THE HISPANIC/LATINO MINORITY AND OUR NATIONAL PARKS:

ENCOURAGING VALUES OF OWNERSHIP AND STEWARDSHIP TO MINORITY CLASSES

A Report of a Senior Study

by

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Editor
ABSTRACT

“The Hispanic/Latino Minority and Our National Parks: Encouraging Values of Ownership and Stewardship to Minority Classes” is a thesis study investigating low rates of participation and visitation by ethnic minorities in U.S. National Park Service units. Beginning with an example of the importance of involving minority classes in our national park, the first chapters is a discussion on the roles of race, environment and the place of parks in American society in regards to American history and cultural development. In continuation, the main structure of the thesis is a qualitative study on the Hispanic/Latino culture of East Tennessee in relation to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The purpose of the thesis is to determine culturally-based explanations for low rates of visitation and participation in national parks by the Hispanic/Latino minority.
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INTRODUCTION

For my senior thesis, I initially planned to study how the promotion of stewardship and ownership of our national parks and protected lands could help their continued conservation. However, the American population across the nation has significantly diversified in the past few decades. The “melting pot” of America continues to mix and change with the mass immigration of new minorities to the United States. As it does so, it seems as if the people who visit our nation’s best kept treasures have not diversified along with the country. Therefore, in an ever-diversifying nation, how can the National Park Service (NPS) hope to instill values of conservation in their visitors if their visitors continue to stay the same as the rest of the world changes? Through my senior study I hope to address this issue by examining the Hispanic/Latino minority in relation to the national parks. Consequently, my topic will be to promote ownership and stewardship among the Hispanic/Latino minority for the continued conservation of our national parks.

I plan to study Hispanic/Latino involvement in the two closest national parks, which are the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Through personal interviews with Hispanic/Latino community members of different socioeconomic backgrounds in Blount and Knox Counties, I will seek to examine and understand the culture of the Hispanic/Latino community. This will give me insight into the Hispanic/Latino culture’s
relation to park attendance and involvement. From these interviews I hope to find out what barriers, if any, inhibit the Hispanic/Latino population from attending. These could include language barriers inside the park, their financial barriers, or what cultural/personal qualities, if any, may influence their decision to visit the national parks. In addition, I will evaluate my research in relation to current theories regarding minority attendance. In the end, I hope to draw conclusions on how best to involve the Hispanic/Latino minority in the national parks. This might be accomplished through youth maintenance programs or the creation of Spanish language materials and information distributed inside the parks.

In some way or another, issues involving our national parks have always been of utmost importance to me. Since I was a small child, I have ventured into the wilderness of the Great Smoky Mountains and other forests with my father. Here, I learned the values of hard work and endurance through the trail maintenance I performed since I was old enough to carry a hand tool. My father always made it a point to me that I should take care of and help to conserve the national park that we technically own as citizens of the United States and of the state of Tennessee. I suppose that I was lucky to have grown up with these values of ownership and stewardship instilled in me by my father, but too often I see that the populations surrounding the national parks do not share the same values or passion as I have.

When I started at Maryville College, thoughts of choosing a major were constantly on my mind, and as I pondered what to study, I could not think of anything else that interested me more than studying the natural environment that I loved. Soon, another passion emerged, and that was for the Spanish language and culture. After declaring my double major, I completed my plans to study abroad in Chile for the second semester of my junior year. After living in Chile, I returned with a new-found appreciation for the national treasures we have and the developing
environmental ethic in our country, as well as a healthy admiration for all things Latin American. After attending the 75th Rededication of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park on September 2, 2009, my passion for the environment and the national parks was combined with my love for Latin America. As I sat listening to congressmen, senators and governors talk about the importance of the National Park and the people who helped to conserve it, I began to notice that there were hardly any members of minority classes present. Of course, the Rededication mainly invited former residents of the park, their families and important leaders of groups and organizations that promote the park, the majority of which happened to be white. Yet, this merely served to jog my memory. Continuing to think, I realized that I had never really seen any minority classes at all on the trails or outside of the few tourist areas in the National Park, and I asked myself, “How can the Park Service expect future generations to have the same values of conservation if the people conserving the park do not diversify with the rest of the nation?” It was from this point that I wanted to dedicate my senior thesis to promoting the values of ownership and stewardship for national parks among the Hispanic/Latino minority.
CHAPTER I

RACE, ENVIRONMENT, AND NATIONAL PARKS

Situated near California’s rural San Joaquin Valley, where nearly half the population is Hispanic/Latino, Yosemite National Park surprisingly receives very few Spanish-speaking visitors. Unlike the majority of parks across the country, Yosemite has the funds to hire rangers both to work inside the park instructing and educating visitors and outside of it visiting local communities and performing community outreach events, where many are specific attempts at reaching out to minorities. Working at different Mexican cultural heritage celebrations in Fresno, CA, an atypical Yosemite ranger regularly leaves the park to perform these outreach events and display pictures of Yosemite’s breathtaking vistas, pass out brochures in Spanish, and encourage Hispanic/Latino families to visit the park. This is Yosemite ranger Mauricio Escobar, and without a doubt, his life has been impacted by wild scenic places in the United States (Khokha).

Growing up in rural El Salvador, Escobar crossed illegally into the United States at age 10 with his family after fleeing a bloody civil war in his home country. As a young adult, he confronted many challenges from gang violence to issues of acculturation, but from participating as a member of the Student Conservation Association, Escobar’s life was changed after spending a summer building trails and visiting national parks.
Recalling these memories in an interview, Escobar said that he had never gone camping before and was surprised when he did because in his opinion at the time, “it was something that white people did on TV” (Khokha). He explained, “Hispanic families don’t recreate the way Anglo families do. Latinos tend to congregate in large families; we like the loud music; carne asada burning anywhere, everywhere; a soccer game spontaneously springs up” (Khokha). As suggested by Escobar, Hispanic/Latino families may not choose to recreate in national parks by the fact that they are intimidated by the rules, regulations and entrance fees or simply because their cultural traditions do not include these outings. However, after reflecting on his life and the profound changes he has experienced, Escobar says, “I didn’t think it was possible to have a place like this. It changed how I saw nature and my place in [it]” (Khokha). Now, Escobar cites his life experiences and encourages Hispanic/Latino families “to make an investment in their children’s future” by bringing them to a national park (Khokha). He says, “It’s moving to know [Yosemite] is among the places that helped me become strong. My life is completely different than what I thought it would be, and yet, it’s so much better because of places like this” (Khokha).

While Mauricio Escobar’s story exemplifies the importance of involving minority groups in our national parks, Escobar may be an exception because not all facets of American society perceive the meaning of the national parks in the same manner. America is unique in the fact that it is diverse, but its diversity can be problematic for a system of parks that has been historically dominated by white, Anglo American influence. However, national parks are for the America of today in all its cultural and ethnic diversity. Therefore, this chapter will not focus on unattainable methods for
reshaping society; instead, it will focus on understanding history and culture in relation to issues of race, environment and the place of parks in American society.

Throughout America’s history of environmental beliefs, views of nature have been dominated constantly by traditional Western thought (Meeker 3). In this context, nature is often seen as “a symbol of peace and purity” and “a place of refuge from the problems of civilization,” while on the other hand, it is also believed that nature reaffirms human worth and purity and sanctifies people through contact with it (3, 4). For much of history, enjoyment of nature was restricted only for the wealthy, privileged classes, who advocated this view, but in the developing American mindset during the American Revolution, land belonged to the people and for the benefit of the people. At the time, many people viewed a close attachment to the land as a way to draw moral strength for themselves and to please God with their work. Continuing in this religious framework, this thought pattern often raised nature to the level of the Garden of Eden, where it was seen as pure and good until infiltrated by corruption, and as Thomas Jefferson saw it, industry was the snake in the garden. To Jefferson and many others at the time, the ideal America would have been one based on the concept of the American, pastoral garden. In this vision, people draw virtue and political rights from their labor and their stewardship to the land, but after America began its transformation into the industrial machine with the War of 1812, Jefferson’s hope for the American agrarian state soon started to vanish. Then, the national park idea was finally born much later in 1872 with Yellowstone in an attempt to preserve some part of that vision from the excesses of industry (4), but in many ways, this structure of environmental belief was not inclusive for all Americans.
In the United States, the privileged aristocracy was simply replaced by farm-landowners and industry leaders, and even though the land existed for the benefit of the people, African and Native American populations were by and large excluded from this vision (Meeker 4). Following the examples of Yellowstone and Yosemite, national parks were created to be Gardens of Eden, but the cultural property of this myth was not shared among all ethnicities. In particular, African and Native American populations did not support “the idea of separate value systems for nature and for humanity” (5). Both cultures saw that it was the essential responsibility of human civilization to adapt to the natural processes of the land, not the other way around as conceived by white populations. In addition, the history of forced removal and slavery in the United States did not encourage these groups to participate in this belief structure either (5). Perhaps, this social construction of wilderness has in many ways been harmful to America because it prevents “discovering what an ethical, sustainable, honorable human place in nature might actually look like” (Feldman and Hsu 201). Yet, it is this idea of the separation of wilderness and humanity that directed early eco-criticism to focus on the representation and stewardship of wild nature, which promoted the national park idea, instead of a place within it (200). Nevertheless, this tendency of multiple viewpoints on nature defined across racial lines is as prevalent in the history of the conception of nature as it was in the evolution of different environmental movements from environmental justice to the environment portrayed through the media.

Of course, the environmental movement promoting preservation, conservation, stewardship and wise use has not infiltrated all aspects of society; in fact, it has been rejected by certain minority groups because of its relation to past patterns of white
exceptionalism (Feldman and Hsu 202). However, as the conception of the environment has expanded, many minorities have begun to explore how the “perception of nature is mediated by race, class, gender, and geography” (200). Therefore, since past conceptions of nature tended to focus on the wild, uninhabited spaces, more current environmental movements have taken an opposite turn toward the urban landscapes of the cities and suburbs.

Elaborating on a more flexible definition of nature and environment, minority critics and activists joined environmental discourse with a movement spearheading tendencies of environmental exploitation toward minorities; this gave birth to the environmental justice movement in the 1980’s (Feldman and Hsu 202, 203). Supported by minority groups, this movement quickly changed the conception of nature’s location and the direction of environmental discourse toward improving urban environments in order to safeguard human health (Soll 265). While it challenged mainstream environmentalism and the importance of the park system, the environmental justice movement brought much needed attention to and has done much to stop the “racially uneven distribution of resources and toxicity” that have plagued urban centers with minority populations (Feldman and Hsu 203). However, environmental justice still has not advocated a form of environmentalism that incorporates the needs of minorities with mainstream tendencies for conservation, but this still remains a challenge.

Even today, America has not been able to create an environmental discourse that can be shared by all facets of society. The cultural property that supports the separation of natural and human affairs still thrives today, and inside environmentalism, the new version of this tendency continues to be seen in the presentation of race and the
environment through mainstream media. From websites and consumer packaging to environmentally sound products, America has been flooded with the message to “Conserve the Environment,” but after looking past the racially balanced advertisements, just who is the target of this new environmentalism being preached in the store front and from the shopping cart? Plainly, this new environmentalism is focused on the consumer and he/she is more than likely to be white (Soll 261). Even inside a topic as broad as the environment, where all “realms of human existence—economy, health, government policy, weather—converge,” racial barriers still exist as many environmental issues are coded as white by green consumption and business (261). Even though responsible, green consumerism is an integral part of this movement, the mainstream, green media supports a dangerous assumption that the problems of resource scarcity and pollution control can be solved on the individual level through responsible consumerism as they extol the energy saving benefits of light bulbs and washing machines (261). These problems are most likely to be solved through international cooperation and collective action, but that topic doesn’t quite get the same attention. Just like the concept of the Garden of Eden, allowing green to go mainstream and stay there may not attract other racial groups. Therefore, the media must be restructured to present the environment and environmental concerns as those that impact the world and all its populations if future movements are going to succeed in creating a common discourse on the environment (262). However, these environmental movements may have always been racially stratified, but another factor does not seem to be.

Even though these movements may have come from different perspectives on nature and the environment, it is still significant that they emphasize different issues and
are supported by different groups. Environmental justice is essential to protecting against abuse towards minorities, while the mainstream media movement has helped to bring environmental thought and practices to public attention. Yet, no matter how much these movements have succeeded in their own goals, they both have only concentrated on segments of society. Whether it is those that are affected by poor decisions impacting pollution levels in urban areas or those that buy “green” to do their part in saving the world, there is one factor that is the same for all races, nationalities and income levels; this is environmental concern, which is a social construction to address environmental problems within a society’s cultural, social and political framework (Hunter 567).

Evidence taken from studies done on environmentalism and conservation issues between races has shown that environmental concern “appears even across racial groups” (566). In some instances, white groups are more likely to support environmental organizations, while African-Americans have higher levels of concern in regards to some issues, such as safeguarding against pollution in urban areas (566). However, for a topic that has been historically divided through different approaches to environmentalism, racial groups can find common ground, and even though national parks may not be the preferred form of nature for all these groups, they are already an integral part of American society and have the capacity to inspire future Americans to work for an integrated environmental movement. In order to create this new environmentalism, where past forms have failed to include all realms of human existence, the original impetus of the national parks has to be protected and shared. In a way, national parks and other wild spaces can be seen as the starting ground for the new environmentalism if all groups can see them for what they are—the original inspiration for protecting the environment.
Since their creation, national parks have been loved by Americans, but this love affair has been historically dominated by white populations. In 2000, the NPS tallied a total of 300 million visits, and among these, racial and ethnic minorities are largely absent. Visitor surveys at parks across the country maintain this fact and reviews of the NPS Visitor Service Project do as well. One review found that “only 7% of visitor groups were ethnic minorities” at nine different national parks, which included the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, while another found that “90% of visitor groups were largely whites” at other park units (Floyd 41). Without a doubt, a great challenge faces the NPS. Soon, the NPS must find a way to “[engender] support for its programs from an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse society” (41). Two basic rationales explain this need. First, racial and ethnic minorities will continue to grow and constitute larger segments of society, and second, if the demographic trends of national parks continue to persist into the future, lower demand for the national park experience may become a reality (42, 43). To address this issue, minority populations should be examined in order to create policy that will hopefully impact their attendance, but the composition of minority populations has been transformed by the growing Hispanic/Latino population. Therefore, this population should be addressed in particular.

According to the US Census Bureau, the Spanish-speaking, or Hispanic, population reached 35.3 million people in the 2000 US Census, which was 12.5% of the total population. Since 1980, the Hispanic population has grown rapidly in the southwestern states of Texas and California and has continued to spread through much of the Midwest, the South and the Northeast. As of July 1, 2006, there was a total of 44.3 million Hispanics residing in the United States. This number accounts for half the
nation’s growth rate between 2000 and 2006 (Hispanics in the U.S.). In fact, the Hispanic/Latino population has supplanted African Americans as the largest minority group (Clemetson). In general, Hispanic/Latino families are larger with an average family size of 3.2, and they are also typically younger with a median age of 25.9 (Lopez, Lopez, Wilkins, Torres, Valdez, Teer, and Bowser 555). Inside this large population, 60% of the population is native born, while on the other hand, roughly three quarters of the foreign and native Hispanic population finds its origin in Mexico, Puerto Rico or Cuba (Hispanics in the U.S.). However, even though this population is predominately Mexican, it cannot be stressed more importantly that it is a large and diverse population that comes from twenty-one countries, three continents, many unique cultures, and as a matter of fact, multiple languages. Therefore, these numbers cannot in any way fully describe this population, because they do not take into account the complexity of identity that this population has. However, understanding cultural identity is incredibly important in order to understand this population, and in the Hispanic/Latino world, it is a complex subject.

Throughout history and across the world, it is human tendency to construct ethnicity “out of the material of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, or regionality” (Nagel 153). Without a doubt, ethnicity is constantly evolving and changing because it is a process of self-definition and cultural formation in contrast to the larger society. In this way, ethnicity is not only constructed by it members but formed through social, economic and political pressures as the ethnicity struggles to maintain its identity (152), and just like all other cultures and ethnicities, the Hispanic/Latino community in the United States has faced a similar challenge. Due to their vast complexity and diversity, the creation of a general term and even general description for the purpose of
establishing an ethnic identity has been very difficult for the Hispanic/Latino population. For instance, many have taken offense to the political term *Hispanic*, which was invented by the US Census Bureau (Comas-Díaz 115). This term is often overgeneralized when it is applied to all peoples from Latin American countries because this term implies that a person has Spanish heritage and speaks Spanish. However, the fact remains that millions of Latin Americans do not speak Spanish and millions more are indigenous, and still, many native born Americans, who only speak English, are classified as Hispanic (116). Perhaps, a true Hispanic/Latino ethnicity will not emerge inside the US any time soon due to the great mixture of national, regional and ethnic cultures, but without a doubt, regional identities are the only acceptable identities as of now because the evolution of the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity is still in transformation. Hispano, Latino, Americano—all are examples of failed attempts at a unified ethnicity, while national and regional identities, such as *Mexicano, Chicano* or *Nuyorican*, pervade (120). Regardless of the term, however, this community keeps searching for an identity because it is still living in contrast to larger society, but with time and the eventual acculturation, it may not be necessary.

In addressing the issue of incorporating the Hispanic/Latino population into the park system, researchers have studied Hispanic/Latino recreational preferences in the United States. In 2000, the Social Research Laboratory of Northern Arizona University collected survey data from 3,515 households in the United States for the *2000 National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public*. In contrast with 36% of non-Hispanic whites, 33% of American Indians, 29% of Asian American, and 13% of African Americans, only 27% of Hispanic/Latino Americans that responded cited that
they had visited a national park in the past two years. In addition, Hispanic/Latino respondents identified the overall cost, lack of information on park activities, and travel distance as barriers to visitation. However, the study also identified that Hispanic/Latino Americans are significantly concerned about having to make reservations too far in advance, and in addition, they are also “more than twice as likely as whites and African Americans to be concerned about safety in National Park System units” (*Ethnic and Racial Diversity*). Moving away from barriers, a study on the management of recreation sites for ethnic and racial diversity found that Hispanic/Latino park visitors showed the strongest preference for an area in which they could recreate (picnic and engage in and watch group sports) with their family; although, they also showed a strong preference for a clean, safe area as well (Baas, Ewert, and Chavez 528).

However, many theories on ethnic patterns in recreation have also been explored. For the purpose of my study, I will examine three hypotheses that appear to be most applicable to my research design and purpose. These are the subcultural hypothesis, the assimilation hypothesis, and the marginality hypothesis. The subcultural hypothesis draws on the common social theory that ethnic and racial groups have “divergent norms, value systems, and socialization practices,” where these cultural differences influence preferences toward recreation. Following this hypothesis, a cultural adherent chooses to recreate according to their own cultural preferences independent of socioeconomic factors (Floyd 44). Consequently, the sites chosen for recreation may represent the group’s collective identity or contrast it with another’s. For instance, white Americans may choose to recreate in national parks because it is a place of refuge and escape for
them, while Hispanic/Latino Americans may choose a city park with a picnic area and soccer field because it is a good place to recreate with their families.

On the other hand, the assimilation hypothesis references that boundaries between societies are reduced as they interact. Inside this hypothesis, the two most studied types of assimilation are cultural and structural assimilation. Cultural assimilation, or acculturation, refers to the acquisition by the minority group of cultural characteristics, such as language and diet, of the majority group, while structural assimilation refers to the interaction between minority and majority groups in primary and secondary groups. However, the key assumption to this hypothesis is that assimilation leads to similarity between groups (Floyd 45, 46).

Finally, the marginality hypothesis holds that participation in various forms of recreation among minority and majority populations can be determined by the population’s access to socioeconomic resources, which in turn, have been influenced by historical patterns in education and the labor market. Moreover, these historical patterns among racial groups to this day affect disposable income relegated for recreation. Therefore, the removal of socioeconomic barriers would influence the participation rates of minority groups, who have the limited access to socioeconomic resources and have suffered the most due to historical discrimination. However, this hypothesis has been used to explain participation in wilderness areas by African Americans and it may help to explain trends with the Hispanic/Latino minority, but the strength of this theory rests on the assumption that both minority and majority groups have an equal propensity to recreate in the same way (Floyd 43). While this may not be true concerning the Hispanic/Latino minority, parts of this hypothesis will still be very important to the study.
In conclusion, I have chosen to concentrate on the Hispanic/Latino population for my senior thesis because this minority is an emerging, complex and important population in the United States that shows potential for further engagement in the national parks. If research is followed in order to create policy to promote the national park system as a place of recreation to minorities, the NPS will be one step closer to providing the park experience for the future of a more ethnically and racially diverse society. In order to achieve this goal, I believe that the Hispanic/Latino minority is a new, important group in which to begin. Evaluating the history of the national parks, it is clear that our system of parks was not founded upon an all-encompassing view of the environment. Through history, many different groups have disagreed with the viewpoint on the environment that helped to establish the national park system, yet it is the multiple viewpoints of nature and the environment that have spawned so many different environmental movements. The environmental justice movement directed much needed attention toward exposure of toxins and pollution in urban populations, while the media’s portrayal of the environment has done much to bring environmental issues to popular attention. Still, these and others have not accomplished environmental unification for all of the important realms of human existence. Due to the power that environmental change has to affect all aspects of society, our environmental future will require that all peoples, especially those within a nation, think and act together in order to solve ecological problems. Achieving consensus in environmental beliefs will not happen overnight because many do not see the immediacy of the problems. Therefore, action must be directed where an impact can be made. While the national parks may not be the preferred form of nature for all groups, national parks already hold an important place in American society. For the continued
conservation of not only our national parks but of our environment, I believe promoting conservationist ideals and appreciation for the environment among minority groups will result in better use of the park system by the diverse American public and opportunities for environmental education. Thus, the next step for incorporating a more diverse visitor population will both help to determine the NPS’s future as well as the future of the environmental movement. I plan to assist the NPS in research on how best to promote values of ownership and stewardship among the Hispanic/Latino minority class in order to involve better this minority in the national park system.
CHAPTER II

METHODS AND RESULTS

The purpose of my senior study research project is to record and analyze the experiences of Hispanic/Latino people living in Blount and/or Knox counties. With my research project, I sought to develop a greater understanding of the Hispanic/Latino community and their opinions of our national parks and their experiences within them. In order to gain this insight, I was determined to complete a series of qualitative interviews with no less than five Hispanic/Latino adults living in the East Tennessee area. In compliance with all standards for ethical research, I explained informed consent during my interviews, and forms were provided to participants in both English and Spanish. I explained to the participants that each participant will be given a pseudonym for confidentiality, but since the project may involve reporting each individual’s personal views and/or experiences, the participants were warned of the possibility that their identity may be detectable due to the uniqueness of his or her experiences or views. In addition, participants signed whether or not he or she was willing to have his or her voice recorded. The consent form, where the participant indicated his or her compliance, consists of both informed and tape consent. Furthermore, participation is entirely voluntary, and the participant was allowed to stop the interview at any time without
penalty. Conversely, if the participant were to decide not to participate, there would not have been any penalty. There were also no costs for participation other than the time it took to complete the interview, and the only anticipated risks were slight discomfort after recalling an experience. However, this did not occur.

Before the interview began, I first gave a preliminary survey of general information including such things as age, gender, education and marital status. Afterward, I conducted a semi-structured interview. The types of questions that were used are qualitative in nature and include the following: “How often do you visit national parks in your area?” and “What do you look for in your recreation areas of choice?” Once the interview was completed, audio files of the interview were transcribed and translated, and both the transcriptions and the recordings are kept on file in a secure location in the Division of Social Sciences at Maryville College.

For the interview process, I prepared a series of eighteen questions, which were then divided into three subsets. The first subset (Questions 1-5) addressed the individual’s preferences toward free time, outdoor activities, park setting, available services, park location, and travel time. The second subset (Questions 6-11 and 15) examined the participant’s knowledge of the NPS, visitation, and overall experience. Lastly, the third subset (Questions 12-14 and 16-18) looked at the Hispanic/Latino minority in relation to barriers that may hinder access to national parks and the perceived relationship between the Hispanic/Latino culture and US national parks. As a whole, this compendium takes into account and tests the marginality hypothesis, subcultural hypothesis, and assimilation hypothesis.
Between the dates of March 16, 2010, and March 23, 2010, I conducted six interviews with nine people. Seven of the participants identified as Hispanic/Latino, and two identified as white, Caucasian. These two participants are spouses and were included in the interview due to their presence at the time and their willingness to participate. Still, their responses represent a different category of people that do not have as much significance to the study or the Hispanic/Latino culture. However, there were five male participants and four female participants overall. The average age for all the participants was forty years, ranging from sixteen to sixty years of age. The participants identified six distinct nationalities, which includes the United States, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Spain, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador. In addition, participants identified personal, cultural identities, such as black-Ecuadorian and Texan, while the terms Hispanic and Latino were also commonly used as a cultural identity as well. Economically, their professions were diverse and included cook, student, bookkeeper, truck driver, social worker and business-owner. Two-thirds of the participants were married, and all married couples had children. Of these households with children, the average was 3.25. In terms of education, five participants had earned a four-year degree or higher, while two had earned a high school degree and two had no educational degree. Overall, I believe that the group was diverse even for its relatively small size.

In response to the first subset of questions, the majority of respondents identified that they enjoyed spending time with family and friends the most during their free time, while other activities like going to the movies, watching TV, and shopping were common. Only about one-third of the participants were explicit in saying that they enjoy spending their free time doing something outside, but when asked about favorite outdoor
activities, all participants identified that they enjoyed one or more of the following activities: trail walking, engaging in or watching sports, and watching their children play. In response to questions on available facilities in a park setting, the presence of trashcans was cited the most; followed by clean bathrooms, available picnic areas and sports fields, respectively. In continuation, eight of nine participants expressed that they would not travel more than an hour to any park, yet four of these participants expressed that they would travel more than an hour to a park setting if it was worth the trip and if they were on vacation. Only one respondent showed no preference for travel time. When asked about preferences towards parks in an urban versus a wilderness setting, the results were divided with four respondents preferring a wilderness setting, four respondents preferring an urban setting, and one respondent preferring both. For the wilderness setting, the respondents overwhelmingly cited the presence of vegetation, fresh air, and tranquility as reasons to go, while respondents for a park in an urban setting cited proximity and ease of access. However, it is important to note that all participants enjoy being outside and connecting to their environment in some way, whether it is in a city park or a wilderness area.

In response to the second subset of questions, all the respondents believed US National Parks to be places for human recreation, while only five included that national parks are also places for environmental preservation and protection. Seven of nine participants were aware of the Smoky Mountains National Park, which is the closest park to Knox and Blount Counties and the most-visited park in the nation. On the other hand, only four respondents were aware of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Five participants claimed to have visited the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the last
year. Of these five participants, three participants said that they made two to four trips a year to the park, while the other two only averaged a visit once a year, if that. Of the four participants that have never visited a national park, one assured that he had the desire to go and visit the park, but with working six days a week, he can’t afford the time. While on the other hand, the other two participants expressed a lack of interest because they did not grow up in a culture that includes these activities. They went as far to say that they do not attend wilderness park settings because it is not in their culture. Yet, neither participant had any fears or complaints related to visiting a park, and this is similar across the whole group. Not a single participant identified that they had any worries or fears related to visiting a national park due to any past experience or preconception. In addition, seven participants said that they do, or would, enjoy visiting a national park, and for this, they cited the simple enjoyment of nature and the profuse and diverse vegetation. Two participants admitted that they enjoy national parks because there are many of them across the country, each affording a different experience in a different place, while on the other hand, one participant said that he finds enjoyment in national parks from the sense of adventure that he feels.

Finally, in the third subset, participants responded to questions on perceived barriers to access and the relationship between the Hispanic/Latino culture and wilderness parks. For this project, we defined a ‘barrier to access’ as anything that may inhibit a person’s access to the use of a national park. While not all participants had identified a perceived barrier, those that did offered varied opinions. The most common issue seen as a barrier to access was a lack of time and money, and going along with this, the second most common issue was the distance and travel time to the parks. However,
other perceived barriers to access included large families, lack of knowledge of park experience and resources, language, and the Hispanic/Latino culture, in general. When prompted with a question to remove these barriers, again, not all participants offered an answer, but in many ways, there are not solutions to many of these barriers. Yet, two participants offered an idea. The first included bilingual information on the national parks and their resources, while this may presently exist in some parks, the participant had never seen this in any previously visited parks. The second solution was a campaign outside of the national park to encourage Hispanic/Latino visitation and educate Hispanics/Latinos on park resources and proper use.
CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Directing early eco-criticism, the national park movement was the starting point for much of what we consider “environmental” and “green” today. Yet, this movement, like many others in history, was founded upon the ideas of few, yet overtime, it engendered the support of many. Throughout American history, the conception of nature as separate from the human experience has influenced many different aspects of society, economy and politics, and undoubtedly, it influenced the formation of the United States’ national parks. Whether it was the prevailing zeitgeist or the encroachment of industry or political will, national parks quickly became yet another example of the separation of nature and the human experience. Today, we can still see how the environment has been quartered off and separated physically and mentally from its many different parts. We need only to compare our air-conditioned, climate-controlled houses and the interlocking web of suburban life to the manicured farmlands and pockets of wilderness in order to see that this separation still exists. Like society, it is clear that our system of parks was founded upon a single interpretation of the environment—one of ownership and stewardship. While many different groups through history have disagreed with this viewpoint, it nonetheless is still firmly entrenched in American life. With this being said,
one should not assume this association to be deleterious. Our national parks have identified with this view and grown into our national identity by it. We can no more change the past as we can guarantee the future, yet I do believe that this association will present a further problem for the National Park Service (NPS). From today and into the future, the United States will only continue to diversify racially, economically, religiously, and politically, and with this, the NPS must continue to provide Americans with an experience of their America through human interaction and recreation without compromising its purposes of ecosystem protection and preservation. In many ways, the national parks represent a heritage of America. They are a part of our unique identity, yet the identity of America is changing and will continue to do so. How should the NPS engender support from a diversifying population and continue to promote the ideals of the park system? Through an analysis of my research into the Hispanic/Latino culture with that of previous studies, my insights may answer this question as I explore how ideals of ownership and stewardship have impacted and are continuing to grow in the Hispanic/Latino minority.

In comparison with previous research, it is important to note that my sample diverges from the US Hispanic/Latino population, but it still yielded similar results. First, my sample exhibited an average age of 40, while the national average is 25.9. Second, only 44% were native born out of the 9 participants, and of the 7 Hispanic/Latino participants, only 28.6% percent were native born. This contrasts with the national population, where 60% of Hispanic/Latino residents are native born. In addition, 66% of my sample cited that they had visited a national park in the last year. Obviously, this contrasts with the NPS study 2000 National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the
American Public, where only 27% of Hispanic/Latino Americans had visited a national park in the last two years. Yet, the number of children per household matched the national average at 3.25. Therefore, while my sample achieved diversity in socioeconomic status and country of origin, it diverges slightly from the national average in terms of age, nativity, and park attendance. Still, I believe that my results strengthen these views and opinions expressed by Hispanic/Latino participants in previous studies, even though my sample was older and primarily foreign born and attended national parks more frequently.

In comparing perceived barriers, my sample of participants gave similar responses to those found by the NPS. In my sample, the most common response as a barrier to visitation consisted of a lack of time and money. This corresponded exactly to the two most common barriers for non-attending participants in a NPS study; these were overall cost, which included fuel, park entrance, food, and other factors, and lack of time due to professions and/or family. The second most common perceived barrier to access in both my study and the NPS study was distance to national parks and travel time, while the third most common barrier was lack of knowledge of national parks and lack of information on activities inside the park.

However, these aforementioned barriers are generalizable across racial boundaries, as the NPS study concluded. To focus more on the Hispanic/Latino culture, my study found that a language barrier was often perceived by the lack of information and signage in Spanish, but many of my participants simply attributed this to life in the US. Additionally, the NPS study found that Hispanic/Latino visitors showed consistent concern about park safety and having to make reservations too far in advance. While
none of my participants thought park units were unsafe or had any fears related to visiting a national park, many of the participants consistently were concerned about their large families and the coordination of family activities. Although no participant gave an explicit concern about making reservations in advance, these concerns are similar due to the fact that family is usually a large factor in day-to-day and future plans.

Concerning preferences towards parks and outdoor activities, the general trend in my study emphasized time spent with family and friends. When at a park, this free time is most often spent walking on trails, playing sports, watching children play, and simply enjoying nature outside. Often, the participants cited that many activities revolved around their children. This was reflected in preferences toward park setting and park services. All participants expressed simplicity in park services. Trashcans, clean bathrooms, and available picnic areas—these services were cited the most and as the most necessary park services for those with children. However, it is most important to note that all participants enjoyed being outside, but each participant preferred a different outdoor environment, whether it was a city park, a wilderness area, or someplace near water.

In relation to other established studies, my results yield similar conclusions. Regardless of park setting, Hispanic/Latino park visitors show more preference toward areas with established amenities, such as bathrooms, sports fields, and picnic tables, than those without these services. I believe that this is because Hispanic/Latino park visitors are more likely to visit in large groups, and consequently, they prefer settings that allow for large family activities. I draw this conclusion from the fact that two-thirds of my participants were married with an average number of 3.25 children. While this
information is helpful to the study, however, I do not believe that quantifiable data alone can answer this complex question.

In evaluation of the tested hypotheses, I believe that all three contribute to the research, but neither answers my research question definitively. As anticipated, the marginality hypothesis correctly assumed that the low rate of participation by the Hispanic/Latino minority in national parks may result from limited access to socioeconomic resources, such as education, income, healthcare, and transportation. From my study, five out of nine participants cited that their most prevalent barrier to participation was a lack of free time and disposable income, where in this case, ample free time can be considered a socioeconomic luxury. Therefore, this hypothesis correctly predicted that a socioeconomic resource was the limiting factor. However, the marginality hypothesis’s principal assumption does not apply to my study. This is because the marginality hypothesis assumes that both majority and minority groups would have the equal propensity to recreate in the same manner and in the same location, but for the purposes of my study, cultural insight matters because the Hispanic/Latino culture showed a similar but not equal propensity towards outdoor recreation in national parks. On the other hand, seven out of nine participants from my study cited that they had the desire to visit a national park through previous experiences interacting with the environment in both rural and urban settings.

In comparison, the subcultural hypothesis further elaborates on the question of culture. Holding that minorities have divergent norms and socialization practices, this hypothesis correctly predicted how Hispanic/Latino cultural characteristics influence
recreational habits. Therefore, this complex issue appears to be based upon both socioeconomic and cultural limiting factors.

As cited by three of the four non-park-attending participants, the Hispanic/Latino culture identifies with nature and the outdoor environment, but it does so in a different way. In comparison with the United States, a person can easily walk to different residential districts, businesses and common spaces within many different cities and towns in Latin America and Spain. This is not to say that cars and buses are not widely used, but with varying levels of public transportation and pedestrian-friendly city layouts, reliance on personal transportation is greatly diminished. In the United States, on the other hand, walking as a means of transportation is limited due to the population’s dependence on the car as a means of personal transportation, the separation of residential and business sectors, and the system of roads and highways. However, for many Hispanics/Latinos, who are often accustomed to living in cities and towns with wide sidewalks, central plazas, and green spaces throughout cities, rural parks may represent a distraction because of location and the expectation for certain forms of recreation.

Therefore, it’s not that Hispanics/Latinos do not identify with nature; it’s just that the culture may identify with it through different forms of interaction. Moreover, this assumption is further magnified by the fact that 40% of the current population is still of foreign birth, which implies that they are still accustomed to outdoor movement within their countries. In addition, American citizens of the Hispanic/Latino culture may still identify with the national, cultural background of parents, grandparents, and other family members. All in all, a large portion of the population has only recently arrived in the United States, and here, the last tested hypothesis takes over.
In combination with the two other tested hypotheses, the assimilation hypothesis added to my study by examining the cultural assimilation of my research group. Following that boundaries between societies are reduced as they interact, it is probable that a minority group will acquire certain cultural characteristics of the majority group. In this case, the acquired characteristic would be the propensity for recreation in a national park. However, four out of nine participants cited that many Hispanics/Latinos in other countries take pride in beautiful, scenic areas in their country of origin. Similar to US national parks, these locations were described as those in far away, rural spaces.

As previously mentioned, the Hispanic/Latino minority has grown so rapidly in the past few decades that a large portion of the minority has only recently arrived. It is plausible that only time and acculturation will influence patterns of recreation in the Hispanic/Latino culture. However, of my seven Hispanic/Latino participants, the two that enjoyed visiting national parks the most were also of their family’s third generation, while those that cited the least interest in national parks were primarily first generation immigrants. Following other three generation models in English language use and fluency, I propose that future generations, who should be more acculturated to the United States, will display similar recreation habits as the majority does. However, if the population continues to grow through immigration, the Hispanic/Latino culture may remain unchanged as the influx of new residents continues.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, my qualitative study of the Hispanic/Latino minority strengthens previous quantitative survey results and hypotheses on Hispanic/Latino recreation habits. The marginality hypothesis correctly predicted that the low rate of participation by the Hispanic/Latino minority in national parks may result from limited access to socioeconomic resources, such as time and disposable income. However, socioeconomic factors are not the only barriers at work.

Using the subcultural hypothesis, I further elaborated how Hispanic/Latino cultural characteristics influence recreational habits due to the divergence between systems of transportation in both the Hispanic/Latino world and in the United States and the cultural identification of interaction with nature. Therefore, I believe that this issue becomes a question of interaction as well as recreation, but then again, much of the population is still relatively new to the United States and it is continuing to grow.

Following the assimilation hypothesis, I expect to see low rates of acculturation as the population increases due to immigration, but eventual acculturation to US recreational habits in national parks may begin to take hold as proposed in a three generation model. With the results from these theories in mind, this may be why parks in low-cost, urban
recreation sites have seen widespread use by the Hispanic/Latino minority, but then the question still remains: how can we expand this minority’s propensity for recreation and willingness to interact with nature to include our beautiful national parks?

Approaching this with the values of ownership and stewardship in mind, I believe that it would be difficult at best to remedy this issue by attempting to address the socioeconomic factors at work. Therefore, I recommend a plan addressing culture and education in order to engender support for the National Park System from the Hispanic/Latino minority. First, it appears that many in the Hispanic/Latino culture are aware but not fully knowledgeable of the park system’s locations, activities, and available experience in park units. Culturally, many in the Hispanic/Latino minority may choose not to reach out and try new things due to the population’s characteristics and the continued flow of culture by continuous immigration. In addition, with the stigma against illegal immigrants, many may also choose not to visit due to the authority figures that represent park units, or they simply do not have the time away from work to recreate. As a result, it appears to me that an educational campaign would be the best option in order to promote the values of ownership and stewardship inside the minority and address cultural barriers to participation.

Directed inside and outside of park units, a proactive educational program in both English and Spanish would be capable of influencing feelings of stewardship towards the park system. To promote visitation, park representatives should seek out Hispanic/Latino cultural celebrations as an outlet to establish interest. This is because in order to care for the park, one must first come to it before one can know, understand and participate in it. However, culturally relevant resource materials on park history, information and
activities as well as varying opportunities for interaction with nature and recreational styles inside the park would hopefully maintain interest and support.

As cited by Park Ranger Mauricio Escobar at the beginning of this thesis, outdoor activities in national parks, such as hiking, backpacking, and camping, are often seen by many minorities as traditionally white activities. While these forms of recreation are not relevant in all cultures, all races and cultures can enjoy them if given the opportunity. In addition to a community and culturally based educational program, a volunteer maintenance program offered in both English and Spanish for Hispanic/Latino youth will go even further to incorporate this minority into our national parks. Regardless of immigration status, an active, hands-on learning experience for Hispanic/Latino youth may be the best method for engendering support into the future. After all, there is not a better way to learn the values of stewardship and ownership than to work for the betterment of the park on the park’s trails and amid its wondrous beauty.

Finally, the Hispanic/Latino minority is constantly growing and changing just as the United States is. Stewardship for the park system may be incorporated into the Hispanic/Latino minority through education and diverse, culturally relevant activities inside the parks, but I believe that values of ownership will only come with acculturation. Perhaps, only time will tell how the Hispanic/Latino minority relates to national parks in the US, but educational opportunities and volunteer, youth maintenance programs will go a long way to incorporate this growing, important minority.
WORKS CITED


