

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN OUTDOOR  
ENTHUSIASTS

A Dissertation

by

DREW ALAN CAVIN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2008

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding the Experiences of African American Outdoor Enthusiasts.

(August 2008)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. David Scott

The study of race/ethnicity and leisure has been an area of great interest to researchers since at least the 1970s. Numerous studies have shown that differences exist in the ways people from different racial/ethnic groups participate in outdoor recreation. Most of these studies have found that racial and ethnic minorities (i.e. non-White groups) participate in many outdoor recreation activities at proportionally lower levels than do Whites. While these studies present numerous hypotheses to help explain this phenomenon, no study has been conclusive.

In this dissertation, I present a theoretical framework and three empirical studies to investigate the nuances of this issue. The first study examines the theory of systemic racism (Feagin, 2006) and its utility to deepen our understanding of the factors that play into African Americans relationship with nature and outdoor recreation. The second study analyzes narrative and historical autobiographical accounts of African Americans from the three major racial eras in United States history in order to examine African Americans' relationship with nature over time. The third study examines the racially related constraints of African Americans who are involved in serious leisure pursuits of

activities generally considered outdoor recreation, as well as African Americans who are involved in nature related careers. The constraints I found with this group are reservations of family and friends regarding being in “the woods,” collective memory and fear, being the “only one,” discrimination and “reverse curiosity,” assumption of novice status, and balancing identity between being Black, and “acting White.”

In the fourth study I analyze this same study group, but explore their experiences of being involved in serious leisure and look at the negotiation schema that this group employed to sustain participation. These negotiation schema are childhood formative experiences, realizing deep connections to nature, transcendental experiences in nature, leaning on knowledge of nature, comfort with White people/places/groups, and positive experiences with White people in nature. The four studies in this collection represent a rethinking and deepening of our knowledge of African American participation in the outdoors.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated foremost to my wife, Jenny, who has been beside me in my life journey for nearly a decade. Without her loving support and encouragement, I would never have made it to this place. I also dedicate this dissertation to the gracious people who allowed me to interview them and were so willing to share of their time and energy for this project. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my family: my blood family, my legal family, and my spiritual family, without whom I would have long ago lost my way.

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I would also be remiss not to acknowledge my wife Jenny for her tremendous efforts in editing the final versions of this manuscript. Her perseverance has been ever inspiring. To my fellow graduate students I would like to extend a big thanks for the constant exchange of ideas. Specifically, Jason Kurten, Todd Grier, and Mat Duerden, thanks. And Todd, thanks for your Herculean efforts in helping transcribe the audio from my interviews, it wouldn't have happened without you, I owe you more than a six pack. I would also like to acknowledge my church community who prayed for me and supported me through the really rough times, along with my mother, father, and my sister who did the same. Finally, I would like to thank my best friend Greta, who's unwavering devotion touches the deepest part of my soul. Thanks to you all.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The study of race/ethnicity and leisure has been an area of great interest to researchers since at least the 1970s. Numerous studies have shown that myriad differences exist in the ways in which people from different racial/ethnic groups participate in recreation in general, and more specifically in outdoor recreation. Most of these studies have found that racial and ethnic minorities (i.e. non-White groups) participate in many outdoor recreation activities at proportionally lower levels than do Whites. A number of fairly recent articles (Floyd, 1998, 1999; Floyd & Shinen, 1999; Floyd, Shinen, McGuire, & Noe, 1994; Gomez, 2002) examined some reasons why minority groups would not participate in outdoor recreation at the same levels as White majority groups. While these studies present numerous hypotheses to help explain this phenomenon, no study has been conclusive.

This area of inquiry dates back to at least the Outdoor Recreation Resources Research Commission (ORRRC) of 1962. The civil rights movement of the 1960s also led to an increase in research examining the disparity in outdoor recreation. Perhaps the seminal article in this line of study was published by Washburne (1978) who examined two hypotheses that would come to dominate the investigation into what he dubbed “Black underparticipation” (p. 175). He proposed the *marginality* and the *ethnicity*

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This dissertation follows the style of *Journal of Leisure Research*.

hypotheses. The marginality hypothesis “suggested Blacks do not participate because of poverty and various consequences of socioeconomic discrimination” (p. 176). The ethnicity hypothesis “holds that patterns of Blacks are based on their subcultural style, or *ethnicity*” (p. 177). The following fifteen to twenty years of investigation would revolve mainly around these two possible explanations.

In the early 1990s researchers expanded the possible explanations to include assimilation and then discrimination. The discrimination hypothesis, examined in studies such as Gramman, (1996) and Floyd, et al. (1993) examines how both perceived and actual discrimination impact participation. The assimilation perspective takes from sociological theories of ethnic assimilation (Gordon, 1964). This hypothesis suggests that as a minority becomes more assimilated to mainstream culture; they will begin to participate in mainstream recreation activities. The two original explanations are by far the most thoroughly tested of the four, though by no means fully examined. There is currently no consensus as to the causes of the current lack of participation by minorities in outdoor recreation. The need to examine this issue further and understand the root causes of the lack of minority interest and/or participation in outdoor recreation remains strong.

### Study Purpose

To this end, I present a theoretical framework and three empirical studies to investigate the nuances of this issue. Chapter II examines the theory of systemic racism (Feagin, 2006) and its utility to deepen our understanding of the factors that play into

African Americans relationship with nature and outdoor recreation. The first study, presented in Chapter III, analyzes narrative and historical autobiographical accounts of African Americans from the three major racial eras in United States history (slavery, Jim Crow, contemporary) to African Americans relationship with nature over time. The second study, presented in Chapter IV, examines the racially related constraints and negotiation schema of African Americans who are involved in serious leisure pursuits of activities generally considered outdoor recreation, as well as African Americans who are involved in nature related careers. I refer to this group as African American outdoor enthusiasts. The last study, presented in Chapter V, analyzes this same study group, but explores their experiences of being involved in serious leisure. I examine the notion that this group has a particular experience of serious leisure based on the uniqueness of their participation in what are considered White activities. My study population is unique in that the experiences and meanings of people who actually participate as an underrepresented minority are examined, whereas most studies examine non-participants. African American outdoor enthusiasts are statistical anomalies: these minority participants have never been studied in depth. Each study will represent a stand alone paper. These studies specifically examine race as a factor influencing outdoor recreation. Factors such as gender, class, and age are also important factors, but are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

## Researcher Biography and Bias

I feel it necessary to point out the path I have taken to pursue this line of research. It is clear that my background has impacted my decision to approach this topic and assumption underlying my beliefs about the goodness of outdoor recreation. I became seriously interested in the outdoors as a college sophomore, and quickly decided to change my career path to become an outdoor professional. I dove headfirst into cycling, rock climbing, whitewater boating, and backpacking. I became competent enough to begin teaching others skills in these activities soon thereafter. My love for the outdoors manifested itself in everything I did. I was struck by the intricacy of the rivers and rock walls I played on and by the awesomeness of the wilderness areas I traveled to. Through graduate school, I learned about the arguments people have made towards the necessity of nature for healthy human functioning. These arguments squared well with my personal experiences. I will outline some of these arguments in Chapter II because they are part of a basic assumption I am making that nature and wilderness are good for all people.

The notion that people of color do not experience nature and parks in proportion to their numbers in the population was something that I experienced in my personal pursuits, and it is also something that I studied academically. It was not until I had a change of focus in my life that directed me towards social justice issues that I decided to pursue this line of study. I took a course from Joe Feagin on race and it changed the way I saw the world regarding racial issues. I decided to integrate this perspective into the status quo understanding of race and outdoor recreation as a way to help alleviate what I

saw as an injustice; the separation of African Americans from nature. Thus, the assumptions that I take into this project are important because they provide a glimpse of my biases. I fully believe that nature is good and necessary for all people and for society. This assumption, along with a belief that an externally-imposed separation from nature for African Americans is an injustice, have guided my doctoral research.

### Problem Statement

Take a look at any magazine having to do with an outdoor adventure activity such as rock climbing, Whitewater kayaking, or backcountry skiing and you will notice something about color. An overwhelming percentage of the people depicted in these magazines are White (Martin, 2004). These magazines represent the reality of the color of participation in outdoor recreation activities. Most available data confirms this pattern. According to numerous studies Whites are heavily overrepresented in terms of participation in human powered outdoor activities. It is clear that minorities do not have the same levels of participation in and commitment to the outdoors. Further, the meaning ascribed to what Martin called a "racialized" (2004) outdoor identity" has not been further pursued. The depths of meaning related to this phenomenon need to be examined.

Both general population trends as well as intra-activity data demonstrate what has been called the underparticipation *problem* because it is in fact, a problem. While Floyd (1998) reminded us of the assumption of "underparticipation", that Black people and other minorities should participate at equivalent levels to their numbers in the

population, I reaffirm the connection all humans have with nature, and I see the disconnect between some minorities and nature as the result of a system of oppression and resulting cultural pathologies. There is a strong (but not uncontested) body of literature that suggests this connection with nature is innate or at least extremely powerful (see Knopf, 1983; Ulrich, 1993; Wilson, 1984; Wohlwill, 1983). This assumption of the goodness of outdoor recreation should wisely be tempered with a hesitance to *insist* that minorities participate. The benefits of outdoor recreation speak for themselves, and I believe they can be realized by all races and ethnicities, but to insist or prescribe that African Americans or Mexican Americans or any other minority group “do” outdoor recreation would be presumptuous at best and fall in line with centuries of oppression at worst. I seek to examine the totality of experience realized by minorities in outdoor recreation to better understand the place of recreation in the lives of people living racially stratified society.

### Conclusion

In a society that claims “liberty and justice for all” to have inequitable access to societal benefits is to have a situation that demands remedy. To have a remedy for such injustice we must first know the nature of the injustice. Just as the prevalence or dearth of large predators can be an indicator of the health of an ecosystem, the prevalence and distribution of recreation and leisure can be seen as an indicator of health within a social system. A look at the commonly cited reasons for undertaking study of race and outdoor recreation reveals a mostly pragmatic or reactionary motive. The increasingly diverse

demographic makeup of the country and waning White majority (and subsequent waning support for nature conservation issues) results in a pragmatic drive for park and recreation managers to make their wares relevant to non-users. Likewise, the original motives for study seem to stem from the mandatory civil rights requirements handed down from Congress and the Supreme Court to a (mostly) unwilling public. Reasons relating to moral obligation or philosophical conviction have simply not been articulated. It for these reasons (not, however to the exclusion of the other reasons) that I undertake this study. Each of the four major chapters will advance contribute to our understanding of African Americans' participation in outdoor recreation.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GREAT WHITE WILDERNESS

#### Introduction

“Whenever I find myself in nature — camping beside a dry creekbed [sic] in Montana, cross-country skiing in northern Vermont, hiking a bit of the Appalachian Trail — mine is nearly always the only Black face around” (Harris, 1997). So says Black author and outdoorsman Eddy Harris. Harris is not alone in being the only “Black face” in most outdoor recreation settings. Research findings clearly corroborate his experiences. The study of race/ethnicity and leisure has been an area of great interest to researchers since at least the post-civil rights era 1970s. Numerous studies have shown that myriad differences are present in how people from diverse racial/ethnic groups participate in recreation in general, and more specifically in outdoor recreation. Most studies have found that racial and ethnic minorities (i.e. non-White groups) participate at proportionally lower levels than do Whites. Four hypotheses—marginality, ethnicity, assimilation, and discrimination—have been put forward to explain disparities in participation rates. None of these are grounded solidly in theory (Floyd, 1999). I will examine these hypotheses shortly. As there is currently no consensus in the research about which perspective best explains differences in recreation behavior, this paper outlines a broader perspective that provides the historical framework for understanding the issue today. The systemic perspective will reveal that the either-or opposition underlying the ethnicity and marginality hypotheses is fruitless. This paper adds a

conceptual model, that of *systemic racism*, to help clarify these important disparities in participation. As an example of how systemic racism has operated in our society, I adapt the conceptual framework put forth by Feagin (2006) to examine the influences of a systemically racist social, political, and economic system on African American leisure outcomes.

If we desire a just and equitable society—one where all people have access to the same benefits—then we must examine deeply the reasons such disparate rates of participation exist in outdoor recreation. The perspective of systemic racism (Feagin, 2006) can inform the study of racial and ethnic disparities in outdoor recreation participation. This perspective gives much needed historical context to why Black people and other people of color eschew outdoor recreation or are turned away from it, also and gives insight into the effects of racism on general leisure participation among non-White people in the United States. Systemic racism's main dimensions are the White racial frame, alienated social relationships, constant struggle and resistance (on the part of non-whites), racial hierarchy, unjust enrichment and unjust impoverishment, and related racial domination. These dimensions are fleshed out later in this Chapter. The perspective holds that Whites have been unjustly enriched by the subjugation of Black people under slavery and through laws to keep Black people from securing desirable jobs and social benefits during legal segregation. Black people have been unjustly impoverished through the stealing of their labor during slavery and through the restricting of the transmission of wealth through generations. This has led to the large disparity in education, wealth and numerous other socio-economic indicators in addition

to (and possibly more relevant today) deep psychological and social wounds to non-White groups (Feagin, 2006). These gaps and wounds have unavoidably affected the recreational behaviors and preferences available to non-Whites. These behaviors and preferences seem to be passed down generationally, such that African Americans today who have the means to visit wilderness areas have probably not been socialized to do so, and if they do participate, there are remaining institutional and social barriers to their full participation.

#### Review of Literature: Shortcomings of Previous Approaches

Any examination of racially related issues in U.S. society must be situated in the context of the unique history of racial stratification and racial oppression of the United States. While some of the research conducted to date has looked at the disparate participation problem from the all encompassing perspective of institutional racism and discrimination (Scott, 2000; West, 1989), most seem to have viewed it from the more predominant colorblind society perspective. The colorblind idea is basically that Americans do not legally “see color” and therefore all Americans have equal opportunity. This ideology is behind eliminating most affirmative action programs and behind so-called “reverse discrimination” law suits. Research, however has challenged the idea of a colorblind society (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Brown, 2003) and has shown that it can serve to reify racism by not addressing race issues critically. Bonilla-Silva outlined the continuing inequality in America in his book *Racism Without Racists*. He noted that Black people are three times more likely than Whites to be poor and have 1/8<sup>th</sup> their net

worth; Black-owned housing is valued at 35% less than White-owned; Black people pay more for cars and houses than do Whites. He argued persuasively that African-Americans in the U.S. face inequalities at near the same levels as they did before the civil rights movement. The reasons for this lasting inequality, under this color-blind ideology, are non-racial and thus relieve Whites from any accountability for the problem. Since Black people and other minorities have equal legal rights, “Whites rationalize the contemporary status [of minorities] as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and Blacks’ imputed cultural limitations” (p. 2). Bonilla-Silva’s notion of color-blind racism is important to our conceptualization here because it belies the common understanding of race in America and shows it to be harmful to racial progress.

With some exceptions, research on race and leisure typically conforms to this common notion (of particular note is research that moves away from race as an explanation to social class or ethnicity). By understanding the systemic nature of the problems and barriers to outdoor recreation many non-Whites face, we can better attempt to remove the barriers that block equal housing, education and employment, and access to recreational opportunities.

The literature examining the predominant viewpoints should be examined against the critical colorblind racist perspective. The marginality perspective, is defined as the underparticipation of Black people due to “poverty and various consequences of discrimination” (Washburne, 1978, p. 176). This perspective assumes that differences in participation rates are a function of differences between Blacks and Whites in income,

access to transportation, and requirements of a second job. A key word in the understanding of the marginality hypothesis is *historical* when referring to discrimination. The hypothesis infers that this discrimination is *in the past*, but does affirm that current realities are somehow a product of long-standing patterns of discrimination. The fact that a separate *discrimination* hypothesis exists is evidence of this understanding of marginality. When one examines the evidence from Bonilla-Silva (2006) and numerous other studies regarding the wealth and income gaps in the U.S. (Bullard, J. Eugene Grigsby, & Lee, 1994; Feagin, 1992, 2006; Feagin & Feagin, 1986; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Thomas & Michael, 1986; Waller, 2000) we can see that there is a discriminatory reality in America that should not be relegated to the past.

The ethnicity hypothesis, likewise, seems to hold a more deeply colorblind ideology. Of the studies that tested these two notions (ethnicity and marginality), a slim majority seem to have found that ethnicity is a more powerful predictor of participation in outdoor recreation, which means that when researchers controlled for socioeconomic factors, participation rates still differed (Floyd et al., 1993; Hutchison, 1993; Johnson & Pepper, 1997). It is important to note that early explanations of the ethnicity hypothesis such as Washburne (1978) and Craig (1972) included caveats. Washburne identified that he was, “not denying that Black leisure may have been shaped by a history of marginality...” (p. 177). Craig also saw that a marginal position in society could “condition” the leisure of a minority group culture. These authors, less than 10 years distant from the implementation of the last major Civil Rights act, saw that these two hypotheses are not fully dichotomous. West (1989) also critiqued the ethnicity theory,

suggesting that what Washburne and others were actually studying were “racial subcultural differences” (p. 11). Ethnicity, noted West, refers to a well established concept in the sociological literature, suggesting the term “subculture.” This different phrasing has been partially adopted in the literature. However, the vast majority of studies, since these early seminal articles, have examined the so-called underparticipation problem from the marginality/ethnicity framework. Manning (1999) offers a breakdown of over 30 such studies through 1998. All but five studies utilized the marginality/ethnicity dichotomy.

The ethnicity hypothesis could also be critiqued using critical sociological understandings of racism. The commonly held definition of ethnicity, such as the one offered by Glazer (1971) is as such:

A single family of social identities – a family which, in addition to races and ethnic groups, including religions (as in Holland), language groups (as in Belgium), and all of which can be included in the most general term, ethnic groups, groups defined by descent, real or mythical, and sharing a common history and experience (p. 447).

The main problem with this definition is that it washes out the effects of oppression based purely on race. Essed (1991) offered this summation: “Indeed, the substitution of ‘ethnicity’ for ‘race’ as a basis of categorization is accompanied by increasing unwillingness among the dominant group to accept responsibility for the problems of racism” (p. 28). Feagin and Feagin (1996) offered this definition for ethnic groups: “a group socially distinguished or set apart, by others or by itself, primarily on the basis of

cultural or national-origin characteristics” (p. 11). It can be seen now that an adoption of the idea of ethnicity to the exclusion of race or in a way that downplays race where it is primary leads to colorblind racism.

Critiques of the predominant perspective have been leveled from within the leisure literature. In fact, Floyd’s (1998) writing marks the beginnings of a new perspective of “getting beyond marginality and ethnicity” and provides a succinct critique of the marginality/ethnicity conceptual basis. According to Floyd, little systematic effort has been put forth in the study of this phenomenon, hence the lack of viable theoretical framework. This is largely due to the reactionary nature of the early attempts to study racial differences in recreation participation. Floyd noted the ineffectiveness of the status quo explanations throughout nearly twenty five years of study. He accounted for this, in the case of the marginality hypothesis, based on the lack of definition of the concept itself. The first problem with the concept is that it fails to “map out how ‘marginality’ operates to impact leisure choices” (p. 5). What Floyd means here is that the concept as defined by Washburne (1978) doesn’t show how the effects of racial stratification (i.e. institutional discrimination, residential or employment discrimination, and socioeconomic stratification) were “channeled” into actually affecting leisure behavior. At the point of Washburne’s article, the racial stratification of the United States had not yet been relegated to the distant past by colorblind ideologies. The working definition of marginality, according to Floyd, also presented no way to account for different socioeconomic statuses within minority populations. It fails to recognize heterogeneity within a racial group. The third criticism of the marginality

hypothesis deals with the lack of “modeling the impact of historical and contemporary discrimination” (p. 6) within the literature. These failures lead to an essentially class or economic based theory, when race criteria were of original interest. Floyd’s criticism of the marginality hypothesis sets up a strong case for examining the problem from the perspective of systemic racism.

Floyd (1998) added one important critique to the ethnicity hypothesis beyond what I discussed above; namely that it contains an “Anglo-conformity bias.” In suggesting that minorities will begin to participate in recreation similarly to Whites once they become more assimilated, the theory holds the White culture up as the ideal.

#### Alternative Theoretical Frameworks

Floyd’s criticism (1998), along with some other prior critiques (Hutchinson, 1988; West, 1989) led a number of researchers to suggest various other theoretical frameworks for looking at the underparticipation issue. Some of the alternative frameworks coalesce well with the systemic racism perspective advanced in this paper. Allison (2000) advanced the *social justice* framework outlined by Young (1990) in the book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. This notion of justice goes beyond the traditional notion of the distribution of material resources equally. Young’s notion and the notion advanced by Allison have more to do with the systems of power and the conditions that create material inequality. This framework is useful as it relates to how race is related to outdoor recreation participation. Allison suggested a few areas that have not been taken into account in previous explanations (i.e. environmental justice,

institutional discrimination, program/agency non-responsiveness, and violence). These factors fit well into the systemic racism perspective.

Scott (2000) examined discrimination specifically within the leisure service agencies. He discussed how “inequality stems from everyday practices that are deeply embedded within organizations” (p.134). Leisure service agencies succumb to institutional discrimination in two ways: utilizing entrepreneurial approaches and by emphasizing customer loyalty. Scott’s emphasis of institutional discrimination represents one of the “everyday” ways a systemically racist society hinders the recreation of the oppressed groups.

Lee, Scott, and Floyd (2001) used the multiple status hierarchy perspective in an effort to examine how multiple social statuses influence participation in outdoor recreation. Their empirical study found that “elderly minority females who do not have a college degree, and who do not make more than \$20,000 per year occupy the lower rank” (p. 427). This study suggests that systemic racism and its effects interact with a patriarchal and class based society. With these critiques and existing alternative perspectives in mind, I show how the perspective of systemic racism provides a macro level perspective to explain disparities in outdoor recreation; a perspective that subsumes previous attempts and theories with a holistic accounting for all the factors that influence and inhibit outdoor recreation participation for minorities.

### *Systemic Racism*

Systemic racism holds that racism is more than an ideology, that it is ingrained in our social and political systems. The effects of this systemic perspective are far reaching, impacting every area of life in our country. When viewed through this perspective, it is clear that all aspects of a person of color's life are affected by racism, recreation included. The perspective of systemic racism is important to the study of race and ethnicity in outdoor recreation because it gets beyond looking at the problem in terms of surface level indicators. The view is also a comprehensive framework for explaining the leisure behaviors of oppressed minorities. The racial issues in the United States go back centuries and are rooted in a system of racial oppression that placed Whites in a superior position and Blacks in a subordinate position. The ghosts of this system linger on into the present and have dramatic effects on how people live their lives.

In this section I outline the systemic racism perspective and adapt it to explain outdoor recreation participation. According to Johnson (1998) wildland recreation still sees large disparities between racial groups. Johnson found that African Americans by and large do not connect with wilderness areas. This disconnect manifests itself in environmental perceptions and behaviors, recreation patterns and attachment to wilderness areas. Through the lens of systemic racism, which holds that the racist system infects every part of society, we can see that this disconnect between people of color and outdoor recreation is part of a larger picture that has excluded groups of people from the benefits of society (in particular, outdoor recreation) based on their skin color.

Thus the relationship between race and participation in outdoor recreation must be understood through a historical lens. One clear example pertains to segregated swimming pools and recreational facilities. For years in the south, pools and other facilities were segregated and often Blacks did not experience their benefits (Wiltse, 2007). This led to a discrepancy in Black children learning to swim, which a key socialization agent for whitewater sports. We know from the environmental socialization perspective (Bixler, Floyd, & Hammitt, 2002) that there are essential play experiences for children that seem to pave the way for participation in outdoor recreation as adults. By revealing underlying reasons why African American children were not allowed to swim allows us to see how racism plays into what would now be called a cultural reason (“i.e. Black people don’t go rafting because they just don’t swim”). So this link, from the segregation of swimming pools to low participation in whitewater sports by African Americans, reveals the possibilities of how the perspective of *systemic racism* has direct implications for the study of disparities in outdoor recreation participation. I will demonstrate that systemic racism deeply affects the culture, identity, ideology, attitudes, and ultimately, the leisure behavioral choices of African Americans as they relate to nature.

The perspective of systemic racism, according to Feagin (2006), views U.S. racial formations as “being first and fundamentally about long-term relationships of racialized groups with substantially different material and political-economic interests” (p. 6). This perspective views racial relations, and the whole of American society, with a lens that brings to prominence the ways in which social structures and powerful

economic structures were created by elite Whites, utilizing the free labor provided by slavery. This system, which was justified by racial ideologies placing African Americans, Native Americans, and subsequent darker skinned immigrants as less than human, sought to profit from this hierarchy. Over the history of the United States, the resulting system of social stratification has created a scenario where every aspect of the lives of those on the oppressed end of the racial hierarchy are affected; economic, cultural, social, ideological, and so on. Feagin (2006) diagrammed the dimensions of systemic racism (Figure 1). I will briefly recount the descriptions from Feagin (2006) of these dimensions.

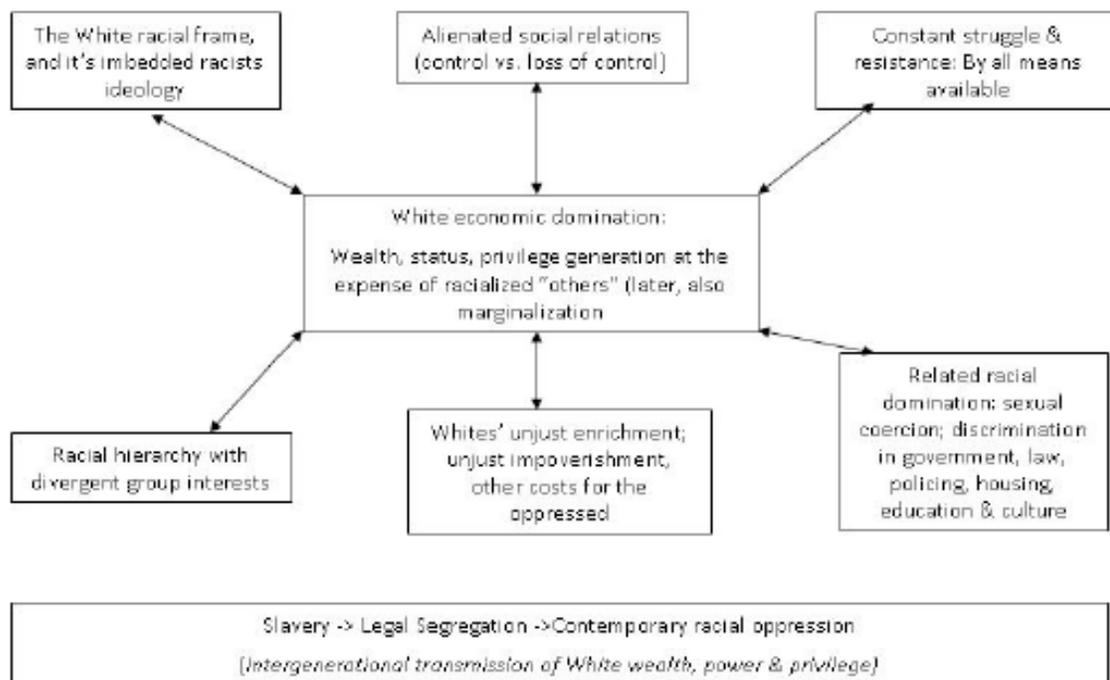


Figure 1: Dimensions of Systemic Racism, (Feagin, 2006)

### *Economic Domination*

Economic domination is perhaps the deepest underlying tenet of systemic racism. Keep in mind that Feagin (2006) was quick to point out the integrated nature of all of these dimensions. He did stress, however, the primacy of the “long term dependence of White Americans on African American labor” (p. 16). He stated that this dependence is mostly responsible for the lasting nature of the system of racial oppression in this country. He went on to outline the ways in which African slave labor was used to build the massive wealth generated during the years of slavery before and after the American Revolutionary War. He also pointed out how the highly profitable (for Whites) institution of slavery was defended on the grounds that the economic benefit (for Whites) was far too great and to abolish slavery would result in drastic economic woes for Whites whose means were somehow tied to industries benefiting from slave labor. Feagin continued on to estimate the value of the labor stolen from enslaved Africans between the 1620s and 1860s at \$1 trillion dollars (in current terms).

The economic disparities facing Africans at the end of slavery were desperate. According to Feagin, the economic subjugation continued into current times via discrimination in employment, and through discriminatory real estate and banking practices. The current realities are seen in 40% lower income and significantly less wealth of Blacks compared to Whites. According to Feagin, systemic racism then, is

At bottom a highly unjust system for creating and extending the impoverishment of large groups of people, such as African Americans, to the profit of other large groups of people, principally White Americans. (p. 20)

### *Racial Hierarchy*

For Feagin, the racial hierarchy involves “extremely asymmetrical relationship(s) of power” (p. 21). These relationships allow Whites to exercise “coercive power” over the lives of Blacks in more ways than economics. This hierarchy sets up relationships between the races that are alienated and distant. These relationships are acted on through political and social institutions where the desires of Black people are not given full consideration. Feagin discussed how the hierarchy, which was created by Whites, acts to interject people of other races into the system as they come into the society. He points out how, when class divisions arise, Whites always have a benefit, because they are oftentimes protected where Black workers are excluded. The alienation that Feagin outlined here works its way into every facet of life, especially the relational and social aspects.

### *Other Types of Discrimination*

While Feagin (2006) stated that economic subjugation is the primary tenet of systemic racism, he also discusses other types of discrimination. Some other arenas he includes in this category are education, politics, health care, public accommodation, and policing. While it is clear that African Americans were excluded from these areas during slavery and under Jim Crow, Feagin pointed out some ways in which discrimination in these other areas is still prevalent in other areas today. He cited the prevalence of police profiling, hate crimes and even racially motivated murders. The discrimination in other areas is also still “widespread” and tolerated and sometimes

perpetuated by most Whites. This distinction is an important one in terms of how the system is perpetuated. The tolerance of Whites, in Feagin's view, is *complicitness*. By this Feagin means that Whites who operate normally in the racist system, without taking action against racism, are taking part in the system. The last form of discrimination Feagin discussed in this section is an "intense cultural imperialism" (p. 25). A Eurocentric culture has been imposed on non-Whites as a national standard. Feagin is focused throughout his explanation of these dimensions on the ways discrimination and racism have become systematized. With cultural imperialism, he states that the primary ways in which it has become institutionalized is through the legal system. As he said, the economic and cultural domination of systemic racism have become "enshrined in U.S. laws and government policies" (p. 25).

### *The White Racial Frame*

Feagin (2006) defined the White racial frame as "an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate" (p. 25). This frame is a crucial component of systemic racism. It helps us understand the nuanced ways in which discrimination works in individuals. The White racial frame, importantly, leads to "recurring and habitual" discriminatory actions and can act "consciously or unconsciously." Frames are the imbedded ways in which we construe our selves. Feagin claimed that the oppression of African Americans and other non-Whites has deeply impacted the "minds and personality structures" (p. 27) of the oppressors. This frame helps to "shape and channel" (p. 27) the commonplace events of one's life,

guiding actions and explaining and interpreting the world. Again, this framing is crucial in how a person chooses to react to events, particularly ones involving people of other races. The frame can act to filter facts, especially when those facts do not fit into the person's frame.

So what is the White racial frame specifically? It basically sees non-Whites in a negative light; imploring stereotyping and negative images. The frame alternately sees Whites and White institutions in a positive light. The frame begins to take hold even at an early age (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001) and often operates on a “nonreporting and unconscious” level (Feagin, 2006, p. 26). Crucial here, however, is that the frame operates, and in many cases operates very strongly and quickly. Feagin sites studies using the Implicit Association Test where Whites almost immediately associate images of Black faces with negative things (Vedantam, 2005). The frame seems to be the unintended but ultimately powerful way in which the system of racism gets perpetuated even though many Whites are not consciously pursuing such a system, as in days of old. While there are undoubtedly groups who pursue openly racist agendas, most do not, and most claim to be non-racist. It takes deep self reflection on the part of most Whites to ferret out the ways in which the frame has become wrapped in their day to day interactions. Feagin discusses how the frame is “more than cognitive” (p. 27) and how the stereotypes combine with images, emotions, and inclinations towards discriminatory actions interject into daily interactions. Along with economic discrimination, the White racial frame is crucial in the perpetuation of the system

### *The Racist Ideology*

The racist ideology associated with systemic racism works with the White racial frame to legitimate the system. We have, as Feagin (2006) points out, the founders of our country speaking in defense of a system of human subjugation, basing their defense on a so-called natural superiority assumed about Whites (see Feagin 2006, Chapter III). The defense of slavery, like the defense of Native American genocide and land seizure, was well developed and was intertwined in the major institutions of the country. In addition to the support of most political leaders of the day, most religious groups justified slavery and the oppression of natives with Holy Scriptures. The ideas of slavery and Jim Crow being a so called natural order, according to Feagin, stem from the patriarchal worldview prevalent in the day. This worldview allows the discrimination and inequality to continue almost wholesale. This ideology also affects those being oppressed. The “plantation mentality” (p. 29) and notions that many blacks have about their place in the world reflect an internalization of these legitimating ideologies.

### *Resistance*

This final dimension of systemic racism is slightly more positive. This dimension involves the resistance against the system that Blacks, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans show. Since the first slaves arrived in the Americas, they have been resisting, in both small and large ways, the subjugation placed on them. Without the struggles of the oppressed, this country would be aching with the desperate places of the aforementioned groups. Feagin (2006) compared this resistance to the

Newton's third law of motion, that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. He cites everything from the more than 250 slave revolts to the civil disobedience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights movements. This resistance has been, and continues to be crucial and inspirational to the efforts of the oppressed, and for those who struggle beside them.

These elements are far reaching and show just how embedded discrimination and racism are in the United States. One could easily make connections linking these dimensions to the leisure outcomes of a person living in this system, but I think it is useful to think of some specific ways, integrating hypotheses and research done specifically on the issue of African Americans in the outdoors, while keeping the picture framed within the perspective of systemic racism.

#### Adapting Systemic Racism to Outdoor Recreation Participation

The four predominant hypotheses regarding the disproportionate participation of African Americans discussed above (marginality, ethnicity, and discrimination, assimilation) can be seen to fit in a smaller box that is surrounded by a bigger box (see Figure 2). The bigger box is the macro-level perspective of systemic racism. This perspective breaks away from the conventional understanding of race and outdoor recreation. By looking at the entire social system within which recreation and leisure take place, a macro level understanding is achieved. Also within the larger box are things that represent the society within which race informs or shapes leisure experiences. Leisure is one of many societal dimensions that are shaped by a systemic racist society.

When we view the phenomenon from this expanded macro perspective, we gain some clarity. The complexity of the situation increases, but the factors stand out more distinctly. Things like socialization, constraints, perceptions, and de facto segregation all play a role in molding people's leisure behavior. The contemporary examinations of disparate rates of participation resides within the small box, and do not take into account the larger historical social system in which leisure behavior happens.

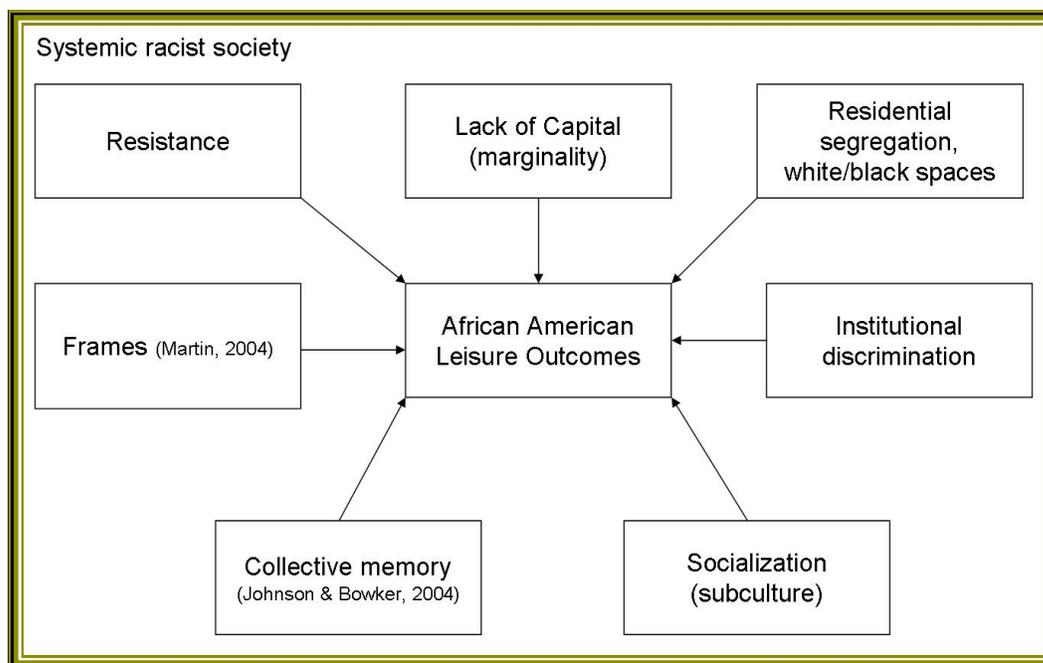


Figure 2: Systemic Racism and African American Leisure Outcomes (Adapted from Feagin, 2006).

In the next section, I will discuss each of the influences on leisure outcomes diagramed in Figure 2. Although these influences are surely not the only factors that wield influence on leisure outcomes of African Americans, they do reflect previous

efforts to identify reasons more African Americans do not engage with outdoor activities. It is highly likely, following more extensive research efforts in this area, that other important factors will be revealed. The areas that I talk about below should serve as a guide for directing future research. They reflect the best research to date and they also take a holistic view of the person, a view that recognizes that people are not easily reducible to equations, and that multiple forces act in sometimes mysterious ways to produce certain behavior.

### *Resistance*

As Feagin discussed, resistance happens in numerous places in our society, for women, for men, and for people of all races. In the context of participation in outdoor recreation, resistance for an African American could possibly come in the form of resisting commonly held stereotypes about what activities are socially acceptable, or in the form of resisting discrimination or perceived discrimination in wildland recreation areas. Shaw (2001) discussed how leisure has been conceptualized as a form of resistance. She states that “leisure practices are linked to power and power relations in society” (p. 186). As we have seen, in the systemic racism perspective, the resistance of oppressed racial groups begins with the onset of oppression itself. Resistance and constant struggle against oppression is a key dimension to the systemic racist society. Likewise, there is a small if not vocal contingent of African American, Latino, and Asian groups and individuals who are participating in outdoor recreation and championing the environment. These people, evidenced by groups such as the National Brotherhood of

Skiers, and publications like *Black Outdoorsman* magazine, can be seen as resisting in the areas mentioned above, as well as potential other areas.

### *Lack of Capital*

The lingering gap in wealth between Black and White Americans is a pressing issue in America. Bonilla-Silva (2006) cited a laundry list of gaps, housing (35% less value), income (40% less) and net worth (1/8<sup>th</sup> that of whites). That these gaps still persist, even 40 years after the end of the Civil Rights era belies the stagnant state of racial relations in the United States. My efforts here do not go into exactly why these gaps exist, but rather, I explore how these gaps might affect the ability of African Americans to travel to and experience natural areas. The marginality hypothesis, first explored by Washburn (1978), certainly guides the discussion here. To review, this hypothesis holds simply that African Americans have fewer financial resources, resources that are necessary for travel and accommodation at outdoor recreation areas. This hypothesis takes into account the fact that most outdoor recreation activities have a significant cost associated with them and since African Americans statistically have a lower income than Whites, African Americans will participate less.

The marginality hypothesis is one of the first that many lay people cite when considering the issue; the idea that African Americans do not typically have enough money to do outdoor activities. While compelling, especially based on the stark wealth gap data, the marginality hypothesis does not explain the whole picture. It has logical problems as well, such as why do not Asian Americans, who have roughly the same or

more wealth than Whites, do not participate in outdoor activities more often? It also does not account for why African Americans do not participate in outdoor activities that are nearby their homes, or inexpensive activities that are easily accessible. What this hypothesis lacks is a broader perspective on the situation many Black people find themselves in today. Wealth is only one indicator. Things like home-ownership, consumer debt, education, and lack of a stable home life are all things that likely play into the reasons why an African American may not participate in outdoor activities. The idea of “lack of capital” brings these things to bear as well.

### *Residential Segregation, White/Black Spaces*

Since the legalized segregation of the Jim Crow era, only minor inroads have been made towards integrated neighborhoods. Through various mechanisms enacted by realtors and homeowners, African Americans and other non-Whites have not been able to gain much access to the housing market (Massey & Denton, 1993). The effects of this segregation are far reaching. Again, I do not intend to explain why this segregation persists, beyond that it is part and parcel of the systemic racist system. What is more important is trying to understand how this situation might come to bear on the question of African Americans participating in outdoor recreation. It may be helpful to think of how these disparities effect outdoor recreation participation in terms of constraints, i.e. structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. In a structural sense, residential segregation might limit someone’s access to outdoor recreation areas because there might not be outdoor recreation areas within easy access. Beyond the structural reasons, it is

important to consider how our social and built environment can influence people's preferences for outdoor activities and environments. Consider, for example, that many outdoor recreation areas are located near predominantly White rural residential areas. Historically, Blacks have avoided these types of areas for a very real fear of violence. It may be that Blacks have a memory of what happens when they venture into these areas, and thus they still avoid them.

There is a deeper level of social construction ascribed to outdoor recreation areas that is tied into the de facto residential segregation that remains from the Jim Crow era. It seems that some places are considered *White* spaces or *Black* spaces based on their social history. Both Blacks and White usually avoid visiting spaces that have been historically defined as off-limits for them. Whether or not this avoidance is necessary is not as important as the powerful notion within a person that a place is not acceptable for them to go. To take this one step further, we can think about activities as being *Black* or *White* activities. And if we understand that Black people are not easily going to be able to participate in White activities, for fear of discrimination, or for fear of excommunication from their own community, then we can understand a bit more about why participation levels in outdoor recreation are not higher among African Americans. This notion of White/Black places and activities can be seen as both interpersonal and intrapersonal. There is an element of discrimination (or fear of discrimination) which is interpersonal, and there is also the idea that one is somehow betraying his/her racial identity, which is intrapersonal. The idea of residential segregation and White/Black spaces and activities is an important one in terms of explaining the outdoor recreation

participation patterns of African Americans. The powerful notion of racial identity, combined with the fear of discrimination in a place or activity is likely to explain why African-Americans do not participate in certain outdoor recreation activities and avoid certain outdoor recreation spaces.

### *Institutional Discrimination*

Institutional discrimination is often what many people mean when they refer to systemic racism. For this paper, however institutional discrimination is a distinctive part of the systemic racism model and has a distinct effect on the outdoor recreation participation of African Americans. Scott (2000) proposed that parks and recreation departments may discriminate unwittingly in their program offerings. Fees and charges may be needed to cover costs, but those fees might price out certain populations, primarily minority populations. As mentioned earlier, the other way these programs perpetuate discrimination is through emphasizing customer loyalty. By doing this they fail to reach out to constituents beyond their base, which typically has consisted of middle class Whites. This discrimination is typically not intentional in the sense of premeditated prejudice, but it is nevertheless consequential in the lives of those who fail to receive park and recreation services.

The notion of institutional discrimination reaches beyond the level of city parks and recreation programs as illustrated by Scott (2000). Federal and state level parks departments and land management agencies surely have practices and traditions that work to exclude African Americans and other minorities. For example, not having

employees that reflect the general population can be a deterrent to minorities who (because of the White/Black spaces idea, for example) may be already questioning the appropriateness of their being in a National Park in the first place. This dilemma has certainly been addressed to some extent by governmental land management agencies, but this is the factor in which land management and parks and recreation agencies have the most control, so the ways in which these organizations perpetuate discrimination are crucial to understand if change is to be made.

Another, much less explored way in which institutional discrimination is manifested is through the outdoor recreation industry. Of course, the main difference between the outdoor recreation industry and the governmental agencies is that of their respective missions. For the industry, the primary goal, ostensibly, is to generate profit. How the industry is reacting to and will react to demographic changes is yet to be seen. One example of how the industry could perpetuate discrimination is by how it reacts to Black outdoors organizations like the National Brotherhood of Skiers. It would seem that the industry could be potentially more responsive to demographic changes since they would be highly motivated to court new users and continue to make their offerings viable. Other areas for the industry to explore might be their marketing materials. Having representative marketing is crucial for attracting minority consumers. Pricing is also an issue, and offering beginner products at prices that are affordable may help alleviate the same market based discrimination that governmental programs deal with. Any organization that offers some type of nature based experiences; public, private, or even non-profit, should be concerned about how their organization perpetuates

institutional discrimination, as this factor is the most easily rectified factor for these organizations.

### *Socialization/Subculture*

In addition to the explanations offered by the ethnicity/subcultural hypothesis (Washburn, 1978) the idea of socialization is likely to be a key factor in helping identify reasons for low levels of participation in outdoor recreation. Bixler, Floyd, and Hammitt (2002) test the notion that adults who were exposed to play in natural areas as children are more likely to feel comfortable in nature. They found that, indeed, childhood play in nature has some bearing on later-life experiences with nature. Environmental socialization has much to say to the discussion on race and outdoor recreation. This idea could be a key element in understanding how negative notions towards nature are passed down from one generation to another. If a child is not exposed to nature early on, the chances of his or her willingness to go into nature for recreation or relaxation later in life are significantly decreased. Richard Louv (2006) identified a broad trend towards children not being exposed to nature. If this trend is real, then African American and other minority children have a double whammy against them. In addition to all the social forces that act to deter minorities from venturing into nature, there is a general trend in society that acts to deter people, regardless of race, from going into nature.

This factor is, from our systemic racist viewpoint, linked to other factors. It is important to remember that each of these factors does not work on its own, but is tied to the others in a systemic way. The ways in which the subculture within the Black

community reacts to the notion of nature or outdoor recreation is inextricably tied to the history of racism. There seems to be a cultural aversion to some outdoor sports among the Black community; i.e. “Black people don’t ski, it’s too cold.” While these assertions are not factually true (there are actually a number of Black skiers), they are important to recognize, in that there is an aversion to some of these outdoor activities. What is important here is to recognize that this aversion did not simply arise from nowhere. It can be traced, essentially, back to slavery. It can also be traced back to more subtle, but nonetheless recognizable ways in which some outdoor activities evolved. For example, mountaineering evolved from a desire for land conquest and exploration. This pursuit was almost exclusively for upper class White Europeans. Today, mountaineering is a sport that is available to all, but it continues to be practiced by more or less the same demographic of people. Overcoming these social barriers may prove to be the most difficult of all the factors. It may take a critical mass of participation by a group of pioneering Black people to turn the tide.

### *Collective Memory*

Collective memory, according to Johnson (1998), is a process of remembering history that is bound to the social context of that history. Collective memory is especially salient among ethnic groups who have undergone some trauma (i.e. Holocaust survivors, slave descendents). She explained that while younger generations do not necessarily remember directly the traumatic events, the stories are passed down. In this way, negative connotations for nature may be related to younger generations. If an older

member of the family or community has a distinct memory of a lynching, or of sharecropping, and a consequent negative association for the land, or for the woods, this may be passed through generations to younger African Americans who then adopt those associations. The way these notions about nature are passed down is similar to the ways in which Blacks actions towards Whites have been passed down. During the Jim Crow era, Blacks were required to act a certain way, with certain etiquette towards Whites, including not making eye contact with women and speaking to any White with utmost reverence. These things were passed on, even after legal segregation ended, to the first generations of Black children to grow up after segregation. In this same way, it is likely that negative notions of nature have been passed on.

Johnson (1998) sets the groundwork for this line of research, linking negative associations with wildlands to collective memory of slave labor, sharecropping, and lynching, all of which typically took place in “the mostly wild, primitive, and in some cases semi-structured environment” (p. 7). Pursuing this area of investigation is likely to begin the process of unpacking the socio-historical connections between the African American community and nature. It is important to note that several African American individuals and organizations are dedicated to reclaiming the ways in which this history is positive, and African Americans have a strong connection to nature. Understanding this, efforts should be made to *re-connect* African Americans with nature. These connections are also ripe areas for research.

### *Frames*

The concept of frames is taken from Feagin (2006), who talked about the “White racial frame” and how it views the world. This “frame,” like a frame that holds a photograph, defines how one sees the world. Like a photograph that focuses on one rectangular sliver of reality, frames can often temper our view of reality. The White racial frame views the world in terms of White exceptionalism, Black inferiority, and ethnocentrism. I would like to put forth the idea that there are White and Black *frames* for nature and wildlands. The White frame, familiar to most in the parks and recreation field, begins with the enlightenment writers and painters, who first saw in nature “the salvation of the world.” This tradition of the romantic wilderness continued through Muir and Leopold, and is held today by traditional environmental groups like the Sierra Club, and writers like Edward Abbey and Rachel Carson. There should be no fault found in these individuals and groups, aside from their lack of inclusivity. While there have been some fruitful discussions and critiques of this notion of wilderness (Cronon, 1996), there is strong evidence that nature is good for people. Where there is room for critique, however, is in how the case has been made for this and who has been left out of nature’s benefit.

The result of this situation is that there is an alternative “Black wilderness frame” that stands in stark contrast to the romantic White wilderness frame. This idea, that there is a frame through which African Americans see the wilderness, or nature, or “the woods” probably encompasses most of the other factors I have discussed. All of them go into the frame. The frame is a handy tool to help explain how an African American

views nature. Everything from a person's childhood experiences with nature, parental attitudes towards nature, socio-economic status, personality (proclivity towards resistance), the specific subculture that person grew up in, and the extent to which their parents or community passed on stories relating to nature are all reflected in the frame. Each person needs to be seen as having a unique frame that has been created and is evolving based on the circumstances and experiences of that person.

Each of these factors is important, and none of them have been exhaustively researched. The efforts for future research should be specific in their attempts to identify one of these factors, but they should also avoid being too bold in making claims that one factor is supremely explanatory. Each play into a larger system, which produces individual frames based on personal experience. Hopefully, each of these factors, and others not discussed, will allow us to bridge the gap towards garnering more interest in the outdoors from African American people and communities, as well as other non-White groups.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, each of these seven factors have potential for further in-depth exploration. What will be crucial for researchers and practitioners to understand is how the factors interact with each other to produce leisure outcomes in African Americans and other non-White individuals. While each person will have a distinct mix of factors that influence their behaviors, we should seek to understand what commonalities exist across the spectrum of diverse racial and ethnic groups. Managers and recreation

providers should also pay close attention to the factors that are directly under their control. Practices furthering institutional discrimination should be brought under close scrutiny and revamped to be more inclusive. Marketing and promotional material should be reflective of diverse groups and material should reflect the shared heritage all racial and ethnic groups have with the land. To further explore these factors, both qualitative and quantitative methods should be used. Examinations of existing programs that attempt to directly serve minority populations should be conducted, and their effectiveness assessed. The body of work relating to race and outdoor recreation participation should be rooted in the most up-to-date understandings of race and society because outdoor recreation participation does not happen in a vacuum void of social forces. The various factors I have outlined here, based on Feagin's perspective of system racism (2006), should serve as a point of departure for establishing a perspective from which we can further our understanding of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER III  
ANALYSIS OF THREE AFRICAN AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL  
NARRATIVES

According to Johnson (1998) African Americans in the South have less place attachment to outdoor places than do Whites. One of the reasons for this is that African Americans “collective memory” of wild places is that of slavery, Jim Crow, and lynching. In order to bring about more diversity in those who take part in outdoor recreation, we must understand the deep historical roots of why more non-Whites do not participate. The social context for which non-participation occurs is crucial. Outdoor recreation participation by any person, regardless of race, requires many things to happen in that person’s life before they come to a place where they will take off into a Wilderness area or down a wild river. For African Americans and other minorities, multiple barriers must be overcome due to the layers of social and economic oppression. This marginalization has come in direct forms (segregated swimming pools) and indirect forms (impoverishment leading to lack of resources for outdoor recreation). To say simply that Blacks and other non-Whites do not participate because they can not afford to or because their culture does not participate is to ignore nearly 400 years of racial oppression. The problem of disparate participation is not an anomaly; it is a symptom of the larger social situation in our country where Blacks and Hispanics are seeing a widening wealth gap (White & Henderson, 2004) among other worsening social problems. For outdoor recreation to be relevant and available, the larger social issues

must be recognized and addressed. At the same time, providers must seek ways to reach minority populations despite the social constraints.

A useful exercise towards this end would be to examine the lives of individual African Americans and their relationships to nature. One way we can do this is through analysis of autobiographical narratives. In his book about systemic racism Joe Feagin (2006) uses analysis of historical figures both White and Black from each of what he described as the three racial eras in United States history: the antebellum slavery period, the Jim Crow segregation period, and the contemporary racial relations period. By analyzing figures from each of these eras he was able to outline how the systemic racist system has been perpetuated through time and to examine how it has affected individuals and institutions. In the same way, an analysis of African Americans relationship to nature through autobiographical narratives can provide us with insight into how nature may have been construed by African Americans over time. The three periods identified by Feagin form three very distinct socio-political epochs, with different laws, standards of behavior, racial relationships, and racial identities.

I have selected three autobiographies that span each of the major eras of African American plight in the United States; the slavery era is examined through *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* by Frederick Douglass (originally written in 1845); the post slavery, Jim Crow era is examined through *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* by W. E. B. Du Bois (originally published in 1920); and the contemporary era is examined through *Mississippi Solo* by Eddy Harris (published in 1988). These three works, the first two more famous than the third, serve as portraits of

life in the three major eras of racial stratification in this country. Each is examined from the systemic racism perspective and examples specifically pertaining to outdoor recreation, or nature, or recreation in general are included.

This type of analysis has been done in leisure studies, but in looking at a poststructuralist feminist analysis of dystopian fiction (Daniels & Bowen, 2003). To my knowledge, no analyses of historical biographical accounts regarding leisure or the outdoors have been analyzed from the perspective of systemic racism. An example of this type of analysis can be seen in Vera and Gordon's *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (2003). In this book, the authors examined portrayals of Whiteness in popular Hollywood films. In a similar way, here I examine the relationship of the authors in the three books to nature and to leisure. I examine, through this unique analysis, the ways in which these authors experience of being Black, in each respective era, impacted their relationship to nature and to leisure.

In the analysis of the three titles listed above, a number of striking similarities emerged. The authors of each book share a reverence and a fear of nature, while each encountered nature in unique and different ways. For Frederick Douglass, encounters with nature were tinged with misgivings stemming from his position as a human enslaved to the labor of his master. Eddy Harris experienced the lingering ghosts of slavery, the worry that the people he would meet on his journey south on the Mississippi might not accept him because of his skin color. For W. E. B. DuBois, encounters with nature revealed the deep ambivalence that existed for the Black community regarding nature: to escape nature indicated progress, one step past the land labor of the slave era.

But DuBois recognized that the nature that people sought to escape also held within it a healing balm for the oppression that weighed so heavy. The simultaneous draw toward and repulsion from nature is apparent in all the three narratives: the dual nature of nature, a place to be feared, and a place to go and stand in awe. In this section, I flesh out the ways these three narratives represent this ambivalence to nature, and I also explore other nuanced ways African Americans have encountered nature in the three major historical eras of race relations.

#### Frederick Douglass and the Ambivalent Woods

For Frederick Douglass, born into slavery in Maryland, somewhere around 1818, nature seemed to mean a number of different things over the course of his life, through different slave masters, both in the city, and on the plantation, and finally as a free man. One of the first mentions of the notion of nature is when Douglass talked about the separation of field and house slaves, or those who worked in “The Great Farm House.” In fact, Douglass compared the selection of a slave from the fields to go to the farm house for an errand to the election of a representative to congress, “few privileges were esteemed higher,” (Douglass, 1968, p. 28) he says. This was likely partially a result of the severity of treatment received by slaves in the out-fields. Douglass described in great detail the treatment received by the numerous overseers he slaved under. His first overseer, aptly named Mr. Severe, would use a large hickory stick, and a heavy cowskin to intimidate those who may miss the morning call to the field. Douglass recalls seeing this man beat a woman “until the blood ran half an hour at the time” (p. 27). But

Douglass made the point that *the field* is where Mr. Severe's cruelty and profanity were to be witnessed. The connection between the fields and one of the very manifestations of the cruelty of slavery, the overseers whip, is a key theme throughout Douglass' narrative. He made the connection early on, between the house slave and the field slave, but later on, when Douglass was moved from the fields to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Auld in Baltimore, he again emphasized that the city slave "enjoys privileges altogether unknown to the slave on the plantation" (p. 48). Indeed, Douglass attributed his selection from the fields to go to Baltimore as a sort of "kind providence" that led to his eventual freedom. The move to the city, along with the better circumstances permitted to slaves there, laid the groundwork for hope that allowed Douglass to persevere through his time in slavery, and later strike out for freedom.

While the forced labor in the fields caused some distaste for the land among enslaved Black people, they held other sentiments towards the land as well. The land provided food for Douglass and his fellow slaves. But this provision was not without costs. Douglass spoke of the days of summer, when the slaves would steal fruit from the master's gardens to supplement their rations, only to face the whip if discovered. Other times Douglass told of fellow slaves fishing for oysters during free time, in order to make up for "the deficiency of their scanty allowance" (p. 40). These attempts to seek from the land provision beyond what the slave masters would provide represent an inherent knowledge that the land and sea can provide, and that there is a connection between nature and man. The only other positive notions that Douglass expressed about nature revolved around the idea of leisure, something slaves of Douglass' era did not

often enjoy. Sunday was typically the only day when slaves did not work through every minute of daylight, but even then, the activities they were allowed were limited.

Douglass speaks of how he felt on most Sundays: he spent his time “in a beast-like stupor, between sleep and wake, under some large tree” (p. 73). At some moments he felt a glimmer of hope about his situation, only to have the hope dashed by a realization of his “wretched condition.” He recalled standing on the banks of the nearby Chesapeake Bay, watching the ships sailing about, wishing that he could be on one of them, and seeing these vessels as the very embodiment of freedom.

Beyond Sundays, Douglass mentioned that the slaves also were typically able to spend the days between Christmas and New Years Day as a holiday. The activities chosen by various slaves, according to Douglass, varied with the type of person. The industrious people made items useful to their work, while others hunted small varmints, and still others participated in “sports and merriment” such as playing ball, foot races, and drinking whiskey. While it is assumed that all these activities would take place in the out of doors, the hunting activities are of particular note. Douglass does not go into detail, but that some of the slaves spent their time hunting on their only significant break of the year seems to indicate some connection between nature and leisure. It is hard to intuit anything direct or substantive, because Douglass does not offer much more detail. What Douglass did speak of however, was the larger meaning and purpose for the slaves “vacation.” The masters knew that allowing the slaves this time was “the most effective means in the hands of the slaveholder in keeping down the spirit of insurrection” (p. 82). So it seems that leisure for these enslaved people was construed by Douglass to be a sort

of opiate to any thought the slaves might have of escape. This use of leisure (and by proxy, nature) by masters to subdue any thoughts towards escape in his slaves, seems to have stained the astute Douglass towards the “gift” of having this leisure time. It is possible that nature, free of work requirements, could be seen in this context as one element of the opiate offered by the masters to the slaves in order to keep their rebelliousness in control.

Douglass further associates nature with fear or danger in a number of ways, aside from the connection to working the land. In a number of incidents, such as when Douglass was sent off into the woods with a team of unbroken oxen to fetch wood, the former slave juxtaposed fear with being alone in the woods. In the incident with the unruly oxen, Douglass ends up alone in a thick wood after the oxen throw off their cart. Being alone in the woods, in an unfamiliar place Douglass felt that he was in peril, once he gets out of the woods his feelings of danger subside. This juxtaposition of danger and safety belie the ambivalence in Douglass’ relationship to nature. Later in Douglass’ life, as the deep yearnings for freedom started to overwhelm him, he toiled in the fields under a man named Mr. Covey. One of Mr. Covey’s tactics was to hide out in the woods waiting for possible escapees. He hid out on the edge of the fields, making sure that the slaves stayed on task. One of the places Covey preferred to hide was the in the woods; “under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush” (p. 71). He hid in these places in order to deter any ideas the slaves might have had towards escape. The woods, likewise, were seen as a place that was both the path to freedom, but also a place replete with fear.

While the narrative of Douglass' life did not center on his relationship with nature, there are components of the narrative that speak to how Douglass may have perceived natural world around him, both in the fields and in the surrounding woods. There is a distinct ambivalence, between the opportunities for leisure and relaxation in nature contrasted with danger and forced labor found there as well. Douglass' relationship is also expressed in his notions of fear, and sometimes reverence or yearning towards nature. This ambivalence towards nature as it relates to slavery can also be seen in Johnson's writing (1998) when she discussed the collective memory of African Americans towards wildlands. Douglass' experiences give a sort of beginning point for those memories. The memories of forced labor, sharecropping, and racial violence, such as lynching, all go into the images that some African Americans have of wild, natural places. With the Douglass account of slavery, and its ambivalent notions of nature, we can trace the memories discussed by Johnson (1998) back to the experience of slavery.

#### DuBois and the Wilderness Ethic

Why do not those who are scarred in the world's battle and hurt by its hardness travel to these places of beauty and drown themselves in the utter joy of life?  
(DuBois, 2003, p. 229)

The question that W. E. B. DuBois confronted in "Of Beauty and Death," a chapter from *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, is one that scholars have struggled with through the ages, from the Romantic period through Thorough and Muir, all the way to contemporaries like Edward Abbey and Rachael Carson. This book, a collection

of essays, socio-political analyses, and poems, contains many of the classics that brought DuBois to prominence as a social scientist. The question asked in this chapter is a very pertinent, yet curious, question for DuBois to be asking. Although many people have taken to the “places of beauty” such as the coast of Maine as DuBois eloquently described, for solace from the cruel world, not too many of the solace seekers have been African American. DuBois encountered what has been called the Wilderness Ethic or the Wilderness Ideal, (see Nash, 1982) which is essentially the idea that wilderness has the power to heal and transform human suffering. This idea is not new, nor was it new when DuBois wondered about it. What is different is that DuBois is Black, speaking for Black people. The idea of wilderness is one that has largely been encountered by White Americans and Europeans. DuBois held his encounters with wild areas in high esteem. In his rich description of the area around Bar Harbor, Maine, he said, “God molded his world largely and mightily off this marvelous coast and meant that in the tired days of life men should come and worship here and renew their spirit” (p. 228). DuBois clearly encapsulated the ideals of the Wilderness Movement, which would not crystallize until after the writing of *Darkwater*. In fact, most minorities were not a part of the Wilderness Movement of the late 1950s and 1960s (Taylor, 1997).

In the chapter “Of Death and Beauty” DuBois aptly contradicted the beauty and mystery of the natural world with the wretchedness of life as a Black person during the period of legal segregation. Following his description of the remote coastal town of Bar Harbor, DuBois relayed a conversation he had with a group of Black people in a “Southern Home” (p. 229). The conversation centered on travel, travel perhaps to a soul

restoring place like Bar Harbor. The Black people from the South, however, travel did not seem so appealing. “Did you ever [sic] see a ‘Jim Crow’ waiting room” (p. 229)? The question is rhetorical. The reality of segregated train travel was less than inspiring. No heat or air in the cars in the “colored” section of the train station. The car itself would usually be a “smoker” car where the riders would have to pass through a White car and be subjected to sneers and stares. Service for Black riders was poor, if available at all. Most “colored” cars were dirty, filthy even. The physical conditions, however, no matter how bad, never compared to the humiliation and degradation of being considered less than human. “‘No’ said the little lady in the corner... ‘We don’t travel much’” (p. 230). Reflecting on conditions like these, it is no wonder, based on 100 years of legal segregation, on top of 250 years of slavery that even today African Americans do not take to wild lands like Whites do.

DuBois continues his pattern of contrast in this chapter by discussing the plight of The American Negro (p. 233) in the US Army during World War I. “From such heights of holiness men turn to master the world” (p. 232) he says. Black Americans felt the call to fight in the Great War, but when they answered it, they were filed off into separate units and sometimes drafted for labor. The war effort of this time or the war effort of practically any war in American history would not be the same without the contributions of African Americans. DuBois points this out along with the fact that many Whites would not fight beside blacks, despite their proven battle readiness. Amidst this turmoil there were riots in St. Louis and Houston where numerous Black soldiers were executed or imprisoned. DuBois transitioned here to describe his love for

the Grand Canyon, and described this natural wonder as the “one thing that lived and will live eternal in my soul” (p. 237). For DuBois, the Grand Canyon represented something eternal, something which held the imprint of God. “It is awful” (p. 237) he says. The bigness of the Canyon, it seems, provided him with some perspective on the atrocities committed against him and his people. Maybe, just maybe there is something else out there, something that provides a basis for hope. If the natural world is so grand, majestic, and beautiful, then maybe humanity could be someday as well. After describing the grand, eternal void of the canyon, he takes us to a place where hope has been found, where a “community of kindred souls” (p. 239) lives and where the racial hatred of America could not be understood. This place is Paris, 1919. DuBois inserted this bit about Paris here to show the reader that a better place is possible; a place where Black and White people can “laugh and joke and think as friends” (p. 239).

The contrasting style of this chapter reflects a similar contrast in our world today. Black people in this country are oppressed by forces both current and historical. Our wild and beautiful natural areas are still there, waiting to be experienced, waiting to heal and welcome the oppressed into their hills and valleys. Due to the taint of destructive oppression and subjugation, however, many Blacks do not realize the power of such places, nor do they have the means to journey to them. DuBois clearly had a connection to the powerful natural places of this country. The contrasting descriptions offered in “Of Beauty and Death” belie his belief in the healing and mending power of nature, even in the face of brutal oppression. Unlocking this connection for today’s generation of

Black Americans could be tremendously powerful for healing the hurts that still deeply affect so many people.

### Eddy Harris' Mississippi Voyage

Unlike Douglass' narrative, and to some extent DuBois' essay, Eddy Harris' *Mississippi Solo* is almost implicitly about the experience of a Black man out in nature. To be more precise, this book seems to be about a man encountering nature, and at the same time trying to come to grips with his own Blackness, and what that means in this country. The experiences Harris recounted in the memoir are rich. He reflected on the beauty of nature, the nuance of being Black, the intensity of solitude, and the exhilaration of physical endurance. Harris was not an expert canoeist as he began the audacious journey down the river, from its origins in Northern Minnesota to its terminus in the Gulf of Mexico at New Orleans. He learned as he went. This is, in part, a piece of his struggle with the river, the fear of facing the inherent dangers, the currents, the rapids, the winds, the barges. But there is also Harris' struggle with the social dimensions of the river, a river that he said "is laden with the burdens of a nation" (Harris, 1988, p. 1). By this Harris is referring to the ways the river represents the diversity and history of the United States. Harris also recognized and reflected the same ambivalence present in both of the other works. Harris first encountered ambivalence in the feelings of his friends, and throughout the book he reflects on the various dangers of the river as well as the joys of being on the river. Most of Harris' peers and family seemed to write off his desires to adventure down the river, thinking him a bit crazy.

One friend summed up the dual dangers of the river and fears of his friends quite concisely, “maybe they don’t want you to get shot by some redneck in the woods. Maybe they don’t want you to fall in and drown” (p. 8). Despite the detractions of his friends, and his low level of canoeing skill, Harris “ached” to be on the river, and he eventually found himself at the headwaters, with a canoe full of camping gear. In this he exhibited resistance to stereotypes, fear (in numerous facets), and peer pressure.

Harris reflected on the history of the river, wondering how it will come to bear on his journey, as “a black man alone and exposed and vulnerable” (p. 7). When he envisioned the river, he saw it flowing with the “tears and sweat” of slaves. Harris did not dwell too long on these notions, however, as he has an adventure to tend to. He was keenly aware, however of the fact of his Blackness, and that the river passes through various regions of the country that have different relationships to Black people. As his friend and mentor Robert put it he traveled “from where there ain’t no Black folks to where they still don’t like us much” (p. 7). Being Black for Harris “has never been such a big deal, more a physical characteristic rather like being tall: an identifier for the police and such. Part of my identity, but not who I am” (p. 13). He seemed to prefer that people treat him with kindness despite his skin color or previous experiences they have had with Black people. He acknowledged in light of these colorblind dreams, that being Black took on a new meaning during his river trip, having to do with how he perceived situations and with how others might have perceived him. Since his trip took him through a part of the country with a very low Black population, he wondered why there were not more Black people in Minnesota. He realized that “there are places blacks

don't much go to" (p. 14). He suggested some reasons why more Blacks do not travel; financial reasons, apathy, lack of exposure in advertising. In the end he was left with the question, "Is the exclusion self-imposed or by hints both subtle and overt" (p. 14)? Since Harris was raised mainly in the post civil rights era, this distinction between self-imposed and societally imposed restrictions pops up quite frequently. For Harris, however, he concluded that, "the only restrictions are the ones I (we all) put in place" (p. 14). His conclusion tapped into a colorblind ideology that affirms everyone's chances. But even with this seeming declaration of his individual rights, Harris still understood the potentially perilous and nuanced way a Black person interacts with the world. In one paragraph, Harris dove into the question of the ambivalence of the river (and nature) and the implications of that for him:

But for all my boldness and my reaching out to embrace the world, what would be waiting for me out there on the river? Kindness or evil? Beauty or savagery? Whatever, I didn't want to miss a thing. The ups days would make up for the down, I knew; the beauty worth the pain. p. 15

With this, Harris started his way down the river.

One common theme throughout the memoir was Harris' curiosity about the various people he encountered on his trip, from food store clerks, to river tug boat operators, to the people he passes on the banks; he wondered what impression they will have of him. Mostly he thought people looked at him as "a bit on the loony side" (p. 21). He was not hung up on these things necessarily, but the perception of others did come up in his mind. This might have been because Harris was not an experienced

canoeist or even a knowledgeable camper at the time of his trip. But the nature of the river and its solitude seems to grip and change him. This trip was an audacious foray into the world of nature, and Harris was enthralled. His desire to be recognized for his accomplishments may have been a reflection of his somewhat novice status. Harris' desire for some kind of recognition stretched beyond his outdoor achievements. It was blended with his racial status as a Black man. In some towns along the river, he noted getting stared at. He mused that this could have been because he was an odd site with his life preserver, but it could also have been because he is a Black man, and there were not many (or any) Black people in that town. Either way, he was faced with the burden of the distinction.

Harris expounded more on the idea of racial identity and racism more in Chapter 17, as he was passing through a town in Wisconsin. He reiterated the notion that race would not be "an issue" for him on his journey. He says he "would not make my being black a part of my success or failure or too great a factor in how I perceive things" (p. 67). Harris' construal of his Blackness not being the most important feature of his life, I think, is a critical element in his perception of the rest of the world. He went on to describe the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways this works out in his life. His perception of racism was that he knows it exists, but "its effect and effectiveness depend as much on reaction as on the action" (p. 69). This perception of the world around him, he realized, is somewhat different from most of the rest of Black culture. A girlfriend of his became terribly upset when he said that he had not experienced much bigotry, she knew that he had and stated that he could not do anything to stop it if he did not

recognize it. But Harris did not (admittedly naively sometimes) let his race become an issue or a reason he was rejected or disliked. A clear example of this was when Harris enters into a conversation with a White insurance salesman in a diner in Wisconsin. The salesman made a joke about how Harris should have a jacket with “River Nigger” (p. 70) on it, laughing loudly. Harris, instead of letting this slide, or getting angry, gave the man the benefit of the doubt and tried to diffuse the joke and enter into conversation. The two continued to converse, with the insurance salesman showing regret for his words. Harris actually began to feel sorry for making him feel so bad about saying the joke. Harris and the salesman seemed to have a genuine moment of reflection and connection, which caused Harris to muse about giving people the chance to “carve at the core of American racism that lies inside if given the chance” (p. 73). Harris held onto the idea that people are not so different. But as he pondered heading into the South, in the back of his mind there remained some apprehension.

Harris’ journey from Lake Itasca in Minnesota to his home in Saint Louis, Missouri, passed with only minor incidents, and beyond the aforementioned racist joke, little in the way of racial interactions. Harris noted frequently, that aside from an odd stare, most people were kind and helpful to him. As he pulled into Saint Louis for a short respite, he looked forward to the balance of his trip down the river through the south. He spoke of “ghosts” that may be waiting for him south of Saint Louis. The nature of the river changes as well: wider, swifter, no more locks to negotiate. He talked of the images of the South that “die hard:” slavery, lynching, Jim Crow. He felt exposed

and vulnerable, wondering how much his positive, colorblind attitude would protect him. He took solace in the river though, and in the “ghosts” to protect him.

In Saint Louis Harris picked up a passenger and co-traveler, his older brother Tommy--an unlikely candidate for a river trip like the one his brother Eddy was on. In fact, he did not last very long, only a few nights. One of Tommy's main fears was sleeping on the ground with bugs and snakes. After the first miserable night (for Tommy) Eddy questioned why their father did not make campers out of them. Tommy's brief travails on the river with Eddy allowed Eddy to see the value of the solitude he had had up until then. Tommy's fears also seemed to echo the larger Black communities distaste for that type of intimate contact with nature.

After Tommy's departure, Harris got back into his routine. He progressed further into the South. Harris' experience of the South embodied the ambivalence and contradictory nature of race relations in present times. One major experience was Harris' befriending of a tugboat driver named Don. Despite Don dropping the N-word frequently, he and Harris struck up a friendship. Don invited Harris to ride along on the tugboat for a spell, and fed him along the way. Over the course of a few days, their relationship grew to where Don shared deep secrets with Harris. The conversation at one point turned to inter-racial relationships, with Don suggesting that it would be allowable for a Black woman and a White man, but not vice-versa. Harris did not question or challenge this sentiment, but instead allowed Don to go about his sentiments, leading to an impromptu confession. When the two parted ways, Harris truly considered Don his friend. This relationship was in stark contrast to what was probably the most

harrowing experience of the trip. Harris was building a campfire in Arkansas when two “greasy rednecks” (p. 206) with shotguns approached him menacingly and started to question and harass him, called him “boy” (p. 207), and made veiled threats. Harris, who had been carrying a pistol the whole trip broke for the dense woods, and had to fire off a warning shot at the men to get them to leave him alone. That night, after he was sure they were gone, he promptly broke camp and spent a restless night searching for a more secure shelter than his tent, eventually breaking into a summer cabin so that he could feel safe. This night’s experience was one that caused him to really question the rest of his trip, and he thought about pulling off the river. He was scared. He did not pull off the river, but eventually reached New Orleans.

The numerous threads of race woven into Harris’ narrative paint a rich picture of the dynamics of being a Black man in nature. Harris was clear that, despite one or two negative incidents, his time on the river regarding race was positive. But he was also clear that this racial dimension was not the most significant theme of the trip. Instead, adventure, solitude, recognizing his place in humanity, and the beauty of nature were the most enriching facets of his journey. Harris’ narrative did speak extensively to the ways in which a Black man experiences nature, which implicitly differ in this society from the way a White man would. There are a striking few themes that emerge from this memoir. The first, consistent with the first two works analyzed in this section, is the ambivalence with which Harris sees nature. The second is the resistance that Harris showed to this ambivalence and to the various pressures that gave him pause about being in the outdoors. Throughout his journey, Harris noticed the differing levels of curiosity that

people have about him. For the most part this was harmless, but a few times this curiosity was strong enough to make him think twice about what he was doing. But the next theme, that of the overwhelming draw of nature, is one of the main things that allowed Harris to overcome any self-doubt inducing encounters, from innocent curiosity to gun-toting rednecks. The draw of nature was clear in Harris' journey. He was enthralled by the ways the river bends and twists, and the way the rapids sing. Finally, Harris had an attitude that was conducive to adventure and to enduring the uncomfortable situations that adventure brings. His attitude towards race also allowed him to resist incidents that might be deal breakers for others, or he was able to turn them into positive experiences. This interplay between race, nature, and Harris' personality provide a rich picture of a contemporary Black man's relationship with the outdoors.

### Discussion

The analysis of these three works, which follow the experiences of three African Americans from three different eras reflect some of the factors which may serve to inhibit African Americans participation in outdoor recreation. For Frederick Douglass, the root of collective memory is seen in his interactions with nature. These interactions, as we saw, were facilitated through the institution of slavery, via the cruel overseers and the harsh labor in the fields. Douglass also showed ambivalence, which we could say played a part in creating his "frame" for how he saw "the woods." Douglass did not seem to see feel the woods powerful draw as the other two did, at least no evidence for a draw was apparent in this narrative. The woods were places associated primarily with

the overseer's whip, an instrument of powerful influence, powerful enough to keep Douglass and his fellow slaves fearful of the outlying woods and powerful enough to create a serious negative image within Douglass of the fields in which he toiled. Cassandra Johnson spoke of these associations in her discussion of African American's collective memory of wildland places (Johnson, 1998) in one of few studies that examine the socio-historical influences on African Americans perceptions of wildland. Douglass' experiences as a slave serve to embody the stories that hundreds of thousands of Black families have related to subsequent generations. As Johnson put it "these 'memories' are retained by younger African Americans and become a part of their collective identities" (p. 6). Johnson cited slave labor, sharecropping, and lynching as factors that enter into the "collective memory" of Blacks' experiences with the land. Douglass' narratives which spoke of both slave labor and of lynching serve as an intimate window into the emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical costs of such practices. These deep impacts are extremely difficult for subsequent generations to overcome. The fact that an affinity for nature has not become a part of most of African American communities is a side effect of the larger picture of oppression that comes from a narrative like Douglass'.

For DuBois, the contradictory White and Black frames are clearly evident. He contrasted nature's opposing potential to be both a refreshing power and also the dark place that represents oppression. DuBois also clearly articulates the romantic view of wilderness that embodies the Wilderness Movement of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. Roderick Nash (1982) in his classic *Wilderness and the American Mind* writes about the notion of

ambivalence that Americans in general have towards wilderness. On the one hand, wilderness is scary and untamed; on the other, it is magnificent, and worthy of bearing an entire country's national pride. Dubois tapped this ambivalence, but realized that factors beyond the inherent dangers or wildness of nature act on African Americans. He realized how the notion of wilderness is wrapped in the context of the American cultural ethos, that it is an actor in the century's old drama between White and Black. He did not encounter wilderness outside of this context, he was firmly connected to it. He had a vision, however, for how nature can rise above the social context in which his people encounter it. This vision allowed him to grasp the awe inspiring beauty of places like the Grand Canyon.

For Eddy Harris, our novelist from the contemporary era, almost all of the factors I identify above are present. Harris' personality seemed to naturally resist the stereotypes or pressures that he encountered as his friends and family call him crazy. The flack he received from his friends and family represent his subculture, one that does not have room in it for prolonged adventure in the wilderness. While Harris did not talk much about his socio-economic background, he did seem to have some of the collective memory, especially that from the South, that brought up memories of lynching and sharecropping. Harris was also keenly aware of his interaction in White spaces. He identified numerous times that he was the only Black person around, and had to negotiate this. What is most striking is Harris' *frame* for how he saw the wilderness. Over the course of his canoe trip down the Mississippi, he was deeply moved by the beauty of nature. But he was also moved by the kindness of the large majority of people

that he met. All of his past experiences were combined with his experience on the river, and any reservations he had about being a Black man in the outdoors evaporated.

What Harris' narrative gives hope for is that nature has power to reach all people, despite their background or whatever frame they have going into an experience. What is more promising, however, is the relative lack of discrimination that Harris encountered. It may be that a well prepared African American person (by prepared, I mean someone who is confident in their right to be in outdoor places) will have much success in taking on whatever outdoor endeavor they choose. While problems of institutional discrimination still plague the parks and recreation profession, there is hope in Harris' story that minorities who have some interest in the outdoors can be spurred on to participation, and those who do not can be spurred to interest.

Leisure as resistance, as conceptualized by Shaw (2001), connects leisure to political power, and to challenging that power with leisure practices. In this sense, Harris may be using his leisure as resistance, although he does not seem completely conscious of it. He certainly saw himself as challenging stereotypes that society has about Black people, namely that they do not canoe down the Mississippi river. But he also challenged notions that people do not go into nature any more to simply challenge themselves. A large portion of the narrative of Harris' trip revealed that he was challenging the demons of fear that he has toward the dangers of nature. While this is not inherently political in the way Shaw conceptualizes it, it did take on form of resistance for Harris. This type of resistance, to personal inhibitions, could be a key

element for attracting people to outdoor pursuits. For Harris, it is just one more form of resistance that seemed absolutely necessary for him to participate.

### Conclusion

So “Why do not those who are scarred in the world’s battle and hurt by its hardness travel to these [outdoor] places of beauty and drown themselves in the utter joy of life?” (DeBois, 2003, p.229). In this paper, I analyze the narrative, autobiographical accounts of three African American authors from three distinct epochs in American history. The experiences related through the three autobiographical accounts add a rich historical perspective to how we understand current experiences of outdoor recreation. I think these different perspectives provide unique insight into the answer to DuBois aforementioned question. Looking back to Frederick Douglass and the larger institution of slavery, negative associations with nature among African Americans are completely reasonable. As the larger ethos surrounding wilderness evolved and matured, W. E. B. Dubois, writing in 1920, astutely recognized the redemptive potential of natural places like the Grand Canyon. Eddy Harris, who is deeply *positively* affected by his time in nature on the Mississippi, is also keenly aware of his Blackness while on the river. Nature wins out however, and the issue of race became relegated to a nagging sort of injury, only popping up occasionally. The progression of the three narratives through time serves as an imperfect proxy for the progression of African Americans relationship with nature. It is imperfect because people like Eddy Harris are quite uncommon.

Future research should seek an understanding of how recreational behaviors are passed down both generationally. This understanding will lead to developing increased opportunities for a more diverse population enjoying outdoor recreation. The accounts I have examined here serve to outline some of the notions prevalent in the minds of individual African Americans regarding nature. Douglass' account serves as the basis for the things that make up the collective memory of African Americans. DuBois' musings act as a primer on the notion of ambivalence, and how one must have the vision to see the beauty of nature from beyond the associations with oppression that stand so starkly for so many. Harris' account provides hope that African Americans can find their way into nature and navigate the waters successfully. His positive experiences and open mind, along with his dogged determination serve as examples of what may be necessary for prolonged participation. Taken together, the three works offer us a deep and wide glimpse into the complicated relationship between the wild places of our country and African American people.

CHAPTER IV  
RACIALLY RELATED CONSTRAINTS AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN  
OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS

Introduction

“I didn’t know you could ski.” I’ve had that said to me, “I didn’t know you guys could ski.” (Allison, skier, mid 40’s).

Most people who participate in or study outdoor recreation know that African Americans do not participate in outdoor recreation to the same extent as White Americans. When you inquire as to why people think African Americans do not participate, however, you will typically get blank stares in return. While the issue has received considerable attention from researchers and natural resource management agencies, few concrete conclusions have been made, and few mainstream media outlets have given the issue any coverage. This study is an attempt to address the reasons why African Americans do not participate in outdoor recreation to the same extent as White Americans by examining the experiences of individuals from the African American community who I label “outdoor enthusiasts.” This is a broad enough label to encompass those who pursue a specific outdoor activity in a serious manner as well as those who dedicate themselves to careers in nature related areas, such as natural resource management or conservation. Based on in-depth interviews, I identify racially related constraints that African-Americans encounter along their journey and the implications in the context of the perspective of systemic racism discussed in Chapter II.

## Literature Review

Research in leisure constraints began in the early 1960s. Edgar Jackson (2000) defined constraints as “factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (p. 62). This line of inquiry attempts to address what seems to be a simple notion: why do people *not* participate or *not desire* to participate in leisure activities? This simple question has spawned nearly three decades of research leading to well formed and well supported theories and models as well as significant realizations regarding gaps in understanding. Jackson and Scott (1999) offer a succinct overview of the constraints research. The first inquiries date to the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission of 1962. These studies simply looked at the specific barriers that might prevent someone from accessing recreation experiences. These studies were not theoretical, but pragmatic. Research about "barriers" began to appear in the recreation journals in the early 1980s (Jackson & Scott, 1999). This early research, according to Jackson and Scott, was primarily concerned with what we know now as structural constraints, or things that intervene with an already existing desire to participate in leisure. This early research, in addition, was almost exclusively quantitative, survey based research. Jackson and Scott summarized the findings of this era of investigation: "Studies of this kind typically demonstrated that, on average among the adult population, constraints related to time and money dominate people's perceptions of the problems they experience in leisure participation" (p. 303).

Beginning in the late 1980s, research into constraints became more sophisticated, expanding the analysis to different dimensions or domains that might be present regarding constraints. Jackson (2005b) discussed the increase in empirical research and "growing awareness among leisure scholars of the pervasive importance of constraints" (p. 5). This new empirical research sought to develop theoretical models that would explain the multi-dimensionality of the concept. Crawford and Godbey's (1987) important article on family leisure reconceptualized the way we think about non-participation. Crawford and Godbey purported that constraints do not only affect participation, but they can, in the form of antecedent constraints, affect preferences. The now "axiomatic" (Jackson, 2005b, p. 5) typology of constraints (interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural) also came from this article. The realization that constraints affected people's leisure experiences at a deeper level than just participation was groundbreaking. The hierarchical model of leisure constraints (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991) was the next breakthrough in the literature. This model placed the three types of constraints identified by Crawford & Godbey (1987) and arranged it hierarchically, with structural constraints being the farthest factor away from (or having the least influence on) behavior. Intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints were the most proximal influence on leisure behavior. This model put forth the idea that people go through a sequence of influence with preferences, motivations, and constraints all acting sequentially. Being published concurrently with the hierarchical model was research identifying the ways in which people tend to negotiate the constraints on their

leisure, thereby abolishing the previously held assumption that constraints would result in nonparticipation. I examine this notion in Chapter V.

### Study Purpose

There are two specific reasons why I have tried to understand the constraints of African American outdoor enthusiasts. The first has been recognized by numerous governmental, non-profit, and commercial recreation providers. According to Floyd (1999), by 2050, 47% of the United States population will be made up of people from minority groups. The need for understanding the seeming disconnect between minorities and nature is clear in light of this stark demographic data. Without the support of the growing minority population, the viability of parks and outdoor recreation is tenuous at best. The experiences of African American outdoor enthusiasts will be extremely helpful if we want to better understand this situation.

In addition to the demographic changes on the horizon in the United States, there is a history of racial turmoil and oppression that drives this research. In Chapter II, I explored the perspective of systemic racism and its dimensions. I attempted to make connections between systemic racism in the United States and outdoor recreation participation among African Americans. My examination of the constraints faced by African American outdoor enthusiasts in this chapter is a first attempt to corroborate some of the factors within the systemic racist society that work to affect African Americans participation in outdoor recreation.

With these two reasons in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to examine racially related constraints in the experiences of African American outdoor enthusiasts. Based on the literature reviews on race and racism (see Chapter II) and constraints, I have attempted to understand how race plays into the lives of my informants, particularly into their desire to experience the outdoors.

### Methods

In this study, I examine the lived experiences of African American outdoor enthusiasts. As stated earlier, minorities face statistical challenges to outdoor recreation participation, which is to say that very few African Americans are statistically likely to be outdoor enthusiasts. I recognize, however, that for an individual African American who is involved in outdoor recreation, these statistics probably do not matter. If there is, however, a general sense of a "racialized outdoor leisure identity" (Martin, 2004), then these participants, no matter how natural their participation may be (socialized into it, wealthy enough to do it, friends who do it, etc.) their participation remains a societal anomaly. It is safe to say, then, that the participants of this study have faced constraints beyond the normal constraints that all face (cost, time, facilities, lack of skill, etc.). It is because of this unique status as groundbreakers, that the experiences of African American outdoor enthusiasts are valuable.

The methods used to gain the experiences of African American outdoor enthusiasts are based on phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 1998). This method strives to find the meaning of lived experiences. According to Creswell (1997),

phenomenological research "describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). In the context of this study, the phenomenon under study is the participation of African Americans in outdoor recreation.

### *Justification of Method*

Numerous authors have cited a need for the deployment of qualitative research methods in the quest for understanding the racial dynamic of outdoor recreation (Floyd, 1998, 1999; Shinew et al., 2006). This study attempts to fill a hole that has been left by scores of studies analyzing the racial disparity of outdoor recreation participation using quantitative data-driven studies (see Floyd, 1998). The understanding of the particular facet of this phenomenon, the avid participation in outdoor recreation by African Americans, is well suited to an inductive analysis method. By using in-depth interviews, I solicit specific experiences from informants that shed insight into the question at hand. Qualitative methods also allow me to capture the distinctive meanings of the African American experience with outdoor recreation. Denzin and Lincoln (2007) concluded that understanding minorities can be accomplished well with qualitative research because it allows the informants in the study to express their own voice without the filter of a survey instrument.

### *Researcher Bias and Involvement*

The nature of this research requires researchers to reflect on themselves and the biases that they will take into the project. I recognize that I have a number of biases.

Since I have a history of outdoor recreation participation in a number of settings, it is important to recognize that I will have certain preconceived notions as to why an African American person may or may not participate in outdoor activities. The most pressing issue, however, is that I am a White male and I will be interviewing African Americans about potentially sensitive topics such as racism, discrimination, or family strains. My position as a racial “outsider” could possibly affect the level of depth an informant will be willing to go into in an interview (Gramman & Allison, 1999). Seasoned researchers have suggested that while it may be better for insiders to conduct research with minority communities, White researchers should still pursue this area of research because there are not enough people doing the research, and because Whites need to be involved with changing systems of racism. One positive way I have been involved with informants is the camaraderie associated with the love of the outdoors and a common pursuit of outdoor recreation. This connection, along with a presumed shared desire to see more African Americans come to experience the outdoors, was a useful and tangible connection. I identified the biases and preconceptions in the research process and attempted to control for them. For example, when the topic of what it is like to be the only Black person in a group came up, I stated that I honestly could not relate to such a feeling. Informants appreciated my honesty and tried to explain what it was like for them. In this way, I attempted to mitigate the fact that I was an outsider. The notions mentioned above, of finding camaraderie in a desire to see more diversity in outdoor recreation participation, proved to be useful. Informants were very eager to talk about their experiences and desires for increased diversity among outdoor enthusiasts.

### *Sampling Procedure*

Interviews were solicited from a snowball sample of African American outdoor enthusiasts. Once the first few informants were identified and interviewed, I asked them if they would recommend any other people who might fit the criteria for my study. The majority of interviews were conducted over the phone, but some were conducted face to face with people from who live locally. A minimum of one, and a maximum of two, interviews were sought from each informant following a general structure from Seidman's (1998) phenomenological interview method: interview one, focused [leisure] life history and the details of experience; interview two, reflection on the meaning. Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. An audio recording was made of each interview, which was subsequently transcribed. Once transcribed, I inductively reduced the data to emerging themes.

Moustakas (1994) states that the essential criteria for an informant to be included in a study are that “the research participant has experienced the phenomenon [and] is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings...” (p. 107). With this in mind, the search for informants began with local networks, seeking out people who know of African Americans who are avidly involved in some type of outdoor recreation activity. The search grew to include groups or individuals found through Internet searches. There are several groups that foster African American participation in outdoor activities, as well as various magazines and online journals that exist to promote participation in outdoor recreation among the Black community. Personal networks were requested from these organizations. This was not intended to be a study of a

particular organization, but utilized the social networks associated with those organizations.

A target goal of 25 informants was sought. Seidman (1998) suggests that instead of a numeric goal, the criteria of sufficiency and saturation of information should be used. Douglas (1984), however, suggested that saturation usually occurs around 25 informants. I interviewed a total of 19 informants at which point I began encountering sufficient saturation. I was able to conduct follow up interviews with 10 of the initial informants. Informants lived all across the United States and ranged in age from mid 20s to mid 60s with most in their 40s or 50s. Table 1 provides a breakdown of my informants' background. Interviewing took place early October 2007 through early February 2008. Five informants were interviewed face to face, while the rest were interviewed over the phone. There was no perceivable difference regarding the level of openness or honesty shown by informants interviewed over the phone and in person. The telephone interviews, most of which lasted over one hour, were in depth, lively conversations just like the face to face interviews. Informants in general had no problem talking about their experiences in nature in great detail as they had all given it some thought over the course of their lives.

It became clear the snowball path my interviews was on would take me to people who were not necessarily pursuing an activity seriously as typically thought of by serious leisure scholars. Sampling led me to interview people who have careers in conservation agencies or natural resource management. I decided to follow this path because I learned that these people had similar experiences to those in my study who

TABLE 1

*Characteristics of Informants*

Name	Description
Claudia	Claudia is in her 60s. She runs a company that takes urban youth and adults into nature. She lives in the Southeast. She and her husband Tom fell in love with the National Parks during a trip through the parks after their children went off to college. She is originally from Jamaica.
Michael	Michael is in his mid 40s. He is a magazine editor and avid fisherman and general outdoorsman. He grew up in working class Black Harlem, and did some boy scout activities with his father. He went to college in upstate New York and ventured out on his own into the outdoors.
Kevin	Kevin is in his late 20s. He is a graduate student. He grew up fishing in working class rural central Texas and now he fishes on the Texas coast and in lakes across the state. He now lives in a major city in Texas.
Frank	Frank is in his late 40s. He grew up in St. Louis in a working class Black neighborhood. He first ventured into the outdoors for solitude. He is an avid fly-fisherman, cross country skier, and makes his living as a writer.
Virginia	Virginia is in her mid 40s. She worked for an environmental organization earlier in life and now works for a diversity consulting company. She grew up in Baltimore in a predominantly Black neighborhood.
Tom	Tom is in his mid 60s and married to Claudia. He grew up in rural south Florida and was involved in scouts. He was also involved in the civil rights movement. He works for a major environmental organization.
Allison	Allison grew up and lives in Texas, in a middle class Black home. She is in her mid 40s. She works in the corporate world, and has worked in Chicago and New York, and became involved in the National Brotherhood of Skiers (NBS) while in New York. She is highly involved in her local NBS chapter.
Keith	Keith is in his mid 40s, a wildlife biology consultant, and an avid and accomplished birder. He grew up in a working class Black neighborhood in Pittsburg, but was bussed to a predominantly White school.
Lawrence	Lawrence is in his early 30s. He is a graduate student, but also works for the National Park Service. He grew up in near Washington D.C. in a lower middle class neighborhood. He is also an avid fisherman.

TABLE 1 Continued

Name	Description
Anthony	Anthony is in his mid 50s, and works for the US Forest Service. He has worked with the service for nearly 30 years. He grew up in a diverse religious community in the Midwest. He lives on the West Coast.
Shauna	Shauna is in her late 30s, and she grew up in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. She went to college in Colorado and began climbing mountains and snowboarding. She moved to Texas and works in the athletic department of a major university.
John	John is in his late 30s and he works as a guide leading urban youth into the mountains of Colorado. He is from a Black neighborhood just outside of Philadelphia. He is a very accomplished climber.
Mark	Mark is in his mid 20s and is a traditional bow hunter. He hunts as much as he can, and takes game ranging from possums and squirrels to deer and wild hogs. He grew up in a mid sized town in Texas, the son of a mixed race couple, raised by his White grandparents.
Traci	Traci is in her early 30s. She is a graduate student in geology at a major university in Texas. She grew up in upstate New York and was an avid hiker. She was also involved in environmental organizations as a high school student.
Rose	Rose is in her late 40s. She has worked for the National Park Service for nearly three decades. She was born and raised in New York City. She is a staunch environmentalist.
Marcus	Marcus is in his early 40s. He works for a park conservation non-profit agency on issues regarding diversity. He is a history buff, and enjoys visiting historical parks, which he also sees as special natural areas.
Walter	Walter is in his mid 40s, and he works as a nature photographer, author and speaker on diversity in the outdoors. He lives in Minnesota, but was raised in Columbus, Ohio in a predominantly Black school. He is also an avid cyclist and birder.
Joy	Joy is in her late 40s and lives and works in the Pacific Northwest. She grew up in a military family in a number of locations along the west coast. She loves snow shoeing and backpacking.
Naomi	Naomi is in her late 30s. She is originally from Haiti. She works to raise awareness about environmental issues in South Florida and in her home country.

were serious leisure participants and because I believed that their experiences with these agencies would provide invaluable data for my study.

### *Interview Agenda*

This tentative interview agenda was broken into the three sections outlined by Siedman (1998). These interviews were in-depth open ended interviews, so the questions listed here served only as a guide. Probing questions along with clarification questions were used to enrich the answers and to explore the meanings of phenomena discussed in the interviews. The interview agenda was as follows:

#### *Focused life/activity history:*

How long have you been doing [specific outdoor activity]?  
 How did you first become involved in the activity?  
 Did anyone in your family do this activity or anything similar?  
 What recreational activities did you do growing up?  
 Did any of your friends do this activity?  
 What initially drew you to this activity?  
 What has kept you from doing this activity in the past?  
 How did you overcome those barriers?

#### *The details of experience:*

Who are your outdoor activity partners?  
 Reconstruct a recent outdoor activity experience that you have had.  
 Do you often do this activity with fellow African Americans?  
 How has being African American affected your experiences?  
 Have you ever experienced discrimination in any situation related to outdoor recreation?  
 What rewards or benefits do you get from participating in this activity?  
 How often do you see other African Americans doing this activity?  
 Do you wish more African Americans would do this activity?

#### *Reflection on the meaning:*

What does it mean to be Black and involved in this activity?  
 How has this changed for you over the years?  
 What does the future look like for you regarding this activity?

How do you think the larger African American community has influenced your experiences?

What place does this activity have in your life?

How does your family see your experiences in this activity now?

### *Ethical Considerations*

The ethical requirements of the researcher in a qualitative study insist on communicating with potential informants regarding every aspect of the project. According to Moustakas (1994), informants must be assured of the confidentiality of the project, and should also be informed about the “nature, purpose, and requirements of the research project” (p. 110). This level of communication was necessary because the informants in this study were actively involved with the production of knowledge and understanding. Rather than seeing the informants as objective sources of data, they were seen as co-creators of the final report. The informants in my study were the experts, as they had the lived experiences of being African Americans in the outdoors. For this reason, complete communication was necessary. The informants knew that they could withdraw from the project at any time. The identity of the informants was and is not known by anyone but myself and my doctoral committee. All reports in this study were compiled using pseudonyms to mask the identities of the informants. Personal information that might be easily linked to an informant has been masked. Transcripts and audio recordings are stored in a safe and secure location at Texas A&M University. An informed consent form (see appendix A) was used to ensure informants knew the parameters of the study and were assured of the previously described details. In the case

of telephone interviews, I sent the consent form to the informants electronically and asked them to verbally consent to participation in the study over the telephone.

### *Analysis Procedures*

Moustakas (1994) offers a guideline to analysis of phenomenological data. The first step is *horizontalization*, which consists of listing every statement (or horizon) that is relevant to the experience and then grouping each statement into preliminary groupings. The second step is the reduction and elimination of data to find the invariant constituents, which are the essential experiences of the phenomenon. These invariant constituents are arrived at via a two step process. The first step asks if the horizon has a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding the phenomenon. The second step asks if it is possible to abstract and label the horizon, and if so, then it remains as an invariant constituent. Vague and repetitive or overlapping expressions, along with those that are not abstract are eliminated. The expressions that remain are the invariant constituents. Once these constituents are identified, they are clustered and placed into themes. The final steps involve the textural description and structural descriptions of what was experienced and how it was experienced. The last step checks the themes with the original transcript to see if they match up in *explicitness* and *compatibility*. Using the invariant constituents and corresponding themes, a picture of the phenomenon occurs.

I went about the process of analyzing my data via the horizontalization process. I entered each horizon into a spread sheet under preliminary headings. After this I went

through each horizon again to find which met the criteria for invariant constituents.

Those themes that remained became my resulting themes. In this paper I talk about the resulting themes related to constraints and constraint negotiation.

### *Establishing Trustworthiness*

Qualitative research faces myriad challenges regarding the trustworthiness of the research. In response to decries by quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers have established criteria for what positivistic researchers refer to as validity and reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer four criteria that have been widely accepted by researchers across different disciplines. These four criteria are: 1) credibility of data analysis, 2) transferability of findings, 3) dependability of findings, and 4) confirmability of analysis. These criteria were accomplished in my study through a number of ways. First, the credibility of my data comes from the word-for-word transcription of the audio interviews. By faithfully transcribing the interviews, the full dialogue of the interview is represented in my data. The findings are transferable in the sense that they contain the context of my informants' experiences. This context is important in applying the findings because the sample was not random and thus not strictly representative. The findings are dependable because I made great efforts to secure the trust of my informants through the interview process. I was open and up front about my background and my reasons for doing this research. They were able to see me as an ally and were therefore willing to share deep experiences. Finally, the analysis was confirmable because I made detailed notes regarding the themes and how each statement from the data fit into each

theme. By utilizing these tools in my interviewing, analysis, and presentation, my research is a trustworthy reflection of the experiences of being an African American outdoor enthusiast.

### Findings

Before discussing the constraints identified by informants, I want to discuss one overarching theme that emerged with regard to constraints. While no two informants had identical experiences, there was one simple but important observation that consistently came up in relation to the informants' experience as an African American outdoors enthusiast. This was the fact that all of my informants indicated that they faced racially related constraints at some point. As previously mentioned, constraints have been shown to inhibit almost every person's leisure behaviors and preferences. This theme is important because it brings out the idea that African Americans who participate in outdoor recreation face constraints that are specifically related to race. While to some this statement is obvious, no previous studies have specifically investigated constraints from a race perspective. All of the informants in my study identified some form of constraint that was racially related, ranging from out-and-out discrimination to concerns from friends and family about their excursions into the woods. Of course, each informant had a unique combination of differing constraints that interacted with their life situations to create each person's preferences and behaviors. But the fact that each person identified racially related constraints to interacting with nature highlights the reality that African Americans live in contemporary American society (see Chapter II).

Another important note about these informants is how remarkable they are. They are outliers within the Black community in that they see themselves as ambassadors, reaching out to both the Black and White populations. In this sense, the sample is unique. This uniqueness is important to note, because many in the Black community are likely not to share my informants' view of the goodness of nature and Black people's place in it.

Six main racially related constraints emerged from my informants experiences. According to Moustakas (1994) each theme needs to be explicit and abstract, and each of these types of constraints fit this criteria. These themes were arrived at via an inductive process through which I asked informants about their experiences being Black and being an outdoor enthusiast. The types of constraints and the ways in which they were able to negotiate those constraints flowed naturally from this line of questioning. It shows that these constraints and negotiations are critical to the experience of being an African American outdoor enthusiast. The following racially-related constraints emerged from the analysis:

- Reservations of family and friends regarding being in “the woods”
- Collective memory and fear
- Being the “only one”
- Discrimination and “reverse curiosity “
- Assumption of novice status
- Balancing identity between being Black, and “acting White”

*Reservations of Family and Friends*

Informants had to deal with the numerous reservations of family and friends regarding their participation in outdoor activities, or in careers in the outdoors. For example, Claudia said:

When we told ... [friends] that we were gonna go off and explore the woods and camp in the parks and forest, people went berserk, they were like “are you nuts! Do you know what happens to black people in the woods?” (yeah). “You must be crazy.” And some of Tom’s friends offered him a gun, I mean one guy actually brought out his collection and gave him a choice.

Here, Claudia, who represents an older generation of African Americans, discusses what happened when she and her husband began talking with their friends about taking a cross country trip to visit various National Parks. The sentiment of their friends clearly reveals the fear that many African Americans have about “the woods.” Some type of firearm was deemed a necessary addition before they began their travels. Michael’s forays into Boy Scouts with his father and brother were uncommon in his community: “They did find it a little strange, a little different; they would call me ‘country.’” While his endeavor into the Boy Scouts was eventually cut short, because it was not something that was accepted by his peers, he did go on to pursue outdoor activities later on as an adult. He is a general outdoorsman with a penchant for saltwater fishing. Michael talked about how his father continues to tell him to be careful when he travels to do outdoor activities. His father remembered having to sit in segregated diners when he traveled, and so he urges his son to be careful.

Kevin also used the term “country” to describe how his friends described his activities:

I have lots of friends that I would always tell “I’ll take you fishing” and some of them I did, and it was really interesting, uh, but when people automatically see, like when they figure out I do a lot of fishing they would almost say on some level “oh that’s the country side of it coming out,” I guess the more small town boy coming out.

For Kevin, this distinction between a rural identity and a more urban identity was almost a source of alienation for him. His fishing trips did not make sense to his urban Black friends. Frank discussed how his father felt about his forays into the woods:

Frank: My father, strangely enough, because he did spend time as a hunter and a fisherman, was probably more fearful of my subsequent forays into the wilderness as anybody. And probably because he had lived, he had lived being Black differently that I did.

Interviewer: Yeah, so he was more afraid of the sort of...

Frank: Yeah, what might happen out there in the woods, and I’m not talking about being eaten by bears...

Interviewer: Like what people might do

Frank: But what some redneck toting a shotgun might have in mind.

For Frank, the fear and reservations of his father were actually rooted in historical memory. His father’s experiences of “being Black differently” caused his father to communicate some trepidation to his son venturing out into nature.

*Collective Memory and Fear*

These reservations connected to collective memory and fear act as another constraint. Virginia, (mid 40s, conservation agency employee) recounted a telling experience while climbing a mountain. Virginia was hiking on a mountaintop when she began to notice trucks with gun racks and White drivers driving by frequently. She began to feel vulnerable:

Now I want you to know, um, two things, one, I was scared shitless up there (yeah) cause I just didn't, you know, it's just that fear, but I was I was scared to death. And then there was this almost this feeling of wanting to stay up at the top of this mountain because it was so beautiful, it was like wow, this is so beautiful up here.

The kind of experience, where an informant was enjoying nature and had forgotten about being Black, but then felt fear suddenly creep into their awareness was fairly common.

Virginia elaborated on her experience on the mountaintop:

I felt like I belonged there, but I felt like it was dangerous there, you get what I'm saying? I think there's a difference there between feeling out of place and then feeling like; I mean it's having all these feeling about being really heavy about being on this mountain, and going, "wow this is so beautiful", and then going all the sudden "holy," excuse me, "holy shit," (right) "Where am I at?" and "What am I doing up here. And then feeling at the same time, really just like a bad person because I'm stereotyping people (yeah). So it's those combination of things that is going on.

Virginia was actually able to very clearly articulate the ambivalence I have talked about in previous chapters. She was fearful, but at the same time overwhelmed by the beauty of nature. Frank discussed how being Black affected his experiences in the outdoors and also hit on this ambivalence:

Of course it affects everything that I do in a way, but not in a negative way.  
(right) Certainly it increased, as I was going down the river, it increased the notion of things that could happen to me, apart from tipping my canoe over and drowning or being eaten by wild hogs or something. Yeah it's always, I mean in racist America you always have the notion or grain of fear that something could happen to you. But no more so than, or no less so than when you are having an encounter with the police. You know that something racial in this society can happen to you (hmmm) but it doesn't impede me from participating and doing what I want to do.

The fear is an integral part of being an African American in the United States, and fear plays into Frank's experiences in the outdoors. However, he was able to get past that fear. The fear felt by informants in the study was often accompanied by a counteracting force or feeling that it was right for them to be in nature. Tom dealt with the fear and the memories that generate that fear, along with the "eternal appeal" of nature:

Oh without, without a doubt, and without a doubt, and I mean they [National Parks] have a universal and eternal appeal to me. And I umm, I experienced, you know, what was so interesting was the grave concern of my relatives, Black and White, that had about our travels. Now I have to put this in context because it

was during the time when the militia was quite active, (uh-huh) up in Idaho, so (yeah) and it was during the O.J. Simpson trial so you know (yeah), so you know there were a lot of tensions (huh). And so you know, uh there were a lot of concerns about us, and it, one must remember that not only are the images purported of bad things happening by the Klan you know in the woods (yeah), but in fact it was it was a fight then (right) on it, there wasn't very many lynchings in town, you know. They were out in the forest somewhere (yeah). Uh so that image lingered you know um, uh, so their concerns were genuine, uh, but I'd have to say we absolutely encountered no problems at all. Uh so, it's like a different world.

According to Tom, fear is understandable but, in the end, nature is a "different world" when it comes to racial issues. Tom has been able to experience the National Parks in great depth, and has experiences and appreciation from which to draw. For others who have not experienced nature in this way, the fears may be just too strong to overcome. Tom is able to bring out the roots of some of the fears that many African Americans have; a fear that is directly related to the practice of lynching. Tom is clear to say that lynching happened out in the forest somewhere, and this is why some African Americans may be afraid. The concept of pursuing nature in spite of these fears and memories will be examined further in the discussion on constraint negotiation.

*Discrimination*

The next constraint pertains to actual instances of discrimination, and as one informant described, “reverse curiosity” (Allison). When asked about instances of discrimination in the context of visiting a park or natural area, most informants were quick to point out that it happened to them rarely. However, almost all of them had experienced some type of discrimination. Allison talked about how often, when she skiied with a large group of Black skiers, someone commented to her about Black people on the mountain:

So what’s happening as we come in numbers to the mountains, there is a reverse curiosity, Whites going, oh my god, looks at all these Blacks. And some of it, I don’t even want to call it racism, it’s curiosity. “I didn’t know you could ski..” I’ve had that said to me, “I didn’t know you guys could ski.”

For Allison, comments like this are not taken as racism. Rather, she saw a certain innocence in them and she sought to turn the situation into a teachable moment by breaking down stereotypes the other person might have. However, she did relate another experience that she took quite differently:

One time I was catching an early van at five in the morning and I was getting on a van to go to JFK to fly to Canada, and it was probably March in New York. And it was two business men in the van, and I have my skis and the guy is loading my skis in the back and I get in the van and one of the business guys says, “Are those skis?” Just in that tone (yeah) instead of “Oh, are you going skiing?” If he had asked in any other kind of way, it wouldn’t have bothered me.

But are those skis, like you stupid person what are you doing with skis, so I said, “Yes they are.” And he said, “Hah, where are you going skiing around here?” And I said, “Actually I’m going to Whistler Canada,” and his whole demeanor changed and like wow, you know, so it could have been arrogance, I wouldn’t call it racism, because I couldn’t point to it as racism, but he was very surprised A) that I had my own skis, and B) he was like putting me in my place but saying there’s no where to ski around here you must be crazy.

The way that Allison tries to parlay the curiosity of the business man in the van ranges from education to sarcasm. She seems to want to believe the best about the man in the end. This was a fairly common assessment informants expressed when they reflected on encountering discrimination. They would usually go out of their way to try to understand the other person’s actions.

In only one instance an informant was actually physically attacked. It happened to Keith who was out birding at a State Park in Illinois. The incident happened in the mid 80s:

I was birdwatching around “Green Lake” State Park, and it was getting close to dusk, and I was just out birdwatching and these two White guys came up to me and they just started calling me names, and the names were not very nice (yeah). And they were just looking to pick a fight and the one guy just got in my face and just continued to call me names like ‘spook’ ‘nigger’ everything, okay. (yeah). Uhh, one thing led to another and we were fighting.

Luckily for Keith, only one of the men jumped him, and he was able to get away. The remarkable thing about this incident is that Keith said that he never let that incident get in the way of his passion for birding. Keith's experience is quite harrowing; however his experience of being physically attacked in the outdoors was unique for my study. For most, if they spoke of discrimination, it was very subtle, and the informants typically had an internal debate as whether or not what was happening was in fact discrimination.

Lawrence related an experience that was indicative:

When I was doing [a] run in [city in Texas], I ran, I was running to the high school, to do the stairs, and I ran in front of, I guess it was the football team's workout facility. As I ran past, you know I'm just jogging, not stopping looking in cars, you know, it might just be because it's a very small town (right), everybody comes out to the front of the workout facility, and they're just looking at me, I'm looking and I kind of waved, I went and did my workout up and down the stairs, I went, I was cooling down, I was walking back to the house I was staying in, and I guess the football coach said, um, "Hey, how you doing?" And I said, well that's friendly—I'm from the East Coast, we don't speak a lot on the East Coast. (haha) He said, "Hey how you doing; hi;" I'm fine how are you? "Good, you new in town?" uh, not really I've been here for a couple years; well um,--what did he say, the dialogue was interesting, it, you know it might be me, I might be hyperconscious about it, and I think sometimes we are, but it felt like he was interrogating me, (yeah) trying to figure out you know, "where do you, why are you here, what's your job, are you the other black guy in town?"

For Lawrence, the feeling that he was being interrogated by a local in the town near his park station was unnerving. It “just stings my mind” as he says, wondering if the same thing would have happened if he were White. Anthony related similar experiences in small towns where he was stationed early in his career. In fact, he came to a point where he decided he needed to be in a large urban area so that he could be closer to the Black community. For many informants, discrimination seemed like a nagging injury that would occasionally flare up and hinder progress. Most of the time discrimination was not a concern, but every once in a while, it would rear its head.

#### *Assumption of Novice Status*

Related to discrimination and reverse curiosity is the notion that African Americans should not be outdoors. This is reinforced by the novice status that people would assume of informants when they encountered them in the outdoors. Shauna relayed the feeling that she is often taken for a novice by salespeople in sporting goods stores:

I think sometimes it is a little bit, you know, if I’m going into a place like a sporting good store or something like that, you know, sometimes I’m not expected to be very knowledgeable about what I’m looking for. I was looking for a certain type of backpack for hiking and... I didn’t want a pack for a full week, but I was trying to find that kind of pack, and I think that people are surprised that I would be, that I wasn’t a novice. I’m pretty much always considered a novice, like I’m always new at this. So you know, I’m not perfect

at it, but you know, I think that the response from Whites is that I must be new at this if they haven't seen me before. I don't know that that is the response that my White friends get.

To deal with this, Shauna takes on the role of educator, "I'm here to help expand horizons" she said in reference to the sporting goods store scenario. John told a specific story in which he was hiking with a friend and some others stopped them on the trail to ask for directions:

As far as they were concerned, I was out of my element, this is not an urban setting, what are you doing, you can't know what you are doing, umm, and so later on you learn to have a good time with it, you understand it, say it was more concern than anything else. And the information was always helpful or at least they thought it was helpful, and then when I started climbing with one of my White friends, who actually I introduced to climbing, so he knew less than I did, but by this time I had schooled myself very well, and bought the right gear, and books, and read and practiced, and everything, and they would always ask him for directions, (yeah) it was hilarious, they would ignore me completely, sometimes they just wouldn't talk to me, they'd talk to him exclusively, and I remember there was one incident where they were, really concerned about where they were and being lost and asking him all these questions, and I knew he didn't know, I was taking him, and so I just stepped out of the way and let them talk, and he eventually says, you know I can't answer that question, but John can, and they were all stunned, so I gave them the information without a lot of fluff, and

just gave them the strait skinny, and I know when they walked away they didn't fully believe the information I gave them, they just had they look, skeptical look like well he can't know.

Even when African American outdoor enthusiasts reach high levels of skill and knowledge, they are brought into question because of the novelty of their existence in the outdoor realm. All of these subtle forms of discrimination and questioning seemed to add up, and the informants seemed to be affected by these subtle acts. However, as we see in the next section of this paper, they were able to deftly negotiate these constraints.

### *Being the Only One*

The next constraint is being the "only one." Repeatedly, informants talked about being the only Black person in a park or campground. Most informants were able to tolerate this. But for many other African Americans, the idea of being the only Black person in a crowd of White people is not too appealing. Mark approached the subject with a bit of humor

You know I joke a lot, some friends of mine, we were out there hunting, and it was like 15 degrees, and I was like, man I guarantee you there's not another Black man in Texas that's out here in 15 degrees with a stick and a string. (yeah). Umm, you know, I've never really come across other black people that hunt.

There are moments when informants would have a realization that they were the only Black person around. Traci discussed having such a realization:

I remember going, and they had a [environmental] festival every year, which was like a gathering, and they would have different informational booths, and mostly it was like a music and arts festival, and really when I was growing up there wasn't a lot of Hispanics at all in the Northeast, and if they were, they were mostly Puerto Rican, not Mexican, so I would not see any Hispanic people and hardly any Black people at these gatherings.

Frank talked about the other areas of his life where he is often the only Black person, and he talked about how that makes him feel:

Well it's not uncomfortable, and I find, I find that that it's something that I have experienced rarely whether we're talking about the outdoors, outdoor activities or whether we're talking about going to the opera, there are just a lot of things that, according to the rules, according to the stereotypes, Black people don't do, so when I do the wacky stuff that I do, like go to the opera or go cross-country skiing in the north of Sweden, (yeah) you don't see a Black person often, I'm the only Black person there (right). It's not something that makes me feel uncomfortable, but for certain certainly it's something that's noticeable, something that either I comment on or something people around me will comment on. You know "Gee you're the only Black person here... do Black people do these things?"

Frank clearly was aware of his solo status as a Black person in these situations, but he continued with what he wanted to do. Rose's experiences of being a Black solo person came from being the only Black person where she worked, and in the local community. She discussed how difficult it was to "stand out" as an African American in a rural Western park setting:

Rose: I mean it's not to say that parks, that being a minority in a park is easy. I mean when I was in [large Western National Park], I was one of only two minorities employed in the park and we both left. As a matter of fact I think they still have zero minorities left in the park to this day, umm (wow) but I think I hold the record for staying in that park the longest, umm,

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Rose: Well, there's no people of color in the community, there's no people of color anywhere around, and not everybody's willing to stand out.

For Rose, it proved difficult, even though she stayed in this park a long time, to find places to have her hair cut, or to find a place with the proper type of shampoo for her to use. She empathized with African Americans who do not want to go to a very rural, very White place for employment because they do not want to have to put their kids in a school where they will be the only Black kid. While visiting a park for an African American is one thing, working in a rural park setting is altogether different and potentially alienating. Thus, being the "only one" had some negative effects on Rose's willingness to work in some locales.

*Being Black and Acting White*

The final constraint involved an identity balancing act between being Black and “acting White.” Some informants faced an identity crisis as they progressed into the activities and careers they pursued. For some, like Shauna it seemed to be something that weighed heavily on them. For others, like Marcus and Walter, they seemed to care less that the Black community thought of them. Regardless, they often reached a certain point where they looked at the activities they were doing, then looked at the people around them and realized that they were not interacting with the Black community much at all. Shauna talked about how her activities in the outdoors were received by her Black friends:

You know, or they challenge your ethnicity (yeah), which I always thought was strange, you know this whole idea of having, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of having your Black card revoked, it’s something like you have a license, and if you do enough non-Black things, they can take it away from you.

For Shauna, her participation in snowboarding caused her to feel alienated from some of her Black friends because it was not something that “Black people do.” Keith had this to say when I asked him if he considered himself a birder before he considered himself Black:

Yeah, ummm, I see myself as a birder before I see myself as an African American, because I think it’s because of my upbringing, my mother being, my mother was not a racist, so when I was bussed from my neighborhood over to the Jewish community, my mother was not saying, “don’t make friends with those

people don't talk to those people, don't associate with those people," she never told me that. And, umm, you know, when I had my [White] girlfriend, she never told me that that was wrong; she was always open to anything I wanted to do... and usually I don't feel different. You just feel like people are people, and that it's what really makes us different is the color and wisdom of our minds. Not our skin. So I always see that the difference between two people is what's between their two ears, not what they look like. And so that's why I see myself first as a birdwatcher and second as an African American.

Keith's ideas were rooted in his belief that all people are equal and should not be judged by their skin color. Traci also spoke of her African American identity and its relationship to the rest of her life:

When I think of myself, I think of myself as a person, I don't think, okay, like, I'm African American, I know I'm African American, and I embrace that part of myself, but I don't define myself by it... And I've thought a lot about who I am and the things I like versus you know, kind of stereotypically what African American people are supposed to like. And as I've gotten older I've gotten more okay knowing that it's okay to be different from the stereotype, and really as you get to know people on an individual level, you realize there is so much variation and that those stereotypes don't really hold a lot of water. I mean, there's certain things I might think about somebody in getting to know them, and that's not the case at all.

For Traci and other informants, their Black identity and their outdoor identity tend to pull them in separate directions. Having a strong Black identity and only participating in activities that are “appropriate” for African Americans are not something that many of informants took time to dwell on.

### Discussion

The implications of understanding the specific ways in which constraints inhibited these African American outdoor enthusiasts are two fold. First, a more holistic framework for understanding non-White participation in outdoor recreation is necessary. As I discussed in Chapters II and III, the perspectives that have been utilized to examine the issue of non-White participation in outdoor recreation tend to be narrowly construed and have failed to view the problem from the needed macro-sociological perspective (Floyd, 1998). Results from this study demonstrate the complexity of factors that play into the lives of African Americans who are involved in outdoor activities and careers, and also the factors in the lives of those who are not involved. By examining the constraints identified by informants, we are able to see just how complex their participation is and the numerous racially related constraints that each of them faced. The informants’ experiences reflect the holistic nature of this issue. In the context of Chapter II and the discussion of systemic racism (Feagin, 2006), I talked about the need to examine the issue of disparities in outdoor recreation participation from a holistic perspective. Informants’ experiences highlight the various factors of a systemic racist society (see figure 1) that ultimately influence leisure behavior. The ideas of

White/Black spaces, institutional discrimination, socialization, and collective memory can all be seen in the experiences of my informants. By examining in depth the experiences of African American outdoor enthusiasts, I have been able to show that the issue of racially disparate rates of participation in outdoor recreation is much more complex than the previously employed simplistic measures can capture. My hope is that my findings can inform research in the future, both inductive and deductive, so that recreation providers can more successfully reach the growing diverse population in American.

If we step back to the commonly touted hypotheses regarding non-White participation in outdoor recreation we see that almost all play into informants' experiences in some way. The subculture or ethnicity hypothesis can be seen in the ways informants encountered reservations from family and friends. The assimilation and inter-racial contact hypotheses can be seen in the ways informants were sometimes uncomfortable with situations where they were the only Black person around. Informants who deal with this discomfort successfully drew on a comfort level with White people they gained earlier in life. They had inter-racial contact and experiences with Whites that provided them skills to negotiate constraints. The discrimination hypothesis can also be seen in my data. Most informants had experienced some form of discrimination while participating in outdoor activities. However, all who had such experiences were just as quick to say that they had far more positive experiences than negative, and that they worried little about it. Some informants, however, did mention that there were certain places that they would not go for fear of harassment. The

marginality hypothesis is perhaps one that was not as prevalent among informants. This could be because my study was skewed to the middle class. Informants were college educated and their annual incomes ranged from \$30,000 to \$80,000. It could also be that informants had not faced this type of barrier. Regardless, many mentioned that the majority of African Americans are not poor, and that it was typically other factors that keep them from participating in outdoor recreation.

The final implication is that constraints research is too broad, and needs some context. Books such as Jackson (2005a) have gone to great lengths to address this issue, and the chapters from that book outline the numerous different issues (such as gender, age, and disability) that constraints research can be used to address. More studies are needed to fully flesh out the nuanced ways that constraints act to inhibit leisure participation in special populations. The specific ways constraints act in the lives of African American outdoor enthusiasts are surely not exclusive to this group. There are most likely constraints related to other forms of oppression, such as sexism or classism that manifest within numerous other social groups such as women and the poor. These constraints need to be fleshed out through in-depth studies that are rooted in the experiences of individuals who have overcome these constraints. In this study, informants' insight into specific racially related constraints was invaluable. It could be expected that in the study of women's leisure, or the leisure of the poor, that certain other specific insights or types of constraints could be identified. However, there is still much to learn about the socio-historical relationships of minority populations and nature, and how those relationships play out in the lives of individual people.

CHAPTER V  
EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN AN OUTDOOR SERIOUS  
LEISURE PURSUIT

Introduction

For some people in Western society, leisure activities are the major driving force in life. The consequences of this driving pursuit of a leisure activity in someone's life are the focus of this paper. Specifically, this paper explores the consequences of serious leisure participation for a group of African American outdoor enthusiasts. Stebbins, in his early attempt explain the phenomenon of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1979) noted that the amateur, or the serious leisure participant in general, is marginalized because their pursuit of a leisure activity goes beyond the popular, normal pursuit of leisure, that of casual leisure. Stebbins also noted that participants in serious leisure are "misunderstood" (p. 260) by their friends and family who do not participate in serious leisure. I want to make this my point of departure for my examination of African American outdoor enthusiasts. That my informants were misunderstood by most of their family and friends was clearly evident. In this paper I want to add the complexity of race and racialized spaces and activities to the discussion of serious leisure. The misunderstanding informants felt was largely based on racialized ideas about the outdoors. They clearly had to "persevere" through hardships (one of Stebbins' dimensions of Serious Leisure), but they had the added burden of negotiating a social world that is predominantly White. Their responses to this burden were noteworthy,

most felt as though they were some type of pioneer or ambassador to the activity and back to the Black community. This study brings a specific context to the area of serious leisure that has not before been investigated. My study adds potentially new dimensions to serious leisure: being involved in a serious leisure social world where you are an “outsider,” adds significant constraints to your participation. It also helps us understand how African Americans go about negotiating constraints to outdoor activities and careers

### Literature Review

The concept of serious leisure has been firmly rooted in the fields of leisure and sociology since the original thesis was published (Stebbins, 1982). Stebbins has constructed a theory that describes and explains the behavior of people as they commit themselves to an activity or set of activities. Serious leisure pursuits are subject to six dimensions. They are the need to persevere; finding a career in the activity; personal effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training, and/or skill; realization of durable benefits or outcomes; tendency to identify strongly with the activity; and the unique ethos that grows up around the activity. The need to persevere is common with many activities. To persevere, one must have adversity. This adversity can come in the form of danger, personal barriers, or any other number of factors, but by overcoming the adversity, numerous benefits are realized by the participant. The fourth quality, durable benefits, can be further defined. Self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration of self, feelings of accomplishment, etc. (Stebbins, 2001) are only a few of the benefits identified from serious leisure. The career is also a key quality of serious

leisure. This career is not the typical occupational career but a career within the leisure activity. Stebbins refers to five stages which the participant passes through: beginning, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline. Leisure careers also come in and out of their peak height, i.e., an actor might have his peak early in his career and then participate at a different level later.

Raisborough (1999) stated that serious leisure has been construed largely as apolitical. In her study of the British Sea Cadet Corps, she examined the experiences of women in a uniformed youth organization from a feminist perspective. While she affirms the overall theory of serious leisure, she criticizes it for being apolitical and notes that any examination of serious leisure as a site where "societal power relations are at once resisted and reproduced" (p. 67) has not been conducted. In addition, Tomlinson (1993) shed light on the assumption that serious leisure is a male dominated pursuit. These critiques of serious leisure go beyond the gender dynamic. The argument could also be made that serious leisure has only been studied from a *White* perspective. In the same way the analysis of serious leisure from a feminist critical perspective (Raisborough, 1999, 2006) leads to rethinking and reconceptualizing the concept from a political or social hierarchical perspective, examining the concept from a racial perspective will shed new and needed light on the phenomena.

Race has not been examined in the context of serious leisure. In fact, there is little known about the differing experiences of serious leisure across different socio-economic strata. Race could be a sensitizing concept, like gender (Stebbins, 2007, p. 61). Stebbins, however stated "there had been significant neglect of the question of

gendered experiences in serious leisure” (p. 85). Some studies have been done regarding ethnicity, (Stebbins, 1994), but they do not particularly inform the study of race in the context of American society and history. The investigation into a racialized notion of serious leisure is completely exploratory. There are a number of possible ways to think about serious leisure in the context of race. Serious leisure participation for these African Americans could have an element of resistance associated with it. Shinew and Floyd (2005) suggest that leisure for minorities can be empowering against structures, such as leisure stereotypes, that are oppressive. Shinew and Floyd also suggest that Black ski clubs or scuba clubs could be a form of "parallel" leisure, where African Americans participate in outdoor activities, but within the cultural safety of their own community. In relationship to serious leisure, this notion could emerge as an important factor to help explain the sustaining nature of the serious leisure phenomenon.

The specific experiences of African Americans engaged in serious leisure have not been investigated to date. While I recognize that many African Americans engage in serious leisure, the nature of informants’ serious leisure endeavors is unique. They are involved in pursuits in which they are almost always the only “Black face” as author Eddy Harris (Harris, 1997) put it. This study was conducted as an exploratory study to see if there was anything different or unique about serious leisure participation when the participant is a minority in their chosen activity. Hopefully, this line of study will expand the breadth of understanding of serious leisure.

Of critical importance in this investigation of serious leisure is the notion of constraint negotiation. The idea that people negotiate constraints stemmed from the

assumption, held by early constraints researchers, that constraints were “immovable, static, obstacles to participation” (Jackson, 2005b, p. 3). The realization that people took active steps to get around, push through, eliminate or otherwise negotiate constraints upon their leisure was first published by Scott (1991). Two other studies that year, (Kay & Jackson, 1991; Shaw, Bonen, & McCabe, 1991) also revealed that people persisted in leisure participation, "despite constraint." This breakthrough led to a pursuit of understanding how and why people negotiated constraints. Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey (1993) added to the emerging understanding of negotiation with their propositional explanation of the process, which they synthesized with the hierarchical model mentioned above. Six propositions were presented; briefly they are 1) participation is dependent on negotiation through constraints, not the absence of constraints, 2) variations in reporting of constraints can be seen as variations in successful negotiation, 3) successful negotiation can lead to reluctance to change current leisure behavior, 4) anticipation of insurmountable constraints may decrease desire for participation, 5) people anticipate their ability to negotiate a possible constraint, 6) the interaction of motivation and constraints affects the negotiation process (Jackson et al., 1993). These six propositions are helpful in examining the negotiation of constraints among African American outdoor recreationists. Hubbard and Mannell (2001) tested four models of negotiation and found support for a constraint-effects-mitigation model. These tests found that although constraints decreased participation, negotiation strategies were triggered which mitigated the effects of the constraint. The purpose of my study is not to examine constraints from this perspective; however, these constraints models do

have some utility for examining the implications of my study. For example, Hubbard and Mannell found that constraints triggered people to seek out resources for negotiation. Another study (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993) discovered a typology of women's negotiation strategies via qualitative methods. Achievers, attempters, compromisers, dabblers, quitters/defaulters were the five types, listed in order from most resistant to subordinate; active response to passive response; and from high benefits to high costs. This typology is useful in thinking of how African American outdoor enthusiasts negotiate constraints. The categories are different; skewed based on the purposive nature of my sample. It is helpful to think about how informants negotiated constraints using this typology.

## Methods

This chapter shares the same data gathering and analysis procedures as Chapter IV. During the interviews with informants I queried them about the dimensions of serious leisure, probing them as to the relationship between these dimensions and their African American identity. For detailed explanation and justification of the methods, refer to Chapter IV. In addition to the interview questions listed in the previous methods section, I investigated a line of inquiry directly related to serious leisure. The six qualities of serious leisure served as a guide to this investigation, and follow-up questions relating to race were used to probe for meaning or new and different experiences.

A brief outline of questions used in addition to the ones mentioned in Chapter IV that will specifically to address the serious leisure and constraints follows:

How long have you been involved with \_\_\_\_\_ activity?  
 Describe the progression of your involvement in \_\_\_\_\_?  
 Talk about some of the social worlds you have been involved in regarding \_\_\_\_\_?  
 Do you think of yourself as a \_\_\_\_\_er? Why?  
 What do you get out of \_\_\_\_\_?  
 Have you ever had times were you have not been as involved in \_\_\_\_\_?  
 Has being involved with \_\_\_\_\_ ever conflicted with your racial identity?

Questions regarding constraints were posed in relation to the informants' racial identity, i.e. "How has your race affected your participation in outdoor recreation.?"

The sample showed a number of characteristics of serious leisure in their behavior. Keith, for example, showed a lifetime of commitment to birding and created a career in it, amassing over 550 life birds in North America. He also created a business that involved birdwatching and other outdoor activities. Anthony talked of the discrimination he faced in his career with the Forest Service. He had to persevere through this discrimination. Even though he faced it in his job and not his leisure, he did not see much of a distinction because his job was tied to his leisure interests. Mark embodied the unique skill and knowledge required for serious leisure in his utilization of traditional bow hunting equipment and the long periods of stillness required in the sport equate to the personal effort characteristic of serious leisure. One thing that stood out regarding the characteristics of serious leisure was the durable benefits experienced by informants. All of them spoke of the serenity or the accomplishment or power of nature to provide spiritual insight. This was strong and universal in my sample. Most informants, particularly those who worked in natural resource careers (Claudia, Virginia,

Tom, Keith, Rose, Walter, and Marcus) felt a strong sense of identity as African American outdoor enthusiasts, and embodied the strong ethos of both the Black outdoors community, and the outdoors community at large. In summary, the informants in my study fit the characteristics of serious leisure as outlined by Stebbins (1982, 2007).

### Findings

The unique experience of being a serious leisure participant (a.k.a. outdoor enthusiasts) for African American informants was something in which all took special pride. They all had a strong confidence in their abilities in the outdoors, and in their place in the outdoors, despite stereotypes or pressures from others that said they should not be in the outdoors. This confidence came thorough years of experiences that entailed negotiating the specific racially related constraints I discussed in Chapter IV. Before I discuss the ways informants negotiated these constraints, I want to discuss overarching themes that emerged with regard to negotiation. While no two informants had identical experiences, there were a number of things that consistently came up in relation to the informants' initial experiences in nature and the ways they faced and dealt with constraints. These key themes serve to identify some overarching experiences of the informants in my study.

The first key theme is that the informants *all had play experiences in nature as children*. In fact, every informant identified experiences from childhood in which they had some connection with nature. Interestingly, none of the informants had to think very long or hard to remember their experiences as children, but could recall them with ease.

This tells of the importance of these experiences. Informants were able to clearly trace their outdoor history back through the years to specific times and events and places from their childhood. This ability to clearly link experiences in childhood to a current enthusiasm for nature demonstrates that informants had previously given some thought to the linkage. Bixler, Floyd, and Hammitt (2002) discussed the importance of childhood play and environmental socialization for later life participation in outdoor recreation and environmental preservation attitudes. It would seem that informants' experiences would lend strong evidence to how important childhood experiences are for later life perceptions and behavior towards nature. Later in the paper I will describe the ways informants spoke about their early childhood experiences in more detail when discussing the negation schema informants implemented in their lives.

The next key theme, that informants *actively negotiate these racially related constraints*, is not a shocking finding, since I selected my sample based on the notion that they were highly involved with nature related activities or careers. However, the simplicity of this theme does not diminish its power to explain leisure behavior, particularly the behavior of a minority group such as African Americans. An overarching conclusion from this theme, taken in combination with the previous one, is that participation in outdoor recreation or in nature-related careers for African Americans is constraint laden, and successful and persistent negotiation of these constraints is required for sustained participation. This conclusion also serves to show how remarkable the informants were. I was continually amazed at the level of commitment to nature each of them exhibited and in the various ways that commitment

manifested in their lives. It is also noteworthy that each informant persisted through barriers that would seem very difficult to overcome for most people. I highlight how informants were able to persist in these ways later in this paper.

The final key theme flows from the last one: *informants were prepared to negotiate the constraints they encountered*. This theme completes the overarching snapshot that emerged from informants' experiences. The first key theme relating to childhood experiences is only one aspect of the informants' *preparedness* for encountering the constraints they faced. Informants had quite a few other ways in which they were in some way prepared to face constraints. For example, many informants cited their parent's examples and encouragement as factors that taught them to be self determined. This self determination, then, was a key ingredient in the negotiation schema of informants later in life. When faced with the reservations of friends later in life when they started venturing into nature, the informants were able to draw on the sense of self determination they learned from their parents. In this way, and in others, the informants were prepared to succeed in negotiating constraints. I will discuss this in more detail when I talk about the specific negotiation strategies I found in my study. A major conclusion from this theme is that without specific preparations, informants would not have been able to successfully negotiate the constraints they faced when they became interested in pursuing nature activities seriously. It should be noted that the preparations I am discussing were for the most part, not specific things that parents or educators implemented in a direct attempt to get informants outdoors and into nature. They were, for the most part, things that one might see as ancillary to introducing a child to nature.

Many informants actually noted this, and referenced a feel of serendipity in the experiences that led them into nature. I will flesh out these key themes in more detail in the next section.

In relationship to serious leisure, these themes highlight the unique and specific ways African Americans enter into an outdoor pursuit and the burdens they bring. These burdens, such as being the only Black person at a ski area, are things that do not go away, no matter how skilled the person is. There is always a perception that they have to deal with. At numerous times this consciousness fades away, but it can be brought back with a single glance or comment. This burden is what this study can add to the concept of serious leisure. If a person is participating in a serious leisure pursuit that is outside of their typical social sphere, they bring the added burden of being an outsider.

### *Negotiation Schema*

Perhaps the most compelling reason why I pursued this study was to find out how African American outdoor enthusiasts were able to advance into highly skilled and specialized activities and careers. It became clear that all informants had a schema of negotiation that allowed them to persist and progress in their outdoor pursuits. By schema I mean that each person had a blueprint that goes back to their formative childhood experiences and to the ways they actively encounter and negotiate a specific constraint. The negotiation schema is not so much a summary of strategies used to overcome barriers but a collection of experiences that contribute to African Americans'

identification with nature and outdoor pursuits. In this section I outline six elements that comprise the negotiation schema:

- Childhood formative experiences
- Realizing deep connections to nature
- Transcendental experiences in nature
- Leaning on knowledge of nature
- Comfort with White people/places/groups
- Positive experiences with White people in nature

Before proceeding, it is important to note that informants all embraced an underlying confidence in their right to the land, and confidence in their purpose on the land, whether it be to identify birds, climb a mountain, manage a park, or tell other people of color about nature. This underlying confidence allowed them to face different constraints with resolve. When looked at in its entirety, the negotiation schema presented here shows that informants were able to successfully sustain serious involvement in outdoor recreation or nature based careers because, through various avenues, they had gained a level of confidence in what they are doing to push past whatever constraints they encountered.

#### *Childhood Formative Experiences*

The first and perhaps most foundational part of the negotiation schema for informants was formative experience during childhood. These formative experiences included interaction with nature and lessons learned from parents and family members

about nature. Importantly, they also learned lessons from parents and family members about how to deal with being Black, dealing with racism, and how to be confident in themselves.

All informants pointed to experiences they had as children interacting with nature. Childhood interactions formed the foundation for informants' appreciation and love of nature and for forming their identities as outdoors men and women. This was evident in the way Virginia used to play in a park near her house she called "the fifties" or how Tom thought back on his childhood playing in the orange groves in Florida, or how Marcus used to spend hours in the pockets of woods in his neighborhood in D.C., or how Walter used to trap praying mantises and keep them as pets. These interactions formed the foundation for an appreciation and love for nature that became integral to their identities. Virginia describes the "fifties" and how she experienced nature as a child:

Well, number one we had a beautiful front yard, and great backyard with huge trees, you know. And so those trees were my respite when things were not going well in the world, I would just climb to the top of the tree and just sit there (hmm). However, there was also this amazing place that we found which was about, umm, maybe six blocks from our house, and uh, we called it the fifties because back then we were little kids of course, and we thought it was a 50 foot mountain, now you go back there and its just a hill right (yeah, yeah), but you'd go back there and it had a stream that went down through you know by the fifties and we would go back there and just hang out, and my brother would catch

crayfish, and you know it was one of those places and you were just a kid and you just really liked it.

When challenged with a constraint, such as a family member questioning why they should be doing things out in nature, informants were able to draw on these foundational experiences. Virginia mentioned that the trees in her yard were a respite from the world. Walter also said that going into nature gave him relief from his alcoholic father and a chaotic home life:

Well, you know the part I sometimes talk about, sometimes I don't (yeah), were my parents for sort of their privacy, but my father drank quite a bit and umm, so for me nature and the outdoors was kind of a safe haven (yeah), it was kind of a thing that umm, I was able to get my mind thinking about other stuff than what was going on in the family home. So when I'm taking care of my tropical fish and uhh you know my bees and butterflies and preying mantises, I'm not thinking about you know my father and the ranting raving and stuff he did when he got intoxicated.

The respite nature provided Walter as a child formed the foundation for a love of nature that would mature as he grew older. The foundations that informants gained as children were critical to their persistence later in life, when they encountered constraints. These foundational experiences acted in different ways than some of the other negotiation strategies mentioned later in this chapter. These foundational experiences were just that, a foundation that the rest of the informant's life regarding the outdoors was built on. It

was not used quite as actively to combat constraints, but it was a critical part of the overall schema.

*Realizing a Deep Connection to Nature*

To deepen the strength of that foundation, many informants recognized the deep connections that African Americans have to nature. Lawrence, for example, was able to see his love for organic gardening as a connection to his heritage of slavery:

And I just see this connection between, um, my abilities in, you know, agriculture, and outdoor recreation as something that I inherited from the (yeah) slave period

Walter realized that he wouldn't be the person he is without nature:

Because I've realized the importance of having a connection with nature, that for me I wouldn't be the sort of independent thinking person that I am today if I didn't have that connection with nature.

Claudia used the term "taxation without representation" to help other Black people understand the ownership they have in public lands as citizens. For her, visiting and experiencing the National Parks is a "right." She realized that she pays into the Parks, and that she has some ownership in them. This knowledge was a powerful sustainer for her as she visited the Parks and told other about them. Walter went on to talk about how there is a certain ownership that he feels in the parks, and how other African Americans do not feel that way:

If you work, you pay taxes, your tax dollars protect these spaces, whether it's a national park, a state park: whether it's protected land by taxpayer dollars it belongs to you. There's also public land that belongs to anybody and everybody who lives in the United States, if its public land then you have the right to go on it (yeah). And most people don't realize that, I honestly believe that a lot of urban inner city folks, um, specifically or particularly African Americans think that every piece of land that doesn't have a house on it belongs to a White person, and you're supposed to stay off of it (huh). And that is not the case (yeah)... public land belongs to everybody.

Walter's observation about how Black people think that if land doesn't have a house on it then a White person owns it is very astute, and could help to clarify a lot of the fear discussed earlier. Walter's insistence that public land belongs to everyone is significant. His ability to access public lands opens up experiences in wildlands that he could not have otherwise. When his entitlement to public wildlands was challenged (whether by others or by his own internal struggles) he was able to go back to his knowledge that he pays taxes and has a legal right to be on that land.

### *Transcendental Experiences*

The next element of the negotiation schema was the transcendental experiences that informants had experienced in nature. Most informants were able to connect their love for nature with these transcendental experiences. Claudia expressed how the magnificence of nature was able to remove barriers between people:

I really think that the magnificence of the National Parks and just being in nature, away from the pretensions: break down that... artificial baggage and waste that we have constructed, (sure) and we see each other as human beings.

Nature became more important than race for most of the informants. In all but a few situations, informants expressed the belief that nature had the power to break down barriers between people. Virginia talked about how some of her favorite natural places made her feel about connecting to a higher power:

The belief in the beauty and magnificence of those places, and nothing can stop me now from going to the Grand Canyon or Yosemite or the Grand Teton.

Nothing can stop me now. And what has happened for me is that again, it has reconnected me to what was important to me as a little girl. But the other thing is that I know that they belong to, I know that whatever it is that has created us and created the Grand Canyon, or, you notice that I say Grand Canyon a lot because it's my favorite place, and created some of these other places, also created me, (right) and it created those places for me to be able to reconnect to that greatness, and I, there is no other way in the world that anybody can stop me from going to those places. And it doesn't matter if anybody looks at me strange, like "What's she doing here?"

The same power of nature espoused by many environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts resonated with this group of African Americans. Among these informants, however, the beauty of nature seems to have the added benefit of countering the racialized history of nature. In the end, for this group of outdoor enthusiasts, the beauty of nature seemed to

overcome the negative racial connotations of wildlands. There seems to be a turning point or anchor point when informants had special experiences in nature. The metaphor of an anchor serves this idea well. An anchor gets cast and grips the ocean floor. The waves and wind attempt to move the boat, but if firmly rooted, the anchor will hold the boat in place. Similarly, when informants experienced resistance in whatever form to there being outdoors, they were able to hold fast to the special experiences they had with nature

#### *Leaning on Knowledge of Nature*

In addition to coming back to the powerful, transcendental experiences in nature, informants were able lean on the deep knowledge of nature they had. When faced with a constraint such as discrimination, or being assumed novice, informants were able to draw on their superior knowledge of nature to justify their place in the outdoors. Walter had a powerful anecdote:

The older I got, the more I learned about nature and the environment and many ways, in my mind, the older I got, the smarter I got, the dumber they got (yeah), because they still knew the same things that they always knew, they never really built on their information base and I was constantly learning new stuff, about nature and the outdoors, and so I got to the point where I looked at them and laughed actually.

Marcus responded to a question about being the only Black person in a natural setting:

Interviewer. What allows you to feel comfortable when you are one Black person in 25 Whites [on a tour in a National Battlefield Park]?

Marcus: Well, the completely egotistical answer is that I probably know more about that battlefield than most of the people who were on the bus.

The confidence mentioned earlier is evident in these statements. Marcus, who is a history buff, was keenly aware of African Americans place in the history of parks and wild places in this country. Without this knowledge, his feelings of attraction and connection to nature could be easily shaken by an experience with discrimination, or by the reservations of his friends, or in the example he brought up, being the only Black person in a group on a historical tour of a park.

#### *Comfort with White People/Places/Groups*

The last two parts of this negotiation schema have to do with informants' interactions with White people. This is an important element as the level of comfort that these informants had in groups of White people spilled over into their comfort in the outdoors. The level of comfort that informants had in White places, with White people, and in White places of employment prepared them to go into nature, which is, presumptively, a White place. Some of the common experiences that informants had regarding this interaction included attendance in mostly White schools, integrated friendships, growing up in integrated neighborhoods, and employment in mostly White jobs. Keith talked about his experience with bussing while in grade school:

In first grade I was put on a bus and sent over to a neighborhood that was predominately Jewish, White. Umm, now I was in a school, well just by the luck of the draw in my neighborhood I was one of the few people born in the year that I was born. Uhh, so, a lot of my friends who were bussed with me were either older than me or younger than me. (right) What that meant was that in a lot of the classes that I took from first grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I was usually the only one, or maybe one of maybe two or three other kids who were African American. (yeah) So a lot of my friends were Jewish, you know, White, Caucasian. Umm, and uh, that has a great bearing on how my life turned out.

Keith realized that his ability to interact with Whites played into his career as a wildlife biologist and birder. Keith also spoke of dating a White girl in high school, and how this had an impact on him. Regarding experiencing nature, the more comfortable a Black person is in a predominantly White setting, the easier it is for him or her to be comfortable in nature, which is often presumed to be a White setting.

Another negotiation resource that informants talked about was possessing skills to interact comfortably with Whites, including knowledge of using appropriate language or feeling comfortable despite standing out. Lawrence discussed how he had to navigate the issue of language during a fishing trip or hiking in the woods:

Its interesting, so when I'm like, in the woods or on the beach, um, I mean my language is what it is, (right) but if I go into the tackle shop and I'm going to get bait or hooks or whatever, I'm gonna buy a new reel, then, um, I think that's accurate, that you kind of maybe clean...speak with the King's English (right).

One, just because you want people understanding you (right), and then you want respect (yeah); you know that's a big deal with anybody.

Shauna offered her experiences of what it was like to stand out. She played basketball at the collegiate level, and was quite tall, so she was used to being in the spotlight. She credits this to helping her feel comfortable in situations, such as visiting a ski resort where she is the only Black person around:

I had already had that experience as a kid and I was used to getting stared at, I was used to being different, in fact, I was so used to being different, It was really unusual that I didn't get stared at, that I didn't get, everybody didn't know who I was. Umm, uhh, so yeah, you have to be used to standing out in the crowd, and you have to be okay with it, and if you are not, you won't be able to hide.

Shauna went on to talk about the language that she uses to “move between worlds,” meaning that she uses one set of mannerisms with White people, and a different set with Black people. This dual identity ties into the idea of an identity crisis, and having your “Black card” revoked (as mentioned earlier that Shauna's friends tried to do to her). For Shauna, who was through different parts of her life, firmly rooted in the Black community, the alienation that came because she was a snowboarder and hiker was hard to bear. She wanted to be accepted by the Black community, but was also very in love with the outdoors. Shauna's ability to negotiate these two worlds stems from growing up on an Air Force base that included only a few Black families. She also went to predominantly White schools and colleges, played basketball, and had to deal with negotiating the limelight that came from being recognized. This allowed her to

understand what being an oddity felt like in certain situations. These formative experiences provided her skills to move comfortably between White and Black places and situations.

### *Positive Experiences with Whites*

The final element of the negotiation schema is the positive experiences informants had with Whites in nature. One of the specific questions I asked informants pertained to experiences with discrimination. What surprised me was the number of positive experiences that informants said they had with White people in nature. I will start with Marcus, our history park enthusiast, who told me about an experience he had during a reenactment of the Battle of Gettysburg:

But when I go over to the confederate side, and you know I'm 6'1" and I have dread locks down to the middle of my back and it's sort of like there are all these confederate flags flying there, and there are literally people leaping over cannons asking me, "Hey how's it going?" You know, "What's going on? Hey, it's good to see you over here." It's sort of like..."Okay. Let me show you how this cannon works. We're the 14th LA regiment." It's almost like they are so happy to see a Black person on the confederate side of the field.

This ironic experience really seemed to have a positive effect on Marcus' confidence in his participation in historical parks. It also exposes what was a common idea for informants. Most people they saw and interacted with in the outdoors, even if the person exhibited reverse curiosity about them being outdoors, were excited and pleased by their

presence. Michael discussed a relationship he formed on a fishing trip to south Texas. Just after he told me about times when he had been called the n-word, he was sure to compare those few incidents to the amount of hours he had been outdoors that have been positive:

So those are real, those are real things, but like compared to the amount of hours I've spent in the outdoors [that] have been truly positive, and I've been welcomed by wonderful people, even in Texas, you know, my wife and I were in South Padre, Texas, on a fishing excursion and we stumbled on this uhh, bar in the back of the marina and we were the only African Americans in the marina, and what do you know it's Texas Waltz night, and we met a couple, they walked up to us, and we gave 'em a beer, and they've been friends ever since, they've called every year. It's an older couple and they've adopted us as their children, and so most of my experiences have been positive, now you know I share those experiences with my parents because most of the time my parents are like, are you sure, and they are still from that 60s-70s period, but overall my hours have been very, very positive, and I've met some beautiful people in the outdoors.

These positive experiences gave informants the confidence to know that the majority of White people in the outdoor did not intend to hurt them or ridicule them. Most informants believed that a majority of people they came across were welcoming, or at least not discriminatory. People seem to understand the power of nature to break down barriers that existed in the everyday, built environment. Taken as a whole, the negotiation schema outlined here has the potential to guide further efforts to engage

African Americans in nature. The realization that informants must have the confidence in themselves, in their right to be in nature, and in their abilities in order to succeed and progress in their various activities and careers is a critical finding of this study.

### Discussion

The first point of discussion for these findings speaks to the literature on constraints and negotiation. The negotiations strategies that informants employed in their lives correlate to three of Jackson and associates' (2003) propositions from their negotiation thesis. Proposition one argued that participation is dependent on negotiation through constraints, not the absence of constraints; proposition three postulated that successful negotiation can lead to reluctance to change current leisure behavior, and proposition six stated that the interaction of motivation and constraints will affect the negotiation process.

For the first proposition, it was clear from informants that constraints inevitably occurred at every level of outdoor recreation participation. Informants had little choice but to negotiate these constraints if participation was to occur. Based on these data, proposition one holds true, and it seems a truism that leisure participation would not occur without some kind of negotiation taking place. However, the African Americans in this study employed negotiation strategies that were singular in nature. For example, they possessed skills to interact comfortably with Whites. This strategy speaks to the greater burden that many Blacks face when participating in activities where they are clearly in the minority.

Regarding proposition three, it is intriguing to think that transcendental experiences in nature solidified each informant's love and attachment to nature. Experiences incurred in nature acted as an anchor that sustained long-term interest and passion for nature and outdoor pursuits. This anchor was so strong for some informants that there was little (including the possibility of physical violence) that kept them from spending time outdoors. This anchoring helps explain why people in general are reluctant to forgo favored leisure pursuits. Further investigation of this notion could yield important insight into constraint negotiation.

Proposition six from Jackson et al. (2003) was drawn out by informants' deep commitment to see other people of color obtain similar benefits of nature. The majority of informants were directly involved in efforts to recruit more African Americans and other people of color into the outdoors. A key motivation that sustained participation was to give back to the Black community and help others understand the benefits that accrue from participating in outdoor pursuits. This sense of purpose gave them confidence to negotiate many of the constraints they encountered. Another way that motivations interacted with constraints had to do with the confidence with which informants approached their outdoor pursuits. To varying degrees, all informants had acquired outdoor skills and a knowledge that they "belonged" in nature. This confidence allowed them to readily overcome constraints, especially those constraints that were based on the notion that Black people do not participate in outdoor pursuits.

The constraints negotiation constraint effect mitigation model put forth by Hubbard and Mannell (2001) also seems to be insightful when examining the

experiences of informants. When faced with a constraint, such as the reservations of family and friends, a negotiation resource, such as a deep knowledge of nature was triggered, and allowed informants to overcome the constraint. The typology of women's responses to constraints identified by Henderson and Bialeschki (1993) also applies. For the most part, informants in my study represent achievers. Informants were able to negotiate constraints and stereotypes, and they also took active roles in this negotiation. All of them were keenly aware of their position as lone African Americans in the outdoors. They also gained tremendous benefit from their participation.

The phrase "negotiation schema" fits well in describing the phenomenon experienced by my informants. However, some other considerations of the phenomenon also yield insight. Feagin (1992) talks about the continuing significance of racism, and lists a typology of types of discrimination similar to the constraints I discuss in Chapter IV. The literature on coping with racism or social stigma (Miller & Kaiser, 2001) may also be helpful in understanding the ways in which the informants in my study dealt with constraints. Coping with stress, or in our case constraints, can come in psychological, social, and even biological forms. Miller and Kaiser suggested that coping with stress for stigmatized populations (i.e. African Americans) occurs when the individual has the adaptive resources to cope with that stress. For the informants in this study, the negotiation schema can be seen as adaptive resources for coping with the stress of constraints on their beloved outdoor recreation pastimes. An interesting study regarding coping with discrimination and social support (Ruggerio, Taylor, & Lydon, 1997) suggested that individuals from disadvantaged groups will minimize discrimination

when they feel that social support is not present. When social support is present, individuals were more likely to claim that discrimination was involved in the scenario. This finding is interesting in light of my study. It is possible that the informants in my study who did not always feel social support attributed some circumstances to things other than discrimination. Had more social support been available, they may have mentioned discrimination more frequently. This literature on coping may provide added insight into the social psychological processes that occur as African American outdoor enthusiasts encounter and negotiate constraints.

### Implications

The implications of this research are far reaching. The first implication is that negotiation impacts a community of people beyond the individual. As noted earlier, most informants sought to translate their personal experiences in the outdoors to other African Americans and people of color. People who are serious about a leisure activity and who have had to actively negotiate specific constraints (such as the racially related constraints) are potentially powerful change agents. It may be that people who have had a relatively clear path to mastery of a skill or success in a career are *not* the most ardent evangelists of social world activity. Instead, principal spokesmen and women may be individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary resilience and perseverance. Many informants in this study became de facto ambassadors, both to the White community and to the Black community. Nearly all informants saw themselves as groundbreakers or ambassadors. They had a strong sense that they were highly visible in the outdoors and

they were compelled to embrace, for better or worse, their roles as ambassadors.

Informants felt positive about this facet of their involvement and being able to spread the knowledge that yes, in fact, Black people do ski (and hike and climb and camp and care about nature).

Stebbins (1982) noted that a key characteristic of serious leisure is that people persevere despite adversity. Not only do African American outdoor enthusiasts encounter constraints that others never have to face, they have the added burden of serving as role models or ambassadors to other people of color. Little to no research on serious leisure has examined the role that participants racial' identity has on perseverance and role in recruitment of other participants. Findings from this study support Raisbourough's (1999) contention that serious leisure is political. While not overt, there is a form of political resistance involved in African American's involvement in outdoor activities. When Black outdoor enthusiasts have both White and Black friends and strangers questioning their participation, continued involvement seems to be laden with a resistance to these outside pressures. For some informants, participation was a way to define their own identity apart from their race. It provided them a way to engage in activities that break down racial stereotypes. Future research is needed to understand how participation in serious leisure helps people contest and make claims about individual and group identities.

Other key dimensions of the serious leisure framework that seemed to be affected by the informants' racial identity were the ability to sustain a career and operate within the unique ethos of an activity. In America today, the probability is low indeed for an

average African American to devote time and energy into a pastime (or vocation) in which they are knowingly in the minority. The people in my study were extraordinary in that they did just that. The difficulty of sustaining this type of career for most African Americans is overwhelming. Only through the right combination of personal traits and experiences (the negotiation schema) were Black outdoor enthusiasts able to sustain an active career in their chosen outdoor pursuits. White people who are serious outdoor participants rarely ever have to content with these concerns. In addition, interactions in the unique social worlds that revolve around certain activities are strained at times due to the racial differences that affect all of society. At times these social worlds can act as safe havens, where an African American person's interest in the activity can protect them from the common racial divisions. At other times, the divisions can be multiplied when African Americans delve into social worlds that are predominantly White and the Black person's participation is seen with hostility. Again, this problem, hypothetically, would not affect a White person entering a White social world.

With this in mind, the connection between constraints and serious leisure also deserves more attention. That serious leisure participants in general go through hardships and must persevere is clear from previous studies. However, the particular ways in which participants persevere, and how they are prepared or ready to persevere, has received scant attention. My study begins to highlight some of the ways people are able to successfully negotiate constraints (or persevere). It could be that studies of other minority groups, women, and other special populations will yield insights into negotiation schema that are often needed to negotiate constraints..

Findings from this study help connect research on both leisure constraints and serious leisure. Negotiating constraints for the Black people in this study was part of a schema of experiences that was integral to their identity as African Americans and as serious outdoor participants. On one level, African Americans recognized they were outsiders and had to prove to other Black people and outdoor recreation participants that they belonged. On another level, developing the persona of a serious participant in outdoor recreation, or any leisure pursuit, entails actively overcoming constraints. Future research on serious leisure should focus on unique constraints that people of color and other marginalized groups encounter as they develop careers in their pursuits.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

By gaining an understanding of the experiences of African American outdoor enthusiasts we glean insight into the factors that both constrain and facilitate participation in outdoor recreation in general among African Americans. Our understanding of constraints and the nature of serious leisure participation is enhanced significantly by the qualitative study of African American outdoor enthusiasts. Also, by adding an understanding of systemic racism to the discourse on the minority participation in outdoor recreation, we are in a better position to refocus research towards a more structural understanding, leading to action by policymakers and recreation programmers. This series of studies was designed to gain much needed understanding of a phenomenon that has not received much qualitatively oriented research. The results further our understanding of racial phenomena as it relates to leisure.

The review of systemic racism (Feagin, 2006) in Chapter II provided the foundation for this series of studies. The examination of systemic racism in light of outdoor recreation participation among African Americans may help guide future examinations of the relationship among African Americans, their history, outdoor recreation and wild lands. A deep, macro level understanding of the history of race and racism in this country must be integrated into future studies. The issue of race in the United States is a profound dilemma in many ways. It is naïve to believe that outdoor

recreation participation could somehow not be affected by the long and dark history of race in America.

To understand the changing nature of the relationship between race and nature through the years I examined autobiographical accounts from three African Americans from three major eras of racial history in America: the slavery era, the Jim Crow era, and the contemporary era. Insights gleaned from this exercise were useful in that they showed a slow, but steady progression in Black people's relationships with the land. From Frederick Douglass, who by and large had fearful notions of the woods; to W.E.B. DuBois who deftly understood the value and beauty of nature, but nonetheless had a hard time experiencing it due to the oppressive Jim Crow segregation laws of the time; to Eddy Harris, who managed to experience the wonders of nature on the Mississippi River while reflecting on the racial dramas that have played out in this country; taken together, the narratives illustrate the complex interaction between race and nature across the centuries.

In seeking to comprehend issues of constraints, negotiation, and serious leisure, I gathered a group of African American outdoor enthusiasts and interviewed them in-depth to reveal the insight they have gained through their own experiences. I was rewarded with a complex and groundbreaking look at what it means to be an African American outdoor enthusiast. I was able to understand what specific racially related constraints informants encountered as they pursued their respective avocations and vocations. These constraints add to our understanding of both *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* constraints. An important contribution is the idea that people who are

associated with certain social groups (African Americans in this case) are also subject to certain social constraints specific to that group, such as the racially related constraints my informants encountered.. The ways in which these constraints were negotiated and how that negotiation schema fits into the persona of being an outdoor enthusiast adds to our understanding of serious leisure. What has been lacking from the serious leisure literature is a knowledge of how social variables like race, age, gender, and income play into the pursuit. It is evident from my studies that race plays an important role in the outdoor pursuits of my informants. Minorities continually encounter situations that cause them to remember their racial status and sometimes question the appropriateness of their pursuit. This burden may be present not only in situations where race is a factor, but also with gender, age, income, or virtually any other social status that places a participant in a leisure social world outside of his or her typical social world. The negotiation schema that I outline also adds to our understanding of how people who encounter constraints are able to negotiate them and continue participation. My findings reinforce previously discussed propositions and typologies (i.e. Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001) and build upon their findings bringing critical understanding to the research on constraints negotiation.

In conclusion, the four studies in this collection represent a rethinking and deepening of our knowledge of African American participation in the outdoors. This area of research will become increasingly important in the coming years. My studies offer guidance to the future of this body of research, both from the foundational

framework of systemic racism, to the practical implications of constraints negotiation for African Americans.

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APPENIDIX A  
CONSENT FORM

**CONSENT FORM**  
**The experiences of African American outdoor enthusiasts**

You have been asked to participate in a research study examining the experiences of African Americans in outdoor adventure recreation. You were selected to be a possible participant because you fit the study criteria. A total of 25-35 people have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of minorities who participate in outdoor adventure recreation activities in an intense way. The study is part of a dissertation for Drew Cavin (see contact information below).

If you agree to be in this study you will be asked to give up to 3 audio taped interviews about your experiences in outdoor recreation. If you do not want to be audio recorded you are still welcome to participate. The interviews will take approximately 1 hour. There are minimal risks associated with this study, but you could possibly feel uncomfortable answering some questions. The only benefit may be that you enjoy sharing your experiences and that it could feel good to talk about this subject.

This study is confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report on the findings. A pseudonym (fake name) will replace your name in any reports, published or otherwise, as will any locations that are discussed. Audio recordings and interview notes will be stored securely and only Drew Cavin will have access to the records. The recordings will be disposed of 6 months after the completion of the project. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future of current relations with Texas A&M University. If you decide not to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without your relations to the University being affected. You can contact Drew Cavin (979-845-5411, drewcavin@tamu.edu) or David Scott (979-845-0446, dscott@tamu.edu) with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Angelina M. Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research at (979)458-4067, arianes@vprmail.tamu.edu.

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for you records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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