

Comment on "Race, Ethnicity, and Natural Resources in the United States: A Review"

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Nearly 20 years after writing this review article on race, ethnicity, and natural resources,¹ my first observation is that the literature is now so vast that it is difficult to even summarize recent developments. I will instead direct my comments mostly to key themes, a few examples from my experience, and my enthusiasm for integrative approaches. The basic structure used in the article, discrimination, culture, and resource use and the ways that these are inextricably linked, continues to provide a solid framework for examining the issues. The effects of individual, institutional, and structural discrimination continue to be felt and have cascading effects on access to natural resources and people's lives. And while individual and institutional discrimination may have declined or become less overt, discussion of structural discrimination among the general public and in the natural resource field has only recently been evident. Awareness and recognition of patterns, while only a first step, is critical to change.

Failure to account for and incorporate diverse cultural patterns of resource use into management policies has the same effect as structural discrimination, meaning that discrimination and cultural diversity are separate but interwoven issues. Just a few decades ago the natural resource field was largely populated by white European Americans who, often without realizing it, enacted policies and management actions tailored to their own group's preferences and practices. Fortunately, it is increasingly recognized that there is generally no one right way to utilize natural resources, and that the different cultural groups that constitute the nation's population need to be understood and accounted for in policies. Certainly this recognition has been stimulated by the growing body of research on cultural resource use. But it has also been encouraged by participatory and collaborative management approaches, as well as greater diversity in the natural resource workforce.

African American land and natural resource issues in the U.S. South have received considerable attention since the article was originally published. One notable example that spans research and practice is the Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program, a

¹ John Schelhas, "Race, Ethnicity, and Natural Resources in the United States: A Review," 42(4) *Nat. Resources J.* 723 (2002).

community-based effort that has focused on land ownership, attachment to the land, access to forestry information, participation in government programs, legal assistance, and development of wealth for African American landowners across the South.² Additional research, outreach, and legal scholarship on African American land ownership and forestry, particularly on heirs' property, has developed a strong foundation for this work. Articles by Connor Bailey, Robert Zabawa, Cassandra Johnson Gaither, and Thomas W. Mitchell are too numerous to cite, but a report edited by Johnson Gaither et al.³ is a good and accessible place to see the range of their scholarship. African American-led organizations conducting outreach and advocacy, such as the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, play an important grassroots role in bringing about change across the South. The Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act, and its adoption in numerous states, is creating new opportunities for retention of family land and bringing attention to the issue. The multifaceted effort around African American land ownership and forestry provides an example of how interdisciplinary research and action can grow synergistically to create a platform for comprehensive multi-sectoral change from local to national levels.⁴

Tribal natural resource management in the United States is another area that has received considerable attention in both research and action. Tribes have been empowered to represent and enact their unique natural resource interests and sovereignty through both broadening awareness and policy changes. These changes build on of a growing body of literature on indigenous knowledge and natural resource management. At the same time, increased indigenous representation at all levels in the natural resources fields has elevated both dialogue and the development of collaborative approaches. While there are numerous people whose work could be highlighted, I want to call attention to Dr. Frank Lake, because he illustrates how these different changes can work together. As a tribal member employed as a researcher for the U.S. Forest Service, his research and writing on indigenous knowledge and fire in California brings important new perspectives and management practices to one of the most pressing issues facing the western United States, wildland fires.⁵ This

² John Schelhas & Sarah Hitchner, "Integrating Research and Outreach for Environmental Justice: African American Land Ownership and Forestry," 44(1) *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 47-64 (2020).

³ S. Research Station, U.S. Forest Serv., "Heirs' Property and Land Fractionation: Fostering Stable Ownership to Prevent Land Loss and Abandonment" (e-General Technical Report SRS-244, Cassandra Johnson Gaither et al. eds., 2019).

⁴ Schelhas & Hitchner, *supra* note 2.

⁵ Frank K. Lake et al., "Integration of Traditional and Western Knowledge in Forest Landscape Restoration," in *Forest Landscape Restoration: Integrated Approaches to Support Effective Implementation* 198-226 (Stephanie Mansourian & John Parrotta eds., 2018); Jonathan W. Long & Frank K. Lake, "Escaping Social-Ecological Traps Through

reinforces the idea that a combination of representation, incorporation of knowledge, collaborative action, and legal and policy changes is often essential to change ecological conditions on the ground.

Research on race, ethnicity, and outdoor recreation was among the most developed areas of the literature 20 years ago, and that research has been augmented by action and activism. While groups and movements like Latino Outdoors, OutdoorsAfro, #BlackBirdersWeek, and many others have been forming and growing for years, in 2020 they achieved mainstream recognition both for the discrimination they have faced and for their role in representing their own unique cultures' approaches to nature appreciation and outdoor recreation.⁶ Professional organizations such as the Society of American Foresters and the Wildlife Society have increasingly paid serious attention to diversity in their meetings, publications, and support of students. Notably, in 2020, mainstream environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, and the Wilderness Society began to publicly reckon with racist and discriminatory elements in their history.⁷ And while Aldo Leopold's land ethic is as relevant as ever, it has also inspired a Black Land Ethic⁸ and a Native American view of an American Land Ethic.⁹

Other important issues covered in the article have not seen as much advancement. Research and action related to Latinx and Asian populations appears to have been more limited, although there has been some attention to Latinx woods workers¹⁰ and both Latinx and Asian gatherers of non-timber forest products.¹¹ Migrant, undocumented, and other woods workers constitute a key gap in our understanding. In general, the concept of environmental justice still refers to environmental hazards like pollution, in spite of efforts to broaden it to include access to and utilization of natural

Tribal Stewardship on National Forest Lands in the Pacific Northwest, United States of America," 23(2) *Ecology & Society* art. 10 (2018).

⁶ Reyna Askew & Margaret A. Walls, "Diversity in the Great Outdoors: Is Everyone Welcome in America's Parks and Public Lands?" *Resources* (2019).

⁷ Darryl Fears & Steven Mufson, "Liberal, Progressive – and Racist? The Sierra Club Faces Its White-Supremacist History," *Wash. Post* (July 22, 2020).

⁸ J. Drew Lanham, *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature* (2016).

⁹ N. Scott Momaday, "An American Land Ethic," in N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words* 42–49 (1997).

¹⁰ Brinda Sarathy, *Pineros: Latino Labour and the Changing Face of Forestry in the Pacific Northwest* (2012); Brinda Sarathy & Vanessa Casanova, "Guest Workers or Unauthorized Immigrants? The Case of Forest Workers in the United States," 41(2) *Policy Sciences* 95 (2008).

¹¹ Kelly Watson et al., "Social Dimensions of Nontimber Forest Products," in S. Research Station, U.S. Forest Serv., *Assessment of Nontimber Forest Products in the United States Under Changing Conditions* 102 (General Technical Report SRS-232, James L. Chamberlain et al. eds., 2018).

resources;¹² perhaps more socio-ecological approaches to research can remedy this.

Twenty years ago, most of the topics I have discussed above and included in my article were nascent, and in the intervening years attention to them has grown and brought about some changes. At the same time, we certainly cannot say that the work of ending discrimination and incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into natural resource scholarship and management has been finished. Even in the areas where we have made the most progress, there is still much work to be done. There are undoubtedly many other areas where the work is just beginning. In areas where the most progress has been made—for example, African American land ownership and forestry in the South and indigenous people around the world—we see changes that go far beyond research on histories and current situations. Programs are now grappling with the effects of long-term material losses from discrimination, new ways of building awareness and reconciliation, and development of and research on processes to bring about inclusive change. Finally, while I may view these many developments through the lens of my own work, new ways are emerging to view and organize the literature and activities, as is evident in the book *Research and Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing Through Indigenous Relationships*.¹³ The contributors to this book, many indigenous, show how observing and reflecting on complex identities, histories, and present situations can spur new thinking and approaches on the path to real advances, though often incremental, amid all this complexity.¹⁴

¹² *Justice and Natural Resources: Concepts, Strategies, and Applications* (Kathryn M. Mutz, Gary C. Bryner & Douglas S. Kenny eds., 2002); Schelhas & Hitchner, *supra* note 1.

¹³ *Research and Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing Through Indigenous Relationships* (Shawn Wilson, Andrea V. Breen & Lindsay Dupré eds., 2019).

¹⁴ John Schelhas, "Review of *Research and Reconciliation: Unsettling Ways of Knowing Through Indigenous Relationships*," 33(10) *Society & Natural Resources* 1328 (2020).