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How Attitudes and Values Shape Access to National Parks

Introduction

This article investigates how dominant Western societal attitudes and values have shaped access to national parks both historically and currently. Parks and protected areas are powerful cultural and spiritual icons epitomizing Western ideals of freedom and independence for many North Americans (McNamee 1993; Primm and Clark 1996). Ecological integrity provides a sound foundation upon which parks are established. Recreationists participate in a diverse range of leisure activities in parks, partly because of access to the ecological richness that parks provide. These images of ecosystem health coupled with visitor satisfaction are perpetuated by park agencies keen to engender public support. However, this view of national parks does not mirror reality.

National park agencies worldwide have responded to Western societal beliefs and values in the development of park policies and programs. Over time, and in response to these shifting values, park agencies have expropriated local peoples, uprooted communities, and inflicted significant socioeconomic damage (Berg et al. 1993; Stevens 1997; Straede and Helles 2000). User fees have been instituted restricting the access of low-income and other visitors. The physically challenged are subject to unique constraints that limit participation in park activities (Henderson 1991). The income level, gender, and physical ability of park users is rarely taken into consideration by park planners (Kraus 1987; Toth and Brown 1997). This article explores how access to national parks has been shaped by prevailing Western attitudes and values.

Attitudes and Values that Shaped Access to Parks

The concept of a park, as a natural area delineated and controlled by humans, originated in Mesopotamia in 1500 BC (Bailey 1978). Spiritual values, based on the need to connect the individual with the divine, shaped the creation of these earliest parks. The Kirishnauru or, "The Park in the Centre of the City," was a 600x1500-foot natural area connected to a temple complex that was established and used for rituals. Parks in ancient China were created to serve similar purposes. Henneberger (1996) writes:

> The large 'Numinous Preserves' of the Han were thought of as micro-representative of the Chinese cosmic order. These 'parks as empire' stemmed from the prototypical divine parks of the mythical Golden Age that held symbolic meaning for the Chinese in their control over nature. They were practical, earthly paradises where sacrifices to the gods were performed to assure an orderly world (p. 128).

The creation of these parks for reli-

gious purposes reflected the values of these early societies. Access to the earliest "parks" was closely linked to the spiritual values of the ruling class. While ostensibly accessible to pilgrims, the Kirishnauru were designed and maintained by holy men for their own activities. These "parks" were established as bounded natural spaces set apart from other areas. Designed as sanctuaries, these "parks" reinforced the spiritual priorities of the religious ruling elite.

Cultural attitudes towards nature later shifted and nature, *for its own sake,* became an integral aspect of parks. In Egypt and Persia, rulers built garden reserves for the purposes of hunting, fishing, and achieving enlightenment. These reserves also acted as a repository for exotic animals brought to the monarch as spoils of war (Henneberger 1996). The utilitarian value of parks, provided primarily through the usage of wildlife, gained in significance, although spiritual values were still important (Nelson 1993). With these prevailing attitudes, parks were accessed only by people of distinction in society.

In Britain, game reserves and parks established by royal charter proliferated throughout the medieval period and emphasized the concept of park as playground. Most of these parks were enclosed areas used for hunting by royalty and members of the landed gentry (Cantor and Hatherley 1979; Henneberger 1996). Access to game reserves was granted by invitation only and extended to the favored few. Illegal entry to these reserves by members of the lower classes was subject to strict punishment. Poachers caught snaring rabbits in the game reserve served as a rude intrusion on the tranquil world of a country gentleman (Lawrence 1991). These game reserves were pleasure-grounds for the gentry who controlled and manipulat-ed natural space and all of the elements contained within it. For the majority of British society, game reserves were a place where subsistence activities could be conducted. Those who transgressed these metaphorical and physical boundaries were not only guilty of trespassing on private property, but, more significantly, of flouting societal attitudes and values.

The later development of the middle classes and shifts in attitudes towards recreational and social pursuits stimulated the establishment of the "landscape park" of country homes and towns. Landscape parks, designed for the edification and delight of residents and visitors, were incorporated into English and French towns and cities in the 18th century (Malcolmson 1973; Nelson 1993). These parks were more accessible to all members of society than were the earlier game reserves (Chadwick 1966).

In moving from private to public space, parks in towns theoretically became more accessible to a greater number of citizens. Public gardens and boulevards were established to allow promenading residents the opportunity of putting themselves on display (Chadwick 1966; Thomas 1983). Colorful and artfully designed botanical gardens were a dominant element of these early parks, but clearly their primary function was sociocultural. These gardens represented public space, but the upper classes claimed the space as their own. Although few regulations applied, restrictions on access to these areas were imposed by the prevailing moral code. Dress and deportment were monitored informally by visitors and those not adhering to this moral code could be encouraged to leave (Taylor 1999).

Values in the "New World"

When Europeans immigrated to the United States in the late 17th and 18th centuries, many brought with them the attitudes and values of a "civilized" society (Nash 1982). Although some people settled in established towns such as Boston and New York, most pioneers in the "New World" were confronted with an unfamiliar and harsh environment (Nash 1982). Survival was seen to be dependent upon asserting control over the elements of nature (Dillard 1993).

The mistrust of the hostile landscape experienced by these pioneers was also manifested through a fear of aboriginal peoples. According to Hendee et al. (1978): "Clearly, the wilderness was a barrier. It hindered movement, it harbored Indians, and it frequently possessed little that could help settlers prosper" (p. 356). The unfamiliar customs, appearance, and sense of oneness with the wilderness displayed by aboriginal peoples were foreign to the settlers. The attitudes and values of the European settlers towards the "New World" did not embrace the value systems of aboriginal peoples.

The pioneering desire of the settlers to modify the landscape was displayed through the exploitation of natural resources and by driving aboriginal peoples from their traditional lands. Inherent in the settlers' goal to establish new colonies and vanquish the wilderness was the attitude that the land belonged to them. By staking a claim and working the land, the settlers believed that the land was rightfully theirs. In reality, the "New World" that the settlers set out to conquer was new only to them.

Many early pioneering settlements in the United States were carved out of the wilderness. Access to the land was gained through conquering nature and this was accomplished through the exploitation of natural resources (Hendee et al. 1978; Nash 1982). In securing their claim on the land, these settlers also sought to deny access to the original aboriginal inhabitants.

Prevailing attitudes in the dominant society towards the landscape continued to shift. In immigrating to the United States, settlers sacrificed security and familiarity as well as a direct connection to their culture. Once the land was "conquered," settlers wished to preserve the scenic vistas of the "New World" that reminded them of the grandeur of Europe (Nash 1982).

The Romantic period in 18th-century Europe was significant in influencing attitudes towards nature. According to the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, cultures previously deemed primitive and untamed were idealized and wilderness was represented as paradise on Earth. In the early 1830s, American artist George Catlin depicted aboriginal peoples as "noble savages" driven from their homelands by white conquerors. Catlin asserted that aboriginal peoples should remain on their traditional lands and argued that the cultures of aboriginal peoples were under attack (Hendee et al; 1978; Berg et al. 1993). Catlin advocated for the creation of a park where both natural elements and human beings were present.

By the 19th century, urbanization within American towns was becoming more prevalent and planners incorporated natural elements such as green squares and tree-lined streets in towns. The landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted sought to encourage residents to engage with natural settings (Taylor 1999). As the originator of the greenbelt concept, Olmsted's ideas were instrumental in introducing natural elements into urban areas throughout North America (Stormann 1991). According

to Rybczynski (1995), "This naturalization of the city represents an unconscious move away from Europe and toward the American Indian urban model, in which architecture was subordinated to the landscape" (p. 52).

This shift in societal attitudes towards nature was also evident in contemporary literature. The works of American Transcendentalists, including Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, extolled the spiritual wonder and delight to be found in natural spaces. Writing in the mid- to late 19th century, they celebrated the beauty of natural environments and portrayed humans as insignificant beings (Thoreau 1966; Emerson 1982; Fuller 1982). Nature was still heralded as a haven for those seeking spiritual fulfillment, but greater emphasis was placed on the wilderness as a sanctuary for *all* individuals rather than solely for the upper classes.

The publication of *Man and Nature: or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* in 1864 by George Perkins Marsh detailed how humans negatively affected the natural environment and helped to marshal public support for the park ideal. The works of the Transcendentalists and others such as Marsh heavily influenced the activist John Muir. Muir founded the Sierra Club and became one of the most powerful and outspoken advocates for protected areas in the United States. Muir's works are permeated with a sense of wonder and galvanized American society upon publication (Hendee et al. 1978).

Sax (1998) states:

Proposals to preserve scenic places followed a period of romantic idealism that had swept the country—the religious naturalism of Thoreau and Emerson, romanticism in the arts and early nostalgia for what was obviously the end of the untamed wilderness, already in submission to the ax, the railroads and the last campaign against the Indians (p. 113).

Attitudes and Values that Shaped the Creation of North American National Parks

In response to vigorous lobbying by John Muir and public support for parks, in 1864, Yosemite was designated as the first public park in the United States. Since Yosemite was deeded to the state of California, Yellowstone, designated in 1872, is considered to be the world's first national park (Stevens 1997).

The creation of Yellowstone National Park reinforced societal beliefs that the protection of outstanding natural landscapes was of public benefit. However, the creation of Yellowstone also reinforced the concept that parks possessed practical value (Sax 1998). According to Glick and Alexander (2000): "From its inception, Yellowstone National Park has been viewed as a treasure trove of natural wonders on the one hand, and as a cash cow on the other" (p. 185).

Created as a public park, Yellowstone was accessible to all citizens. However, due to the constraints imposed by a lack of transportation infrastructure, lack of leisure time, and high traveling costs, physical accessibility to the park was limited. The Northern Pacific Railroad became the principal means of accessing Yellowstone and other parks (Glick and Alexander 2000).

In Canada, the origins of the national park system were also related to the conservation of natural features *and* economic benefits (McNamee 1993; Carter-Edwards 1998). In 1885, Banff was established as a national park. In 1887, park boundaries were expanded and Banff became known as Rocky Mountain

Park. Although Prime Minister John A. MacDonald supported the concept of protection, he was first and foremost a pragmatist. He stated: "The Government thought it was of great importance that all this section of country should be brought at once into usefulness"(Brown 1969:49). Canada's early national parks, including Banff, focused on attracting wealthy visitors as well as protecting natural features. Access to Banff was provided through the establishment of a railway system. However, for the average citizen, the costs of traveling to Banff were still prohibitive and it is likely that most early visitors to both Banff and Yellowstone national parks were members of the upper classes.

Early national parks in North America reflected 19th-century societal beliefs that parks were valuable because they protected outstanding natural features and generated income. However, these parks also reflected earlier ambivalent attitudes towards local aboriginal peoples. According to Achana and O'Leary (2000):

> The Yellowstone model of national parks that views parks essentially as instruments of conservation with minimal human involvement has not been enthusiastically embraced by adjacent local communities. Tensions that originate from the adoption of some exclusionary natural science-based park management policies are translated in local communities as a failure to address their transboundary concerns (p. 75).

In the late 1800s, these exclusionary policies (based on Western ideals of protection) extended to evicting aboriginal peoples from their communities within areas proposed as national parks. This policy was enforced even if these peoples had lived in the area for generations before park boundaries were imposed (Berg et al. 1993). One example of the spurious treatment of aboriginal peoples by the National Park Service is the case of the Havasupai people in Northern Arizona. Living in the Grand Canyon area from at least the 12th century, the Havusupai way of life was based on farming, hunting, and gathering. Summers were spent in watered areas below the rim of the canyon and winters were spent on the plateau (White 1993). The traditional territory of the Havasupai extended from the south rim of the Grand Canyon to Flagstaff, Arizona. In 1882, at the behest of the United States government, the Havasupai people were confined to a reservation in the village of Supai only 518 acres in size. Prior to 1882, the Havasupai used the village of Supai as only one of several summer farming areas. White (1993) states:

> Confinement to such a small area and exclusion from the area that became the Grand Canyon National Park led to a tense relationship between the Havasupai tribe and the National Park Service.... The confinement also eliminated many of the Havasupai's traditional activities, which over the past century has taken its toll socially, culturally and economically (p. 341).

Contemporary Attitudes and Values Shaping Access to Parks

Access and local peoples: the Canadian context. As indicated, some national parks have been established on lands traditionally inhabited by aboriginal peoples, and in several cases these peoples have been forcibly removed and their access to traditional activities and resources denied (Hodgins and Cannon 1998). In Canada, it was government policy to

expropriate local residents (aboriginal and non-aboriginal) and dissolve communities located within the boundaries of proposed national parks. For example, more than 200 families were expropriated to create Forillon National Park in Quebec and 1,200 residents were removed from their land in the establishment of Kouchibouguac National Park in New Brunswick (McNamee 1993).

According to McNamee (1993), "Until the 1960's, there was little mass resistance to expropriation for national parks or other purposes. However, society began to reassess its relationship with those elements that exercised authority over daily life. This manifested itself in mass resistance by the residents affected by government plans to establish Kouchibouguac National Park" (p. 27). As a result of the organized public outcry, an inquiry was launched into the expropriations at Kouchibouguac. This inquiry condemned the governmental practice of expropriations of local peoples for the purposes of national park establishment. Following the inquiry, the government modified its practice of removing local peoples before the establishment of a national park.

This revised policy was evident in the process leading up to the establishment of Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland. In 1970, the Family Homes Expropriation Act was passed by the Newfoundland legislature and stipulated that none of the 125 families affected by the park would be forced to move. Today, seven communities are contained within the boundaries of Gros Morne National Park (McNamee 1993). The federal government also amended its policy in 1979 to prohibit the expropriation of private landowners in areas where it wants to establish new national parks. Private land can now only be acquired for the establishment of parks if the

owner is willing to sell the land to the government. In addition, traditional activities and uses of the park by aboriginal peoples are allowed upon the negotiation and/or settlement of land claim agreements. This is most prevalent in Canadian national parks in the North, including Vuntut and Ivvavik national parks.

Access and local peoples: the international context. Lusigi (1981) contends that national parks are a Western idea introduced to developing countries by colonial powers and implemented under pressure from international conservation organizations. Not surprisingly, relationships between national parks and local residents in developing countries are typified by conflict (Hough 1988; Glavovic 1996; Straede and Helles 2000). While the goal of conservation of natural resources is laudable, the process of evicting local peoples from within park boundaries and otherwise marginalizing local communities has had adverse socioeconomic impacts for both the community and the park agency (Hough 1988; Stevens 1997).

The concept of strict protection causes particular challenges in developing countries which may be ill-suited to cope with and manage monitoring and enforcement of park legislation. Negative consequences for local communities include the restriction of access to traditional resources, the disruption of local cultures and economies by tourists, increased depredations on crops and livestock by wild animals, and the displacement of peoples from their traditional lands (Lusigi 1981).

Conflict may result in resentment towards park staff, leading to vandalism in the park itself, continued harvesting of natural resources, and other violations of park policies (Hough 1988; Nepal and Weber 1994). Many national parks in developing countries

are established in areas where communities are heavily reliant on local resource use. As the human populations in these areas increases, so too does the pressure to utilize natural resources. Park policies prohibiting traditional activities and restricting access to local peoples results in significant hardships for these communities. Thus, it is likely that these repressive policies will be violated. Conflict between parks and local peoples due to restricted access and other factors is recognized as an on-going challenge in developing countries (Nepal and Weber 1994; Glavovic 1996).

Access and affluence. In the 1990s, the national park systems in North America began implementing economic policies that dramatically affected the accessibility of parks for all visitors. Primarily due to an economic recession and the failure of both national governments to adequately fund parks, park agencies adopted a multifaceted policy of fiscal restraint. Park agencies adopted a "corporatist" philosophy based on demonstrating fiscal responsibility. As private and public sectors struggled to adapt to a changing economic milieu, the boundaries between these two sectors began to blur (Thurston and Richardson 1996). Government agencies, including Parks Canada and the National Park Service in the United States, began incorporating competitive business practices that had previously been relegated to the private sector (Johnson and McLean 1996).

One option implemented by national park agencies was to impose or increase user fees. Charging a user fee to enter and/or access park services evokes a powerful response in the general public (Aspinall 1964; Lowry 1993; Miller 1998). According to More and Stevens (2000): "Few recreation issues are as controversial as imposing fees for the use of public lands" (p. 5). It raises fundamental questions regarding which among a country's resources should be provided free of charge and to whom parks belong. Laarman and Gregersen (1996) state:

> In many settings, access to public wildlands has been everyone's right, particularly for dispersed uses of lands not privately claimed. If the use of public lands is everyone's right, then is it justifiable for a government to deny access to individuals who cannot or will not pay a fee? (p. 252).

Arguments supporting the imposition of user fees fall into one of three categories: equity, revenue generation, and efficiency. Parks Canada and other agencies uphold the imposition of user fees on the grounds that they promote social equity (Leclerc 1994; Miller 1998). Parks provide services, such as protecting natural resources and raising environmental awareness, for all citizens. However, parks also provide services that only benefit park visitors. According to Parks Canada, user fees promote equity by shifting the burden of financing these activities from taxpayers in general to those who benefit directly (Leclerc 1994). Additionally, proponents of the user fee system assert that user fees recover costs and provide revenue to improve overall park services during periods of economic restraint (More 1999). Lastly, user fees enable recreation resources to be allocated more efficiently through shifting use between sites and so avoiding user conflicts to some degree.

Park user fees discriminate against those individuals with lower incomes, since fees constitute an obstacle to park access (Leclerc 1994; Scott and Munson 1994). Some park professionals believe that people with low

incomes have a greater need for government park and recreational services (Taylor 1999; More and Stevens 2000). Constraints on park visitation for those with low incomes include distance from parks and limited access to transportation, fear of crime, and poor health. Income is the single most significant constraint to park visitation (Scott and Munson 1994). Some who favor user fees state that lower-income individuals are already priced out by high travel and recreation equipment costs and that resource-based recreation ranks relatively low among the priorities of lower-income individuals (More and Stevens 2000).

According to Laarman and Gregersen (1996), a flexible system of different user fees can be instituted that is tailored to fit each situation. For example, general fees can be maintained at a low level to ensure that no visitor is turned away and individual services and facilities can be priced at cost. However, this system poses considerable operational challenges.

Access and the physically challenged. Physically challenged individuals face barriers related to access to parks—barriers that are both physical and metaphorical (Potter 1989). Physical barriers include uneven terrain and steep slopes throughout the park, as well as trails unsuitable for wheelchairs, limited wheelchair accessibility to park facilities, signage that is not interpreted into Braille, and lack of hearing devices for the hearing impaired (Waldichuk 1989). Physically challenged visitors may also be constrained by the attitudes of park planners who may design parks and park services with the young and able-bodied park visitor in mind.

In recent decades, greater emphasis on recreation and leisure planning for the physically challenged has occurred. Burdge (1996) states that natural resource agencies are increasingly confronted with a diverse clientele as a result of shifting demographics and changing societal attitudes. According to Waldichuk (1989): "Planning for the physically challenged is a very new concept. Only in recent years have actions been taken to allow physically challenged persons to participate in society both socially and physically" (p. 107).

Today, there is a rise in the number of active, physically challenged individuals in society. For example, in the United States, approximately 42% of the population would benefit from services and facilities provided for those with physical impairments (Park 1985). These individuals are increasingly vocal and organized politically. Advocates have been successful in lobbying for the rights of the physically challenged. In the United States, the rights of the disabled are now guaranteed due to recent legislation. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act stipulated that people with disabilities must be allowed to participate in all aspects of life, including employment, transportation, communication, public services, and accommodation. Physically challenged persons cannot be discriminated against or treated separately due to their disability (Porter 1994). This act has had significant ramifications within the National Park Service regarding park programs and facilities. Strict compliance and monitoring systems within the National Park Service ensure that the act is adhered to (Stensrud 1993; Lose 2002).

Despite this legislation, providing specialized park access to the physically challenged remains a contentious issue. Park advocates argue that increased accessibility for the physically challenged impacts negatively on a park's natural resources, while advocates for the physically challenged assert that accessibility for visitors is of

greater or equal priority as conservation. It is unlikely that this debate will be easily or quickly resolved due to the conflict between values and diverse attitudes towards park accessibility.

Conclusion

This article has explored how Western societal attitudes and values have shaped access to national parks. In adopting a chronological approach, I have demonstrated how access to parks has been controlled by powerful groups representing the dominant value system. These groups established park boundaries and determined how the park would be used and which individuals could have access to the park. Historically, these "gatekeepers" emerged from religious orders, the monarchy, and the gentry. In the United States, "gatekeeping" responsibilities later devolved upon early settlers, whose concept of the natural landscape excluded aboriginal peoples. During the 20th and, now, the 21st centuries, national parks have been managed by park agencies. Reflecting societal attitudes and values, park agencies have constrained the access of local peoples, low-income visitors, and the physically challenged.

This examination has focused primarily on how attitudes and values shape physical accessibility to national parks. However, as Lindsey et al. (2001) state: "Theorists have observed that the degree to which facilities such as parks truly are public and accessible depends on metaphorical as well as physical boundaries" (p. 332). Further research into how societal values and attitudes shape metaphorical access to national parks would likely yield interesting results. Other questions relating to access to parks remain to be answered: How does accessibility to national parks vary over the life span of a park visitor? How have values and attitudes shaped access to provincial/territorial parks or parks at other levels? How can "equitable" access to parks be defined and achieved? Does the fact that attitudes and values shape access to national parks affect the park itself? Ultimately, an examination of accessibility to parks must be reconciled with critical questions about the meaning and purpose of parks in contemporary society.

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