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Echoes of environmentalist sensibilities: exploring the origins of a movement

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Introduction

In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt demonstrated tremendous foresight by organizing a conference of state governors, congressmen, and Supreme Court justices to address what he considered “the weightiest problem” facing the United States: diminishing natural resources.¹ In the gathering’s opening address, he articulated his concerns as follows: “The occasion for the meeting lies in the fact that the natural resources of our country are in danger of exhaustion if we permit the old wasteful methods of exploiting them longer to continue.”² A year prior, in his annual address to Congress, Roosevelt stated, “Optimism is a good characteristic, but if carried to an excess it becomes foolishness. We are prone to speak of the resources of this country as inexhaustible; this is not so.”³

Although Roosevelt was exceptionally farsighted in his accomplishments in land protection and resource conservation, his ideas did not emerge out of nowhere. Previous efforts to explain Roosevelt’s policies and the roots of environmentalism primarily have focused on the influences of other late nineteenth and early twentieth-century wilderness advocates, including proponents of the preservationist and conservationist movements.⁴ In an article entitled “The American Environmental

¹ Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 20.

² Theodore Roosevelt, “Conservation as a National Duty” (speech, Washington, D.C., May 13, 1908), *Voices of Democracy*, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/theodore-roosevelt-conservation-as-a-national-duty-speech-text/>.

³ Theodore Roosevelt, “The Conservation of Natural Resources” (speech, Washington, D.C., December 3, 1907), PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/eight/trconserv.htm>.

⁴ For examples, see Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); Paul Russell Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Making of a Conservationist* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001).

Movement,” for example, scholar D. T. Kuzmiak includes a general overview of the origins of environmentalism. But his treatment of the contributions prior to Roosevelt is meager and relegated to merely two pages.⁵

Roosevelt and his contemporaries were undeniably important for their contributions to wilderness protection; however, this thesis attempts to trace the origins of environmentalist attitudes by emphasizing often overlooked connections among various groups and exploring lesser-known figures and ideas. By examining the Native Americans’ relationship with nature, early religious attitudes toward wilderness, the ideas of nineteenth-century Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and the writings and actions of environmentalist icons including John Muir and Gifford Pinchot, a more comprehensive understanding of the American environmental movement is attained.

Native Americans

Considered by many to be America’s first conservationists, Native Americans’ relatively harmonious relationship with nature serves as an appropriate starting point in tracing the origins of environmentalist attitudes.⁶ According to scholar George Cornell, “spiritual perceptions of other beings conditioned environmental responses of American Indians.”⁷ When George Bird Grinnell, a contemporary of Theodore

⁵ D. T. Kuzmiak, “The American Environmental Movement,” *The Geographical Journal* 157 (1991): 268-269.

⁶ For example, see Wilbur R. Jacobs, “The Great Despoliation: Environmental Themes in American Frontier History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 47 (1978).

⁷ George Cornell, “The Influence of Native Americans on Modern Conservationists,” *Environmental Review* 9 (1985): 107.

Roosevelt and fellow sportsman, encountered Native Americans while on a western expedition in 1870, he was impressed by their thoughtful hunting practices and actually returned to join the Pawnee tribe on a buffalo hunt in 1872. The ceremonial elements involved, which included fasting and praying, intrigued Grinnell, who also respected them for utilizing every part of the animal.⁸ In his book about his experiences with the tribe, *Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-Tales*, Grinnell commented on how the Pawnee Indians perceived the divine—which they referred to as Ti-ra’-wa—in the natural world: “The sacred character of Ti-ra’-wa extends to animal nature. The fishes which swim in the rivers, the birds of the air and the beasts which roam over the prairies, have sometimes intelligence, knowledge and power far beyond those of man.”⁹ In fact, Grinnell claimed the Pawnee would pray to animals if their request was a small one.¹⁰

This ascription of the sacred to living things no doubt affected the American Indians’ interaction with the environment they occupied. Vine Deloria, Jr., a Sioux Indian, explained the Natives’ relationship with nature: “The land-use philosophy of Indians is so utterly simple that it seems stupid to repeat it: man must live with other forms of life on the land and not destroy it.”¹¹ American Indians safeguarded against the extinction of beavers and other animals by forming hunting preserves. They demonstrated an understanding of soil health by opting to grow beans and corn

⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁹ George Grinnell, *Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-Tales* (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing Company, 1889), xvii.

¹⁰ Ibid., xviii.

¹¹ Vine Deloria, Jr., *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf* (New York: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 189.

together.¹² Their agricultural practices, though appearing frenzied and disorganized to Europeans, yielded a large amount of produce per acre, keeping more land untouched by humans.¹³ Even Native Americans' calendar names indicated their unity with natural rhythms. Northern New England Indians' months were determined by the moon's cycles and were given names that correlated with changes in animal patterns, including bear hibernation and salmon migration.¹⁴

Scholars have debated whether American Indians were conservationists. Wilbur Jacobs argues that they indeed were America's first conservators, emphasizing their many sustainable agricultural practices.¹⁵ Shepard Krech III, who has written extensively on the subject, disagrees with this characterization. Krech has outlined his basis for dismissing the notion, which he claims developed from the "Noble Indian" myth.¹⁶ While acknowledging Native Americans' impressive understanding of ecological systems, Krech argues that the common Native belief in reincarnation eliminates the possibility that American Indians purposefully conserved resources for future use. He identifies several tribes who viewed their prey as existing in unlimited supply, which he claims precludes the idea that Indians were cognizant of dwindling animal populations.¹⁷

¹² Wilbur R. Jacobs, "The Great Despoliation: Environmental Themes in American Frontier History," *Pacific Historical Review* 47 (1978): 5.

¹³ William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003), 44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵ Jacobs, "The Great Despoliation," 5.

¹⁶ Shepard Krech III, "Reflections on Conservation, Sustainability, and Environmentalism in Indigenous North America," *American Anthropologist* 107 (2005): 78.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

Although the characterization of Native Americans as conservationists is debated, in the discussion of the origins of environmentalist thinking, their impact on wilderness champions is undisputed. George Bird Grinnell, who served as editor of the conservationist magazine *Forest and Stream*, was profoundly influenced by American Indians' relationship with nature. He juxtaposed Native American hunting practices against the slaughtering of western mammals by non-Indian sportsmen. Toward the end of 1889, Grinnell regularly included articles praising Indian hunting techniques in *Forest and Stream*.¹⁸ According to scholar George Cornell, Grinnell's experiences with Native Americans "helped shape his developing perception of human-animal relations, and provided underpinnings for his continued work in conservation."¹⁹ Together, in 1887, Grinnell and Theodore Roosevelt formed the Boone and Crockett Club, an organization with the primary objective of preserving game animals in Yellowstone National Park.²⁰ In March 1891, their efforts were proven successful when President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation that discontinued the practice of giving away land that bordered Yellowstone to the railroad companies, thereby ensuring the government a role in protecting America's wilderness.²¹

¹⁸ Cornell, "The Influence of Native Americans," 108-109.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

Early American Religious Attitudes

Native Americans' conservationist principles, whether intentional or not, are most often touted when contrasting them with American colonists, who wreaked havoc on the environment and viewed resources as commodities. According to environmental historian William Cronon, "New England lumbering used forests as if they would last forever."²² Cronon depicts colonists as wasteful, participating in uncontrolled burning practices that completely cleared large tracts of land. Although Indians used fire to eliminate underbrush, their method was more controlled and much less extensive.²³ Colonists also engaged heavily in the fur trade and manipulated Native Americans into taking part, which drastically reduced beaver populations in Massachusetts.²⁴ The Indians' involvement in the fur market radically changed the landscape they inhabited, and Cronon refers to them as the "real losers."²⁵

Cronon's classic narrative of environmental degradation centers on colonial New England, a region largely populated by English Puritans. Upon arriving in New England, Puritans immediately were frightened by the austere wilderness they found. According to scholar Peter Carroll, "The savage state of the wilderness signified Satanic power; [Puritans] were convinced that America, the land of spiritual darkness,

²⁰ Aubrey Haines, *The Yellowstone Story: A History of Our First National Park*, Vol. 2 (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 94.

²¹ Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 237.

²² Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 111.

²³ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

was the realm of the Antichrist.”²⁶ William Bradford, who served as governor of Plymouth colony between 1621 and 1657, expressed this sentiment in a collection of his journals known as *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which depicted many of the challenges faced by the early Puritans, including the wilderness they encountered when they landed. His unpleasant description indicates how repulsed they were by the natural world: “What could they see but a hidious and desolate wilderness, ful of wild beasts and willd men? ‘For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a wetherbeaten face; and the whole countrie, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage heiw.”²⁷

This fear, however, did not hinder Puritans from utilizing the land and its many resources. According to Cronon, “New England lumbering used forests as if they would last forever.”²⁸ Justifications for resource exploitation were recorded in many early Puritan works. John Winthrop, a prominent Puritan and one of the founders of the Massachusetts Bay colony, defended the Puritans’ desire to settle and cultivate the land: “The whole earth is the Lord’s garden, and He hath given it to mankind with a general commission to increase and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it.”²⁹ Puritans viewed nature as a gift given to them from God. Although they feared it, they felt it was their duty to eliminate wilderness and replace it with “civilization.” According to Carroll, “The Puritans interpreted their hardships in New

²⁶ Peter Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: 1629-1700, The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 11.

²⁷ William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1856), 79.

²⁸ Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 111.

England as part of a divine scheme to complete the Protestant Reformation in the New World.”³⁰ Early laws of property distribution ensured that land would not remain “wild.” The General Court of Massachusetts Bay, for instance, mandated that residents build on or “improve” their property within three years of occupying it, or risk having it seized by the court and redistributed.³¹ Francis Higginson, a Puritan minister, gave an account of the New World’s resources in 1630. He listed the species of trees to which the colonists had access, making note that the timber would “yeeld abundance of Turpentine, Putch, Tarre, Mafts and other materials for building both of Ships and Houfes.”³² But he did not stop there; he also noted the many uses for the trees’ various products, including “dying and tanning of Leather” and making perfume.³³ His records reveal that Puritans were viewing nature as a source of important commodities from the onset of settlement.

Puritans’ contempt for the natural world they encountered, and subsequent motivation to improve it, did not end with wilderness; they also feared its human inhabitants and desired to Christianize them. Puritan minister Thomas Shepard spoke for many Puritans when he described Native Americans as “herds of beasts” and “enemies to the Lord.”³⁴ This sort of rhetoric served as justification for taking land from the Natives and attempting to radically transform their lifestyles. John Winthrop

²⁹ John Winthrop, *Winthrop’s Conclusions for the Plantation in New England*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Directors of the Old South Work, 1894).

³⁰ Carroll, “Puritanism and the Wilderness,” 66.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

³² Francis Higginson, *New Englands Plantation* (St. Louis: Essex Publishing, 1908), 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁴ Thomas Shepard, *The Works of Thomas Shepard*, Vol. III (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1967), 382.

explained the Puritans' objective regarding Natives when he stated, "It will be a service to the Church of great consequence to carry the Gospel into [New England]." ³⁵ Native Americans in southern New England lost most of their land during the latter part of the seventeenth century as they found themselves increasingly surrounded by colonists. ³⁶

Exceptions to this anti-wilderness ideology, however, existed within Puritan New England. Jonathan Edwards, who became a well-known Puritan minister during the Great Awakening, expressed a favorable view of nature. As a young boy, he sought quiet places in the woods to pray and developed an interest in science. ³⁷ As an adult, he found evidence of God in nature: "The beauties of nature are really emanations, or shadows, of the excellencies of the Son of God. So that when we are delighted with flowery meadows and gentle breezes of wind, we may consider that we only see the emanations of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ." ³⁸ Edwards's unique appreciation for nature separated him from the majority of his Puritan forefathers.

Additionally, statutes regarding timber regulation in New England during the seventeenth century indicate that some Puritans did possess foresight when it came to resource utilization. In 1649 the town of New Plymouth passed a law forbidding the use of a specific area of timber without government permission, and in 1651 a

³⁵ Winthrop, *Winthrop's Conclusions*, 1.

³⁶ Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 103.

³⁷ Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 7.

³⁸ Jonathan Edwards as quoted in Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 246.

colonist named Edward Halle was punished “for feling of timber and selling of it out of the colloney, which timber is on the townes comons.”³⁹ These early examples of land management, however slight, provide evidence that conservationism existed in America as early as the seventeenth century.

Unlike most Puritans, Quakers tended to have a more positive view of the natural world. Instead of a wilderness conqueror, scholar Donald Brooks Kelley explains that Quakers considered a man to be a “simple custodian of God’s environment.”⁴⁰ Many prominent Quakers preached against the materialism and capitalistic exploits that devastated the environment, and they typically resisted city life.⁴¹ William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, expressed a preference for the rural landscape over the urban setting: “The Country Life is to be preferr’d; for there we see the Works of God; but in Cities little else but the Works of Men.”⁴² Penn’s fondness for the countryside influenced his plans for the city of Philadelphia, which he envisioned as a “greene Country Towne.” He incorporated eight-acre public areas to serve as parks and proposed that each house sit in the center of its lot “so there may be ground on each side for Gardens or Orchards, or fields.”⁴³

Quakers also displayed a propensity for protecting nature’s inhabitants in their compassion for other living beings. John Woolman, an eighteenth-century

³⁹ New Plymouth Colony, *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Press of William White, 1855), 174.

⁴⁰ Donald Brooks Kelley, “Friends and Nature in America: Toward an Eighteenth-Century Quaker Ecology” *Pennsylvania History* 53 (1986): 267.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴² William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude in Reflections & Maxims* (London: Freemantle & Co., 1901), 342.

Quaker from New Jersey, expressed concern over the ways in which commercialism was inciting cruelty toward animals. In his journal he explained his opposition to such unfair treatment:

[The mind] was moved to love [God] in all His manifestations in the visible world; that, as by His breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal sensible creatures, to say we love God as unseen, and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by His life, or by life derived from Him, was a contradiction in itself.⁴⁴

When Woolman journeyed to England, he refused to ride in “flying coaches,” an English innovation that reduced travel time by forcing horses to continue pulling for hours without rest.⁴⁵ Woolman’s protest against these modern forms of transportation delayed his arrival in London for days because he would not take the coach from Dover, opting to stay aboard the ship as it slowly wound its way around and up the Thames River.⁴⁶

But Woolman’s passion for animal rights was decidedly less fervent than the radical Quaker Benjamin Lay, who moved to Pennsylvania in the 1730s and became renowned for his eccentricities. According to Plank, Lay is considered the “best-known Vegetarian in colonial North America,” with the exception of Benjamin Franklin, who only briefly abstained from consuming meat.⁴⁷ Nineteenth-century poet and well-known Quaker John Greenleaf Whittier described Lay’s commitment: “His

⁴³ William Penn as quoted in John Frost, *The Life of William Penn: The Founder of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1849), 113.

⁴⁴ John Woolman, *The Journal of John Woolman*, ed. Alexander Smellie (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873), 58.

⁴⁵ Geoffrey Plank, “‘The Flame of Life Was Kindled in All Animal and Sensitive Creatures’: One Quaker Colonist and Animal Life,” *Church History* 76 (2007): 569-570.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 571.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 577.

drink was the spring-water flowing by his door; his food, vegetables alone. He persistently refused to wear any garment or eat any food purchased at the expense of animal life.”⁴⁸ Lay’s compassion even extended to insects, as he kept bees for their honey but was careful not to kill or injure them.⁴⁹

According to historian Geoffrey Plank, this advocacy for animal rights “[anticipated] protests that would be voiced in the nineteenth century.”⁵⁰ Theodore Roosevelt, for instance, frequently articulated his disdain for animal cruelty. In a letter to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, a nineteenth-century feminist author, Roosevelt expressed his affection for even the smallest creatures: “At this moment, my small daughter being out, I am acting as nurse to two wee guinea pigs, which she feels would not be safe save in the room with me—and if I can prevent it I do not intend to have wanton suffering inflicted on any creature.”⁵¹

The Transcendentalists

When Transcendentalism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, it popularized the notion that nature was something to be valued, as opposed to conquered or feared. Transcendentalists held a conception of nature that differed greatly from the majority of Puritans, who perceived wilderness as a place that enticed people to surrender to their sinful natures. According to Roderick Nash, a renowned scholar of

⁴⁸ John G. Whittier, introduction to *The Journal of John Woolman*, by John Woolman (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1871), 13.

⁴⁹ Plank, “The Flame of Life,” 578.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 573.

⁵¹ Theodore Roosevelt, *Letters to His Children* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919), 36.

environmental history, it was the Transcendentalists' belief in man's innate goodness that allowed them to fully appreciate the American wilderness.⁵²

The most prominent Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, loosely associated himself with Quaker ideology, claiming to have more in common with the Society of Friends than any other religious sect.⁵³ Because of this, it is unsurprising that Emerson did not fear nature as many of the New England Puritans had. Emerson considered the divine to be present within the natural world, which is evident from what he professed to experience while in nature: "I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."⁵⁴ This idea that the divine is present in nature was integral in fostering a widespread appreciation for American wilderness.⁵⁵ However, it was not a new concept; it had characterized Native Americans' relationship with nature and had been previously articulated by figures such as Jonathan Edwards.

Emerson ascribed certain restorative powers to nature: "In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, – no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes) which nature cannot repair."⁵⁶ When surrounded by woods, Emerson found inspiration that he could not find in civilization, a similar sentiment to William Penn's preference for the country life.

⁵² Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 86.

⁵³ Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 158.

⁵⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 39.

⁵⁵ Roderick Nash, "The American Wilderness in Historical Perspective," *Forest History Newsletter* 4 (1963): 4.

⁵⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems* (New York: Bantam Classics, 1990), 18.

Emerson's radical depictions of nature as something both divine and curative marked the beginning of a major shift in people's attitudes toward wilderness.

Henry David Thoreau, another eminent Transcendentalist, also expressed a love for nature. In a journal entry dated January 7, 1857, Thoreau expressed a belief similar to Emerson's that nature possessed restorative abilities: "Alone in distant woods or fields... I come to myself, I once more feel myself grandly related. This cold and solitude are friends of mine."⁵⁷ Thoreau often referred to nature in terms that depicted it as a sort of companion or friend. A true introvert, he found the societal demand for continuous interaction with others to be exhausting, believing that people lose respect for their friends because they tire of the incessant communication.⁵⁸ Thoreau remedied this irritation with society by immersing himself in wilderness, seeking refuge by Walden Pond for over two years, from July 1845 to September 1847. Although he was not far from civilization (only a mile from another house) and journeyed into Concord frequently during this period, Thoreau enjoyed the intellectual retreat, during which time he cultivated crops, observed the habits of local flora and fauna, and took many walks through the woods. In his explanation for why he chose to live by Walden Pond, Thoreau stated, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not

⁵⁷ Henry David Thoreau, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: Journal* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1857), 208.

⁵⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1910), 178.

lived.”⁵⁹ Walden provided Thoreau with an opportunity to remove himself from the materialistic habits of civilization and appreciate a complex and exciting natural world.

Thoreau’s excursions to Maine, which he described in *The Maine Woods*, also provided him the opportunity to develop and articulate his ideas about nature. In a particularly regretful passage, Thoreau described a scenario in which his Native American guide stalked and killed a moose calf, portraying his own role in the event as an unfortunate bystander. His depiction of the skinning process was teeming with remorse for the creature’s death, as he referred to it as “tragical” and described the moose carcass as “ghastly.”⁶⁰

Although Thoreau felt shame for his connection to the moose’s death, a sense of awe for his Native American companion’s tracking and hunting techniques is interspersed throughout the passage. He was impressed by the man’s silence and stealth as he stalked the moose and used blood droplets on leaves to guide him to the animal. Thoreau consistently contrasted the man’s method with that of white men, which indicates his fascination for the natives’ interaction with the environment. He stated, “When we heard a slight crackling of twigs and he landed to reconnoitre, he stepped lightly and gracefully, stealing through the bushes with the least possible

⁵⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁰ Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods: A Fully Annotated Edition*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 107.

noise, in a way in which no white man does, – as it were, finding a place for his foot each time.”⁶¹

Thoreau’s respect for Native Americans is evident in another passage from *The Maine Woods*. Thoreau, watching the campfire as the other men slept, noticed a white light emitting from the burning wood. He also observed the same glow on decaying wood near the fire. Thoreau’s excitement after witnessing the marvel is clear: “I was exceedingly interested by this phenomenon, and already felt paid for my journey. It could hardly have thrilled me more if it had taken the form of letters, or of the human face.”⁶² The following day Thoreau was intrigued by his Native American companion’s account of the phenomenon. The man knew of many natives who reported seeing the light, which they referred to as “Artoosoqu,” in the trees at night. Thoreau, claiming that a scientific explanation would have bored him, was thrilled with the man’s familiarity with the glow. Thoreau concluded his account of the experience by stating, “Long enough I had heard of irrelevant things; now at length I was glad to make acquaintance with the light that dwells in rotten wood.”⁶³ Thoreau’s resistance to a scientific explanation and enthusiastic reaction to his companion’s expertise, both regarding the glow and his hunting tactics, reveals that Thoreau believed Native Americans were inherently more natural than white men.

Thoreau, however, believed that the death of the moose calf was a tragedy, despite his admiration for the Native American man’s relationship with nature.

⁶¹ Ibid., 103-104.

⁶² Ibid., 168.

⁶³ Ibid., 169.

Although he had been interested in his companion's hunting ability, Thoreau nonetheless was troubled by the act, perhaps due to his own involvement: "For Nature looked sternly upon me on account of the murder of the moose."⁶⁴ This disdain for useless killing pervaded Thoreau's other works as well, including the "Higher Laws" chapter of *Walden*. Like Theodore Roosevelt, however, Thoreau believed hunting to be a masculine activity that was not always without purpose. For instance, he explained that young boys should engage in hunting or else be deprived of an important rite of passage. This assertion may appear to be an inconsistency given Thoreau's grief over the moose; however, he thought the desire to hunt without reason should fade as boys grow into men: "No humane being, past the thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature which holds its life by the same tenure that he does."⁶⁵ This is a point at which Roosevelt and Thoreau's beliefs regarding hunting diverge. Roosevelt proudly considered himself a sportsman throughout adulthood and seemingly held no regrets for killing countless animals, whereas Thoreau considered the activity an impermanent attraction for boys that introduced them to wilderness and ultimately led them to an intrinsic appreciation for it.

Not only did Thoreau oppose unnecessary hunting, he also suffered from an inner conflict concerning the killing of animals for sustenance. Although he claimed to be a skilled fisherman, he expressed regret and a loss of self-respect when he obtained nourishment through the "unclean" diet of flesh. His assertion that bread and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 111.

potatoes would suffice in place of meat reveals that Thoreau, like Quaker Benjamin Lay, was an early promoter of vegetarianism.⁶⁶

Thoreau not only believed hunting to be unwarranted, but also that intrinsic value existed in vegetation. Amidst the accounts of his adventures during his Maine excursions, Thoreau also expressed his disgust at men's greed and the effect it has on the wilderness they occupy. While traveling through the lumber mill towns of Stillwater and Oldtown, Thoreau explained his disdain for the sawmill industry and compared men to demons who seemingly desired to rid the country of all of its forests. Thoreau saw beauty in the Maine pine forests while others did not: "Think how stood the white-pine tree on the shore of Chesuncook, its branches soughing with the four winds, and every individual needle trembling in the sunlight, – think how it stands with it now, – sold, perchance, to the New England Friction-Match Company!"⁶⁷ Thoreau considered the tree to be important in its own right and not only for the materials it provides humans, a sentiment that certainly was unconventional for the mid-nineteenth century.

Thoreau later elaborated on his frustrations and lamented that few people shared his appreciation for nature: "Strange that so few ever come to the woods to see how the pine lives and grows and spires, lifting its evergreen arms to the light."⁶⁸ He claimed that most people consider the pine's purpose as providing wood for boards and houses, comparing this attitude to the absurd notion that men's highest purpose is

⁶⁵ Thoreau, *Walden*, 281.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 283-284.

⁶⁷ Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, 3.

to be made into manure. He argued that the resources offered by the pine are only accidental and not its primary function, referring to the tree as having a “living spirit” which he loved.⁶⁹ He even personified the tree, referring to it as a man who was murdered and the lumber it produces as a corpse.⁷⁰ He criticized towns for their barren, pasture-like landscape and their unwillingness to allow trees to prosper within them, and he humorously added, “At this rate, we shall all be obliged to let our beards grow at least, if only to hide the nakedness of the land and make a sylvan appearance.”⁷¹

Thoreau’s contempt for hunting and deep appreciation for nature ultimately resulted in his advocating for wilderness preservation. His musings about nature culminated in the statement, “Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine-trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.”⁷² This belief led Thoreau to argue in favor of wilderness preserves that would safeguard nature from human impact, an idea he borrowed from English kings who set aside land to protect game that they would later hunt. Thoreau, however, had a different purpose in mind for such preserves, which he felt should be established “not to hold the king’s game merely, but to hold and preserve the king himself also, the lord of creation, – not for idle sport or food, but for inspiration and our own true re-creation.”⁷³ He mentioned a similar idea in his 1862 essay *Walking*, which was

⁶⁸ Ibid., 111.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 213.

⁷¹ Ibid., 143.

⁷² Ibid., 112.

⁷³ Ibid., 145.

based on a lecture by the same title and published posthumously. He proposed the establishment of “pleasure grounds,” arguing that the notion of private property hinders humans from truly enjoying the land.⁷⁴ Though Thoreau’s proposals were not totally void of human benefit—as he believed nature provided men with a necessary source of inspiration and sense of wildness—this idea of preserving nature without reaping some tangible human advantage was monumental in the evolution of human interaction with the environment. Thoreau was not advocating for conservation for later human use; he instead wanted to set aside these resources to remain relatively untouched by humankind. Thoreau never witnessed the widespread realization of this dream, as he passed away in 1862, only a few years after his Maine adventures. His ideas, however, were embraced and expanded by John Muir, an adventurous Scottish immigrant with a passion for defending wilderness.

Nineteenth-Century Proponents of Wilderness Protection: John Muir, Jeanne Carr, and Gifford Pinchot

Initially hesitant to thrust himself into the budding environmental movement, John Muir’s dedication to wilderness protection ultimately influenced a president and gained him recognition as the iconic American preservationist. Born in 1838, Muir lived in Dunbar, Scotland until the age of eleven when he and his family relocated to Kingston, Wisconsin. When his father informed him of their impending departure,

⁷⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2007), 18.

Muir was elated and immediately began to imagine the exciting and mysterious natural world he would encounter in America.⁷⁵

John Muir found inspiration in the Transcendentalist movement; both Emerson and Thoreau's writings heavily influenced his own.⁷⁶ Muir encountered their ideas in 1862 while studying under his geology professor, Dr. Ezra Carr, at the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Carr's wife Jeanne, a nature enthusiast and amateur botanist, frequently discussed Emerson and Thoreau's ideas with Muir.⁷⁷ According to scholar Richard Fleck, Thoreau likely served as Muir's biggest inspiration: "Thoreau's rich experience of living in nature and visiting the wilderness of Maine made him more important, I believe, than Ralph Waldo Emerson."⁷⁸ In fact, a close examination of Muir's writings reveals multiple allusions to Thoreau's ideas.⁷⁹

Although Emerson had a deep affinity for nature, his journeys into wilderness were not as extensive as Thoreau's time at Walden and his dedication to wilderness protection was nowhere near as fervent as Muir's. In a eulogy Emerson wrote for Thoreau, Emerson actually criticized Thoreau's time at Walden for what he considered a lack of purpose: "I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition. Wanting this, instead of engineering for all America, he was the captain of a huckleberry-party. Pounding beans is good to the end of empires one of these days;

⁷⁵ John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 53-54.

⁷⁶ Steven J. Holmes, "John Muir, Jeanne Carr, and Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Case-Study of the Varieties of Transcendentalist Influence," *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* 25 (1998): 15.

⁷⁷ Richard Fleck, "Join Muir's Homage to Henry David Thoreau," *Pacific Historian* 29 (1985): 55.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

but if, at the end of years, it is still only beans!”⁸⁰ Following a visit with Muir in Yosemite in 1871, during which he opted to stay in a hotel instead of camp, Emerson encouraged Muir to abandon his life in Yosemite and utilize his talents at a university in the East.⁸¹ Clearly Emerson did not share Thoreau and Muir’s passion for living in nature for an extended period of time. Thoreau, however, also appeared only to enjoy the outdoors in small doses, expressing a preference for the “half-cultivated” country, rather than total wilderness, and experiencing relief upon his return to Concord following his Maine adventures.⁸² John Muir, on the other hand, took great pleasure in existing in wilderness for an extensive amount of time. When one of his closest friends, Jeanne Carr, wrote to him in Yosemite and asked him to visit her in her home in Oakland, California, Muir declined the invitation:

I thank you most heartily for the very kind invitation you send me. I could enjoy a blink of rest in your new home with a relish that only those can know who have suffered solitary banishment for so many years, but I must return to the mountains, to Yosemite. I am told that the winter storms there will not be easily borne, but I am bewitched, enchanted, and to-morrow I must start for the great temple to listen to the winter songs and sermons preached and sung only there.⁸³

Emerson and Thoreau nevertheless profoundly influenced Muir. In 1893 Muir journeyed to the cemetery in which both of these prominent Transcendentalists were buried and laid flowers on their graves. In a letter to his wife, Muir commented that

⁸⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Thoreau,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1, 1862, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/08/thoreau/306418/>.

⁸¹ Michael P. Branch, “‘Angel Guiding Gently’: The Yosemite Meeting of Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Muir, 1871,” *Western American Literature* 32 (1997): 137.

⁸² John Jalbert, “Lifeworld Cartography: Echoes, Footprints, and Other Guideposts to the Self,” in *Ecoscapes: Geographical Patterning of Relations*, ed. Gary Backhaus and John Murungi (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 195.

he was “moved at the site of the resting places of these grand men.” He was so affected by the visit to the cemetery that he added, “I could not help thinking how glad I would be to feel sure that I would also rest here.”⁸⁴ After showing his respects, Muir visited Walden Pond and toured Emerson’s home.⁸⁵

As a boy, Muir, like Thoreau, enjoyed hunting. Similar to the moose episode in *The Maine Woods*, Muir expressed a sense of disdain for animal suffering in his 1913 book *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*. On one occasion, Muir described shooting a hawk that was preying on his chickens. After injuring the hawk and watching it fall halfway down the tree, Muir shot at it again “to put him out of pain.”⁸⁶ This concern for the bird’s distress separates Muir from the hunters who had little concern for animals’ wellbeing.

Muir also articulated similar ideas about hunting as those put forth by Thoreau in the “Higher Laws” chapter of *Walden*. Muir contended that young boys possess a natural desire for killing animals, but he too felt that this propensity should fade once boys mature into men: “But when thoughtless childhood is past, the best rise the highest above all this bloody flesh and sport business.”⁸⁷ Muir, however, also believed that mankind as a whole should eventually progress past this desire to kill: “Surely a better time must be drawing nigh when godlike human beings will become truly humane, and learn to put their animal fellow mortals in their hearts instead of on

⁸³ John Muir to Jeanne Carr, November 15, 1869, in *Kindred and Related Spirits: The Letters of John Muir and Jeanne C. Carr*, ed. Bonnie Gisel (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001), 94.

⁸⁴ John Muir to Louisa Muir, in *John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings*, ed. William Frederic Badè (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 1996), 311.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁸⁶ Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood*, 25.

their backs or in their dinners.”⁸⁸ Although Thoreau grappled with his own inner conflict concerning hunting, he never claimed to foresee a time when all of mankind would discontinue killing other beings.

Muir’s friendship with Jeanne Carr was another major influence on his emergence as a wilderness protector. Muir met Carr in 1860 while he was attending the University of Wisconsin in Madison and studying under her husband, Professor Ezra Carr. According to scholar Roderick Nash, it was Carr’s friendship with Emerson and admiration for Thoreau that encouraged Muir to engage with their writing.⁸⁹ Historian Steven Holmes claims that Jeanne Carr was “Muir’s closest friend, mentor, and intellectual influence over the next ten years, introducing him to numerous other like-minded spirits (in person or in books) along the way.”⁹⁰

Through Carr and Muir’s correspondence, a more intimate understanding of Muir’s feelings about nature can be attained. Their closeness is apparent from Muir’s response to Carr’s encouragement to read about California’s Yosemite Valley: “I read a description of the Yosemite Valley last year and thought of it most every day since. You know my tastes better than anyone else.”⁹¹ When Muir finally arrived in Yosemite, he wrote Carr about the enthralling scenery he encountered there. The passage is filled with vibrant and anthropomorphic language. The “singing” streams and “waving” mountains thrilled Muir.⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibid., 181.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Nash, *Wilderness*, 125.

⁹⁰ Holmes, “Varieties of Transcendentalist Influence,” 7.

⁹¹ John Muir to Jeanne Carr, April 1867, in *Kindred*, ed. Gisel, 50.

⁹² John Muir to Jeanne Carr, July 26, 1868, in *Kindred*, ed. Gisel, 72.

Both Muir and Carr's attitudes about nature were heavily shaped by religion, as evidenced in their letters. This commonality is arguably one of the reasons Muir and Carr forged a close friendship. In a letter to Carr in 1868, Muir referred to the Yosemite Valley as an Eden, made more majestic by the larks' songs that "filled all the Valley with music like a sea."⁹³ Muir's consistent use of religious language was the result of a Calvinist upbringing. His father, Daniel Muir, did not share Muir's adoration for nature. According to Nash, Muir's father believed that scripture "was the only source of God's truth, and young John was obliged to commit the entire New Testament and most of the Old to memory."⁹⁴ Although Muir differed from his father in his feelings about wilderness, a religious worldview pervaded Muir's writing. In 1920 Muir argued for protecting California redwoods, explaining, "Through all the eventful centuries since Christ's time, and long before that, God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand storms."⁹⁵

Letters further reveal Carr's role as a major source of encouragement to Muir. While working at a broom factory in Indianapolis, Muir suffered an eye injury that rendered him blind in that eye for a month. Muir's letter to Carr about the incident is teeming with demoralization: "Dear friend, You have, of course, heard of my calamity. The sunshine and the winds are working in all the gardens of God, but I – I am lost."⁹⁶ Carr responded to Muir, expressing her sorrow and urging him not to

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Nash, *Wilderness*, 123.

⁹⁵ John Muir, "Save the Redwoods," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 11 (1920): 4.

⁹⁶ Jeanne Carr to John Muir, March 15, 1867, in *Kindred*, ed. Gisel, 44.

allow himself to be consumed with misery.⁹⁷ She used the incident as an opportunity to praise and encourage Muir: “Let us *believe* that nothing is without meaning and purpose which comes from the Father’s hand. I am glad to feel that you will see more with one visual organ than most persons could with half a dozen.”⁹⁸

Carr also proved to be an important influence on Muir’s development as a writer. Not only did she introduce him to figures such as Emerson and Thoreau, who provided him with a framework for thinking and writing about nature, but she also served as an editor for Muir’s early writings. Following a trip to Yosemite in the summer of 1868, Muir fell in love with the Sierra Nevada region and decided to settle there in 1869.⁹⁹ It was during his time in Yosemite that Muir began to write for publication, but not without Carr’s help. In 1871 he wrote to Carr to inform her that the president of the Boston Institute of Technology, Professor John Daniel Runkle, had asked him to write an article about the Yosemite glacial system: “I told him that I meant to write my thoughts for my own use and that I would send him the manuscript, and if he and his wise scientific brothers thought it of sufficient interest they might publish it.”¹⁰⁰ His underwhelming response to Runkle exposes his lack of enthusiasm for sharing his work with the American public. Nevertheless, Muir consented to the request, and in December 1871, the *New York Tribune* published Muir’s first article, entitled “Yosemite Glaciers.” Carr’s importance to Muir’s writing career is perhaps most apparent in a letter he sent to her in 1872, in which he directly

⁹⁷ Holmes, “Varieties of Transcendentalist Influence,” 9.

⁹⁸ Jeanne Carr to John Muir, March 15, 1867, in *Kindred*, ed. Gisel, 42.

⁹⁹ Holmes, “Varieties of Transcendentalist Influence,” 12.

asked for her assistance in readying his writing for publication: “I send you a cascade jubilee which you will relish more than anybody else. I have tried to put it in form for publication, and if you can rasp off the rougher angles and wedge in a few slippery words between bad splices perhaps it may be sufficiently civilized for *Overland* or *Atlantic*.”¹⁰¹

Until he began to publish, Muir had limited the expression of his ideas about nature to personal notes and private letters to friends. This decision to allow the American public access to his writing was a watershed moment for the environmental movement, which until then primarily had been composed of a few intellectuals’ vague ideas for land protection. In 1876 the *Sacramento Record Union* published Muir’s essay entitled “God’s First Temples,” in which he discussed the need to protect America’s forests. This work mostly explained the practical reasons for safeguarding forests, stressing their connection to other natural processes. Should the forests be destroyed, he argued streams would become “destructive torrent[s].” They would strip away fertile soil from the banks and spread “the lowland fields with detritus to a vastly more destructive degree than all the washings from hydraulic mines concerning which we now hear so much.”¹⁰² Muir’s emphasis on the practicality behind forest protection is perhaps what allowed his ideas to resonate with more people. Whereas Thoreau’s reasoning for forest protection centered primarily on the intellectual development of humankind and the need for people to

¹⁰⁰ John Muir to Jeanne Carr, September 1871, in *Kindred*, ed. Gisel, 148.

¹⁰¹ John Muir to Jeanne Carr, January 8, 1872, in *Kindred*, ed. Gisel, 154.

maintain a sense of wildness, Muir offered specific details about the negative consequences of forest destruction.

Muir also desired to preserve forests for reasons beyond practicality; he found intrinsic value in nature that deserved to be upheld, whether or not humans benefitted. In *The American Forests*, which was published in 1897 by *The Atlantic*, Muir's description of America contains similarities to his assessment of Yosemite that he included in a letter to Carr. His excited language divulges his profound affection for the country, which he described as the home of "exuberant" forests, "bright seas," and "happy birds and beasts." The forests in America, he claimed, were "the best [God] ever planted."¹⁰³

Muir, like Thoreau, also mentioned Native Americans among his musings about nature in North America. Thoreau articulated a belief that Natives lived more in harmony with the land than white men through his discussion of hunting and the phenomenon of light emanating from decaying wood. Muir had a similar assessment of Native Americans in "The American Forests," perhaps even directly responding to Thoreau's section on the moose in *The Maine Woods*:

The Indians with stone axes could do no more harm than could gnawing beavers and browsing moose. Even the fires of the Indians and the fierce shattering lightning seemed to work together only for good in clearing spots here and there for smooth garden prairies, and openings for sunflowers seeking the light.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² John Muir, "God's First Temples" in *John Muir: Nature Writings*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Library of America, 1997), 629.

¹⁰³ John Muir, "The American Forests," *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1, 1897, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1897/08/the-american-forests/305017/>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Muir was decidedly more critical of how white men interacted with their environment, portraying them as greedy and lacking of foresight. According to Muir, instead of appreciating the beauty of the wilderness that surrounded them, white men regarded trees as obstacles to civilization, cutting them down in mass numbers across the country.¹⁰⁵ The regret he expressed was not unlike Thoreau's lamentations over the New England sawmill industry in *The Maine Woods*. Both men believed Americans had a tendency to be self-serving in their interactions with the environment.

Because of Muir's earlier statements regarding the abolishment of hunting and his fondness for American wilderness, his advocacy for the preservation of forests is not surprising. Similar to Thoreau's discussion of Britain's hunting preserves, Muir also alluded to other countries' efforts to protect wilderness: "Every other civilized nation in the world has been compelled to care for its forests, and so must we if waste and destruction are not to go on to the bitter end, leaving America as barren as Palestine or Spain."¹⁰⁶ Muir cited several examples from various countries and wrote more extensively about these nations' policies, which suggests he had conducted thorough research in an effort to influence the American public to protect its forests. He described how France heavily regulated its forests by fining citizens for clearing their land without the government's permission, a policy which was enacted to reduce erosion and flooding, protect dunes and beaches, and sustain springs and other waterways. Those who violated the policy were subject to hefty fines and potentially

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

could be ordered to replant the area they had cleared. He described Switzerland's forest management, explaining that foresters were well educated in forestry law and that timber was heavily regulated to ensure that no more timber was cut than was generated each year. He discussed measures taken by Japan to safeguard their wooded areas from exploitative inhabitants, including founding a forestry school in Tokyo and declaring forests that previously had belonged to feudal lords to be state property. Muir concluded his discussion of other countries' efforts by criticizing the American government: "So far our government has done nothing effective with its forests, though the best in the world, but is like a rich and foolish spendthrift who... has left his rich fields and meadows, forests and parks, to be sold and plundered and wasted at will, depending on their inexhaustible abundance."¹⁰⁷

Muir's passion for wilderness protection eventually found an outlet in the fight for the preservation of Yosemite. After the establishment of Yellowstone as the first national park in 1872, Muir worked to ensure Yosemite would share the same fate. Although Yellowstone's creation indicated that a major shift toward a more environmentally conscious populace was occurring within the United States, scholar Roderick Nash claims that this feat was "almost accidental and certainly not the result of a national movement."¹⁰⁸ Those who advocated for Yellowstone's preservation, Nash argues, were motivated by their desire to safeguard the park's oddities from

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Nash, *Wilderness*, 122.

exploitation by private landowners. Wilderness still needed a champion, and it found one in the Scottish-born John Muir.¹⁰⁹

In 1890 *Century* magazine published two of Muir's articles about Yosemite. In "The Treasures of the Yosemite," which appeared in the August volume, Muir referred to the 1864 Yosemite Grant Act, a piece of legislation signed by President Abraham Lincoln that preserved tracts of land in the Yosemite Valley. He lamented that only the Mariposa Grove, an area that includes hundreds of giant sequoias, had been "reserved as a park for public use and pleasure" and urged readers to support legislation which would expand the borders of protected land.¹¹⁰ Like Thoreau, Muir expressed his disgust at the sawmills in the area, arguing they operated in a wasteful and destructive manner: "For after the young, manageable trees have been cut, blasted, and sawed, the woods are fired to clear the ground of limbs and refuse, and of course the seedlings and saplings, and many of the unmanageable giants, are destroyed."¹¹¹ But Muir was even more frustrated by the damage inflicted on the mountain pastures by sheep herds, which were allowed to graze freely. "Every garden within reach is trampled," he wrote, "the shrubs are stripped of leaves as if devoured by locusts, and the woods are burned to improve the pasturage."¹¹²

In "Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park," which was published the following month, Muir attempted to gain support for the park's protection by appealing to the senses of his readers with his inviting descriptions of Yosemite's

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ John Muir, "The Treasures of the Yosemite," *The Century Magazine* 40 (1890): 487.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

weather, flora, and other characteristics. His depictions of Yosemite's seasons would have prompted many to experience the region's treasures and tranquil atmosphere firsthand: "In October the nights are frosty, and then the meadows at sunrise, when every leaf is laden with crystals, are a fine sight. The days are warm and calm, and bees and butterflies continue to waver and hum about the late-blooming flowers until the coming of the snow."¹¹³ Muir likely felt that emphasizing the serenity of Yosemite would encourage people to fight against the exploitation of its riches. He concluded his descriptions with a plea for Yosemite's preservation and a warning about its future if left unprotected: "Unless reserved or protected the whole region will sooner or later be devastated by lumbermen and sheepmen, and so of course be made unfit for use as a pleasure ground."¹¹⁴ The efforts of Muir and others were not in vain. On October 1, 1890, a bill declaring Yosemite a national park was signed into law by President Benjamin Harrison. The protected area included a large portion of the Sierra Mountains, with the Yosemite Valley remaining a state park, as it had been designated under Abraham Lincoln.¹¹⁵ The passage of this act was the United States' first conscious effort to preserve wilderness.¹¹⁶

In June 1892, Muir co-founded the Sierra Club, along with twenty-six other men, in an effort to protect these established parks. Muir realized that the land was

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ John Muir, "Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park," *The Century Magazine* 40 (1890): 656.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 667.

¹¹⁵ J.S. Holliday, "The Politics of John Muir," *California History* 63 (1984): 137.

¹¹⁶ Nash, *Wilderness*, 132.

not completely safe from those who desired it for its natural commodities.¹¹⁷ In 1895, during a Sierra Club meeting, Muir acknowledged the challenge of protecting Yosemite: “But no sooner were the boundaries of the park established, than interested parties began to try to break through them. Last winter a determined effort was made to have the area of the park cut down nearly one-half.”¹¹⁸ The Sierra Club’s attempts to protect the park resulted in the organization’s first victory, as the original boundaries were maintained.¹¹⁹

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the environmental movement began to split into two distinct factions: the preservationists and the conservationists. Incompatible ideas for land management surfaced, forcing environmental champions to align themselves with one camp or the other. In 1891 legislation known as the Forest Reserve Act passed through Congress, allowing the president to create forest reserves. Benjamin Harrison signed the bill into law and subsequently created fifteen of such reserved areas.¹²⁰ Muir, who had been fighting since 1876 to preserve forests, served as a source of inspiration for Harrison.¹²¹

Competing ideas existed, however, over the goals of these reserves. Gifford Pinchot, who soon became known as the preeminent American conservationist, argued for managing these lands in a utilitarian fashion. His primary concerns were with managing resources to reduce waste and safeguarding them from being

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ John Muir, “The National Parks and Forest Reservations” (speech, San Francisco, November 23, 1895), Sierra Club, http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/nat_parks_forests_1896.aspx.

¹¹⁹ “A Chronology of The Sierra Club,” *California History* 71 (1992): 160.

¹²⁰ Nash, *Wilderness*, 133.

controlled by “monopolies and special interests.”¹²² He was an advocate of the concept of forestry, which he defined as follows in his book *Breaking New Ground*: “Forestry is tree farming. Forestry is handling trees so that one crop follows another. To grow trees as a crop is forestry.”¹²³

Initially, Muir and Pinchot’s relationship was one of mutual respect. Muir even appeared to agree with some of Pinchot’s ideas about forest management. In Muir’s book *Our National Parks*, which was published in 1901, Muir included a revised version of his earlier article “The American Forests” as the final chapter. Here, Muir expressed a sentiment similar to Pinchot’s ideas about trees: “Timber is as necessary as bread, and no scheme of management failing to recognize and properly provide for this want can possibly be maintained.”¹²⁴ For the first few years following the establishment of forest reserves, Muir expressed a willingness to compromise his desire for total preservation, explaining, “The forests must be, and will be, not only preserved, but used. The forests, like perennial fountains, may be made to yield a sure harvest of timber.”¹²⁵ Because these statements seem incompatible with Muir’s preservationist values, Roderick Nash clarifies Muir’s compliance on the issue of forest management by explaining that Muir perceived forestry as such an

¹²¹ Holliday, “The Politics,” 137.

¹²² John M. Meyer, “Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, and the Boundaries of Politics in American Thought,” *Polity* 30 (1997): 269.

¹²³ Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998), 31.

¹²⁴ John Muir, *Our National Parks* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1902), 343.

¹²⁵ John Muir, “A Plan to Save the Forests,” *Century Magazine* 49 (1895), 631.

improvement on “unregulated lumbering practices” that he was unable to “immediately see its incompatibility with wilderness preservation.”¹²⁶

Pinchot and Muir initially joined forces in the fight for wilderness protection. In 1896 a National Forest Commission was formed to determine how to manage the forest reserves, and both Muir and Pinchot were appointed to serve.¹²⁷ That summer the group embarked on a journey to evaluate lands in the West for the purpose of potentially setting aside more tracts for national parks and forests. In his recollection of the journey, Pinchot’s affinity for Muir is apparent. When Pinchot learned Muir would be accompanying them, he considered it a “great delight.” Pinchot regarded Muir as an engaging storyteller and recounted a time that he and Muir stayed awake until midnight while Muir told stories. Pinchot recalled, “It was such an evening as I have never had before or since.”¹²⁸

This high regard for one another came to a sudden halt following their journey westward. In September 1897, Muir read an interview with Pinchot in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in which Pinchot was quoted as approving of sheep grazing in forest reserves. Both men happened to be in Seattle when the interview was published. A furious Muir approached Pinchot in the lobby of the hotel at which Pinchot was staying and announced that he no longer wanted to have anything to do with the conservationist.¹²⁹ This conversation marked the beginning of a deep divide within the environmental movement between the preservationists – who lobby to

¹²⁶ Nash, *Wilderness*, 134.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹²⁸ Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 100.

preserve land for its intrinsic value – and conservationists – who fight to protect land in an effort to manage resources for future generations.

The battle between the conservationists and preservationists over the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite is often considered the pivotal moment in this divide in environmentalist thinking.¹³⁰ In an effort to protect the valley from being dammed to create a water source for San Francisco, John Muir advocated for keeping Hetch Hetchy a part of Yosemite National Park. In an essay originally published in 1908 as a *Sierra Club Bulletin*, Muir used words such as “sublime” and “precious” to describe what he claimed was the “greatest of all our natural resources.” Similar to his letters to Jeanne Carr regarding the features of Yosemite, Muir used religious imagery in his descriptions, suggesting that his Calvinist upbringing continued to have an influence on his outlook on wilderness. He used phrases such as “Cathedral rocks” and referred to his opponents’ arguments as “curiously like those of the devil.”¹³¹ By 1908 Muir believed nature, as opposed to religious institutions, to be where one found God, which is evident from his final frustrated plea for the protection of Hetch Hetchy: “Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.”¹³² This radical statement separated Muir from his Puritan and other religious predecessors who appreciated and enjoyed nature but did not deem it more divine than churches.

¹²⁹ Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1945), 275.

¹³⁰ For more information about this divide, see Kendrick Clements, “Politics and the Park: San Francisco’s Fight for Hetch Hetchy,” *Pacific Historical Review* 48 (1979): 185-215.

¹³¹ John Muir, *The Yosemite* (New York: The Century Co., 1912), 260.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 262.

In a letter to Theodore Roosevelt regarding Hetch Hetchy, dated April 21, 1908, John Muir appealed to the president's affection for Yosemite in an attempt to gain his support in opposing the damming of the valley: "[Hetch Hetchy] is a counterpart of Yosemite, and one of the most sublime and beautiful and important features of the Park, and to dam and submerge it would be hardly less destructive and deplorable in its effect on the Park in general than would be the damming of Yosemite itself."¹³³ Muir's fondness for the president is evident in the postscript, in which he alluded to a camping trip they had taken together a few years earlier. "Oh for a tranquil camp hour with you like those beneath the sequoias in memorable 1903," Muir wrote.¹³⁴

Unbeknownst to Muir when he sent his letter to Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot had written to a San Francisco official in 1906, urging the city to utilize Yosemite as a water source.¹³⁵ In his book *The Fight for Conservation*, Pinchot defined the goals of his philosophy of wilderness protection as bringing "the greatest good the greatest number for the longest time."¹³⁶ Without ever having visited Hetch Hetchy, Pinchot determined that the best course of action would be to dam the valley to provide San Francisco with a water source.¹³⁷

Although he sympathized with those who desired to preserve the park, President Roosevelt eventually sided with Pinchot and the conservationists in the

¹³³ John Muir to Theodore Roosevelt, April 21, 1908, in *His Life*, ed. Badè, 378.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Meyer, "Boundaries of Politics," 270.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 273.

battle over Hetch Hetchy prior to leaving office.¹³⁸ Ultimately, legislators too agreed with Pinchot and Roosevelt that damming Hetch Hetchy would provide the greatest good to the greatest number. In 1913 Congress passed and President Woodrow Wilson signed the Raker Act, allowing for the flooding of Hetch Hetchy Valley.¹³⁹

The battle over Hetch Hetchy resulted in a loss for the preservationists. Roderick Nash, however, contends, “The most significant thing about the controversy over the valley was that it occurred at all. One hundred or even fifty years earlier a similar proposal to dam a wilderness river would not have occasioned the slightest ripple of public protest.”¹⁴⁰ The preservationists had proven their ability to pervade the American consciousness, as evidenced by the amount of protests that occurred over the question of whether to dam the valley. Several magazines published articles protesting the dam, while hundreds of newspapers, including *The New York Times*, included editorials in favor of protecting the valley from being flooded.¹⁴¹

Muir’s impact on Theodore Roosevelt was one of his most significant contributions to the environmental movement. Although Roosevelt ultimately sided with Pinchot on the damming of Hetch Hetchy, he still managed to become a champion for the preservationist cause, gaining John Muir’s respect. In March of 1903 the president corresponded with Muir, requesting that he serve as his guide in Yosemite. “I do not want anyone with me but you,” Roosevelt wrote, “and I want to

¹³⁸ Kendrick Clements, “Politics and the Park: San Francisco’s Fight for Hetch Hetchy,” *Pacific Historical Review* 48 (1979): 191.

¹³⁹ “A Chronology of the Sierra Club,” 163.

¹⁴⁰ Nash, *Wilderness*, 181.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

drop politics... and just be out in the open with you.”¹⁴² Agreeing to accompany Roosevelt, Muir responded, “Of course I shall go with you gladly.”¹⁴³

In *An Autobiography*, Roosevelt described Yosemite in a style similar to much of Muir’s writings about the park. The president noted the “majestic trunks” of the sequoias, which he claimed “rose round us like the pillars of a mightier cathedral.”¹⁴⁴ Roosevelt’s sense of awe for the marvels he witnessed and his use of religious imagery helps explain much of the mutual affection the two men shared. Both took great pleasure in immersing themselves in wilderness and considered it a near religious experience. Roosevelt’s appreciation for the scenery he encountered complicates the notion that he can be categorized as a strict conservationist, a tendency of many scholars.¹⁴⁵ In fact, while listing his own accomplishments in resource protection as president, Roosevelt included many of the ways in which humans benefitted from his actions. But he then added, “Even more important was the taking of steps to preserve from destruction beautiful and wonderful wild creatures whose existence was threatened by greed and wantonness.”¹⁴⁶ Pinchot’s writing, on the other hand, is straightforward and pragmatic, lacking the enthusiasm for natural wonders which characterizes the writings of Muir and Roosevelt.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Theodore Roosevelt to John Muir, March 14, 1903, John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University Library, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California.

¹⁴³ John Muir to Theodore Roosevelt, March 27, 1903, John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University Library, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California.

¹⁴⁴ Theodore Roosevelt, *An Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 322.

¹⁴⁵ For example, see Stephen Ponder, “Publicity in the Interest of the People,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 20 (1990): 547-555.

¹⁴⁶ Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, 420.

¹⁴⁷ For more information about Pinchot’s conservationist policies, see John Meyer, “Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, and the Boundaries of Politics in American Thought,” *Polity* 30 (1997): 267-284.

Following their 1903 visit in the park, Roosevelt agreed to support Muir in his fight to expand Yosemite's borders to include the Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley, which had remained under state control after the park's establishment in 1890.¹⁴⁸ In 1905 a bill was finally passed by Congress and signed by Roosevelt that incorporated both areas into the national park.¹⁴⁹ In a letter to his friend Robert Underwood Johnson, the associate editor of *Century Magazine*, Muir acknowledged the crucial role Roosevelt played in enlarging the park: "About two years ago public opinion, which had long been on our side, began to rise into effective action. On the way to Yosemite [in 1903] both the President and our Governor were won to our side, and since then the movement was like Yosemite avalanches."¹⁵⁰

In 1915, following John Muir's death, Theodore Roosevelt wrote a tribute to the preservationist. In the editorial, which appeared in *Outlook Magazine*, Roosevelt referred to Muir as an "emphatically good citizen" who was "brimming over with friendliness and kindness." The former president recounted his and Muir's camping trip, declaring he "spent a delightful three days and two nights with [Muir]."¹⁵¹ Roosevelt concluded his eulogy by commenting on Muir's ability to inspire those he encountered: "His greatest influence was always upon those who were brought into personal contact with him. Our generation owes much to John Muir."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Holliday, "The Politics," 138.

¹⁴⁹ "California National Parks Chronology," *California History* 69 (1990): 93-94.

¹⁵⁰ John Muir to Robert Underwood Johnson, April 21, 1908, in *His Life*, ed. Badè, 350.

Conclusion

Theodore Roosevelt often is credited as being the first conservationist president. A visionary, he had established himself as an active protector of wilderness lands before ascending to the presidency from 1901 to 1909. While Governor of New York, he fought for the protection of the Palisades Parkway and recommended safeguarding land in the Adirondack and Catskill mountains. While president, he added five new national parks, greatly increased the amount of land designated as forest reserves, and created the U.S. Forestry Service. According to scholar Douglas Brinkley, Roosevelt “did far more for the long-term protection of wilderness than all of his White House predecessors combined.”¹⁵³

Although he often sided with conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot and George Bird Grinnell, Roosevelt’s passion for land protection extended beyond a desire to conserve resources or game animals for future use. He also had a non-utilitarian appreciation for wilderness, not unlike figures such as Henry David Thoreau, Jeanne Carr, and John Muir. In 1905 he expressed a desire to preserve the United States’ natural wonders:

Surely our people do not understand even yet the rich heritage that is theirs. There can be nothing in the world more beautiful than the Yosemite, the groves of giant sequoias and redwoods, the Canyon of the Colorado, the Canyon in the Yellowstone, the Three Tetons; and our people should see to it that they are preserved for their children and their children’s children forever with their majestic beauty unmarred.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Theodore Roosevelt, “John Muir: An Appreciation,” *Outlook Magazine* 109 (1915): 27.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁵³ Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 20.

¹⁵⁴ Theodore Roosevelt, *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 317.

It was Theodore Roosevelt's realist attitude toward protecting nature, however, that ultimately characterized him as an effective defender of wilderness. In a letter he sent to Muir in 1907 concerning the damming of Hetch Hetchy, Roosevelt articulated his protectionist philosophy:

I will do everything in my power to protect not only the Yosemite, which we have already protected, but other similar great natural beauties of this country; but you must remember that it is out of the question permanently to protect them unless we have a certain degree of friendliness toward them on the part of the people of the State in which they are situated; and if they are used so as to interfere with the permanent material development of the State instead of helping the permanent material development, the result will be bad.¹⁵⁵

Roosevelt understood the delicate political balance between considering the needs and desires of the people and preserving natural wonders. Although he believed in the notion that nature was intrinsically valuable, he knew that its protection could never be realized without the support of the public.

Roosevelt's numerous accomplishments in wilderness protection were remarkable and should not be understated. However, a more thorough understanding of his ideas and policies is gained by examining the origins and many influences on environmentalist attitudes throughout America's history. Native American interactions with land, early American religious principles, Transcendentalist ideas, and icons such as Muir and Pinchot are all an integral part of the ideological origins of the American environmental movement.

¹⁵⁵ Theodore Roosevelt to John Muir, September 16, 1907, John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University Library, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California.

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