Race, Ethnicity, and Leisure

Perspectives on Research, Theory, and Practice

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CHAPTER 12

Wilderness in the U.S. Immigrant Mind

Cassandra Johnson-Gaither

OVERVIEW

The perspective of Latin American and Asian immigrants on nature and wildlands is strikingly different from the view typical of European Americans. The very idea of outdoor recreation may be strange to the cultures from which many of these immigrants originate. This chapter addresses immigrant interaction with wildlands and wilderness by examining the environmental worldviews of Latino and Asian cultures in the United States. The aim is to assess how congruent these various ontologies may be with European American[1] ideals of nature interaction and preservation. Implications for managing wildlands and wilderness are also considered.

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, readers will be able to

- identify potential problems related to immigration and land conservation and management agencies;
- describe views of nature and wildlands associated with European, Latino, and Asian American cultures; and
- suggest possible ways of introducing wildlands and wilderness to immigrant populations.

[1]In this chapter the term European American refers to the cultures, politics, and economies of Anglo and other Northern European–origin peoples.

> *Just who are 'we' who have inherited the wilderness idea? And who are 'our' forebears?*
>
> *Callicott and Nelson (1998, p. 2)*

Individuals representing the U.S. land trust community gathered in the summer of 2008 at a workshop hosted by Yale University to discuss the woeful underrepresentation of people of color in the conservation movement (Newsome & Gentry, 2008). Those convened urged that organizations advocating for nature conservation be diversified along racial, ethnic, and class lines. Participants raised concerns about the future of wildland conservation in the United States, arguing that it might decline considerably if the wider populace does not have direct contact with these lands. Outdoor nature activists and public lands managers also convened in 2009 at Atlanta's "Breaking the Color Barrier" conference with a similar goal of "integrating outdoor nature experiences" along ethnic and racial lines.

These meetings are but two examples of natural resource organizations' and outdoor advocates' attempts both to understand and to respond to the United States' changing sociodemographic makeup. An important element to consider in the diversification of both nature-based recreation and wildland advocacy is immigrant populations. The proportion of immigrants in the U.S. population reached its maximum in the late 1800s and early 1900s when large numbers of southern Europeans immigrated to the United States. From 1880 to 1920, the foreign-born population accounted for between 13% and 15% of the U.S. population (Grieco & Trevelyan, 2010). In 2010, almost 40 million foreign-born persons resided in the United States. This number represented 13% of the 2010 population (Acosta & de la Cruz, 2011). Importantly, between 2000 and 2010, the U.S. foreign-born population increased by 28%; and roughly 61% of this increase was accounted for by persons from either Mexico or South and East Asia (see Introduction) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012).

Since the early 1990s, a fair amount of research has focused on the recreation behavior of non-U.S.-born populations (Carr & Williams, 1993; Chavez, 2001; Stodolska & Yi, 2003), but relatively little research has examined this topic in the context of wildlands or wilderness-based recreation[2] (Johnson, Bowker, Bergstrom, & Cordell, 2004; Johnson, Bowker, & Cordell, 2005). This is an important consideration, given charges by some that wildland and wilderness recreation represents elitist or class-based activities relevant primarily to Euro-American cultures (Cronon, 1996; Callicott, 1994/1995; Walker & Kiecolt, 1995). Although the early wilderness champion John Muir was a Scottish-born immigrant, it is argued that the cultural underpinnings informing Muir's appreciation of the wild were different from those that characterize the experiences of contemporary immigrants (Inglehart, 1990, 1995). Increased immigration from Latin American and Asian countries begs questions of whether and to what extent these immigrant groups engage with wildland and wilderness activities after they arrive in the United States. For instance, how relevant is the idea of wilderness, as defined in the 1964 Wilderness Act, to more recent immigrant populations? Might increases in the foreign-born population result in greater wear and tear on wildland and wilderness resources? To what extent do Latino and Asian American immigrants' environmental worldviews determine engagement with wildlands? Can natural resource management agencies expect to receive continued political support for conservation among groups newly arrived to the United States?

[2]Wilderness refers to lands that are part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. These lands were established by the 1964 Wilderness Act.

IMMIGRATION AT ODDS WITH CONSERVATION?

Increases in the U.S. population stemming from both domestic births and immigration led one of the nation's premier conservation groups, The Wilderness Society (TWS), to formally adopt a policy in the 1990s encouraging reductions in birth and immigration rates. The policy explicitly refers to the degradation of wildland recreation resources resulting from population increase:

> [S]ince 1940, the U.S. population has doubled, but [national] park visitation has increased sixteen times. Recreational demand on our other public lands—the forests, wildlife refuges, and Bureau of Land Management lands—has also reached record numbers. An increase only one-half as great in the next fifty years would devastate these areas, diminishing the quality of visitors' experience and reducing resources to unsustainable levels. (The Wilderness Society, 1998)

The Sierra Club was criticized from both within and outside of the organization for considering a similar resolution calling for restricted immigration as a means to reduce the U.S. population in the late 1990s (Clarke, 2001). Although the mainstream organization shied away from advocating an immigration reduction policy, some Sierra Club activists formed the organization Support U.S. Population Stabilization (SUSPS) to reverse the club's neutral stance on immigration. The goal is to limit what SUSPS terms "over-immigration" to the United States.

Some in the conservation community make the "overcrowding" argument that the more immigration, the higher the number of people recreating on U.S. wildlands. But this reasoning equates demand for wildland and wilderness recreation with demands for routine or life-sustaining necessities such as food, shelter, or employment. Because wildland and wilderness visitation is influenced to a large extent by cultural values, immigrants' cultural views would act as a sieve through which demand is filtered. Cultural norms about nature held by groups from Latin America and Asia may constrain these groups' interaction with wildlands and wilderness. European American ideals around conservation and wildland preservation emphasize the separation of humans and nature. This ontology has played out in the formal designation of wilderness, parks, and forest preserves. However, this mode of viewing nature may not resonate with cultures from around the world because many traditional non-Western cultures do not segregate culture and nature (Buijs, Elands, & Langers, 2009; Guha, 1989; Han, 2008; Parajuli, 2001). Indeed, the distinction between society and nature has been roundly criticized when exported to other parts of the globe and has been critiqued in the U.S. context as well. American academics Callicott and Nelson (1998, p. 2) go so far as to state that federally recognized wilderness areas are "ethnocentric, androcentric, phallogocentric, unscientific, unphilosophic, impolitic, outmoded, even genocidal." Diegues (2008, p. 265) called the American model of distinguishing nature and civilization "devastating" for those people and cultures directly dependent upon natural resources.

Dong and Chick (2005) argued for a "cultural constraints" model of outdoor recreation that acknowledges the legitimacy of culture in influencing outdoor recreation behavior. Along similar lines, Lee (1972) argued that an understanding of the culturally based meanings that sociocultural groups attribute to an environment can help explain a group's interaction with that particular milieu or class of milieus. Because of the saliency of culture in immigrant societies, it behooves researchers to examine culturally based meanings and images of nature.

Johnson, Bowker, Bergstrom, and Cordell (2004) examined whether immigrants were less likely than those born in the United States to visit wilderness or to deem it worthy of preservation. Study results showed that immigrants were indeed less likely than native-born respondents to say they had visited wilderness or that they would visit such places in the future. Immigrants were also less likely to indicate agreement with either of these statements: "I enjoy knowing that other

people are currently able to visit Wilderness" or "I support protecting wilderness just so they [these areas] will always exist in their natural condition, even if no one were to ever visit or otherwise benefit from them." Further, Johnson, Bowker, and Cordell (2005) examined the role of nature-based recreation in the acculturation of Mexican and Chinese immigrants to American society. The study made explicit the role of acculturation in influencing nature-based or wildland recreation participation. Findings showed that Mexican immigrants were less likely than U.S.-born Whites to say they had done either birding, developed or primitive camping, or mountain biking. Similarly, Chinese immigrants were less likely to do all activities except birding. Interestingly, higher acculturation levels increased the probability of developed camping but decreased the likelihood of primitive camping.

The following section presents an overview of the various ontologies or human–nature paradigms found in European American, Asian, and Latin American cultures. This explication should aid the reader in better understanding immigrant interactions with and perceptions of wildland-based nature in America. Note that the various "Americas" referenced in this chapter are not monolithic. Latin America includes an array of cultures, climates, and economic systems. The intent in this chapter is not to summarize a single "Latin American" view of the wild but rather to discuss some of the fundamental differences between views of the topic in European-dominated America and Latin countries of the Americas. Similarly, the following discussion of wild nature in the European and Asian imagination should be understood with the caveat that country-specific variations exist.

Wildland and wilderness visitation is influenced to a large extent by cultural values; therefore, it is important to understand the environmental worldviews of Latino and Asian cultures in the United States.

EUROPEAN AMERICAN CULTURE AND NATURE-BASED RECREATION

The underpinnings for wilderness and other wild nature preservation in the United States can be traced to the mid- to late 1800s and the influence of American icons such as Ralph Waldo Emerson in New England and John Muir, who eventually found his way to the American West. Both men espoused transcendentalism, a philosophy that included the belief that the natural world—wild, natural places—could help redeem humanity from the denaturalization caused by industrial society. Important in this worldview are clear distinctions between the natural world and civilization.

No doubt influenced by this culture–nature dichotomy, early ecologist Charles C. Adams presaged the 1964 Wilderness Act's intent of clearly demarcating wilderness from society by stressing that wild places are reservations "set aside . . . *to allow nature to take her own course, with as little interference by man as is possible*" (original emphasis, in Adams, 1929, p. 57). That federally designated wilderness lands are viewed as sanctified or set apart from pedestrian human habitat is also evident in the writings and musings of early preservationists such as Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Muir. This central theme is taken up again in Sanders' (2008) discussion of "Wilderness as Sabbath," which likens wilderness to the ancient Judeo–Christian avocation of resting the mind, body, soul—in the case of wilderness, a recognition of the limits to human growth and exploitation (Sanders, 2008).

Inglehart (1990, 1995) would also argue that the interest in and protection of wildland and wilderness in Anglo-dominated North America have been aided by the comparative wealth of large North American countries. Inglehart's (1990, 1995) postmaterialist thesis suggests that lack of material need in Western countries affords individuals in those countries the luxury of adopting egalitarian attitudes and actions more inclusive of others in society. Because basic needs have been attended to in the West, a greater number of people are freer to concentrate on issues and concerns besides those that are most fundamental, such as racial and gender equality; animal rights; and environmental protection, including wildland and wilderness preservation.

NATURE PERCEIVED IN LATIN AMERICA

Latin American perspectives on wildland and wilderness offer an interesting contrast to those of European Americans (see chapter 5 on leisure among Latino Americans). Although the Judeo–Christian influence pervades both of the Americas, Latin countries have a decidedly different conceptualization of the wild. This view appears more consistent with Inglehart's postmaterialism. Price (1994, p. 42) commented that "environmental conservation is not widely embraced by Latin Americans." Citing the Latin American terror and tumult of the 1970s and 1980s, she wrote that more pressing concerns revolving around political instability and unemployment took precedence over concern for environmental quality during this time. Price (1994) and Diegues (2008), however, stressed that conservation, environmentalism, and overall concern for the environment were increasing in Latin America through the efforts of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but that the environmentalism of Latin American NGOs differed from that of their European American counterparts; the former included a broader base of support across political and class spectra. DeLuca's (1999) charge, for instance, that wilderness preservation is dominated by elite White males in America would carry much less weight in the Latin American context given that their NGOs employ a model more akin to the United States' environmental justice movement, which emphasizes both economic justice and environmental integrity in the nonwild places that people inhabit. Price (1994) remarked, "Combining the goal of environmental stewardship with economic needs of the poor, these NGOs are more likely to promote extractive reserves than parklands free of human inhabitants" (p. 44).

To suppose that nature-based or wildland and wilderness recreation would resonate with newly

arrived or even more acculturated Latino and Asian immigrants may be presumptuous given that the very concept of outdoor *recreation* (as opposed to nature contact for sustenance) may be wholly unfamiliar to native cultures from which many of these groups stem. Cowell (1991), for instance, quoted in Gómez-Pompa and Kaus (2008), remarked that South American Indians in tropical forests approach natural resources from a sustainable albeit utilitarian perspective: "There are saplings for making bows, and jatoba for making canoes . . . but there are never trees noticeable for self-conscious reasons—beauty, terror, wonder" (p. 297). Lynch (1993) also asserted that people of Latin American descent in the United States hold a contrasting view of nature, relative to Whites. Unlike the traditional American view of nature as separate from the individual and community, Latinos perceive humans to be intimately connected with their natural surroundings (see chapter 5 on Latino Americans). In support of these claims, Schultz, Unipan, and Gamba (2000) found that less acculturated foreign-born Latinos in southern California were more likely than acculturated Latinos to agree with the New Ecological Paradigm worldview of "people in harmony with nature." Schultz and colleagues (2000) attributed the differences to two possible sources. One relates to the argument presented here, that Latin American collectivism encourages a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. The second explanation is that more acculturated Latinos have been in the United States longer than recent immigrants and perceive less environmental degradation because its level in the United States is comparatively lower. Schultz and colleagues (2000) remarked that the first explanation seems an oversimplification given the gross exploitation of material resources throughout Latin America. However, in explaining Latin American concern for the wild, both Price (1994) and Gómez-Pompa and Kaus (2008) highlighted stark class differences within Latin America. Price (1994) argued that folk understandings of nature remain throughout the region but that wild places have been degraded via the actions of economic and political urban elites, both from within the region and from the United States and Canada.

WILD NATURE IN ASIAN THOUGHT

In China, scenic and historic interest areas are included in the country's national park system (Han, 2008). The designation of these areas, however, has not been without controversy because their establishment follows the Western or American model of culture–nature schism, which demands that anthropocentric features be removed. As Han (pp. 252-253) wrote, "These policies are strongly opposed by local communities and local governments because local people are uprooted and traditional lifeways [sic] and subsistence economies are ruined . . . such policies are not consistent with the traditional Chinese attitudes toward and values regarding nature." Hung (2003) noted the increases in land set aside for conservation in China since the 1970s but questioned whether the Chinese have actually embraced wilderness and conservation values. In stark contrast to the Western idea of wilderness as cathartic, spiritual cleanser, in the Chinese mind, wildlands are perceived as anathema to humans. Rather, valued nature includes carefully cultivated landscapes arranged with intention. Han (2008, p. 254) identified several characteristics that distinguish traditional Chinese and Western ideas about nature. For the Chinese, nature is

- humanistic rather than religious;
- aesthetic rather than scientific;
- consistent with human culture;
- an extension of home, an enjoyable and inspiring place; and
- managed to imitate art because art is more beautiful than uncultured nature.

Importantly, the aim of traveling is to be companionable instead of solitary and physically daunted.

Along similar lines, Yu and Berryman (1996) cited four cultural factors that distinguish Chinese and American outdoor recreation (also see chapter 6 on Asian North Americans). Two of these are relevant for the present discussion: (1) Chinese people view recreation as relaxing, passive engagement rather than as strenuous activity, in contrast to forms of wildland- and wilderness-

based recreation that require much effort; and (2) *outdoor* recreation generally is not viewed positively by Chinese families.

Han (2008) argued that contemporary Chinese views of nature are rooted in Confucianism and Taoism, which includes significant elements of humanism and, again, a human culture in situ with nature. The Chinese also place much greater value on designed garden spaces than on wild nature. Hung (2003), for instance, wrote that the manicured gardens in Chinese mountain monasteries are examples of cultural distinctiveness for the Chinese and are analogous to the national park ideal for North Americans.

In traditional Chinese society, engaging in outdoor woodland activities is closely aligned with class—primarily with peasants, who are most connected to wild nature because they must eke out a subsistence from the land. As a result, modern, more Westernized Chinese distance themselves from wild, undeveloped settings. The difference in wildland engagement as described by Hung and the symbiosis espoused in the Taoist and Buddhist traditions seem to be a difference between a contemporary, secularized relationship to nature and a more philosophic stance. Also important in China is that communism contributed greatly to the former perspective by attempting to supplant centuries-old views of nature with more self-centered modern ideas that emphasize mastery over nature (Sodowsky, Maguire, Johnson, Ngumba, & Kohles, 1994).

Writing from the perspective of a "sympathetic outsider" to deep ecology,[3] the Indian ecologist Ramachandra Guha (1989) criticized the lens through which deep ecologists and other Western writers have constructed East and South Asia's relationship with nature. Guha (1989) wrote that the "complex and internally differentiated religious traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism—are lumped together as holding a view of nature believed to be quintessentially biocentric" (p. 76). Guha argued, to the contrary, that ordinary Easterners have continually altered their surrounding environment, sometimes with lasting and devastating results. Guha too emphasized that wilderness designation and protection is a uniquely American concept that has little resonance in India among the common folk. Rather, when rural Indian peasants engage in environmental activism, they are not seeking to shelve or restrict access to pristine nature but are seeking rights to lands so that they might be used *sustainably* to support traditional livelihoods.

Importantly, Sodowsky and colleagues (1994) suggested that East Asian immigrants to the United States may not adhere to traditional Taoist views of holism but adapt to a more material culture that has as its basis unsustainable resource depletion. The so-called BRIC nations, Brazil, Russia, India, and China (so named for their emergent economies), are quickly adding to the amount of human-produced carbon emissions worldwide (Chousa, Tamazian, & Chaitanya, 2008). Indeed, China's economic expansion, which is consuming natural resources at accelerating rates both within the country and abroad, bears scant resemblance to the holism discussed here and detailed by Altman and Chemers (1980) or Goodman (1980). The contradictions that appear in Latin America regarding environmental stewardship and economic realities are also evident in the Asian interpretation of nature. Traditional conceptualizations of nature are necessarily tempered by contemporary realities of globalism and strivings of emergent economies for wealth maximization.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Returning to the issues that the land managers and agency heads raised at the land trust and outdoor recreation conferences mentioned earlier, the present author thinks that a key to engaging these communities is to emphasize conservation and outdoor recreation activities in and near respective immigrant communities. While wildland restoration may be ideal for mainstream U.S. conservation and land management organizations,

[3]The term "deep ecology" was penned by Arne Naess in the 1960s. Deep ecology is an ecological philosophy that advocates for the interconnectedness of all living organisms, a philosophy that sees humans as part of a larger biotic structure rather than at the pinnacle of that structure (Harding, n.d.).

immigrants from places in the world where there is little contact with wild nature would best be introduced to conservation practices and wildland protection in the United States by first engaging with these resources where they live. In many instances, these are urban areas.

Viewing urban and immigrant populations as legitimate constituencies of land management organizations would help to direct attention to the potential for support in these communities. Some of these initiatives have already taken place. The Trust for Public Land founded the Parks for People program in six urban areas, and the Sierra Club is actively engaged with environmental justice efforts (Lanfer & Taylor, n.d.). The U.S. Forest Service also supports urban greening, but outside of the Northeast, these programs are not well known or established. The southern United States is ripe for such programming given the dramatic increases in immigrant migration and immigration to the South over the past 30 years (Johnson-Gaither, 2011).

Land management and conservation agencies should look into ways of highlighting the "wild" nature that exists near immigrant communities. Traditional interpretations of wildlands and wilderness do not include tree-adorned urban parks or commons; however, these resources may be as close to the Great Outdoors as some people may be able to or desire to come. In an effort to help engage urban communities with the nature that exists in cities, Harnik (2010) and Campbell and Wiesen (2009) suggested that municipalities encourage the planting of community gardens in permissible areas around homes and in abandoned lots. Neighborhood gardens have been successful in urban areas in the Northeast. Campbell and Wiesen documented a number of cases in some of New York City's high-crime areas, such as the South Bronx, where the planting of gardens helped to reestablish community. Latinos of Caribbean descent were highlighted in this research. The gardens are cultural expressions brought with Latino immigrants from their native countries or passed on by their immigrant parents. Public parks and community gardens may provide immigrants a venue for establishing meaning and attachment to their new environs while remaining connected through nature to their culture of origin.

CONCLUSION

The environmental worldviews held by immigrants from Latin America and Asia may be useful for understanding these immigrants' likely demand for wilderness in the United States. The complexity of these attitudes and beliefs is not easily deciphered, however, because of the various, often contradictory, interpretations of nature. Still, the literature presented in this chapter does not suggest high demand for wildland and wilderness activities among Latino and Asian immigrants. Thus, concerns in the conservation community that the rise in immigrant populations may overload the carrying capacity of wild nature may be unwarranted. Latino and Asian interest in nature-based activities may depend on whether these involve physically demanding activities in remote settings or activities in developed settings. For instance, Chavez's[4] research in and around national forests in California shows relatively high visitation by Latinos in that part of the country; but again, these impacts are concentrated in day-use, developed areas and do not indicate system-wide Latino visitation increases. In fact, Chavez and others (Roberts, Chavez, Lara, & Sheffield, 2009) decry the lack of cultural diversity in publicly managed forests and parks in California. Garnering political support for these preserves may be an especially difficult task given that research shows that political activism for environmental concerns among immigrants is usually low (Pfeffer & Stycos, 2002). The U.S. land trust community clearly understands that protection of wildlands and wilderness will depend, to a great extent, on the continued popular political support of all Americans and the varied perspectives they hold about the land. Yet, as immigrant populations grow, their support of wilderness values will be crucial as well.

[4]Chavez (2001, 2005) documented decades of Latino recreation in urban proximate national forests in Southern California.