr. Both men highlighted a need to tell Indigenous stories from a Native perspective. Arterberry also commented that the NPS still runs consultations in a top-down, bureaucratic manner where they seek to place Native history in a pre-defined space. More work needs to be done to incorporate the voices of non-federally recognized tribes with historic ties to our parks as well. Oscar Rodriguez, a member of the Lipan Apache noted the difficulties and marginalization that occurs when tribal groups are excluded from participating in a meaningful manner. This further complicates the inaccurate presentation of Lipan history at places like Big Bend, such as Rodriguez's example of Lipan exoticization at Josephine's Cantina.

Recent scholarship by Indigenous academics is extremely useful for identifying accurate methodologies for representation. Nēpia Mahuika states that for Native peoples, history is a collective undertaking. This statement was echoed by the Comanches I interviewed. This collectivization of history focuses heavily on oral histories passed down from generation to generation. These histories have nuances and meanings that are only fully understood by the peoples whose stories these are. The academic misuse and misunderstanding of these stories has relegated them to the status of myths and led to inaccurate representation. Amy Lonetree discusses representation of Indigenous history in museums. Lonetree notes that Native run museums and exhibits can provide a way to address past trauma, such as dispossession, and grant Native peoples a way to begin healing from these events. Additionally, newer more inclusive methodologies are

constantly being created, such as the process of repatriation. As discussed by Marie Archambeault, repatriation is the process of consulting with Native American women, and it can radically alter the parts of Native history that are preserved and displayed.

The National Park Service only began to properly acknowledge the historic marginalization of Native history around the 2010s. More inclusive methodologies and reconsidering of proper outreach procedures has only been adopted within the last four or five years. The historic appointment of Charles Sams III suggests a promising focus on outreach and cooperation with Native Americans, and the NPS seems to be rethinking how to approach the issue. The standardization of NPS consulting guidelines, and alterations to NAGPRA are currently being considered, but ideally this will lead to a more inclusive environment for Indigenous populations in the National Parks. It remains to be seen how effective these changes will be.

The National Park Service personnel that I have interviewed are personally invested in representing the history of Native Americans. Tom Alex has a long history of cooperation with Native peoples and has worked diligently to document their history and protect sacred sites at Big Bend. Dorothy FireCloud is in a unique position as the Native American Affairs Liaison for the NPS. As a member of the Rosebud Sioux, she has a unique awareness of the need for expanded Native American representation, and she is in a senior position within the NPS leadership. FireCloud is aware of potential changes to NAGPRA and is personally working on developing NPS specific consultation guidelines to standardize the process throughout the Park Service. Despite this work, the NPS is inherently slow to change due to its inherently bureaucratic nature.

This thesis adds an important dimension to the extant literature on the NPS. Specific Native American ties to parks have been researched and discussed by scholars in the past. My contribution is a focus on the specific historical narratives representing Native Americans by the National Park Service through the lenses of the Indigenous people and NPS workers I have interviewed. In their work *Restoring a Presence*, Peter Nabokov and Lawrence Loendorf state that one topic that hasn't been analyzed is "the ways in which parks and their like *represented* and *interpreted* the claims and experiences of their indigenous neighbors or residents."<sup>33</sup> To that end, I conducted interviews with Native Americans who corroborated that this important distinction remains relevant.

The National Park Service is showing an increasing awareness of the need to accurately represent the histories of Native American peoples. The most promising indications are discussions currently underway for Native-run areas at certain parks. Ideally, this program will be expanded. With the appointment of Charles Sams III, the first Native American director of the NPS, and with other Native Americans in senior roles, including the current Native American Affairs Liason Dorothy FireCloud, the NPS is in a unique position to address the issue the only way it can be done: through adequate cooperation based on an awareness of Indigenous cultural schemas and an explicit acknowledgement of the authority of relevant Native peoples to tell their own history. Without these steps, attempts at Indigenous representation at our national parks will always fall short.

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<sup>33</sup> Nabokov and Loendorf, *Restoring A Presence*, 306.

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