Unseen Trailblazers
Women's Hidden History in America's National Park Service

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In 1873 and 1884, Anna Dickinson and Carrie Welton were two of the first women to climb Longs Peak in what would become Rocky Mountain National Park. One of these women would come home alive. One would not. Anna Dickenson was the only women in a party of thirteen to attempt Longs Peak in 1873. She was also the first white women to climb the peak, just five years after the first white man made the ascent. [1] Feeling ready to attempt the mountain, Dickinson had already successfully climbed multiple "fourteeners" in Colorado, the nickname for mountains over fourteen-thousand feet. [2] Having climbed Mount Washington in New Hampshire twenty-seven separate times, a peak in Colorado was designated Mount Lady Washington in Dickenson's honor. Over a decade later, Carrie Welton set out to climb Long's Peak with a man's suit underneath her dress and an unwavering determination. She hired seventeen-year-old Carlyle Lamb as her guide and the two began their ascent in September of 1884. [3] They too successfully summited Long's Peak. However, on the way down, the two hit a storm. Welton grew weak and Lamb, sensing the urgency of the situation, gave her his spare clothing and went to get help. By the time Carlyle Lamb returned with his father, Welton had already succumbed to the storm. [4] Both Dickinson and Welton are considered pioneers in women's mountaineering and outdoor recreation. Their stories reflect the extreme highs and lows that female environmentalists have faced throughout history.

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[1] Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection* (Duke University Press, 2016), 100.
[2] Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice : A History* (University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 14.
[3] Glenda Riley, *Women in Nature: Saving the "Wild" West* (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 118.
[4] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice,* 14.

As one of the first historians to publish academic work examining women's involvement in the National Park Service, Heather Huyck contributes many new arguments to the topic of women's environmental history. More specifically, she focuses on women's history throughout America's National Parks. [5] In her own chapter of the edited volume, *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation* Gail Lee Dubrow states, "Heather A. Huyck first brought attention to the problem of interpreting women's history in national parks in her 1988 essay "Beyond John Wayne." [6] In Huyck's essay, one of her main claims is that women's history has not been adequately represented or preserved within the National Park System. She argues that if women's history is included in a site at all, it often seems more of an afterthought than a main focal point.

Similarly to Heather Huyck, Polly Welts Kaufman was among the first historians to publish an extensive, academic work analyzing women's history in the National Park System. Kaufman's book, *National Parks and the Women's Voice: A History,* is possibly the most comprehensive account of women's history within the National Parks to be published in one monograph. This book examines contributions to the National Parks and conservation by both individual women and women's groups. Kaufman explores what it means to be a woman in the National Park System and how women's experiences differ from those of men. She also highlights the achievements of individual women that are often hidden behind their more famous male counterparts. She argues that many National Park records set, discoveries made, and goals established, that were first done so by women, are ultimately credited to men. Kaufman also

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[5] Heather Huyck, "Beyond John Wayne: Using Historic Sites to Interpret Western Women's History," *OAH Magazine of History* 12, no. 1 (1997): 7–11.

[6] Gail Lee Dubrow, "Recent Developments in Scholarship and Public Historical Practice," in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation,* ed Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman (The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 6.

argues that women's greatest contributions lie where their perspectives and values diverge from men's. [7] Kaufman introduces an idea proposed by theorist Christine A. Littleton, that suggests a scenario in which men and women accept their differences, and use them to complement each other, promoting collaboration and diversity within conservation. [8]

Polly Welts Kaufman is not the only author to promote inclusivity within the field of history. Denise D. Meringolo's *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* is the first book to take a unique perspective in understanding public history as an established field. Meringolo argues that in order to better understand and further public history as a discipline, it is crucial to take a multidisciplinary approach. Focusing on two main examples of public history in America: the Smithsonian Institute, and the National Park Service, Meringolo validates the work of many academics from various disciplines, including both men and women. Her work is unique because rather than focusing on public history as an entirely separate entity, she recognizes that the achievements of other academic fields, such as sociology, archaeology, and anthropology, come together to bring public history to life.

Although the National Park Service has historically been a male-dominated institution, it has also historically been an elite-dominated institution. In her book, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection,* Dorceta E. Taylor's argues that the widespread American environmentalist movement started as a way for elites to set themselves apart from those in lower social classes. "Saving" the environment was a way for the wealthy to lean into their superiority complex while simultaneously making environmental activities less accessible for anyone but themselves. On the other hand, Taylor mentions that

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[7] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice,* 21.
[8] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice* , xiv.

white, wealthy women were not able to fully participate in strenuous outdoor activities, lest their womanhood come into question. [9] She also brings to attention the ways in which people of color and indigenous people interacted with the environment, both by choice and involuntarily. Taylor's book explores how power, privilege, and elitism were the driving factors behind the American conservation movement.

In 1999, historian Glenda Riley published a book titled, *Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West* that brings light to a unique perspective of women's history. Riley examines women's contributions to the American Western landscape, a geographic region typically thought of to be very masculine and often described as unruly, untamed, or dangerous. She seeks to challenge these stereotypes and highlights women's involvement in western communities in a way that has not been thoroughly explored by historians before. Riley not only believes that women played a huge role in defining the western frontier, but she also believes that gender issues have both "positively and negatively influenced the work and reputations of environmentally minded women." [10] Similarly to Dorceta Taylor, Riley defends the idea that women have significantly contributed to the conservation movement, but also recognizes that this movement is most heavily influenced by white, European traditions, which often excludes minority women from the greater historical conversation.[11] Themes of classism and elitism from Dorceta Taylor's monograph can be found in Riley's book, as the western United States was considered a much lower-class area than the wealthy northeast.

Strengthening Riley and Taylor's arguments, Simon Wendt's *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century* provides examples of the

[9] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 85.
[10] Riley, *Women in Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, xiv.
[11] Riley, *Women in Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, xiv.

way in which the American conservation movement found its genesis in elitism. Wendt's book is the first and most comprehensive account focusing specifically on the work of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and their preservation efforts. [12] The monograph highlights the fact that the DAR was a very elite and prestigious group throughout the 20th century and explores how gender and racial stereotypes were enforced because of this organization. Wendt also seeks to understand how those stereotypes affected all of America and acknowledges that the definitions of race and gender have changed and are still changing over time.

This project seeks to contribute to the broader historical argument by analyzing the ways in which women directly and indirectly contributed to the American conservation movement. Over time, both intentionally and unintentionally, the National Park Service has carefully constructed an image of what a "typical" ranger looks like. This image has changed over time as racial, gender, and social class stereotypes have evolved. Black and indigenous women have been heavily excluded from the National Park Service and discredited when it comes to women's achievements in park history and conservation in general. Women of color interacted with the environment in ways that white women simply did not, but this is a side of preservation that it not often recognized. In fact, minority women were often *forced* to interact with the environment *by* white Americans. In the past and even continuing on today, the history of minority groups was purposely cast aside in favor of upholding Eurocentric stereotypes and painting a stronger American image of peace, victory, and patriotism.

Historically, men have been able to profit off of women's contributions to the parks, while simultaneously pushing them down and restricting their rights. They wanted women close enough to help do the dirty work, but not so close that they would get any credit above men.

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[12] Simon Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century* (University Press of Florida, 2020), 2.

Women were often accused of being too "fragile" and "afraid" to participate in outdoor recreation. In reality, this was a false narrative pushed by the patriarchy in order to control women and keep them from being independent. Despite these hurdles, women's history can be found within every National Park site, even within sites that were not initially intended to focus on it. Women's history *is* United States history, and the foundation of the country rests upon the work of *every* group of people living within. The NPS's mission to preserve America's history and landscape is most successful only when a diverse range of thoughts, ideas, and cultures are considered. In order to reach its fullest potential, the National Park Service must be open to valuing all genders, cultures, and social classes equally.

Following a chronological and topical organizational structure, this paper will explore women's roles within the National Park Service, tracing their conservation and preservation contributions throughout history. Each topic will be analyzed in its historical context, understanding that gender norms and expectations shift over time. The efforts of early women's organization will be examined first, followed by the work of elite women in America's Progressive Era. Next, women's roles in the National Park Service will be discussed, including the origins of Women's Rights National Historic Park in Seneca Falls, New York. Additionally, a section focusing on black and indigenous women will explain how minorities participated in conservationism both voluntarily and involuntarily. Although black and indigenous women's stories are some of the earliest in preservation history, they have only recently been considered in broader historical narratives. Thus, sections on black and indigenous women have been included near the end of this paper. Finally, an overview of women's current involvement in conservation and preservation will be included, providing insight into the present state of these fields.

On August 25, 1916, the Park Service bill was signed by President Woodrow Wilson, effectively establishing the official National Park Service as a government organization. [13] The National Park System (NPS) of America is the Unites States' largest federal outdoor recreation organization. Not only does the NPS claim 63 official National Parks, but it also includes national landmarks, monuments, battlefields, historic sites, seashores, forests, and more. In total, the NPS oversees 433 individual units. Some of the first American National Park rangers were former cavalrymen, hired first and foremost to protect the parks. [14] Early on, men working in the park service or in the field of naturalism were considered to be more "feminine" by others, creating a negative image of park rangers and perpetuating misogyny. These men fought to keep their image of masculinity despite their careers, and in doing so, pushed women out of the professional conservation field altogether. [15] However, women were still able to contribute to the National Park System. In fact, many early preservationist efforts were run and led by women.

Some of the earliest groups of women who organized over a shared interest in the preservation of American history can be traced to the mid 19th century. Around the 1840s, some women's groups began to publicly advocate for the preservation of historical structures that they deemed nationally significant. Individual donors often supported the efforts of these women's groups, which validated their legitimacy. Various women's organizations were directly responsible for preserving the homes of the Founding Fathers, and their success helped define historic preservation as women's work and an extension of the domestic sphere. [16]

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[13] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice* , 35.
[14] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice* , 14.
[15] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice* , 16.
[16] Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 5.

Of the early 19th century women's preservationist groups, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) have been credited as one of the first and most influential organizations. In 1890, Mary Lockwood, Mary Desha, Eugenia Washington, and Ellen Hardin Walworth founded the Daughters of the American Revolution. [17] The genesis of this group was in part a protest by women who felt strongly about being excluded from the patriotic organization, the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). [18] Many women of the time, especially those on the East coast, felt a sense of patriotism toward the country and sought ways to express their views. Women who were relatives or descendants of American Revolution war veterans especially felt a sense of devotion to America and wartime history. These feelings were heightened as the country experienced a new generation of veterans after the Civil War. Furthermore, chaos and turmoil were tearing their way through America during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow Era, causing people seek out any possible sense of order or stability. However, an unfortunate reality is that white women's preservationist groups may have been established in part as a response to fear of black freedom during the Jim Crow Era. Creating preservationist groups was women's way of strengthening Union ideals and improving patriotism, even if it was at the expense of minorities.

One attribute of the DAR that set it apart from similar women preservationist groups was its exclusive membership requirements. Members of the DAR, which is still an active group to this day, are required to prove that they are a descendant of an American patriot who "actively contributed to the cause of the American Revolution." [19] In its original form, the DAR"s main goal was to keep the spirit of the American Revolution alive and honor the people who had sacrificed their lives for freedom. They enlisted members from all over the country, and worked

[17] Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 31.
[18] Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century*, 3.
[19] Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century,* 4.

on a national, rather than local or regional level. The hope was that their mission and collaboration would create a stronger sense of nationalism and American pride.

The Daughters of the American Revolution first began putting their ideologies into practice by advocating for the preservation of certain sites and places significant to Revolutionary War history. They were the first national organization dedicated to protecting historic sites around the nation. [20] One of their first notable successes was the restoration of Philadelphia's Independence Hall in 1896. After a yearlong argument with the SAR over access rights, the city of Philadelphia granted the DAR and the SAR equal access of the building. However, the SAR withdrew, and in 1898, the DAR were able to solely restore the second floor of the building for the public. [21] The successful preservation of other sites such as the Betsy Ross House, Cowpens National Battlefield, and Yorktown Battlefield, can be partly or fully credited to the early efforts of the DAR. [22] Later on, the DAR would be among some of the organizations that helped select buildings and sites to include in the National Park Service. [23]

While the DAR is credited as one of the largest women's preservationist organizations on a national level, it was not the only group working to protect the nation's history. Ann Pamela Cunningham, arguably the most influential women in early preservation work, established the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) in 1853. The MVLA was successful in achieving their main goal: purchasing and restoring Mount Vernon, George Washington's home. [24] Cunningham powerfully summed up the mission of the MVLA by stating, "I was painfully distressed at the ruin and desolation of the home of [George] Washington, and the thought passed

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[20] Barbara J. Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation: The Legacy of Ann Pamela Cunningham," *The Public Historian* 12, no. 1 (1990): 36.
[21] Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 37.
[22] Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 36.
[23] Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century,* 182.
[24] Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 34.

through my mind: Why was it the women of his country did not try to keep it in repair, if the men could not do it?" [25] Cunningham, along with other organizers of the DAR, recognized that women tended to feel a deeper sense of "national allegiance" in peacetime, whereas men exhibited strong patriotism primarily during wartime. [26]

Many historians have compared men and women's interactions with the preservation and the environment, and believe that they are two vastly different experiences. Women often had wider definitions of environmentalism than men did, and believed that conservation included people, cultures, and structures. Men tended to believe that sites and regions were to be conquered, taken, or exploited, while women were taught all their lives to preserve family, community, and culture. In this way, women already approached preservation with different assumptions than men. [27] This was, in part why women's associations were able to gain so much traction in the 19th and 20th centuries. Keeping with domestic gender expectations, women felt that it was their cultural and maternal duty to maintain care of the country's memory. More specifically, DAR members believed it was their responsibility as American women to teach future generations about patriotism and the history of the nation. [28] Women's groups helped reinforce gender stereotypes because they established a role in preservation that people believed was specifically for women. At the time, many Americans felt that to challenge these strict gender stereotypes would be to "jeopardize the nation's stability." [29]

Although women were a minority leading the charge in the preservation movement, not all women were equally welcome to join the cause. Much of the early American conservation

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[25] Cunningham in Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 11.
[26] Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century,* 3.
[27] Riley, *Women in Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, xiii.
[28] Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century,* 3.
[29] Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century,* 1.

movement begun among the urban elites as a way to keep nature close and alive. [30] The Progressive Era, which lasted from the late 19th to the early 20th century, was a time of radical social reform in America. This time period saw an increase in political advocacy, nationwide calls to action, and the creation of social organizations. For minority and lower-class Americans, this meant desperately advocating for more rights and better working conditions. For elite Americans, it meant becoming the faces of new organizations and reform movements. Urban elites were becoming appalled by the behavior of the lower class in the city, and looked to environmentalism in order to reinforce their status and set themselves apart. [31] In 1910, the Boy Scouts of America were established as an attempt for middle class Americans to teach their urban-raised boys traditional frontier values and skills. Feeling strongly that girls were being excluded from these experiences, some women began to create outdoor activities and organizations such as the Girl Scouts of America. [32]

Elite women were given more opportunity than lower-class women to be involved in the preservationist movement, but neither group was yet welcomed into the field of conservation. Even middle and upper-class women were not afforded the same freedoms to take on the wild as men of the same status. [33] In the 15th century, a female writer named Dame Juliana Berners hypothesized that four specific pastimes- hunting, hawking, fishing, and fowling, were honest sports that allowed men to lead long and happy lives. She associated these sports with elite men, and had no mention of women, youth, or the lower class in her writing. [34] Even centuries after the Berners' claims, women were continually excluded from the historical conversation

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[30] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 1.
[31] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 2.
[32] Nancy C. Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 109.
[33] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 83.
[34] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 51.

regarding conservation, preservation, and outdoor recreation. It would be over a century more until the perspectives of women of color were even considered.

Despite elite women's participation in many early preservationist organizations, societal expectations still dictated their roles in conservation. Women in general, but especially elite white women, were expected to remain out of the wilderness itself. Before the mid 19th century, it was assumed that men, and men alone, were to explore and conquer America's wilderness. By the 1870s, women were starting to become accepted into these roles, and were even encouraged to participate in them, but only if they were accompanied by men. [35] Even so, not all women were looked favorably upon when pursing these endeavors. White elite women, who were perceived as "delicate" and "incapable", risked having their womanhood questioned if they took on strenuous outdoor activities. [36] As the matriarchs of America, they were expected to educate and advocate without participating in physical labor.

The latter half of the 19th century saw a shift in women's roles within the conservation movement. Previously, women had been encouraged to participate in preservationist groups such as the DAR and the MVLA. However, around the turn of the 20th century, women began to take on the "explorer" role, which formerly had been reserved exclusively for men. With these new opportunities at hand, women had to find ways to adapt to a field that was not designed with their interests in mind. Until the mid-20th century, it was still widely expected that women were to wear skirts, and consequently, they had to invent devices such as buttons, hooks, and flaps to allow them more mobility outdoors. At the time, women's clothes were not designed with

[35] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 26.
[36] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 85.

flexibility or comfortability in mind, and even riding cross-saddle on a horse was a new obstacle for female explorers. [37]

Women in the Western United States specifically took advantage of the conservationist movement as a way to promote feminism. The word "feminist" held a largely negative connotation in the late 19th century, and women were not able to practice feminism without being met with hostility or criticism. Glenda Riley states in her book, *Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West,* "Women could be activists, and thus subtle feminists, within the conservation movement without raising too many hackles or being labeled "strong-minded women."[38] Although outdoor recreation was not a space originally designed for women, they were not intimidated and found ways to make it their own.

During the early 20th century, some room was finally being made for women to participate in the exploration of natural America. However, their options were still limited in the eyes of the patriarchy. Women were expected to support men in their own endeavors, but never to lead their own expeditions or take credit for important breakthroughs. Jeanne Carr, the first serious women botanist at Yosemite National Park, is recognized as John Muir's mentor. [39] Whereas Muir is credited as being the "father" of the National Park Service, Carr is hardly ever mentioned unless Muir's name is first referenced. Historian Dorceta E. Taylor claims in her monograph that Carr "lived vicariously through Muir's experiences." [40] This statement leaves the reader to wonder whether Carr really was living vicariously through her Muir or whether her work was overshadowed and overlooked by a more famous male figure. It was also widely

[37] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 26.
[38] Riley, *Women in Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, xvi.
[39] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 34.
[40] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 83.

believed at the time that women were wary or fearful of the outdoors. [41] It was not that women were afraid or did not want to participate in conservation, but they were perceived that way by men, so it became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In 1872, Yellowstone was officially recognized as America's first National Park. Although the Park Service bill would not be signed into effect for nearly another 50 years, this was a turning point for conservationists, explorers, and historians alike. The American public would finally be able to unite over shared interests of outdoor recreation on a national level. Soon after Yellowstone was established, other National Parks became recognized in the Western United States. The founding of these new parks coincided with the westward expansion movement, causing people to flock to the Western United States in search of new opportunity and adventure. People from all social classes took advantage of this situation, using the new parks to inspire both themselves and others. Farmers and working-class Americans viewed the parks as new job and business opportunities. The elite utilized the parks for recreation and entertainment. Even certain movements were able to incorporate the National Parks into their campaigns. In 1871, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony visited Yosemite National Park to conclude their California Suffrage Campaign. [42] Little did these women know, their hard work for women's suffrage would be directly commemorated in its own National Park site, Seneca Falls, nearly 100 years later.

When President Woodrow Wilson signed the Park Service bill into effect in 1916, he had tourism and recreation in mind, rather than the preservation of biodiversity. [43] The National Park

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[41] Riley, *Women in Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, xii.
[42] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 33.
[43] Stan Stevens, "A New Protected Area Paradigm," in *Indigenous Peoples, National Parks, and Protected Areas: A New Paradigm Linking Conservation, Culture, and Rights* ed. Stan Stevens (The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 43.

Service was established initially to feed the desire of the American people, rather than to meet the needs of the landscape. The beginning years of the NPS lined up with an increase in automobile use in the 1920s, leading to the parks becoming busier, more crowded, and more polluted. [44] In the 1930s, the National Park Service formally assumed responsibility for historic sites, properties, and battlefields. [45] This was the beginning of a shift for the NPS, a shift that would lead to the merging of both history and nature within the organization. Although it would not be known until later, the work of women's organizations such as the DAR and MVLA were crucial in founding the National Park Service. Many of the historic sites that they fought to protect would end up becoming vital NPS attributes. In fact, the National Park Service valued the work of these women's groups so much that the DAR helped decide which historic sites were to be included in the NPS. However, the work of women in preservation and conservation did not stop after the creation of the National Park Service. Instead, this new development provided women with more opportunities in the field. In the 1920s, women did not hold jobs in the parks but began to push for environmental education to be introduced in schools at an elementary level. [46] By the 1960s, women were being hired as national park interpreters, because men were refusing those jobs. [47] American women were finally being let into the fields of conservation and outdoor recreation. Nevertheless, they were not always welcomed with open arms. It is important to note that at this time, even many women themselves still believed that the park service was for men. [48]

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[44] Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers,* 108.
[45] Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 38.
[46] Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers,* 105.
[47] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 16.
[48] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 34.

Throughout the 20th century, cracks began to form in the preconceived notion that the park service was exclusively for men. In 1982, this notion completely shattered with the creation of Women's Rights National Historic Park in Seneca Falls, New York. The establishment of this site marked a turning point for recognizing women's history in America. In her book, *Restoring Women's History Through Historic Preservation,* Gail Lee Dubrow claims that the Women's Rights National Historic Park is the "prime place" within the National Park System for interpreting women's history. [49] It was also the first NPS site that specifically commemorates women's history.

Despite its historical significance, the creation of Women's Rights National Historic Park was not an easy road. A few simultaneous events eventually gave the park the final push it needed. Firstly, the National Park Service had recently recommended to congress that a park be established to directly commemorate women's rights. Additionally, a man named Ralph Peters had purchased the Elizabeth Cady Stanton's House and decided to hold it until the Stanton Foundation could raise enough money to purchase it. On April 21st, the house was officially transferred over to the National Park Service on what would be known as "Ralph Peters Day". [50] The final nail in the coffin came in 1979, when the Regional Conference of Historical Agencies held a conference on women's history in Seneca Falls. 100 people were expected, but 400 showed up, proving to congress that people were interested in learning about the history

[49] Dubrow, "Recent Developments in Scholarship and Public Historical Practice," 12.
[50] Judith Wellman, "It's a Wide Community Indeed: Alliances and Issues in Creating Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, New York" in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation,* ed Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman (The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 243.

women's rights. [51] Women's Rights National Historic Park in Seneca Falls, New York was finally opened to the public on July 17, 1982. [52]

The National Historic Park at Seneca Falls was the first NPS site to directly recognize women's history, but it would not be the last. However, there is still a significant absence of parks dedicated to women and women historical figures. In her article, historian Heather Huyck writes that National Park Service sites can be divided into three categories: "places that focus on women's history, places that include women's history, and places that surprise us with women's history". [53] Even at sites where it is not specifically commemorated, women's history is still very much present if one knows where to look.

While white American women fought for recognition in conservation and outdoor recreation, other minority groups had been putting in just as much work only for their voices to be silenced. More specifically, black and native Americans were two of the most vital minority groups to the conservation movement. As Dorceta Taylor powerfully writes, "the achievements of women of color and low-income white women were all but ignored in popular conceptions of women." [54] White, elite women were the ones leading the charge when it came to preservationist movements and organizations. This is because they were the ones privileged enough to be listened to by other white Americans. It does not mean that women of color did not contribute equally, but rather that their voices were ignored. Even preservationist groups such as the DAR turned a blind eye to African American and Indigenous American history, "other than to acknowledge that their ancestors had owned slaves or had fought Native Americans." [55] It was

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[51] Wellman, "It's a Wide Community Indeed: Alliances and Issues in Creating Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, New York," 236.
[52] Wellman, "It's a Wide Community Indeed," 242.
[53] Huyck, "Beyond John Wayne," 9.
[54] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 84.
[55] Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 30.

because of this purposeful omission that women of color could not participate in the traditional early American conservation movement as it is referred to in history. Specifically in the Western United States, women's accounts of natural history before the 20th century are often overlooked, "especially if those women were not white or academics." [56] Before the mid 20th century, very few minority women were able to claim formal environmental history careers such as nature writers, illustrators, botanists, or wildlife observers. [57] Again, this absence of participation was not due to lack of interest, but rather due to racism and exclusion. In fact, future achievements by women of color can be considered all the more impressive considering the oppression and discrimination they repeatedly faced.

As the first group of people to live on American soil, Indigenous Peoples were the first conservationists. Although they were barred from participating in the 19th and 20th century conservationist movement, indigenous groups protected and maintained the American landscape centuries long before the first Europeans even set foot in North America. By this standard, it can be argued that Native Americans were effectively the ones to begin both the conservationist and preservationist movements, even if their efforts went unrecognized for centuries. The very perception of the American conservation movement as having begun in the 19th century fails to recognize the art, traditions, stories, and illustrations created by indigenous people, who regarded nature and wildlife at the very forefront of their existence.

Ironically, the National Park Service, whose main mission has been to protect and preserve American landscape and culture, has had a long and rocky history with the indigenous American population. After being driven out of lands that would later become National Park

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[56] Riley, *Women in Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, xi.
[57] Vera Norwood, *Made From This Earth: American Women and Nature* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 19.

sites, Native tribes found themselves in various disputes with park management over access to resources. Fish, wildlife, flora, and other natural resources remain frustratingly limited to Native populations within United States National Parks. [58] To park officials, these resources are features of the landscape to be preserved; to Indigenous Americans, they are culturally significant assets needed for survival.

Unfortunately, the biggest pitfall of the American conservation movement was more than its dismissal of native culture and contributions. There were much darker elements at play that had detrimental effects to the indigenous American population. In the late 19th century, white Americans had begun to scout out sites to be included in the emerging National Park System. Many early National Parks were chosen plots of land in the Western United States, numerous of which housed various Indigenous tribes. Over time, countless tribes would be forcibly removed from their land as the NPS expanded. Historian Stan Stevens addresses this issue in his book, *Indigenous Peoples, National Parks, and Protected Areas: A New Paradigm Linking Conservation, Culture, and Rights*. Stevens writes, "In international conservation circles, it was once widely assumed that this [conservation] could only be achieved by removing resident Indigenous peoples entrusting protected areas solely to state administration." [59] This statement makes apparent the extent to which conservation through the 19th and 20th century excluded anyone who was not white. Native Americans were forced to use environmental knowledge and skills during forced treks and stays on reservations.

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[58] Thomas F. Thornton "A Tale of Three Parks: Tlingit Conservation, Representation, and Repatriation in Southeastern Alaska's National Parks" in *Indigenous Peoples, National Parks, and Protected Areas: A New Paradigm Linking Conservation, Culture, and Rights,* ed Stan Stevens (The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 109.
[59] Stan Stevens, "Introduction," in *Indigenous Peoples, National Parks, and Protected Areas: A New Paradigm Linking Conservation, Culture, and Rights* ed. Stan Stevens (The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 3-4.

Despite history's common interpretation of events, the earliest conservation efforts were not led by elite white women or adventurous expeditioners. This achievement can be credited to Indigenous Americans who spent centuries maintaining and preserving the American landscape. [60] However, White American women were labeled "pioneers" in the field as they explored the very land that they had forced native women to leave. It is ironic that indigenous people were removed from their land in the name of conservation, but they were able to conserve the land much more effectively than white administrators and government officials who had monetary or political motives. Many National Parks have been created at the expense of Indigenous people, but have also failed to meet conservation expectations and long-term biodiversity goals. [61] The NPS was not originally established with preservation in mind, but was instead driven by tourism. The lands so carefully nurtured by Native Americans quickly became ransacked in the name of exploration and Eurocentric conservationism.

Despite a vast history of tension and conflict, there have been efforts between both the NPS and Indigenous tribes to repair a broken relationship. Under the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Indigenous and non-Indigenous Alaskan communities are authorized to practice subsistence hunting on NPS land. [62] In the South Unit of Badlands National Park, which is part of the Pine Ridge Reservation, hunting is also permitted. [63] This area of the park is now formally comanaged by the NPS and Lakota tribe. [64] As the largest National Park in the contiguous United States, Death Valley's entrance sign reads, "Homeland of

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[60] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 84.
[61] Stevens, "Introduction," 3.
[62] Stan Stevens, "Indigenous Peoples, Biocultural Diversity, and Protected Areas," in *Indigenous Peoples, National Parks, and Protected Areas: A New Paradigm Linking Conservation, Culture, and Rights* ed. Stan Stevens (The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 45.
[63] Stevens, "Indigenous Peoples, Biocultural Diversity, and Protected Areas," 45.
[64] Stevens, "A New Protected Area Paradigm," 78.

the Timbisha Shoshone", recognizing the tribe that still lives there. In the year 2000, 300 acres of land within Death Valley was restituted to the Timbisha Shoshone by Congress. A third of the land within the park was designated a Timbisha Shoshone Natural and Cultural Preservation Area, and provisions were given to the tribe in order to comanage the park with the NPS. [65] As the 21st century progresses, Park officials and Indigenous tribes continue to work together to restore Native history and culture.

At the same time that Native Americans were being driven out of their lands in the West, Black Americans were being held captive in the East. They too were expected to interact with the environment in untraditional, yet horrific ways. For two and a half centuries, both black men and women were forced to work outside as slaves in almost every possible weather condition. Female slaves in particular were able to use learned and observed environmental knowledge to limit cotton production and accelerate soil exhaustion. At the time, these were some of the best forms of resistance possible. [66] Other enslaved women encountered the wilderness when their enslavers trafficked them across the landscape as chattel, or when they were escaping captivity. [67] They were forced to use nature's resources as food sources, hiding places, and temporary shelters as they endured and escaped unimaginable conditions.

Similarly to native women, black women's experiences in Mother Nature were often cast aside in favor of a more patriotic view of conservationism. Even in the 20th century, when black women assisted white explorers on their journeys, they were seen merely as "tools" to achieve expeditionary goals. These women are rarely recognized for their participation in expeditions, and they were certainly not acknowledged at the height of the conservation movement.

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[65] Stevens, "A New Protected Area Paradigm," 79.
[66] Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers,* 10.
[67] Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement,* 84.

Additionally, in the Jim Crow Era, black Americans were commonly banned from public parks, lakefront areas, and other outdoor recreation sites. [68] However, despite the oppression they faced throughout most of American history, black women were eventually able to find their place in conservationist spaces. Hazel Johnson, known as the "Mother of Environmental Justice", made it her mission to educate others on the disproportionate environmental hazards faced by low-income populations and people of color. Johnson received numerous awards for her work, which is carried on today by her daughter, Cheryl Johnson. [69]

Early preservation rarely recognized Black history, and never made it a central focus. Historian Barbara J. Howe recognized this phenomenon stating, "If the early preservationists saved a slave cabin, it was because it was on the grounds of Mount Vernon, not because they consciously preserved and interpreted a site related to African American history." [70] Howe's statement powerfully encapsulates the American preservation movement's dismissal of black experiences. Not only have the physical remnants of black history not been adequately preserved and recognized, but in many cases, they have been purposefully destroyed. For example, over time many objects in the home of Harriet Tubman had been lost, sold, or destroyed. [71] In the 1920s, the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) purchased the Tubman home in an attempt to save it from complete destruction. Their efforts were ultimately successful, as the house was officially added to the National Park Service in 1974. Similarly to the DAR, the NCNW was a women's group founded to preserve the integrity of the nation's history. The

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[68] Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers,* 90.
[69] Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers,* 216.
[70] Barbara J. Howe, "Women in the Nineteenth-Century Preservation Movement" in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation,* ed. Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman (The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 18.
[71] Fath Davis Ruffins, "Four African American Women on the National Landscape" in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation,* ed. Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman (The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 65.

NCNW's primary goal is to spotlight female black historical figures and bring attention to their contributions. In 1982, the NCNW's headquarters, the Council House, was declared a National Historic Site. In 1994 it was officially obtained by the National Park Service. Today, the Council House, located in Washington D.C., is home to the Black Women's Research Archives. [72]

Other historically significant sites, such as The Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged and businesswomen Maggie L. Walker's home in Richmond Virginia specifically commemorate black history and culture within the National Park Service. The Tubman house, which is arguably the most famous black history site within the NPS, is owned and managed by the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church. [73] Furthermore, the Maggie L. Walker Historical Foundation laid the groundwork for Maggie Walker's home becoming a National Park site in 1985. [74] These forementioned NPS sites are just a few of many established and managed through the hard work of black communities and organizations. In fact, much of the African American history within the National Park system was first preserved by small black organizations, usually women's groups. [75]

Although women have played both traditional and untraditional roles in the American conservation movement, their contributions have only more recently become part of the historical conversation. Heather Huyck was the first historian to bring attention to women's history within the National Park service in her 1988 essay, "Beyond John Wayne". [76] Huyck argues that women's history has not been adequately represented or preserved within the national Park System, and that if it is included at all, it almost seems an afterthought. However, since her

[72] Ruffins, "Four African American Women on the National Landscape," 66.
[73] Ruffins, "Four African American Women on the National Landscape," 60.
[74] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 228.
[75] Ruffins, "Four African American Women on the National Landscape," 63.
[76] Dubrow, "Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation," 6.

essay was published, women's conservation history has come further than ever. In the summer of 1989, the National Park Service appointed five new female superintendents, which raised the total from seven to ten percent. [77] As of 2006, one third of all National Park rangers were women, and twenty percent of those women were minorities. [78] Furthermore, in the late 1990s, the NPS attempted to find any park sites that did not have some sort of female presence and history. Of the 375 units of the NPS at the time, not one site was found without some sort of women's history. [79] It is around this time that the National Park System finally began to recognize the importance of women's history and consider their conservationism valuable. This is a far cry from the exclusion and dismissal that women faced just a century earlier. Countless women throughout history have paved the way for present day female representation within academia. Even outside of the NPS, women have ample opportunity to become formally educated in fields such as history, archaeology, botany, ornithology, and zoology.

Despite recent progress, there is still work to be done in terms of honestly portraying women's history in America. Various historical projects and groups are still pushing for more representation for not only women, but all minority groups. The Women's History Landmark Project and the Women's History Education Initiative are collaborations between the National Park Service and the Organization of American Historians. These groups have notably increased the number of National Historic Landmarks significant to women's history and have also worked to improve the interpretation of women's history in existing parks. [80] Old preservationist groups such as the DAR and NCNW are still very much active today, and continue to dedicate their energy to preserving American women's history.

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[77] Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 60.
[78] Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 23.
[79] Huyck, "Beyond John Wayne," 7.
[80] Dubrow, "Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation," 13.

In order to fully understand America's history, it is vital to consider all perspectives, especially those that have been silenced in the past. Despite the false narrative that women were too "fragile" to participate in environmentalism, women's history can be found all over the American landscape, including within every National Park site. Women, specifically those of lower social class and women of color, have long been pushed out of professional conservation and preservation circles. In favor of upholding a Eurocentric view of nationalism, the unique environmental history of minority groups has been cast aside and largely ignored. This is particularly problematic when considering these minorities were often *forced* to interact with the environment *by* white Americans. National Parks quickly became white sanctuaries that pushed people of color out, while catering to westward expansion and manifest destiny. However, the National Park Service's image of a "typical" ranger has evolved over time, and is currently much more inclusive than it ever has been. Even still, there is considerable work to be done to adequately highlight women's contributions to the National Park Service. American history includes the stories of all people living within, and the country's foundation rests upon the work of every group that has contributed to its development. The conservation and preservation of America's history and landscape through the National Park Service is most successful only through the culmination of diverse thoughts, ideas, work, and cultures. Only when the perspectives of all genders, cultures, and social classes are valued equally will the National Park Service reach its fullest potential.

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