



---

## Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race

Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness

---

**Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo**

In 1990, the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) sent a series of letters to a coalition of mainstream environmental groups known as The Group of Ten. In what was termed “the letter that shook the movement,” SWOP charged the coalition with racism and classism in their perspectives, issue selection, and hiring practices: “Your organizations continue to support and promote policies that emphasize the cleanup and preservation of the environment on the backs of working people in general and people of color in particular.”<sup>1</sup> The SWOP letters were not the first to articulate the role of race and class in environmental politics. The modern environmental justice movement starts for many in 1982 when more than five hundred predominantly African-American protestors took to the streets, literally lying in roads, to prevent the relocation of hazardous waste into their community in Warren County, North Carolina. Others point to 1978, and the efforts of working-class families to protect themselves from the toxic dump contaminating their Love Canal neighborhood and school. In 1987, a Commission for Racial Justice report, “Toxic Waste and Race in the United States,” further documented the role of racism in perpetuating environmentally destructive practices. Although not the first to link class and race to environmental injustice, the SWOP letters represented a turning point in the environmental justice movement and environmental politics. The letters served as a turning point because they placed racism and classism at the heart of the environmental movement itself. In addition to addressing issues of staff composition and hiring practices, the letters pointed to fundamental problems within mainstream environmental organizations. “The Achilles heel of the environmental movement,” activist Pat Bryant noted, “is its whiteness.” Bryant’s comment, while critical of the movement’s racial homogeneity, refers less to the biological incident of skin color than the deep-seated cultural beliefs that blinker major environmental groups in ways “that make it very difficult to build a mass-based movement that has the power to change the conditions of our poisoning.” In other words, whiteness as a social condition — Eurocentrism — enables environmental groups to see environmental issues through a frame of pristine wilderness while blinding them to issues in environments where people live. This perspective hinders the ability of environmental groups to forge coalitions across race

and class lines, coalitions that are necessary to challenge the practices of industrialism. As activist Carl Anthony summarizes, “With its focus on wilderness, the traditional environmental movement on the one hand pretends there were no indigenous people in the North American plains and forests. On the other, it distances itself from the cities, denying that they are part of the environment.”<sup>2</sup>

The charges have hit home, and some of the mainstream environmental groups spent the 1990s fostering productive partnerships with grassroots environmental justice groups with varying degrees of success. At a Sierra Club centennial celebration, then Executive Director Michael Fischer called for “a friendly takeover of the Sierra Club by people of color . . . [or else] remain a middle-class group of backpackers, overwhelmingly white in membership, program, and agenda — and thus condemn[ed] to losing influence in an increasingly multicultural country. . . . The struggle for environmental justice in this country and around the globe must be the primary goal of the Sierra Club during its second century.” Although race has received more publicity and the byword of environmental justice is “environmental racism,” as the SWOP letters suggest, class is equally central to the issue of environmental justice. For example, the infamous Cerrell Associates report to the California Waste Management Board on how to overcome political obstacles to siting mass-burn garbage incinerators is framed in terms of class: “All socio-economic groupings tend to resent the siting of major facilities, but the middle and upper socio-economic strata possess better resources to affectuate their opposition.” African-American environmental justice activist Alberta Tinsley-Williams puts it plainly; “The issue is not Black and white. The issue is the haves vs. the have-nots, because poor people, I don’t care what color you are, suffer in this country.”<sup>3</sup>

During its first one hundred years, the environmental movement has been concerned, almost exclusively, with preserving pristine places. This narrow, class- and race-based perspective of what counts as nature leads the environmental movement to neglect people and the places they inhabit, thus isolating the movement from labor and civil rights concerns and rendering it vulnerable to charges of elitism and misanthropism.<sup>4</sup> Grappling with such a legacy remains a difficult process, for its roots in environmentalism run deep. Class and race are both etched and elided in the early “texts” of the environmental movement. Examining Carleton Watkins’s 1860s Yosemite photographs and John Muir’s 1890 *Century Magazine* essays on Yosemite, show that a classed and raced notion of sublime wilderness comes to stand for “Nature” and defines what is worth preserving. Yosemite occupies a privileged place in the American imagination and the environmental movement. At the height of the Civil War, it was designated the world’s first wilderness park. John Muir discovered his calling and voice in Yosemite and founded the Sierra Club and the environmental preservation movement. As hallowed ground, Yosemite is a rich site for considering both the constructedness of nature and consequences of a pristine wilderness ideal.<sup>5</sup>

Nature has long been understood to be unnatural. Karl Marx argued in 1846 that nature was “an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations.” Raymond Williams characterized it as “perhaps the most complex word in the language.”<sup>6</sup> Under the rubric of thought that can be tentatively titled postmodernism and that would include versions of poststructuralism, cultural stud-

ies, and feminism in various disciplines, inquiries into the constructedness of nature and its consequent deconstruction have proceeded apace.<sup>7</sup> Until recently, the related term “wilderness” has remained relatively unscathed; the “trouble with wilderness,” like the unnaturalness of nature, now constitutes a flash point for environmental historians and activists alike.

“Wilderness,” Roderick Nash noted in the opening lines of his classic study, “has a deceptive concreteness at first glance.” One might add that this deception remains at last glance, too, since its concreteness has beguiled even those who suggest otherwise. In his closing discussion of national parks, Nash writes, “Essentially, a man-managed wilderness is a contradiction because wilderness necessitates an *absence* of civilization’s ordering influence.” Both Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* and Max Oelschlaeger’s *The Idea of Wilderness* make evident the constructedness of wilderness yet read as descriptive rather than critical histories. Both authors implicitly grant wilderness a core essence. William Cronon’s more recent polemic grants no quarter. In contrast to prevailing notions that depict the wilderness as a transcendent space distinct from humanity, a “pristine sanctuary,” Cronon’s wilderness “is quite profoundly a human creation,” indeed, “a product of that civilization.” By mistaking wilderness as an anecdote for the ills of civilization, we fail, Cronon warns, to recognize that the “wilderness is itself no small part” of “our culture’s problematic relationships with the nonhuman world.”<sup>8</sup>

The deconstruction of wilderness has provoked a firestorm of protest, including special issues of *Environmental History* and *Antipode* as well as the edited volumes *The Great New Wilderness Debate* and *Reinventing Nature?: Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*. Critics accuse Cronon of dealing in academic abstractions and insist on their ability to point to a thing out there and call it wilderness. Samuel Hays writes, “Cronon’s wilderness is a world of abstracted ideas, real enough to those who participate in it, but divorced from the values and ideas inherent in wilderness action.” Critics also decry the political consequences of challenging the sanctity of wilderness. Michael Cohen asks, “How is it possible to offer a constructive critique of environmentalism, of the past and present, especially of its ‘save the wilderness’ version, without damaging viable parts of the movement, and without offering an argument largely usable by the opponents of environmentalism who are motivated only by narrow economic gain?”<sup>9</sup>

Cronon is not alone in attempting to answer Cohen’s question. A growing body of work suggests the constructedness of wilderness as well as nature.<sup>10</sup> In deconstructing wilderness, these scholars often point out the implicit race, class, and gender connotations of wilderness and note the unintended political consequences. In particular, through close readings of founding texts of the preservation movement, we attend to the mechanics of creating wilderness. In studying what can be termed the “rhetoric of wilderness,” the debate moves from the abstract realm of ideas to a focus on the prosaic practices that construct wilderness on the ground, that turn a stretch of rocks and trees into a place of sublime wilderness. By linking wilderness to whiteness, the universality of the idea of wilderness as a natural fact comes under and scrutiny and its cultural specificity and social and political history can be traced.

## Whitening the Wilderness

The ills of the environmental movement diagnosed by activists such as Pat Bryant and groups like SWOP are not only an effect of contemporary shortsightedness within the movement but also reflect a legacy of Eurocentricism. The most obvious example, well documented by environmental historians, concerns the forced removal of native peoples from Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Parks between the 1870s and 1930s.<sup>11</sup> The “justifying myth” or ideological narrative that rationalized government policy toward native people from the antebellum era forward characterized Indians as “primitives” obstructing the progress of the nation’s destiny.<sup>12</sup> As historian Mark Spence notes, Yosemite advocate Samuel Bowles typified this position and its effects on wilderness discourse. During his 1865 visit to Yosemite, Bowles remarked that the decision to “preserve such areas” was both “a blessing to . . . all visitors” and “an honor to the nation.” The preserved wilderness area championed by Bowles privileged a conception of wilderness predicated on Indian displacement. In his 1868 best-seller, *The Parks and Mountains of Colorado: A Summer Vacation in the Switzerland of America*, Bowles wrote: “We know they are not our equals . . . we know that our right to the soil, as a race capable of its superior improvement, is above theirs; [therefore,] let us act directly and openly our faith. . . . Let us say to [the Indian] . . . you are our ward, our child, the victim of our destiny, ours to displace, ours to protect.”<sup>13</sup>

The Bowles passage functions as an appropriate entry into an analysis of whitening the wilderness. First, the passage introduces the notion of race as a category for classification. Indeed, Bowles suggests a stability with regard to the notion of race that our analysis will demonstrate to be an effect of rhetoric rather than science. Second, by classifying a “race,” in this case Indians, by their “barbaric” relationship to the land, Bowles articulates the “self-reciprocating maxim” that defined both colonial- and antebellum-era conceptions of the Indian wilderness: “forests were wild because Indians and beasts lived there, and Indians were wild because they lived in forests.”<sup>14</sup> The binary logic (civilized/savage) implicated in such maxims is not limited to native peoples, however. Rather, the “we” to which Bowles refers—and that Watkins anticipates and Muir inscribes—naturalized a particular definition of whiteness that also excluded ethnic groups not fully assimilated to the Victorian norms of the period. Finally, Bowles’s title, *The Parks and Mountains of Colorado: A Summer Vacation in the Switzerland of America*, suggests the ways that wilderness discourse served nationalist exigencies. Yosemite’s mountain cathedrals and majestic redwoods offered cultural legitimacy to a nation seeking a heritage that could compete with the cathedrals and castles of Europe. The wilderness vision dramatized by Bowles, and immortalized in Watkins and Muir’s Yosemite views, hinges on Eurocentric dichotomies that privilege particular relationships with nature over others.<sup>15</sup> An analysis of the pristine wilderness ideal depicted by Watkins and Muir is as much a study of whiteness as an examination of preservationism. The growing literature on the history of race as a social category demonstrates that whiteness, much like nature, is neither a self-evident or fixed term. Whiteness, indeed the white race, is defined as “a historically constructed social formation . . . corresponding to no classification recognized by natural science.” Whiteness is reconceptualized as a learned “knowledge system” rather than a neutral physiological referent to skin color. Such a shift foregrounds the ways in

which discourse, such as Watkins's photographs and Muir's writing, contributes to making whiteness the environmental movement's "Achilles heel." As a complement to the historiography on Anglo dispossession of Indian land, this rhetorical critique seeks to reveal how wilderness imagery engendered a commensurate gain: the colonization of Victorian imaginations.<sup>16</sup> Writing about white America has never been a simple task. Historian Noel Ignatiev notes that in 1790, when the first Congress of the United States voted that "only 'white' persons could be naturalized as citizens," "it was by no means obvious who was 'white.'"<sup>17</sup> In an analysis of changing Anglo-American perceptions of indigenous peoples, historian Alden Vaughan found that "not until the middle of the eighteenth century did most Anglo-Americans view Indians as significantly different in color from themselves."<sup>18</sup> During the period between Watkins's first Yosemite series in 1861 and Muir's Yosemite essays, the meaning of whiteness conformed to the changing political climate as nativist hostilities gave way to a backlash over Reconstruction. Even in its most provisional formulations, whiteness has been defined by its opposition to blackness. Throughout "the century of immigration" (1820–1924), associations with blackness served to mark a group as unassimilable.<sup>19</sup> An analysis of whiteness during the nineteenth century must account for how immigrant populations such as Irish, Italians, and even Swedes attempted to assimilate to whiteness by adopting values, affiliations, and discourses that fostered "a solidarity based on color." Despite working conditions that encouraged "white workers to at least entertain comparison of themselves and slaves . . . the continuing desire *not* to be considered anything like an African-American," David Roediger notes, discouraged a solidarity based on class.<sup>20</sup>

This is not to suggest that nineteenth-century whiteness was not constituted by a class component. It emphasizes that the construction of whiteness is already inscribed with WASP values. If whiteness is not a biological condition, not all whites are white. In addition to race, class and ethnicity are also crucial markers of whiteness. For most of the history of the United States, "white" has meant "WASP."<sup>21</sup> When turn-of-the-twentieth-century urban environmentalist Alice Hamilton expressed skepticism about an apothecary's claim of no lead poisoning cases in a neighborhood near smelters, the apothecary qualified his claim: "Oh, maybe you are thinking of the Wops and Hunkies. I guess there's plenty of them. I thought you meant white men."<sup>22</sup> The connections drawn between blacks and Irish did not always favor the Irish. Between the 1840s and 1920s, the Civil War, the end of slavery, waves of mass immigration, and industrialism produced enormous social and cultural dislocations. The deployment of electoral and cultural politics to shore up whiteness against these forces of dislocation became a national project and preservation politics, inspired by the images of American landscape photographers like Watkins, played an important role in this project.

### Capturing the View: Watkins's Iconic Wilderness Landscapes

By the time Ralph Waldo Emerson deemed the mid-nineteenth century an "ocular" age, photography had evolved from a scientific novelty to a commonplace in Victorian parlors on both sides of the Atlantic. William Brewster's 1849 invention of the mass-produced stereoscope, which gave paired images a three-dimensional effect,

garnered such international popularity that the London Stereoscopic Company advertised its 1854 opening with the following slogan: “No home without a stereoscope.”<sup>23</sup> Related innovations fueled the burgeoning profession of photography, producing not only “daguerreotype factories” that glutted urban markets during the early 1850s but also a generation of landscape photographers who defined the American West with their iconic views. Outdoor view photography, or what art historian Peter Hale characterizes as the “view tradition” within photography, visually enacted the colonizing imperative of manifest destiny by domesticating the American landscape for Victorian sensibilities.<sup>24</sup> Commissioned by the government, industry, and independent patrons, photographers such as Carleton Watkins, Timothy O’Sullivan, William Henry Jackson, and A. J. Russell made sites like Yosemite Valley, Mariposa Big Tree Grove, Yellowstone, the Colorado Rockies, and the Grand Canyon accessible to the nation. Reverend H. J. Morton was both a frequent contributor to the *Philadelphia Photographer* and one of the first to draw public attention to Carleton Watkins’s Yosemite photographs. He remarked that “Without crossing the continent, we are able to step as it were, from our study into the wonders of the wondrous Valley, and gaze at our leisure on its amazing features.”<sup>25</sup> The Edenic wilderness depicted by view photographers such as Watkins not only displayed humanity’s command over nature but also calmed national anxieties by countervailing the stigma of America’s Indian wilderness with a visual tradition of sublimity.

Watkins was the apotheosis of the landscape photographers associated with the “view tradition.” His mammoth-plate Yosemite images served as models of outdoor view photography for critics in his own time. After viewing Watkins’s Yosemite views in the wake of the Yosemite legislation, *Philadelphia Photographer* editor Edward Wilson declared the camera “mightier than the pen.”<sup>26</sup> Hale labels Watkins the photographer most representative of the interrelated “production, distribution, consumption, and interpretation of views” that occurred during the 1860s. During an 1858 deposition regarding a boundary dispute, Watkins defined his occupation as a “photographicist” with the ability to find “the spot which would give the best view.”<sup>27</sup> His preoccupation with the “best view” is reflected throughout his career—most directly in the descriptors he used to entitle a photograph. Using stereography, a panorama format, or mammoth-plate camera, Watkins depicted wilderness landscapes with an exactness and transparency instrumental to the geographical and geological surveys established in the late 1860s. California state geologist Josiah Whitney’s 1868 *Yosemite Book* included twenty-four of Watkins’s photographs. Watkins’s photographs not only served land sciences such as geology and botany but nascent environmentalism as well. Watkins’s 1861 photographs, according to the oft-repeated account of 1864 legislation that consigned Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove to the state of California “for public use, resort and recreation,” served as the only evidence needed to convince California Senator John Conness and his congressional colleagues as well as President Lincoln to “prevent occupation and especially to preserve the trees in the valley from destruction.”<sup>28</sup> The immediate political impact of the Yosemite photographs notwithstanding, the vision of nature institutionalized through Watkins’s lens may constitute the photographer’s most lasting legacy to American environmentalism. Watkins’s career as a photographer began as most did, working with daguerreotypes. By 1858, four years after starting in a daguerrian gallery, Watkins

was commissioned to photograph outdoors. Although Watkins's pre-Yosemite images featured commercial rather than wilderness landscapes, such as the Guadalupe Quicksilver Mine and Mariposa quarries, they reveal a developing technical commitment to transparency, visual density, and the sublime spectacle. These early but "deliberated" outdoor views, according to art historian Mary Warner Marien, are defined by a "breathtaking vantage point" that "energizes the image, suffusing it with a sense of the sublime, which would not be lost on the investors for whom these pictures were formulated."<sup>29</sup> The compositional depth and suspended perspective constitutive of the "breathtaking vantage point" that Marien highlights is perfected in Watkins's magisterial Yosemite photographs.

If Watkins's style can best be described as magisterial, then it is through the composition, perspective, and texture of his photographs that ideologies of whiteness and Manifest Destiny were enacted. Reactions to his 1861 and 1865–66 Yosemite series dramatized the effect of Watkins's colonizing vision. Described as a "commanding view" and "transcendent eye," Watkins's way of seeing positioned viewers to encounter the Yosemite landscape as a sublime site. Treatments of the sublime by both contemporary and Victorian authors often begin with Edmund Burke's 1757 treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke's distinction between the sublime and beautiful illuminates the dramatic foreground/background contrasts in many of Watkins's Yosemite photographs. Victorian references to the term often reduced Burke's association of the sublime with terror and pain to a worldly embodiment of the divine. Watkins's technical virtuosity, particularly his ability to depict the landscape with "pictorial transparency," or what Rebecca Solnit describes as "superhuman eyes," dramatizes the scale, amplitude, and sense of perpetuity in Yosemite's sublime landscapes. Reactions to Watkins's photographs echo the awe and wonder that rhetorical critic Robert Harriman argues is constitutive of sublime encounters, which reflect the "paradoxical simultaneity of seeing beauty and experiencing power: we see an aesthetic object, separate from us because so beautiful, and we feel an enormous transfer of energy that sweeps us into a transformed world."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the "paradoxical simultaneity" that Harriman describes is a recurrent theme in both scholarly interpretations of Watkins and in nineteenth-century reactions to his Yosemite series. Edward Wilson's 1866 essay in the *Philadelphia Photographer*, for example, noted that "Each pebble on the shore of the little lake . . . may be as easily counted as on the shore in nature itself. . . . We get a nearer view of the mountains, only to make their perpendicular sides look more fearful and impossible of ascent."<sup>31</sup> Photographs such as Watkins's *Yosemite Valley #1* offer a transcendent view of the valley that not only situates the landscape on an Edenic space-time continuum devoid of human markings but also positions viewers as if to be teetering on a precipice. In beholding the "great power and force exerted" by nature from this seemingly precarious vantage point, Watkins's photographs simulate, and thereby commodify, the "paradoxical simultaneity" of terror and astonishment that defines the sublime.

The sublimity of photographs such as *Yosemite Valley #1* naturalizes a construction of wilderness devoid of humanity. Within this perspective, nature functions as spectacular object rather than as inhabitable space. In addition to commodifying the sublime for East Coast urban patrons, Watkins privileges a particular human/nature

relationship. Weston Naef, curator of photography at the J. Paul Getty Museum, notes that “the balance of the one hundred stereographs of Yosemite are totally without figuration,” that is, without markers of “human habitation” such as cabins or even wildlife. The cultural legacy that defines wilderness landscapes in opposition to “human habitation” is among the most important aesthetic effects of such compositional decisions. Watkins’s pristine wilderness views enact a mode of envisioning nature suited to prevailing national, racial, and class ideologies.<sup>32</sup>

The appeal of Watkins’s Yosemite views partly resulted from national anxieties regarding the status of the American landscape in relation to Europe. His Yosemite photographs served as the defining pictorial evidence for American claims to a monumental landscape that would effectively counter notions of European cultural superiority, quieting fears that the nation lacked both the history and divine favor associated with the castles and cathedrals of the Old World. Prior to Watkins’s photographs, the debate over cultural superiority between the New and Old Worlds was structured by a binary logic that associated the Old World with sublimity and the New World with ignobility. Photographs such as Watkins’s *River View*, *Cathedral Rocks*, *Yosemite* and *Yosemite Falls* embody the Gothic landscapes heralded by no less than Keats in his 1818 letter to John Reynolds: “I am going among Scenery whence I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe — I’ll cavern you, and grotto you, and waterfall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous sound you, and solitude you.” Each photograph is composed on two planes: a beautiful foreground and sublime background. The dominant positioning and light shading of the rocky sentinels overshadow the serene foreground in each image. The immense monoliths centered at the focal point of the photographs signify power and dominance. Intimidating in their sheer verticality, the rocky sentinels of Yosemite Falls inspired nationalist comparisons from visitors who remarked upon seeing the falls, “we behold an object which has no parallel anywhere in the Alps,” and “I question if the world furnishes a parallel . . . certainly there is none known.”<sup>33</sup> Watkins’s use of a deep-focus extreme long shot taken from a low angle dramatizes the verticality of the landscapes that inspire such awe.

The awe produced by Watkins’s photographs not only evidenced the nation’s cultural legitimacy but also naturalized a particularly classed way of seeing nature.<sup>34</sup> His point of view defined nature in relation to a pristine sublimity dependent upon both an absence of human habitation and a tourist form of spectatorship.<sup>35</sup> In yoking the sublime to the beautiful, Watkins’s photography produces a domesticated sublime in two ways. Most obviously, he produced photographs that can be viewed in art galleries or gazed at as private possessions in one’s own home, far from the terrors of sublime wilderness. Equally significant within the photographs themselves Watkins created a safe space for the spectator—the beautiful place—from which to view the sublime spectacle. This dynamic, at work in many of the photographs, is particularly evident in the photograph “Yosemite Falls.”

In “Yosemite Falls,” the beautiful literally frames the sublime. An idyllic meadow occupies over a third of the photograph. In the immediate foreground is a flat space ringed by flowering plants, grasses, and four trees. The area resembles nothing so much as a picnic site. The trees occupy entirely the left and right sides of the frame, creating a frame within the frame. Within this treed frame, positioned in the upper

center of the photograph, is the spectacular sight of Yosemite Falls cascading down the cliffs of the canyon. The cascading plume rivens the canyon walls and links to the washed-out sky.

Two compositional elements sharpen the sublimity of Watkins's "Yosemite Falls." First, the foregrounded scene draws viewers to the summit. The meadow and framing trees position the canyon walls and waterfalls as the image's vanishing point. The second is the contrast in lighting. While the foreground is shot in a familiar black and white, the background is a distinctly brighter shade, giving the canyon walls a decidedly celestial hue. The twice-enframed sublime is domesticated and commodified, a view for the taking, the common currency of the tourist trade. In the union of the sublime and the beautiful is born the tourist gaze. The beautiful foreground gives the tourist a pleasing place from which to view the spectacular spectacle of the sublime. Positioned in the meadow, viewers experience the scene at ground level. From the picnic site, the viewer gazes across a wide expanse of meadow to the cliffs and Yosemite Falls. Apprehending the scene from this plane envelops viewers within a garden rather than positioning them at the precipice. Watkins anticipates and constructs a sublime experience in which comfort displaces risk as the spectator replaces the participant. The distanced position of the spectator obviates the emotional experience of the sublime. In a sense, Watkins's images blaze a trail for the tourist at the expense of the adventurer and hollow out the sublime, leaving only spectacle.

In addition to the classed way of seeing the American wilderness naturalized by Watkins's photography, the discursive framing of Yosemite through the language of the sublime and Gothic frames nature from a Eurocentric perspective by naming a granite formation Cathedral Rock. Named for what Josiah Whitney describes as "isolated columns of granite, at least 500 feet high, standing out from but connected at the base with, the walls of the valley," the Spires of Cathedral Rock appear from some angles as if to be twin towers of a Gothic cathedral. The deep reverence for nature induced by the soaring sublime of Watkins's images assume an even greater significance as a result of this naming and the site's subsequent appropriation as a holy symbol and divine space. Compositionally, Watkins creates a sense of an almighty dominion that resonates with visitors' divine experience of the site: "It seemed indeed, that I was making a pilgrimage to some vast cathedral shrine of Nature. The stately trees were as columns through which one finds their way along the vast colonnade, when approaching St. Peters. There is a hush in the air—you feel you are in a mighty presence. This wondrous valley—Nature's own great cathedral, where her votaries come from all lands to wonder and admire—whose cathedral spires point to heaven, whose domes have withstood the storms and tempest of all the ages, seems set apart from all the world to show forth the mighty works of Omnipotent Power."

Samuel Bowles developed the analogy suggested by the name, writing that Cathedral Rocks replicated "the great impressiveness, the beauty and the fantastic form of the Gothic architecture. From their shape and color alike, it is easy to imagine, in looking upon them, that you are under the ruins of an old Gothic cathedral, to which those of Cologne and Milan are but baby-houses."<sup>36</sup>

Watkins and his peers, in creating a way of viewing wilderness, in a very material sense created wilderness. Although the U.S. wilderness parks are now understood as natural and national sacred sites, that cultural perception had to be learned. Before

the 1870s, whites perceived Yellowstone as a hell on earth. When mountain man James Ohio Pattie became one of the first whites to stumble upon the Grand Canyon, he found the view “horrid.” As de Tocqueville observed of Americans in 1832, “In Europe people talk a great deal of the wilds of America, but the Americans themselves never think about them; they are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet.”<sup>37</sup> Watkins’s images played a pivotal role in making Americans perceive inanimate nature as sublime wilderness.

### Saving White Wilderness: Framing Muir’s View

In popular accounts, John Muir stands as the savior of Yosemite and the mythical founder of environmentalism. Arriving in Yosemite four years after it had been designated the world’s first wilderness park, Muir was soon popularizing the area and trying to insure its preservation through his writings. His popularity garnered him audiences with such notables as Ralph Waldo Emerson and President Theodore Roosevelt. By 1889, Muir’s reputation was such that Robert Underwood Johnson, an associate editor of *Century*, the nation’s leading literary monthly, urged Muir to write on behalf of making Yosemite a national park. Muir’s two essays, “The Treasures of the Yosemite” and “Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park,” appeared in the August and September 1890 issues of *Century*. On September 30, 1890, a parkbill resembling John Muir’s proposal passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law the next day by President Harrison.<sup>38</sup>

Our preceding account of the effects of Watkins’s photographs suggests that the Muir myth is not the whole story. The railroads as well as landscape photographers and painters were crucial players in the cultivating of a wilderness sensibility and in the founding of national parks. Still, Muir remains a pivotal figure. His writings certainly contributed to the shaping of the social imaginary with respect to wilderness and preservation politics. Besides these two articles functioning as a blueprint for establishing Yosemite National Park, they provide a vision of wilderness, white wilderness, that many environmental groups still embrace today.

Muir’s *Century* essays are framed and interlaced by the values of whiteness. This is seen most obviously and yet most unquestioningly in the choice of Yosemite as an object worthy of being saved. Muir considers Yosemite a “temple lighted from above” that presents the “most striking and sublime features on the grandest scale.” Regarded on aural as well as visual dimensions, Yosemite Falls is a “sublime psalm,” “pure wildness.” The values of white wilderness are also evident in Muir’s descriptions of Yosemite. Muir translates the pictorial conventions of Watkins’s photographs into word-pictures. Most telling, Muir’s descriptions at times echo the sublime/beautiful dynamic at work in Watkins’s photographs: “the main canons widen into spacious valleys or parks of charming beauty, level and flowery and diversified like landscape gardens with meadows and groves and thickets of blooming bushes, while the lofty walls, infinitely varied in form, are fringed with ferns, flowering plants, shrubs of many species, and tall evergreens and oaks.” Muir also translates the conventions of

Watkins's landscapes into word-pictures through the repeated deployment of key terms: sublime, massive, immense, imposing, grandeur, serene majesty, temple, psalm, and so on. Both essays are filled with such word-pictures of the various treasures of the Yosemite region and threats to that wilderness. In addition, the two essays include twenty-two pictures attesting to the sublime wilderness beauty of Yosemite. These pictures reproduce most of Watkins's famous images: the view of Yosemite Valley from Inspirational Point, Cathedral Rocks, Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, Three Brothers, and Sentinel Rock. In other writings, Muir's view of Yosemite is framed by Watkins's vision of sublime wilderness. In his book *The Yosemite*, Muir remarks on the pristine quality of the region: "In general views no mark of man is visible upon it." Many of the descriptions in the book of the iconic treasures of Yosemite are copied verbatim from the earlier essays.<sup>39</sup>

Muir's use of religious imagery is crucial in distinguishing Yosemite as a sacred place that deserves comparison not to the exotic spaces of Africa or South America but the sacred places of white civilization. By comparing American wilderness to cathedrals, Muir transforms it from a potentially corrupting place into a divine place that reaffirms America's connection to European civilization. Muir and other popularizers of American wilderness understood themselves to be in a commercial competition for tourist dollars as well as a nationalist competition for cultural capital. By viewing Yosemite as a white wilderness of "mountain temples," it becomes a sign of the blessing of the white man's god and maintains Americans' connection to Europe even in the New World. In arguing for the preservation of Hetch Hetchy, Muir makes the connection in no uncertain terms: "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."<sup>40</sup> The association of wilderness with European civilization has continued in contemporary environmentalism. In successfully preventing the damming of the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon during the 1960s, the Sierra Club ran an ad that asked, "SHOULD WE ALSO FLOOD THE SISTINE CHAPEL SO TOURIST'S CAN GET NEARER THE CEILING?"<sup>41</sup>

The white wilderness actualized in Muir's writing is a result of his focus on Yosemite, his mode of description, and his ability to evoke a sublime response. Despite Watkins's ability to depict the sublime, Muir more aptly translated a domesticated sublime for his middle-class, eastern, urban readers.<sup>42</sup> Watkins offered a beautiful vantage point from which to view the sublime sights, while Muir positioned readers to vicariously experience the sublime by living through his adventures. In many of his writings, Muir constructs his persona as a knowledgeable but reckless wilderness guide. In the first of the two *Century* essays, after conducting an extensive tour of the sublime sights Muir closes with accounts of numerous dangerous adventures that risked his life, including rock and ice-climbing escapades, traipsing through a spring-time deluge at night, and Muir's most fear-inspiring specialty, defying the fates at Yosemite Falls. Muir gets to experience the sublime and the readers enjoy a domesticated sublime in the comfort of their homes, perched on the ledge with John Muir, but only in their imagination.

## Banning Class

A white notion of civilization as not only separate from but also the antithesis of wilderness permeates the two essays as well. The wilderness of Yosemite must be saved from the encroachments of such a civilization. The civilization/wilderness dichotomy is imbued with the values of whiteness, so it is laced with class distinctions. This is clear in Muir's discussion. Muir warns that "all that is perishable is vanishing apace . . . every kind of destruction is moving on with accelerated speed."<sup>43</sup> The "ravages of man" include logging, farming, and grazing (sheep and cattle). To save Yosemite "it is proposed to reserve [it] out of the public domain for the use and recreation of the people."<sup>44</sup> The universalized "people" masks race, ethnicity, and class dimensions that influence for whom and from whom Yosemite is being saved. *Who* counts as "people" and *what* counts as "use and recreation" is determined by the prerequisites of white wilderness. Muir makes these distinctions more explicitly in other parts of the essay. "The Yosemite Valley, in the heart of the Sierra Nevada, is a noble mark for the traveler: he writes, whether tourist, botanist, geologist, or lover of wilderness pure and simple."<sup>45</sup> White wilderness permits only visitors, but not all visitors. The recreations that Muir mentions are notably upper class. Noticeable by its absence is hunting. Though hunting traverses classes, in the United States hunting for food becomes associated with rural lower classes, not the elite, eastern urban dwellers that Muir is appealing to. This is evident a few decades later in the conservationist tract *Our Vanishing Wildlife*, wherein author William Hornaday condemns the crimes of "Italians, negroes and others who shoot song-birds as food" and concludes that "all members of the lower classes of southern Europe are a dangerous menace to our wild life."<sup>46</sup> In this sentiment, the mix of class and race condemn those who do not share the white values of WASP culture. Another key distinction in the "use and recreation" phrase is that between leisure and work. Aside from scientists, Muir limits "use and recreation" to tourists, explicitly arguing against those who do manual work in nature. Muir laments the presence of loggers and shepherds. In other places, Muir mocks those who work in the wilderness. Much of Muir's first summer in the Sierras was spent working with Billy, a shepherd. Muir mocks Billy's clothes: "his wonderful everlasting clothing on. . . . These precious overalls are never taken off, and nobody knows how old they are;" his fear of bears "seems afraid that he may be mistaken for a sheep;" and his blindness to the sublime beauty of the wilderness.<sup>47</sup> This last point irks Muir. "I pressed Yosemite upon him like a missionary offering the gospel, but he would have none of it. 'Tourists that spend their money to see rocks and falls are fools, that's all. You can't humbug me. I've been in this country too long for that.' Such souls, I suppose, are asleep, or smothered and befogged beneath mean pleasures and cares."<sup>48</sup>

Muir's vitriolic wit and class bias foretells the split between labor and environmentalism that has haunted the latter in the twentieth century. Muir is unable to take Billy seriously. He ridicules his work clothes and fears. He dismisses Billy's pleasures and cares as "mean." Since his tone is one of derision and condescension, it is no wonder his missionary work fails. Though Muir dismisses Billy as asleep or befogged, the passage actually contains a dialogue and if we pay attention to Billy's words, it is clear that his is an insightful position. For Billy, Yosemite is not an idle place of sightseeing, but a workplace. His knowledge of Yosemite is not that of the sublime aesthetic

transposed from Europe but an intimate knowledge derived from on-the-ground practices in Yosemite. Muir and Billy's encounter is not a meeting of wisdom and ignorance but a clash of different knowledges and worldviews. In this dialogue, Muir models an attitude that environmentalists have imitated to great detriment. This attitude implicitly includes a classed notion of work. Blue-collar labor in the woods is bad, white-collar labor in city skyscrapers escapes notice. This position is problematic, for while the latter activity isolates humans from the natural world, physical labor in nature is one of the primary ways that humans come to know and connect with the natural world.<sup>49</sup> The irony of Muir's position becomes evident when he recognizes that the work of some makes possible the play of others in the wilderness—that play is founded on work, both in civilization and in the wilderness. Muir's acknowledgment that the shepherd's work enables him to be “free to rove and revel in the wilderness all the big immortal days” adds specificity to his white perspective.<sup>50</sup> Further, Muir did advocate tourism, which requires a work force of cooks, maids, and guides to enable the tourist to consume the wilderness experience. As Karl Jacoby explains in his analysis of the designation of the Adirondack Park and the class tensions played out in constructing that wilderness, “The paradox of the touristic understanding of the Adirondacks—as a place apart, free from the corrupting influences of contemporary life—was that it was achieved by transforming the Adirondacks into a workplace . . . a scenic vista for visiting tourists, whose arrival had helped to solidify the presence of a wage-based service industry in the region.”<sup>51</sup> Muir's position is the precedent for today's ecotourists, for whom wilderness is not a place to be worked but a recreational fantasy to be consumed.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to his work as a shepherd, in order to support his wilderness wanderings, Muir operated a sawmill for the owner of the largest hotel in the valley. In a sense, Muir embodies the interactions of aesthetic and use values but celebrates only the former. In short, although Muir presents his perspective as universal and ideal, he is advocating a white wilderness that is a social construction with roots in culture, class, and race and which works to mark social distinctions and affirm hierarchies.

### Race in the Woods

White wilderness certainly forbids inhabitants. Muir only briefly mentions the Native Americans of the region, when, in discussing Hetch Hetchy, Muir observes, “Furthermore it was a home and stronghold of the Tuolumne Indians, as “Ahwahne was of the grizzlies.”<sup>53</sup> Muir's association of the Tuolumne with the grizzlies is telling, for often in the civilization/wilderness dichotomy, those not part of white civilization get coded as nature. This example is not atypical of Muir's writings. In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir writes admiringly of the vague Indian “instinct” of “walking unseen”: “All Indians seem to have learned this wonderful way of walking unseen,—making themselves invisible like certain spiders I have been observing here. . . . Indians walk softly and hurt the landscape hardly more than the birds and squirrels, and their brush and oak huts last hardly longer than those of wood rats.”<sup>54</sup> Again, Muir clearly associates Native Americans with nature—spiders, birds, squirrels, and wood rats. They are constructed as a natural part of wilderness. To Muir's credit, during the

concluding stages of the military campaign against Native Americans, Muir clearly admires and respects them.<sup>55</sup> In the passage immediately following the above quote, Muir decries the destructive marks of the white man. Yet Muir's perspective is still more complicated, and it reflects both discourses in his own time and foreshadows the United States's continuing simultaneous demonization and idealization of Native Americans. In *The Yosemite*, Muir's account of the removal of Yosemite's Native Americans is quite conventional, and he sees nothing wrong with the military campaign.<sup>56</sup> Muir describes Native American resistance to the encroachments of miners as "their usual murdering, plundering style" and describes the "Yosemite Indians" as "this warlike tribe."<sup>57</sup>

Even Muir's admiration is problematic. Muir is clearly operating from the perspective that Indians are a part of nature and not human agents that transform nature. He praises them for having no more impact than birds, squirrels, and wood rats. Such an understanding requires Muir to ignore the Native American practice of setting fire to the meadows, the very practice that creates the pristine, Edenic garden that he celebrates. Muir's attitude of "demeaning exoticization"<sup>58</sup> holds sway today: "We are pious toward Indian peoples, but we don't take them seriously; we don't credit them with the capacity to make changes. . . . This is why our flattery (for it is usually intended to be such) of 'simpler' peoples is an act of such immense condescension. For in a modern world defined by change, whites are portrayed as the only beings who make a difference."<sup>59</sup> The point is that within the context of whiteness, those not part of white civilization are, at best, seen as part of nature. At worst they are often expelled from wilderness and forcibly "civilized." The myth of pristine wilderness is founded on the erasure of the humanity, presence, and history of Native Americans.<sup>60</sup> Muir's "wilderness blinders" materially impacted Yosemite Valley. Most of those with long experience of Yosemite Valley and its state managers argued for continuing the Ahwahneechee practice of annual burning and noted the effects of not burning. In 1894, Galen Clark, an early state guardian of Yosemite, recalled how on his first visit to Yosemite in 1855 clear open meadow land was at least four times as large.<sup>61</sup> The *Biennial Report of the Commissioners to Manage Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove for the Years 1891–1892* described Yosemite originally as a forest park, dotted with open meadows and maintained by Indians through annual burning and weeding. Such interventions by Native Americans made visible the sublime vistas that earned the valley its renown as a tourist wilderness destination. The *Report* noted that leaving nature alone had negatively impacted the beauty of the valley as underbrush and scrub trees obscured the views.<sup>62</sup> Muir, however, saw burning as antithetical to wilderness and adamantly opposed the practice. His position carried the day, so that in 1929 when Totuya, the granddaughter of Chief Tenaya, visited her native Yosemite Valley for the first time since being forced out in 1851, she remarked, "Too dirty; too much bushy."<sup>63</sup>

While Muir perceived the practice of burning as a violation of the wilderness, he did not see tourism as a practice that threatened the wilderness. Although Muir had doubts about tourists, he advocated building tourist accommodations in Yosemite Valley, declaring that "A large first-class hotel is very much needed."<sup>64</sup> By 1895, besides hotels, the infrastructure of tourism cluttered Yosemite Valley: "warehouses, barns, livery stables and a blacksmith; ice house; vegetable stalls, a general store, a bakery, a

butcher, and a laundry; a lumberyard, a cabinet shop; saloons; express, telegraph, and post offices; a chapel; two art galleries, and two photographic studios. There were also countless private dwellings with attendant cow sheds and chicken coops.”<sup>65</sup>

### In Retrospect

The rhetoric of white wilderness practiced by Watkins, Muir, their peers, and their corporate and political backers established the arc of environmentalism for its first century. The successes of wilderness advocacy have been great and its cultural impact impressive. Yet in taking as their task wilderness preservation, mainstream environmental groups rescued themselves from the responsibility of protecting urban and inhabited rural areas and of critiquing industrial consumer society in general. Starting with the emergence of pollution as an “environmental” issue in the 1960s, and now with the growth of environmental justice activism, environmental groups, to their credit, have begun to engage issues outside the bounds of their traditional focus. Environmental groups’ move beyond wilderness will always be haphazard as long as the concept of wilderness is left undisturbed. In this move, scholarly efforts to deconstruct and historicize wilderness can be of vital significance.

Admittedly, the stakes for environmental politics are great, for our deconstruction of wilderness challenges the essential object of much of environmentalism. Indeed, for many groups, wilderness functions as both the reason for their existence and the goal of their activities. So why deconstruct wilderness? Clearly, such a process is fraught with danger. What makes sense theoretically can be harmful politically. Still, the deconstruction of wilderness potentially benefits environmental politics. The origin myth of environmental politics is that John Muir and others of his ilk came across wilderness and were so inspired that they dedicated their lives to saving it. The construction of wilderness in the works of Watkins and Muir belies the belief in the mythic origins of environmentalism anchored in the formation of the first wilderness parks. Quite clearly, wilderness parks are the products of multiple discourses and serve a role within the paradigm of industrial progress. The parks had no clear environmental mission and were not even ends in themselves but means to attract tourist dollars and extend industrial development. Further, the sublime feeling produced by wilderness is not an innate, universal feeling but a culturally conditioned response. Within the discourses of the late nineteenth century, the sublime becomes not so much a feeling but a commodity produced through specific techniques. In the world of politics, where pristine wilderness has become an effective wedge issue, the benefit of the deconstruction of wilderness is clear. Most obviously, this shatters the belief that wilderness is a natural object that people will “naturally” respond to. Wilderness is not a natural fact, but a political achievement. When environmentalists keep this in mind, they will never take for granted that others will necessarily share their feelings about wilderness once they are exposed to it. Preserving wilderness always requires political struggle. It also requires cultural education. Too often when certain types of people, loggers or urban dwellers, do not revere wilderness, environmentalists have dismissed or ignored them. This tendency has earned environmentalism a reputation as an elitist movement and has isolated it from potential allies in the struggle against

the depredations of industrialism. Instead, environmentalists need to accept that wilderness does not have value in and of itself but instead has social value that must be communicated and fought for. Wilderness is a social construction—one worth preserving. The deconstruction of wilderness as a founding concept, the revealing of wilderness to be unnatural, is not an argument for the abandonment of wilderness and preservation politics. It is to realize that an unquestioning embrace of pristine wilderness has political and social costs as well as benefits. The proponents of industrial progress have deployed wilderness to divide environmental groups and workers. Yet the industrial juggernaut threatens the environment, the working class, and minorities. To preserve wilderness as anything more than tattered relics symbolizing the failure of environmentalism requires recognizing the social character of wilderness and the role of people in it. The struggle to preserve wilderness must not center on issuing proclamations of divine revelations of wilderness as sacred spaces and denunciations of the unimpressed as maleficent or ignorant. Instead, preservation must rest on the recognition that wilderness is not a divine text but a significant social achievement. The preservation and expansion of that achievement depends on making arguments about the worth of wilderness to the social and biological worlds and on forging uncommon alliances. Maybe Thoreau was right, that in wilderness is the preservation of the world. Conversely, in society is the preservation of wilderness.

**Kevin Michael DeLuca** is an assistant professor in speech communication and an adjunct professor in the Institute of Ecology at the University of Georgia. He is the author of the book *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (Guilford Press, 1999). **Anne Teresa Demo** is an assistant professor of communication studies at Vanderbilt University. She has published work on visual rhetoric and cultural politics, and her current research addresses the relationship between territoriality and identity by examining modes of visualizing the U.S.-Mexico border.

---

## Notes

A version of the essay was also presented at the 1999 National Communication Association Convention in Chicago, Illinois.

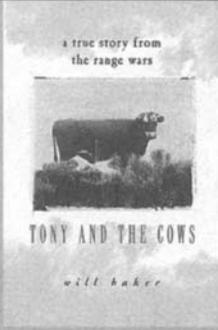
1. Southwest Organizing Project, "The Letter that Shook a Movement," *Sierra* (May/June 1993): 54.
2. "A Place at the Table: A Sierra Roundtable on Race, Justice, and the Environment," *Sierra* (May/June 1993): 28, 57.
3. "A Place at the Table," 51.
4. Gender, too, is etched and elided in these early texts. An analysis of the role of gender in the construction of wilderness will be the focus of another essay.
5. Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 142–43.
6. Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 146–200; Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture Keywords* (Great Britain: Redwood burn, 1980), 71.

7. This process has been particularly intense in feminism. See Carolyn Merchant, *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and The Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row, 1980); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).
8. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Imagination* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Vail-Ballou, 1973), 1, 273; William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 69.
9. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 7–28; Samuel P. Hays, "Comment: The Trouble with Bill Cronon's Wilderness," *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 29–32; Michael P. Cohen, "Comment: Resistance to Wilderness," *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 33–42; Thomas R. Dunlop, "Comment: But What Did You Go Out into the Wilderness to See?" *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 43–46; William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: A Response," *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 47–55; J. Baird Collect and Michael P. Nelson, eds., *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998); Michael Soule and Gary Lease, *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1995); Hays, "Comment: The Trouble with Bill Cronon's Wilderness," 31; Cohen, "Comment: Resistance to Wilderness," 33.
10. See the collection of essays in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1995), especially the essays by Anne Whiston Spirm, Candace Slater, Caroline Merchant, and Karl Jacoby, "Class and Environmental History: Lessons from 'The War in the Adirondacks,'" *Environmental History* 2 (1997): 324–42.
11. For further discussion of the relationship between Eurocentricism, wilderness, and Native Americans, see Mark Spence, "Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1864–1930," *Pacific Historical Review* (1996): 27–59; Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West* (San Francisco, Calif.: Sierra Club Books, 1994); Marcy Damovsky, "Stories Less Told: Histories of U.S. Environmentalism," *Socialist Review* 22 (1991): 11–54.
12. Joe Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and Its Relation to the Policy Process* (New York: Longman, 1975).
13. Quoted in Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27.
14. *Ibid.*, 10.
15. Cronon aptly summarizes this position when writing: "Wilderness suddenly emerged as the landscape of choice for elite tourists, who brought with them striking urban ideas of the countryside through which they traveled. For them, wild land was not a site for productive labor and not a permanent home; rather, it was a place of recreation. One went to the wilderness not as a producer but as a consumer, hiring guides and other backcountry residents who could serve as romantic surrogates for the rough riders and hunters of the frontier if one was willing to overlook their new status as employees and servants of the rich;" Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground*, 78.
16. Editorial, "Abolish the White Race," *Race Traitors*, ed. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (New York: Routledge, 1996), 9. Similarly, Audrey Smedley characterizes race as "a 'knowledge system'; a way of knowing and looking at the world and of rationalizing its contents (in this case, other human beings) in terms that are derived from previous cultural-historical experience and reflective of contemporary social values, relationships, and conditions." Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 15.

17. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 41; also, Noel Ignatiev, "Immigrants and Whites," in *Race Traitor*, ed. Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (New York: Routledge, 1996).
18. Alden Vaughan, "From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review* 87 (October 1982): 918.
19. A number of scholars detail the various descriptors used to mark immigrant groups as unassimilable. See Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 41; David Roediger, *Abolition of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), 141.
20. Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 96; Roediger, *Abolition of Whiteness*, 68.
21. See Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verso, 1994); David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (New York: Verso, 1994); Richard Brookhiser, *The Way of the WASP: How It Made America, and How It Can Save It, So to Speak* (New York: Free Press, 1991); and Joe Kincheloe, ed., *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).
22. Quoted in Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), 235.
23. For histories of the status of photography in the nineteenth century, see Robert Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History: Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); Richard Masteller, "Western Views in Eastern Parlors: The Contribution of the Stereograph Photographer to the Conquest of the West," in *Prospects: The Annual of American Cultural Studies*, 6, ed. Jack Salzman (New York: Burt Franklin and Company, Inc., 1980).
24. Quoted in Peter Bacon Hale, *American Views and the Romance of Modernism in Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Martha Sandweiss (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., Publishers 1991), 206.
25. Reverend H. J. Morton, "Yosemite Valley," *Philadelphia Photographer* 3 (December 1866): 107.
26. Quoted in Hale, *American Views and the Romance of Modernism in Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, 207.
27. Watkins, deposition of 27 August 1858 in the case United States vs. Charles Fossat, quoted in Palmquist and Sandweiss, *Photographer of the American West*, 9.
28. Quoted in Han Huths, "Yosemite: The Story of an Idea," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 33 (1948): 47–48.
29. Mary Warner Marien, "Imaging the Corporate Sublime," *Carleton Watkins: Selected Texts and Bibliography*, ed. Amy Rule (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1993), 5; also Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting, cd. 1830–1865* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
30. Robert Harriman, "Terrible Beauty and Mundane Detail: Aesthetic Knowledge in the Practice of Everyday Life," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 35 (1998): 10–18.
31. Edward Wilson, "Views in the Yosemite Valley," *Philadelphia Photographer* 3 (April 1866): 106–7.
32. Although artists associated with the Hudson River school also celebrated the nation's majestic natural resources, artists such as Thomas Cole and Alfred Agate also dramatized the transformation of the American landscape from wilderness to pastoral scene. See: William Cronon, "Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscapes of Frontier Change," *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 37–87. Weston Naef, David Robertson, David Featherstone, Tome Fels, Peter Palmquist, Amy

- Rule, "Looking West: The Photographs of Carleton Watkins," *In Focus: Carleton Watkins* (Los Angeles, Calif.: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1997), 99–100.
33. William Keats quoted in Diego Saglia, "Looking at the Other: Cultural Difference and the Traveler's Gaze in The Italian," *Studies in the Novel* 28 (spring 1996): 12; Lieutenant Colonel A. V. Kautz and William B. Brewer quoted in Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 3<sup>d</sup> ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 17–19.
  34. Frederick Law Olmsted, the first commissioner for the organization established to protect the landscape, illustrates how a particular relationship to nature functions as index of civility and class. In his 1865 commission report on Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove, Olmsted justifies the protection of Yosemite on the following grounds: "The power of scenery to affect men is in a large way proportionate to the degree of their civilization and to the degree in which their taste has been cultivated." Frederick Law Olmsted, "Preliminary Report upon the Yosemite and Big Tree Grove," *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: The California Frontier 1863–1865*, vol. 5, ed. P. R. Ranney (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 505.
  35. Although this may have been an artistic imperative (and Watkins's naming of his studio the Yosemite Art Gallery speaks of his artistic aspirations for photography), it was also a commercial imperative as Watkins left the financial security and comforts of portrait work for the uncertainties and hardships of landscape photography.
  36. Josiah Letchworth, Letter to Mrs. Delia Skinner, Yosemite Valley, May 22, 1880. Yosemite Collection, 31; Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 15.
  37. Quoted in François Leydet, *Time and the River Flowing: Grand Canyon*, ed. David Brower (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1964), 37; (1945, p. 78).
  38. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind: Revised Edition* (Binghamton: Vail-Ballou, 1973), 130. Johnson's urging was Muir's doing. Johnson had arrived in San Francisco looking for someone to write about the romance of gold-hunting. Muir lured him into a camping trip in Yosemite. When Johnson saw the destruction caused by the hooved locusts (sheep), he exclaimed a need for a park and proceeded to try to sell Muir on an idea that Muir had proposed in 1881.
  39. John Muir, "The Treasures of the Yosemite," *The Century Magazine* (August 1890): 484–85, 492, 493.
  40. Muir, *The Yosemite*, 197.
  41. Quoted in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 231.
  42. Christine Oravec, "John Muir, Yosemite, and the Sublime Response: A Study in the Rhetoric of Preservationism," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67 (1981): 247, 257.
  43. Muir, "The Treasures of the Yosemite," 483.
  44. John Muir, "Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park," *The Century Magazine* (September 1890): 667.
  45. Muir, "The Treasures of the Yosemite," 483.
  46. Quoted in Darnovsky, "Stories Less Told," 25.
  47. John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 171, 173, 259.
  48. *Ibid.*, 197–98.
  49. Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).
  50. Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras*, 174.
  51. Karl Jacoby, "A Class and Environmental History: Lessons from 'The War in the Adirondacks,'" *Environmental History* 2 (July 1997): 336.
  52. Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 78–79.

53. Muir, "Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park," 665.
56. Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierras*, 71–73.
55. This is not true in all of Muir's writings. Sometimes Muir describes the Yosemite Indians as "dirty" and "lazy."
56. John Muir, *The Yosemite* (San Francisco, Calif.: Sierra Club Books, 1914 [1988]), 168–74.
57. *Ibid.*, 168.
58. Darnovsky, "Stories Less Told," 21.
59. White, *The Organic Machine*, 175.
60. Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*; Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*; Robert H. Keller and Michael F. Turek, *American Indians and National Parks* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998).
61. Quoted in Runte, *Yosemite*, 3.
62. *Ibid.*, 6.
63. Quoted in Margaret Sanborn, *Yosemite: Its Discovery, Its Wonders, and Its People* (New York: Random House, 1981), 238.
64. *Ibid.*, 116; Muir, *The Yosemite*, 175.
65. Sanborn, *Yosemite*, 229.



a true story from  
the range wars

TONY AND THE COWS

will baker

**Changing Plant Life of La Frontera**  
*Observations on Vegetation in the U.S./Mexico Borderlands*  
**Edited by Grady L. Webster and Conrad J. Bahre**

"This book will not only provide a useful ecological background for the many interested in border studies, but will also stimulate additional collaborative investigations, in both the United States and Mexico, of the wide range of serious environmental problems in *La Frontera*."—Dr. Paul S. Martin, emeritus professor of geosciences, The Desert Laboratory, University of Arizona

**Hardcover: \$60.00**

NEW IN PAPERBACK

**The Great Maya Droughts**  
*Water, Life, and Death*  
**Richardson B. Gill**

"The book is a major contribution in its own right in its use of massive amounts of climatic data. It is also an answer to what is perhaps the most interesting problem in Maya archaeology: the fall and lack of recovery of a great culture."—R. E. W. Adams

**Paperback: \$27.50**

**Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848–1880**  
**Rodman Wilson Paul**  
**A Revised, Expanded Edition by Elliott West**

This highly praised classic study of western mining is now available with three new chapters by Elliott West.

HISTORIES OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER SERIES

**Paperback: \$21.95**

at bookstores or call  
 1-800-249-7737  
[www.unmpress.com](http://www.unmpress.com)



**University of New Mexico Press**