

WPA-Inspired Artwork's Relationship to Minority Recreation Preference in the American National Park System

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Abstract

A well-established field of inquiry has exposed an anomalous difference in whites' and nonwhites' visitation of National Parks; 'below' these statistics are also sweeping differences between how whites and nonwhites participate in recreational activities offered there. Various hypotheses propose causal mechanisms to explain why, for example, African Americans participate in markedly less backcountry recreation than White Americans. These mechanisms are divided into four categories; this study will focus primarily on a gap in one, namely Subcultural theory. This theory investigates where preferences for recreational activities are perpetuated? My intention is to investigate a pivotal style of National Park Service promotional materials, a necessary step in undergoing efforts to diversify utilization of American parks. If the National Park Service is to succeed effectively in this broader mission, it is crucial to understand how Subcultural variation in recreation preference is engrained in the materials in which it is perpetuated. An integral portion of this project will be the qualitative analysis of pieces of promotional artwork: those created by either the Works Progress Administration (WPA) through the 1930s, or by a contemporary storefront headed by ex-National Park Ranger Doug Leen. If left unexamined, this style may be contributing to the nebulous phenomenon of "Boundary Maintenance," a mechanism that differentiates groups from one another – ingroup from outgroup – and continue to marginalize people of color in spaces otherwise meant for relaxation and rejuvenation.

Keywords: Racial & Ethnic Politics, Land Management, Recreation, Art History, Qualitative Analysis

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Introduction

The statistical discrepancies between ethnic groups' utilization of Public Lands are well-established facts in land management literature. Various hypotheses propose causal mechanisms to explain why, for example, African Americans participate in markedly less backcountry recreation than White Americans. The existing literature is divided into four categories: The Subcultural, Discrimination, Assimilation, and Marginality hypotheses. This study will focus primarily on a gap in Subcultural theory – being from where are preferences for recreational activities perpetuated? An understudied realm of Public Lands literature, investigating National Park Service promotional materials is a necessary step in undergoing efforts to diversify utilization of American parks. If the National Park Service is to succeed effectively in this broader mission, it is crucial to understand how Subcultural variation in recreation preference is engrained in the materials in which it is perpetuated.

The topic of recreation preference exists 'below' park visitation trends. There already exists an anomalous difference in whites' and nonwhites' visitation of National Parks (Scott & Lee 2018); within these statistics are also sweeping differences between how whites and nonwhites participate in recreational activities offered there. It is on this level that the aforementioned literature gap exists, around where those groups' participatory preferences are manifest. There is no reason to believe that African Americans are 'predestined,' in any Calvinist sense, to participate less in backcountry recreation within National Parks (Floyd 1999). Therefore, variations such as these must come from external sources that form conceptions of cultural identity and belonging. An integral portion of this project will be the qualitative analysis of pieces of promotional artwork: those created by either the Works Progress Administration (WPA) through the 1930s, or by a contemporary storefront headed by ex-Grand Teton National Park Ranger Doug Leen. Leen originally rediscovered many of the WPA prints and has led an unmistakable revitalization of the entire art style, which has infected an uncountable number of other independent

artists, whose works are outside the scope of this study. A quick glance between original WPA prints and his modern reimagining shows Leen's diligent adherence to their original style – one that overtly validates the authority of the NPS by establishing a unified graphic language that centers around a pristine landscape's grandeur and communicates the park's recreational opportunities (*Ranger Doug's Enterprises* n.d.).

Analysis of this pivotal artistic style will be done through the creation of a rubric assessing depictions of recreation activities, the demographics depicted as participating in them, the presence of human-made structures, and what explicit textual information is included in their frames. The intention of this rubric is to assess the image of the NPS land curated by Leen's catalog and to analyze what dominant themes emerge from them, as well as what 'acceptable' modes of recreation are articulated by the prints. Since the study's goal is to determine how these artworks might enshrine recreation preference, limiting their sources to official gift shops or NPS websites is an arbitrary choice which would overlook informal means of proliferation that equally affect public conscience. By coding each work, I hope to see whether the WPA style has changed between its original and contemporary iterations and to determine its relationship with minority groups' recreation preferences captured in national level survey data.

My intervening variable, being this perception of cultural belonging, has been captured in surveys conducted at different kinds of NPS units, each of which offer *why* respondents do or do not participate in different types of recreational activities. According a 2003 study of ethnic and racial visitation trends in the NPS, only 13% of African Americans, 27% of Hispanics, and 29% of Asians, and 36% of White non-Hispanics visited NPS units in the last two years (Solop et. al. 04). Upon 'zooming into' these statistics, what these visitors actually participate in diverges significantly. The NPS' 2018 Comprehensive Survey of the American Public reveals that 34% of African American respondents choose not to visit more often because

“[they] don’t share the same interests as people who visit National Parks;” 21% of Hispanic respondents don’t because “National Parks are unpleasant places for me to be” (12). Myron Floyd expands on these sentiments by concluding that upon visitation, African Americans are significantly less likely to participate in wildland recreation [such as backpacking, hiking, etc.] while Whites are most likely to do so (1999, 11). Hispanics and African Americans both place considerably more emphasis on utilizing developed facilities with amenities, and generally conduct outdoor activities in larger groups than Whites (Floyd 1999, 16). Explicit segregation policies in National Parks, their centrality in White national identity, histories of racist prohibition to State Parks, and intentionally designing parks with Whites’ preferences in mind have combined over time to reinforce people of color’s – especially African Americans’ – perceptions of “these spaces as not for them” (Krymkowski et. al. 2014, 40). Even replacing Floyd’s 1999 data with Krymkowski et al.’s 2014 data shows that African Americans in particular are strongly averse to nature and solitude-based forms of outdoor recreation (39). Across four decades of work, striking dissimilarity in recreation preference between Whites and African Americans have persisted, while researchers have seen Hispanic and Asian American preference converge somewhat (Floyd 1999, 11). There is little reason to assume that current recreation preference diverges significantly from information captured in national-level and local-level over the past few decades of data recorded by these authors’ findings.

I feel that an integral part of the National Park Service’s mission in diversifying their visitorship and constituency must simultaneously include reaching a better understanding of how harmful stereotypes are subtly enshrined or validated through their inclusion or exclusion in pieces of art. These conceptions appear to unwittingly perpetuate exclusionary attitudes and invalidate how minority communities choose to utilize Public Lands. The imagery evoked by this artwork is inherently positioned to reach large audiences, meaning it can efficiently confer racist notions that continue

to separate groups' feelings about their 'place' in the Nation and its National Parks. It is for these reasons that I have conducted the first comprehensive analysis of one of the NPS's most pivotal art styles – one that continues to grow constantly more popular. If left unexamined, this style may be contributing to the nebulous phenomenon of “Boundary Maintenance,” a mechanism that differentiates groups from one another – ingroup from outgroup – and continue to marginalize people of color in spaces meant for relaxation and rejuvenation (Scott & Jerry Lee 2018, 76).

Research Question

What is the relationship between minority groups' recreational preferences and artistic materials created to promote the National Park Service?

Literature Review

Amongst the literature on outdoor recreation, there has emerged four dominant avenues for theoretical analysis. I believe it important to detail them, since the vocabulary will be integral to my study and its literature review. Their brief tenants are as follows, summarized by Myron Floyd (1999).

- *Marginality Hypothesis* assesses recreation preference against socioeconomic realities experienced by social groups, proposing that financial and structurally discriminatory barriers prohibit groups' participation in certain forms of recreation.
- *Assimilation Theory* posits that over time, preferences will converge along those of the dominant social group through their acceptance in intergroup settings.
- *The Discrimination Hypothesis* focuses its analyses on crystallized instances of racial or ethnic discrimination and its influence on individuals' choice to participate in recreation.
- *The Subcultural Hypothesis* proposes that preferences emerge from subtle, multifaceted value systems that are unique to their

group, independent of external socioeconomic affects or governed exclusively by overt discrimination practices, policies, or attitudes.

In the section that follows, I will be providing insights into works that exemplify each of these perspectives, and simultaneously map out a brief overview of research assessing recreation preferences. This is far from a comprehensive list of related literature.

Marginality Hypothesis

Xiao, X. et. al. approach access issues to National Parks from a statistical background and attempt to determine which structural barriers may limit participation in wildland recreation in their 2018 “The Impact of Spatial Accessibility and Perceived Barriers on Visitation to the US National Park System.” This research perspective is reminiscent of more traditional approaches to answering the question of ethnic preference variation, where structural issues are proposed to affect its patterns. The authors assume that if large scale barriers limit access to NPS lands, these barriers are the largest creators of disparities in utilization. The study’s maps are broken up by demographic groups to depict their unique geographic relationships with National Parks, concluding that economic and educational barriers affected Whites more than Hispanics or African Americans (2018, 212). Their findings also showed that Whites have the highest degrees of proximity to nature based NPS sites (2018, 211). The authors determine that their models do little to explain ethnic variation in park visitation compared to the surveys’ cultural-or-discrimination-based reasons, meaning that spatial proximity affects visitation relatively little (2018, 213). While their approach to structurally contingent ethnic variation yields negative correlations between minorities, their assessment of structural barriers to visitation is important to empower other hypotheses with. Troublingly, prior research in the Subcultural wheelhouse has controlled survey results

for differences in socioeconomic environments and been left theoretically ‘wanting.’

Ramsay, G. et. al. (2017) leave the United States’ park dynamics, assessing the variables which affect visitation to Rouge Urban National Park [RUNP] in Toronto, Canada. Counter to America’s wildland-focused NPS touchstones, urban National Parks are designed specifically to combat urbanization’s negative effects on outdoor recreation. The study’s focus centers around Millennials’ utilization of these urban spaces and exposes their reasons for doing so – being personal expression, novel experiences, and experiencing local culture (2017, 03). A sample of 360 Toronto Residents indicated that structural barriers to visitation limited their utilization of RUNP, such as public transport and personal car ownership concerns (2017, 06). While awareness issues partly influence Millennial visitation to RUNP, the authors determine that economic issues affecting their ability to travel affect their visitation to urban parks most of all (2017, 12). These large-scale transportation barriers have had detrimental effects on the park’s visitation, but still do not explain why respondents have prioritized other, more distant Canadian National Parks over RUNP despite its relative spatial proximity and urban niche.

Discrimination Hypothesis

Scott and Jerry Lee’s 2018 article “People of Color and their Constraints to National Park Visitation” examines multiple theoretical perspectives on people of color utilizing Public Lands and devotes considerable time detailing discriminatory incidents, which continue to affect all facets of park visitorship for minority groups. The authors cite the fact that the NPS’s Visitor Services Project has determined that Hispanics and Asian Americans comprise only 5% of total visitors each year, while African Americans comprise only 2% (2018, 73). This dramatic discrepancy is complicated by the fact that discriminatory histories in these parks has left lasting effects on minority’s personal willingness to engage with NPS units. They spend time assessing the applicability of sociological frames but focus on overt discrimination

and “White racial frames” in the latter half of the article. A link is made between the Discrimination and the Subcultural hypothesis: beliefs about Public Lands recreation emerges first from discriminatory and exclusionary events (2018, 76). This chronology has since informed groups’ perceptions about these spaces. To understand these conceptions, one must likewise understand crystalized events of discrimination which affect individuals’ personal choices. Simply put, people of color continue to report that they routinely encounter overt discrimination, which has affected their willingness to visit them (2018, 77). Their outline of White racial frames concludes that a subversive collection of stereotypes, images, etc... determine acceptable modes of recreation and excludes alternative modes (2018, 77). This manifests as outward scrutiny of people of colors’ preferred modes of recreation by discriminatory attitudes as well as subtle vindications of White preference (2018, 78). Discrimination Hypothesis perspectives struggle to explain why the perceptions of these landscapes can have intergenerational affect, however. It moreover fails to explain how these trends were engrained and how they inform individuals’ conception of Public Lands. These discriminatory actions, often violent, do occur often, but have also not caused a convergence of preferences across groups to align with those of the oppressor and emerge across ages in complicated ways.

Assimilation Theory

As foreshadowed in the contemporary statistics discussed in my *Introduction* section, Assimilation Theory holds some degree of truth for Hispanic Americans in Public Lands. Authors Sandra Shaull & James Gramman have conducted surveys which evince the importance of linguistic acculturation among Hispanics and its role on preference convergence; they find that their feelings of importance for nature-based recreation increase as their acculturation into White-dominant society increases, also emphasizing the importance ascribed to modes of family-based recreation (1998, 59). The authors control these observations by ensuring that comparisons are made across similar

socioeconomic classes, excluding possible Marginality effects that would affect the Hispanic population. These findings may imply that Hispanics are seen as acceptable groups to be ‘allowed into the fold’ of White modes of recreation, marginalized less than African Americans in these settings. The Hispanic preference anomaly is corroborated by findings in Floyd’s (1999) national level data.

Subcultural Perspectives

Myron Floyd conducts a comprehensive review of the existing theoretical frameworks which address ethnic and racial disparities in National Park utilization in his 1999 “Race, Ethnicity and Use of the National Park System. After first detailing the four frameworks [The Marginality Hypothesis, The Subcultural Hypothesis, Assimilation Theory, and The Discrimination Hypothesis], Floyd applies their assumptions to prior studies conducted at multiple spatial levels, attempting to gain a broader, national understanding of the disparity. Floyd’s *Table 1* is an incredibly helpful reference point, a summary of the four frameworks’ assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses (1999, 04). Floyd determines in his work that NPS units evinced similar disparities to National and Regional levels and most notably, largely discredit the Assimilation theory’s assumptions of preference convergence towards those of Whites – save for Hispanic groups (1999, 14). His research conclusions suggest that the Subcultural Hypothesis is the most salient theoretical approach to explain racial and ethnic usage disparities at the National, Regional, and NPS unit levels.

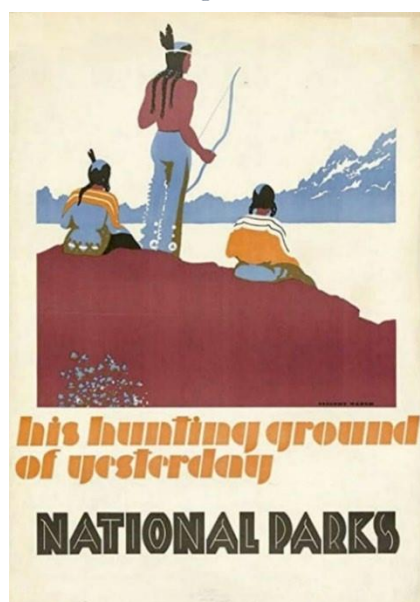
By presenting the cultural norms which influenced WPA artwork created through the Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, Curtis Hendrickson’s 2020 article “WPA National Park Posters: Preserving a Memory of Innocent Colonialism” becomes a scathing critique of federal promotional material and addresses its social fallout. Hendrickson proposes that Whites cultivate their sense of American identity, in part, through the curation of cultural artifacts such as these WPA (and WPA-inspired) prints (2020, 130). The article continues by

assessing two seminal pieces of artwork: the print for Yosemite NP created by the WPA and Doug Leen's contemporary piece created for Yosemite's Mariposa Sequoia Grove. Hendrickson claims both depict an artificially innocent view of the landscape and federal government, deemphasizing their role in a history of violent discriminatory action within Public Lands against minorities and Native Americans (2020, 131).

Ultimately, Hendrickson concludes that these artworks are pivotal to American national identity and echoes Whites' conceptions of nature, subtly distancing those who do not conform to its perceptions (2020, 146). This article provides an invaluable historical account of the creation of a set of these promotional materials as well as their social fallout on the civilian population. These posters have certainly still voiced overtly racist messages; *Figure 1* shows one of the most egregious WPA-era print available on Leen's storefront. By doing a deep-dive into Yosemite's WPA-inspired prints, Hendrickson speaks to how exclusionary perspectives can emerge in materials superficially unrelated to socioeconomic realities, overall, quite different from explicitly racist actions or language.

Johnson and Bowker's 2004 "African American Wildland Memories" approaches the topic of cultural memory itself, specifically the collective memories of African Americans regarding wildland areas. The authors propose that the experience of historical events amongst a group contributes to the very formation of their ethnic identity (Johnson and Bowker 2004, 59). Their causal mechanism

Figure 1



echoes my own: being that differing historical experiences across racial and ethnic groups can cultivate a sense of belonging, explaining current utilization disparities between the groups. While Whites may perceive backcountry wildlands as sanctified, spiritual respites, the authors argue that African Americans may not view it as such. Whites' attachment to these areas creates an integral facet of their national identity, though for marginalized peoples, they epitomize "sick places" which evoke collective memories of "toil, torture, and death" (Johnson and Bowker 2004, 60). The inheritance of these ideas through successive generations informs current ethnic and racial perspective on wildlands, and in turn, their interrelated recreation preferences. African Americans were intentionally denied access to the mythos of 'frontier discovery' which has shaped much of Whites' perceptions of wildlands. Because of this history, and their concentration to urban centers, African Americans' relationship with 'nature' is often opposite that of White Americans on the whole (Johnson and Bowker 2004, 75).

Summary of Literature Review

The limited applicability of Marginality, Assimilation, and Discrimination perspectives when faced with contemporary survey research means that something deeper moderates groups' perceptions of belonging in wildland settings. African American respondents' overall incompatibility with the first three perspectives' causal mechanisms throws a wrench into their power to explain this group's aversion to nature-based activities. Other minority groups nevertheless evince divergent preferences to Whites, just to varying degrees that are likely contingent on the malleable perception of their 'Whiteness' in the ingroup's eyes. None of the existing explanatory mechanisms except Subcultural Theory have ample room to assess art's role in curating public images of acceptable recreation modes, nor explain art's ability to inflect past attitudes of explicit exclusion through subtle visual language. The actualization of Subcultural preference variation is especially important due to its reflection of often-subconscious attitudes and its multifaceted origins in the history of the formation of

a group's identity. Subcultural Theory does well to integrate the effects of many explicit phenomena such as discriminatory encounters, cultural identity, and economic limits, melding them into kaleidoscopic feedback loops which culminate in the reality of preference divergences that we can measure today.

Theory

While Leen's work is not officially owned by the NPS, his work revitalizing the WPA's style has now dominated the public's collective imagination of what Public Lands should look like, positioning its style as a 'face' of the park system itself. I would ultimately like to image how such artworks inform, as well as cyclically reinforce, these groups' perceptions of cultural belonging in wildland spaces. Because Subcultural explanations for recreation preference orbit around culturally enshrined beliefs (conscious and subconscious), I have structured my research around the occurrence of those indicators in WPA-inspired promotional artwork.

One's willingness to participate in certain modes of outdoor recreation hinges around not only their safety, but whether an individual feels it is 'their place' to embark on various activities. Discriminatory attitudes dictate both the safety and belonging 'angles' of recreation choice but have slowly become relegated to more subtle outlets – frequently deemed 'new' modes of racism (Sniderman et al. 1991). Discrimination frequently emerges in materials which depict activities or demographics that signal to viewers' their own acceptability in the landscape being shown. For example, if a park's prints and postcards predominantly show visitors hauling RVs and expensive gear, people hailing from lower-income communities may feel as though they do not belong in such a space. If the outward facing promotion of backpacking trips appears only to depict white hikers, it would be difficult for African or Hispanic Americans to picture themselves navigating those trails. If the artwork and informational text communicate different messages about acceptable modes of recreation in their landscapes, it may result in mixed messaging over

what the NPS unit is ‘for’ – relaxing with family in developed areas or escaping from society into remote trail networks. To maintain a consistent or unbiased image of NPS unit recreation, this promotional artwork would have to communicate diverse modes of recreation in both its artistic compositions *and* in its informational text. This diverse collection of recreational activities would have to appeal to the preferences of minority groups and Whites. Their existence as pieces of art infers a certain primacy to the compositions each piece boasts, it being sufficient to say that most individuals process the imagery before any supplementary text which borders it. Therefore, trends which emerge from the prints’ artistic compositions will be treated with considerably more weight than that from informational text.

Information for park recreation exists in many forms like pamphlets, websites, as well as the text bordering WPA-inspired art. Park information’s more nuanced form comes in these prints’ wordless compositions, containing subjective messages which “contribute better than other forms of inquiry to the understanding of such complex phenomena as ourselves, our emotions, our relations to each other and our place in the world” (Young 2001, 97). Subtly racist imagery which excludes the practices of the out-group still has the same effect of blatant discrimination; the result is “still out-group rejection” (Abraham 1998, 12). But these artistic documents did not emerge passively from a social landscape which, in the 1930s, ‘happen’ to be racialized. As Hendrickson observes, “art is constructed in a political battlefield, where the victors are able to control a narrative through popular forms of artistic expression” and henceforth engrain their political beliefs into the very visual language of culturally-formative media (2020, 130). ‘First Impression’ perspectives in psychology dictate that individuals are inclined to make judgements about a subject based upon their initial observations and feelings (Smith & Mackie, 2007). WPA-inspired pieces’ reliance on minimalistic and low-polygon designs considerably decreases their visual complexity and simultaneously ‘distills’ their frames into their simplest elements, ripe for immediate consumption by the viewer. A large

majority of original WPA-era prints are especially strict in style, positioning their landscapes as innocent and devoid of human presence (Hendrickson 2020, 134). Each prints' real estate is unchangeably dominated by their artistic compositions, text appearing more as an after-thought than focus, and only secondary to the messages that their sterilized and simplified artistic subjects communicate. This is especially the case in the sizeable number of prints which entirely lack informational text (apart from federal labels and references to the naturalist service); *Figure 2* shows how their visual language is intended to be the viewers' first, and according to psychological research, most lasting impressions (Tetlock 1983).

Figure 2



It is my belief that such materials can subtly perpetuate discriminatory beliefs, even if created by well-intentioned individuals. The specific style of WPA-inspired National Park art emerged from a segregated political landscape and holds vestiges of those exclusionary views of racial belonging. Unless we more carefully examine how these materials depict Public Lands [and if they reinforce contemporary recreational preference], the NPS and Leen are bound to unwittingly portray their lands as exclusionary to the out-group. My hypothesis runs as follows:

Differences in park promotional materials yield differing senses of belonging between minority groups, which reinforces discrepancies in racial and ethnic recreation preferences.

For the purposes of this study, the independent variable is *Stereotyped depictions in artwork*, the intervening variable is a group's *Subcultural perception of belonging*, and the dependent variable is the *Recreational preferences of minorities*.

Methodology

Study Areas

A national-scale analysis of all 56 WPA-era and WPA-inspired prints (created by the Federal government and Leen) will serve as the first comprehensive analysis of this popular body of WPA-inspired Public Lands artwork. A certain reverential attitude has emerged around the character of Leen, being called “The Ranger of the Lost Art,” in his circles (Berger 2020). The original WPA-era prints emerged properly from the WPA’s Federal Arts Project, a governmental program meant to enfranchise artists through the Great Depression (Bentley 2018). Leen’s revitalizations are now sold in most park stores, and their proceeds are mostly donated to the park they depict – meaning that

even if not directly sanctioned, his company holds an undeniably intimate relationship with the NPS's image (Berger 2020).

My role as a researcher emerges as one who's own artistic pursuit, landscape photography, has been deeply influenced by the WPA-inspired style prints recovered and penned by Leen. My own childhood painted such imagery as innocuous under the guise 'universalized' national sentiment, its designs have long entranced me and reflect much of my own recreation preference emerging in my young adulthood. Its effect on my artwork presents an important conflict with my own schooling as a political science student, prompting this project's critical evaluation of the environment it emerged from, as well as the harmful, lingering political dynamics it may validate in our present.

Data Sources and Collection

Supplementary survey data, which records visitor's participation in recreational activities at various NPS units, will inform the art's relationship with actual recreation preference, detailed before in my *Introduction* section. I cannot conduct surveys with racial or ethnic minorities at any single study location, so this study extrapolated current trends from their national-level and local-level data. NPS data from their Visitor Studies can inform a park's specific visitation data, broken down by racial and ethnic variables, but they do not encapsulate the deeper phenomena of recreation preference.

My catalog of WPA-inspired artwork originates from Doug Leen's storefront and is supplemented by the Library of Congress' (LOC) records of original WPA print scans. This is not an entire collection of either original WPA-era artwork nor all contemporary iterations on its so-popularized style. Coding began by my capturing of screenshots from each entry on his webpage, then marked as either "WPA" or "Contemporary" to determine the time period of creation for each entry. This collection of image files was combined into a single document then sorted chronologically by its period of origin. If there were multiple versions of a design, I only recorded its original; any

WPA-era pieces which were available on the LOC's website replaced their version on Leen's store. Only minor color choices or logo insertions were made during the reproduction process and comprised all occasional changes between versions – no significant compositional edits occurred between the historical LOC or Leen sources.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative codes were developed to reflect existing observations from existing literature on recreation preference. Of particular concern is their general division between artistic depictions and textual elements that exist on each piece. These two categories were conceptualized with the aim to assess whether there were discrepancies between *activities/ideals* being illustrated and those *activities/ideals* being typed on top of the artwork. *Figure 3* lists the definitions and code words for each as well as whether each applies to textual information, artistic depiction, or both. The groups 'I' and 'R' refer to "Information" and "Recreation" respectively, the former being used to code textual information, the latter coding depicted modes of recreation that may appear in the art of a piece. Each was assigned a specific color so that I was able to easily code each image with Adobe Acrobat's highlighter tool. The only outstanding point on code definition exists in "Specific Demographic," which marginally exists as a dummy variable. However, while coding, I noted my subjective perception of each individual's demographic, based on their dress and skin color. My notes on this subject, which will be briefly discussed in my *Discussion* section, does not claim to be empirically conclusive – my subjective perception of their demographics nevertheless mirrors how other viewers may intake and process this imagery. Codes were not allowed to repeat in the same individual piece, and therefore only recorded the occurrence of its subject once even if it were mentioned multiple times in a print. Finally, their tallies were recorded in separate spreadsheets that separated contemporary and WPA prints, and then added together in a final one which assessed their occurrences across the entire history of the WPA-inspired art style.

Figure 3

Code	Definition
<i>Man-Made Structure</i>	Design includes at least 1 man-made structure, either roads or buildings. Artistic.
<i>Pristine Myth</i>	No sign of human affect in frame, lack of figures, structures. Artistic.
<i>Specific Demographic</i>	Dummy variable that indicates the artwork depicts a specific demographic - inferred from skin color, stereotypical clothing, etc... Artistic.
<i>Wildlife</i>	Shows any kind of wildlife within frame. Artistic.
<i>Group - R</i>	Depicts groups of 3 or more people participating in an activity together. Artistic.
<i>Hiking - R</i>	Depicts people hiking through landscape. Artistic.
<i>Driving - R</i>	Depicts/implies participation in car-based activities. Artistic.
<i>Indigenous</i>	Depicts/Describes indigenous peoples or sites. Can be textual and artistic.
<i>Lodging</i>	Poster recommends/depicts stays at developed housing. Can be textual and artistic.
<i>Camping</i>	Poster recommends/depicts stays at camping sites. Can be textual and artistic.
<i>Community Recreation - I</i>	Information/art recommends activities with groups at developed sites, such as participation in guided tours [including car tours] or lectures at visitor centers. Textual.
<i>Wildland Recreation - I</i>	Information/art recommends generally-soloed activities in undeveloped environments, such as backcountry excursions, hiking, backpacking. Textual.
<i>Grandeur - I</i>	Information/art notes specific statistics or flowery allures of areas within park boundaries for sightseeing purposes. Textual.

Findings

This section will proceed by addressing coding results chronologically – being first those from original WPA prints from the 1930’s, followed

by contemporary ones, and finally, reporting the combined trends of both time periods. Percentages of occurrence have been rounded to one-tenths of values, and exact code words have been italicized in this section. The reports will move from codes referring to textual information to those that reference both artistic composition and text, to finally those that only refer to artistic composition.

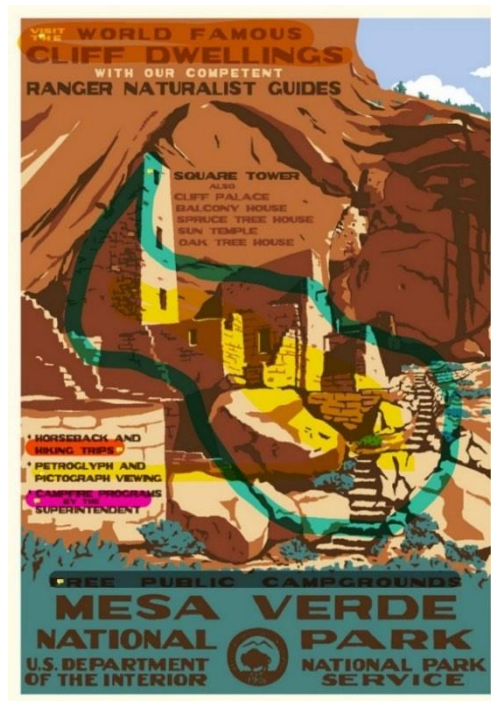
WPA era: The prevalence of informational text that highlights *Community* or *Wildland Recreation* are most consistent between original WPA prints, emerging in 63.2%, and 68.4% of pieces, respectively. 5.3% of prints used flavorful text to communicate the *Grandeur* of their sites. The presence of *Camping*, *Lodging* opportunities, and *Wildlife* were only communicated in 5.3% of artworks. *Specific Demographics* seem to be depicted in 21.1% of them, and 15.8% of artworks feature *Indigenous* sites, individuals, or informational text. Another prevailing trend is that of the *Pristine Myth* – 57.8% of pieces feature compositions that imply no human interaction or presence on the landscape. A dominant feature of these original prints is their strict visual style having fewer overall subjects and informational text. None of the WPA originals depict *Group* activities, *Hiking*, or *Driving* in their frames. *Man-Made Structures* were only present in 15.8% of compositions.

Contemporary era: The informational text of Leen's Contemporary WPA-Inspired prints communicated *Community Recreation* opportunities 56.8% of the time, and *Wildland Recreation* opportunities less often at 27%. They frequently focus on the *Grandeur* of their sites more often, referencing it in 73% of pieces. The presence of *Camping* opportunities existed in 8.1% of designs, and *Lodging* in 5.4%. *Specific Demographics* appeared in 21.6% of artworks, and only

.4% of them featured references to *Indigenous* influence. The *Pristine Myth* emerged in 27% of pieces' compositions. These contemporary prints' denser compositions yielded higher occurrences of all codes and began to depict more modes of recreation in their frames. *Group* activities are depicted in 10.8% of prints, *Hiking* in 5.4%, and *Driving* in 8.1%. *Wildlife* was featured in 16.2% of Contemporary pieces. *Man-Made Structures* were present much more often, at 59.5% across this era of artworks. *Figure 4* provides an example of a contemporary piece with codes highlighted on top of it, according to those colors detailed in *Figure 3*.

Combined eras: Between both eras of artwork, *Community Recreation* was mentioned in the informational text 59% of the time, while *Wildland Recreation* featured in it 41.1% of the time. Focus on

Figure 4



Grandeur in informational text rounds out to an even 50% across all designs. References to *Camping* opportunities existed in 7.1% of designs, and *Lodging* in 5.4%. *Specific Demographics* appeared to be represented in 21% of pieces, and 8.9% of all designs feature references to *Indigenous* influence. The *Pristine Myth* emerged in 37.5% of all compositions. *Group* activities are depicted in 7.1% of them, *Hiking* in 3.6%, and *Driving* in 5.4%. *Wildlife* was featured in 12.5% of all pieces. Finally, *Man-Made Structures* were present in the compositions of 44.6% of total designs.

Analysis

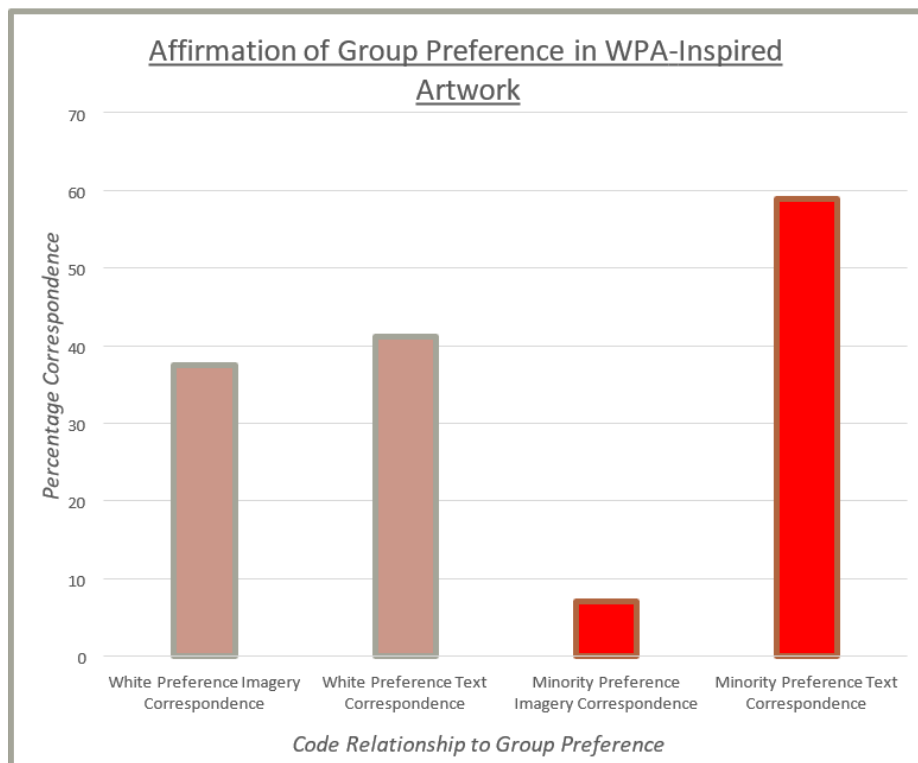
A remarkable discrepancy between depictions of stereotypically White and stereotypically minority-preferred recreational activities exists across both eras of WPA-inspired artworks. This is seen in a fundamental disconnect between what the designs depict and what their text communicates to the viewer. The preference of minority groups for developed sites with amenities for group recreation is evinced in current trends and is epitomized namely by my codes *Group* – R [for artistic compositions] and *Community Recreation* [for textual information]. The preference of Whites towards backcountry recreation and smaller group sizes is manifest best by my codes *Pristine Myth* [for artistic compositions] and *Wildland Recreation* [for textual information]. Results from my coding shows a disconnect between textual information and artistic composition along the lineament of minority vs. White-dominant recreation preference. The textual information of 41.1% of prints correspond with White preference, and the compositions of 37.5% of prints correspond with White preference. On the other hand, the textual information of 58.0% of prints correspond with minority preference, and a mere 7.1% of compositions correspond with minority preference. It is doubly important to remember that these preference trends are especially salient for African American park visitors, whose survey data reveals an overwhelming preference for the aforementioned types of activities. The traditional recreational preferences of whites are affirmed at

almost the same rate between both the textual information and artistic compositions of WPA inspired prints, while the recreational preferences of minorities are almost completely relegated to inclusion in the designs' peripheral text boxes. *Figure 5* graphs out this alarming discrepancy and visualizes the disconnect between visual imagery and transactional ways to communicate recreation acceptability on Public Lands. Given the psychological primacy of visuals over bordering text, the critically low measure of minority preference in the prints' compositions is especially important (Pelowski et al. 2016).

This discrepancy can aid Subcultural theory in addressing the creation and perpetuation of group preference, and identity itself. Such views of causality fall outside the standard conception of 'if-then' statements and instead crystalize as cyclical observations that pose more even more questions, some of which will be remarked upon in my *Conclusion & Limitations*. Artwork emerges from our own social landscapes, and inherently confers some of our values on itself, impressing on its compositions a reflection of deeply-held values and moral beliefs. On an entirely different conscious level exists the textual information, which comes from retrospective thinking that allows one to curate their perceptions in the form of formal writings. In affirming White preferences in its artwork at much higher rates, WPA-inspired artwork subtly reinforces our existing conceptions by, quite literally, excluding alternatives from view, and relegating their possibilities to the periphery in the 'small text.' In doing so, they characterize the forms of interaction that are acceptable and sanctioned for visitors to partake in – and exclude minorities' most often (Hendrickson 2020, 133). The ability for such imagery to dictate preference emerges from their visual impressions, and their ability to, socially, "construct reality" by "engender[ing] subjective experiences which are real in themselves, and which inspire further action, thought and being (Gorichanaz 2018, 02). The prints' correlation to – and emergence from – well documented trends are blatantly apparent. These results may imply that artists, and by extension other members of the American public, have yet to fully reconcile with subtly racist perceptions of minorities'

belonging in wildlands, a mental situation surfacing in these pieces of art. By surfacing from the subconscious, these trends reveal that these documents can “furnish *moral knowledge*,” dictating how individuals and their groups “should act in order to live best” (Gorichanaz 2018, 02). By solely affirming White preferences, these prints’ compositions still imply that minorities do not belong in these spaces according to the subconscious of artists in the 1930s and those in the present, and ultimately contribute to the act of cultural “Boundary Maintenance.”

Figure 5



Conclusion and Limitations

The topic of group identity creation is multifaceted and subversive. It entails different aspects born from a multitude of historical events and political environs. WPA-inspired artwork is a particularly popular, and ever-expanding art style that continues to affect the public conscience around wildlands and recreation within them. Doug Leen's storefront has led a charge to revitalize interest in American Public Lands through his rediscovery of the relicts of the Federal Arts Project. This led to a tide of popularity that has resulted in increasing visitation for NPS units, but the stubborn persistence of age-old patterns of recreational preference remains (NPS 2022). The contemporary prints' creation by multiple artists among Leen's staff inflect *group perceptions* onto their compositions, an observation that requires more research in psychology to fully explain. Nevertheless, it is clear that even Leen's contemporary artwork perpetuates certain exclusionary images of recreation: ones that deemphasize minority preference in their compositions and broadly affirm those traditionally relegated to Whites. It is likely that these images are crafted by well-intentioned individuals who may be unaware of the ability of such depictions to further divide the American public's attitudes towards outdoor recreation, and instead reveals some of the subconscious effects that the country's history of racial exclusion has left on our collective imaginary. My study's conclusions should be complimented by a suite of additional work to flesh out these connections.

Namely, a comprehensive historical examination of original WPA-era artwork drafted for the NPS should be undertaken to more accurately pin what politics they arose from. Such a perspective could relate their art to specific policies and individual beliefs held by NPS officials, such as the work done by Curtis Hendrickson (2020). My own list of WPA-inspired artwork does not encapsulate all pieces influenced by its style that have emerged due to Leen's work and should only be approached as a particularly salient collection of the art style in recent NPS promotion. The difficulty in defining a directional causal relationship between WPA-inspired artwork [or any other

promotional imagery] and recreation preference moreover casts complexity on my observations about its relationship to political trends. I do not believe this to be an issue but instead evidence of the Subcultural perspective's nontraditional approach to analyzing group identity and its regard to individual choice. The cyclical effect of imagery on Boundary Maintenance proves difficult to analyze in traditional fashions but should be taken note of due to its ability to explain the especially persistent exclusion of African Americans.

As the gap between White and African American recreation preference widens, the NPS should more critically assess how its promotional imagery relates to racialization (Floyd 1999). Married with ethnocentric conceptions of nature, WPA-inspired artwork appears to curate a view of virgin wilderness that predominantly licenses Whites' prevailing modes of wildland recreation, relegating alternatives to either exclusion or assimilation. While preference convergence has occurred at sizeable rates for Asian and Hispanic visitors to the NPS, African Americans continue to be absent from wildland modes of recreation (Shaull & Gramman 1998). Determining how group identity is reinforced in pieces of art is a crucial angle which social science should further investigate to better heal divergent senses of belonging between racial and ethnic groups in America. Their reflection of contemporary recreation trends is a troubling symptom of internalized views of others' roles in wildlands and should be viewed as pieces of political media, regardless of the intention behind their creation.

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<https://www.rangerdoug.com>.

Figure 2. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. “Grand Canyon National Park, a Free Government Service.” Image. Accessed April 26, 2022.

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Figure 3. Ruffner, Jakob. 2022.

Figure 4. Doug, Ranger. “Mesa Verde National Park.” Ranger Doug’s Enterprises, April 7, 2011. <https://www.rangerdoug.com>.

Figure 5. Ruffner, Jakob. 2022.