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The Environmental Education About Preserving American Wilderness: John Muir's National Park Discourse

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In the late 19th century, John Muir was an ardent environmental educator who used his eloquence to teach the Americans to value and protect the wilderness environment in the United States. To effectively fight against the destruction of the wild land for commercial interest, Muir created a national institution: the national park system. By the end of the 19th century, Muir composed abundant works to educate his readers about the concept of national park and thus became a public figure in America. By the 1890s, Muir's writings had become a powerful voice in influencing legislation regarding national parks. Muir's environmental education and his advocacy of creating national parks to preserve the wild resulted in the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890. This essay focuses on the environmental pedagogy about establishing national parks in Muir's writings: It explores Muir's national park discourse and preservationist politics, examining how Muir perceived and depicted the American wilderness, how he defined the values of wilderness, and how he educated his audience about the importance of establishing national parks for America.

Keywords: John Muir, environmental education, the discourse of national park

Prologue

When the first European settlers came to North America, the land was covered with primitive forests[1]. American Indians lived in those forests, cutting only those trees and killing only those animals that they needed to clothe, house, and feed themselves. They believed that all of nature was sacred and should not be thoughtlessly destroyed. The white settlers, however, saw the wilderness as an enemy to be conquered: Forests had to be cut down to make room for farms and towns; wild animals were to be shot for food and in later years for sport; and the native Indians must be subdued. At first, few people spoke in defense of wild nature. By the end of the Civil War in 1865, some people—especially John Muir (1838-1914)—began to save the remaining forests and wild lands. Through his environmental education, Muir used his eloquence to teach the Americans to value and protect the wilderness environment in America. As Muir traveled through the mountains and valleys of California in the 1870s and 1880s, he became disturbed at two kinds of environmental destruction[2]. Herds of sheep were destroying the grasses and wild plants of the meadows. In addition, lumbermen were cutting and blasting the huge and ancient sequoia trees. Muir was disgusted with the popular view that the land and its resources were to plunder, that their value was only in the dollars they would bring to some sheep

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[1] At that time, America was covered with primitive woods from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the banks of the Mississippi River.
[2] Starting in the 1870s, Muir made exploring wilderness and extolling its values a way of life (Nash, 1982, p. 122).

owners or lumbermen. He wanted to save the wilderness as a precious heritage for all the people. Muir became a preservationist, seeing that nature was one unified and interdependent system[3]. To effectively fight against the destruction of the wild land for commercial interest, Muir created a national institution: the national park system. Through this system, Muir secured for wild areas protected legal status and "concrete institutional form" (Dorman, 1998, p. 106).

By the end of the 19th century, Muir composed numerous works and became a public figure in America[4]. Most people began to know Muir as a keen observer of nature and as an advocate of national parks. By the 1890s[5], Muir's writings had become a powerful voice in influencing legislation regarding national forests and national parks[6] (Dorman, 1998, p. 130). Muir's environmental education and his advocacy of creating national parks to preserve the wild resulted in the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890. Simply stated, Muir's environmental pedagogy about establishing national parks played a significant role in his writings. In this essay, I shall explore Muir's national park discourse and preservationist politics, examining how Muir perceived and depicted wilderness in his environmental writings, and ultimately, how he successfully educated his audience about the importance of establishing national parks for America.

Muir's Discourse of National Park in His Environmental Education

Observing how unconstrained economic activity exploited and corrupted wild landscapes, Muir educated his readers about national park ideas so as to save "the remnant" of the wilderness (ONP, p. 1).[7] In his national park discourse, Muir frequently presented the urgent necessity of protecting the American wilderness; he raised his voice on behalf of the wilderness and against the forces of destruction. He fought against greedy and wasteful lumbering practices, ruinous livestock grazing on fragile lands, and needless flooding of a priceless valley. Challenging any individual or group contributing to the destruction of public lands, Muir would not win all of his battles, but he would awaken a nation to its precious natural heritage.

Always outspoken and fearless when defending the land, Muir spearheaded efforts to protect forests areas and the American wilderness. In his essays about wilderness protection and national parks, Muir often praised America's primitive forests[8], bringing the beauties of the wilderness to the attention of his readers as a first step toward ultimately saving them. In *Our National Parks*, he stated:

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[3] Muir also saw that grasses and trees protect the land from erosion and save water (Tolan, 1990, p. 37).

[4] In the late 19th century, to protect the parks, reserves, and public lands from men's depredations, Muir sought in his articles about environmental education to provide some definitions of their value; these articles included "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West" and "The American Forests," subsequently collected into his popular book, *Our National Park.*

[5] In the 1890s, the popularity of Muir and his message, the receptiveness and the very existence of an audience for him were evident (Dorman, 1998, p. 130).

[6] In 1889, Robert Underwood Johnson, a nature lover and the editor of *Century* magazine, asked Muir to write a series of articles for *Century* on the wonders of the Yosemite Valley in order to build public support for the establishment of a national park there. In actuality, Muir's writing career culminated first in perhaps his most important book-length work, *The Mountains of California*, which incorporated refashioned material from the *Century* Yosemite articles and his 1870s notebooks and magazine pieces.

[7] The following abbreviations will be employed throughout this paper to stand for Muir's works: MC: *The Mountains of California*; ONP: *Our National Park*; Y: *The Yosemite*; SY: *South of Yosemite*; RY: *A Rival of the Yosemite*; OYNP: *Our Yosemite National Park*; and YNP: *The Yellowstone National Park.*

[8] In his discourse of national park, Muir frequently stressed the "marvelous beauty" and the magnificent wonder of nature (OYNP, p. 3). In *The Mountains of California*, for instance, he displayed the magnificent and "superb view" of the Sierra Nevada to his readers so as to build public support for efforts to save the mountains and forests in America (MC 295). In *Our Yosemite National Park*, for another instance, Muir depicted "the rocks, streams, lakes, glaciers, irised falls, and the forests of silver fir and silver pine" of the mountains in the Sierra Nevada (OYNP, p. 3).

> ... Lakes and rivers shone through all the vast forests and openings, and happy birds and beasts gave delightful animation. Everywhere, everywhere over all the blessed continent, there were beauty and melody and kindly, wholesome, foodful. (ONP, pp. 331-332)

Displaying the vastness, abundance, and beauty of the American forests, Muir suggested that instead of conquering the wilderness and mountains, men should be kind to forests and all living creatures[9].

In most of his national park articles, Muir intended to teach his fellow citizens the concept that Nature's realm and the majestic, beautiful forests were worth protecting. In fact, by the mid 1870s, finding that the American settlers were destroying the forests of the Sierra at an amazing rate[10], Muir poignantly expressed his observation:

> ... the continent's outer beauty is fast passing away, ... Only 30 years ago, the great Central Valley of California ... was one bed of golden and purple flowers. Now, it is ploughed and pastured out of existence, gone forever, ... (ONP, p. 5)

In these lines, Muir presented the strong contrast between the beautiful countenance of wilderness in the past and the rapid disappearance of the primeval forests in the present. From the 1870s to 1890s, in his beloved Sierra Nevada, Muir further found eroded soil, polluted streams, forests scarred by clear cutting, and wildlife species vanishing[11]. The virgin lands were diminishing[12]. Disappointed in men's ignominy of conquest or exploitation, Muir promulgated that the primitive forests should be saved:

> ... lovers of their country, bewailing its [the American forest's] baldness, are now crying aloud, "Save what is left of the forests!" Clearing has surely now gone far enough; soon timber will be scarce, and not a grove will be left to rest in or pray in. (ONP, pp. 336-337)

In order to "save" "the forests," Muir called for American government's intervention and federal legislation to protect the forests (ONP, p. 336); he believed that "under this care," the forests would be "flourishing, protected from both axe and fire" (YNP, p. 9).

Discovering that the "destruction and use" of the pristine forests were "speeding on faster and farther every day," that "the axe and saw" were "insanely busy, ... and every summer thousands of acres of priceless forests, with their underbrush, soil, springs, climate, and scenery" were "vanishing away" (ONP, pp. 363-364), and that in the wild environment, the "diverse and interesting fauna" and "all the species were being rapidly reduced in numbers" (RY, p. 18), Muir contended that what was left of wild nature had to be protected, mainly in designated wilderness area and national parks, against the onslaught of commercial exploitation and the "progress" of human industrial expansion. Therefore, he ardently educated his readers the significance of establishing American national parks. In *A Rival of the Yosemite*, for instance, Muir remarked:

> ... all of this wonderful King's River region ... should be comprehended in one grand national park. Let our law-givers then make haste before it is too late to set apart this surpassingly glorious region for the recreation and well-being of humanity, and all the world will rise up and call them blessed. (RY, p. 23)

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[9] Muir had realized that human avarice, particularly the economic greed engendered by capitalism, was virtually unchecked. Rejecting the notion that human beings stood in merely economic relations to nature, he felt that the trees were kindred spirits and that going into the woods was going home.

[10] In the 1870s, these American settlers stampeded for gold and silver before they destroyed the untamed, pristine forests in the West (Cohen, 1984, p. 191).

[11] From the 1870s to 1890s, farmers, ranchers, lumber barons, railroad builders, and miners all alike were diligently abusing the riches of the West as if nature's bounty were limitless.

[12] By seeking the wildest remnants of the receding and vanishing frontier out, Muir in his environmental writings frequently reported back to his contemporaries on fragile, besieged places of unparalleled beauty and on vast, spare, inhuman landscape of rock where conventional practices and assumptions became obsolete. Next, he would express the urgency of federal and public action to preserve the remaining wilderness in New England.

Like these lines, Muir in his environmental pedagogy essays frequently expressed the pressing necessity of creating national parks to protect the American wilderness. Also, in order to express the urgency of wilderness preservation, most of Muir's environmental writings—especially his writings about national parks—were couched in the first-person singular and plural, "I" and "we," or in the second person, "you." This strategy gave his nature description a sense of immediacy and provided readers with Muir's own sympathetic and comforting presence as wilderness guide.

Overall, Muir's discourse of national park generally followed a recognizable structural and rhetorical pattern. In "The Sequoia and General Grant National Parks" (an article collected in *Our National Parks*), for instance, Muir began by delineating the sequoia groves in superlatives, pointing out some of their most distinctive and unique features and noting the incredible age of the trees, all intended to give a reader a sense of the exceptional beauty of the park. Next, Muir described the ruthless ravages of a lumber mill situated in the sequoia forest, creating "a sore, sad center of destruction" (ONP, p. 299). Constructing the image of the lumber mill lurking darkly in the background, he depicted the rest of the park. At the end of "The Sequoia and General Grant National Parks," Muir went back to the image of the lumber mills and the danger they posed to the redwood forests. Through his vivid portrayal of the park, Muir so effectively conveyed a sense of the value of the groves that by the end of the "tour," unquestionably, most of his compatriot readers had already anticipated the need for protective legislation as called for in the article's conclusion.

In "The American Forests" (it was one of Muir's best known essays; it was collected in *Our National Parks*; and it first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897)[13], for another example, we can find the similar structural and rhetorical pattern in Muir's national park discourse. In the beginning of this essay, Muir depicted the exceptional beauty of the American wilderness when it was first discovered and how the immense forests contained hundreds of species of trees. Nevertheless, instead of prudently using these wilderness resources, early American settlers proceeded to wage "interminable forest wars; chips flew thick and fast; trees in their beauty fell crashing by millions, smashed to confusion, ..." (ONP, p. 336). After portraying humans' relentless destruction of the primitive forests in America and asserting that every civilized country in the world did a better job of preserving its forests than the United States, Muir expressed the pressing need to fight for responsible management policies and posed the issue of wilderness protection as one that had reached crisis proportions:

> Now, it is plain that the forests are not inexhaustible, and that quick measures must be taken if ruin is to be avoided. ... Laws in existence provide neither for the protection of the timber from destruction nor for its use where it is most needed. (ONP, p. 340)

Urging "government protection" in these lines (ONP, p. 360), Muir declared that the federal government had a key role to play in enacting restrictions on forest use. In this way, Muir's national park discourse emanated a sort of attractive, persuasive, and effective power.

Near the end of "The American Forests," Muir stated that the effectual laws and regulations protecting the forests were pressingly necessary: "the fate of the remnant of our forests," asserted Muir, was "in the hands of the federal government" (ONP, p. 364). Anticipating opposition from lumber interests and others who benefited

[13] In late-19th-century America, both *Century* and *Atlantic Monthly* were very popular and important magazines supporting conservation; these two magazines had many influential readers (Tolan, 1990, p. 45). Writing a series of conservation articles published in these two magazines, Muir hoped to educate his audience about creating national parks to preserve the wilderness in his own country. "The American Forests" was the first article Muir wrote for *Atlantic Monthly.*

from the exploitation of the forests, Muir categorized those who would oppose national policy of forest protection as "thieves who are wealthy and steal timber by wholesale" (ONP, p. 361). In spite of the substantial damages already done to the forests, Muir still emphasized that it was not too late for the federal government to act. However, he warned, "if the remnant is to be saved at all, it must be saved quickly" (ONP, p. 364). Muir concluded "The American Forests" with a passionate call to action, describing the trees in terms that he empathized with them as living beings, not merely as resources:

> Any fool can destroy trees. ... Through all the wonderful, eventful centuries since Christ's time—and long before that—God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools—only Uncle Sam could do that[14]. (ONP, p. 365)

Truly, the destruction of forests by natural causes was something Muir and nature could always take in stride. Nevertheless, humankind suffered from an unnatural and shortsighted foolishness, and therefore required the inhibition of law to abate his stupidity.

In the 19th century, it was well known that Muir publicized the idea of national park; however, few people knew that before Muir, the notion of national park was also enunciated by Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) and that Muir's national park discourse was under the great influence of Olmsted's national park philosophy[15]. To Muir, Olmsted's "The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees" (1865/1990) was an inspiring and significant essay: It was an early plea for Yosemite's protection and it conveyed Olmsted's widely influential philosophy of national parks and their larger purposes, "a philosophy with which Muir strongly concurred" (Dorman, 1998, p. 138). In this essay, Olmsted argued that wild nature should be preserved, because it had value for civilized men and that to be in a place surrounded by "natural scenery" would enhance human health and welfare (p. 50); he asserted: "It is a scientific fact that the occasional contemplation of natural scenes of an impressive character, particularly if this contemplation occurs in connection with relief from ordinary cares, change of air and change of habits, is favorable to health and vigor of men" (p. 46). The "enjoyment of scenery," Olmsted (1865/1900) wrote in "The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees," "employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it and thus. … gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system" (p. 46). Olmsted's philosophy of what a national park should be, how "natural scenery" could improve "the health and vigor" of civilized men (Olmsted, 1990, p. 46), played no small role in the formation of Muir's national park discourse.

Like Olmsted, Muir in his national park discourse frequently stressed the significance of national park for the civilized tourists: "the wildest health and pleasure grounds accessible and available to tourists seeking escape from care and dust and early death," wrote Muir, were "the parks and reservations of the West" (ONP, p. 12). Proclaiming that "wilderness" was "a necessity" in *Our National Park* (p. 1), Muir appealed to the public interest (men's universal need for beauty, relaxation, health[16], and happiness) for measures to seek federal intervention to protect natural wonders from the narrow and exclusive use of those people who were interested only in quick profit. When "all the Western mountains are still rich in wildness," Muir continued to state, people should take interest in the "preservation of forests and wild places, and in the half wild parks"; these

[14] In *South of Yosemite: Selected Writings of John Muir*, some of these lines appeared again (SY, pp. 207-208).
[15] Muir had been regarded as the father of national parks; Olmsted (1990), asserted Brower, "was at least of the grandfather" (p. xiii).
[16] In *Our National Parks*, Muir told his readers that the natural beauty of wilderness and mountains could provide the sense of freedom, independence, and happiness for mountaineers.

people, Muir (1901) suggested, could "get in touch with the nerves of Mother Earth" and rejoice "in the deep, long-drawn breaths of pure wildness" (ONP, p. 2). For Muir, such a contact with the wild nature was "fine and natural and full of promise" (ONP, p. 2); it would eventually prove meaningful and useful to even the most casual tourists.

When Muir articulated his defense of the wild places in the American West in his environmental education discourse about creating national parks, he did not emphasize the intrinsic values and rights of nature. He only emphasized that Nature was valuable for people—for rest and recuperation, for aesthetic satisfaction, and for spiritual nourishment. In *The Yosemite*, for instance, Muir (1988) stated that the Yosemite National Park was "one of the greatest of all our natural resources for uplifting joy and peace and health of the people" (Y, p. 192). Also, Muir called the Yellowstone National Park "a grand health, pleasure, and study resort" (YNP, pp. 8-9). Although Muir broke sharply with Pinchot and other utilitarian conservationists, yet his discourse of national park was equally anthropocentric. Why did Muir renounce his bio-centric environmental advocacy and constructed another discursive grounds centered on the benefits of nature for people? The reason was that he got into politics and became pragmatic. Muir believed that the only way to save the American wilderness was to persuade the American citizens and their government of its worth for them. As a result, he tempered his bio-centric environmental discourse, hiding them in his national park discourse under a cover of anthropocentrism.

As a matter of fact, in 1879, there was still only one national park, Yellowstone, and there were no national forest preserves. Muir's role in creating the system of national park that exists today was critical, and his national park discourse was central in the effort. While his personal motivation in preserving wilderness areas was primarily eco-centric, Muir realized that arguments for preservation based solely on eco-centric grounds would find a limited audience. Therefore, he combined utilitarian and anthropocentric reasons for preservation with the eco-centric, emphasizing the benefits of wilderness for people, such as the salubrious effect of the outdoors on one's health and vigor, and so forth. Muir knew that if wilderness preservationists were to prevail over sawmill owners, ranchers, miners, and others with entrenched economic interests, they had to persuade the general public that their interests were better served by preserving the wilderness than by allowing vested interests to exploit it unfettered by any governmental restrictions.

In this respect, Muir was politically sophisticated; he knew that wilderness areas would be preserved only if they were incorporated into the pragmatic and anthropocentric mainstream ideology. In order to mobilize public opinion behind wilderness preservation, for example, Muir told the public that "going to the mountains" was "like going home," because it was a setting of spiritual renewal and physical reinvigoration (ONP, p. 1). He emphasized that preserving the wilderness provided tangible advantages to people and society. Among these benefits was spiritual and physical relief for those who used nature as antidote for the industrial age. In *Our National Park*, for instance, Muir (1901) argued that visiting wild mountains did not merely enable men to awaken from "the stupefying effects of the vice of over-industry and the deadly apathy of luxury," but also enabled people to "get rid of rust and disease" (ONP, p. 1). In this pragmatic sense, Muir fenced wilderness intellectually within the bounds of public taste and the prevailing ideology of anthropocentrism; as an advocate seeking to persuade the broad public to his cause, he could not afford to ignore these bounds. Simply stated, Muir in his environmental education discourse on national park ideas had to cater self-consciously to the public tastes because only by doing so would the wilderness areas win over the influential constituency of the well-to-do necessary for their preservation.

In truth, in his later life, Muir eventually turned to reconcile public and political demands for the defense of wilderness (Gifford, 1993, p. 17). In other words, he tempered his bio-centricity and radical egalitarianism. The pursuit of nature's good and the public good in Muir's national park discourse became equivalent and Muir's ultimate purpose in publicizing wilderness and bringing people to the national parks was to secure the long-term protection of the primitive nature in America. To preserve the remaining wilderness, Muir educated his readers that the only possible path would require that "every acre that is left should be held together under the federal government as a basis for a general policy of administration for *the public good*" (ONP, p. 361, emphasis added). In his discourse of national park, Muir did variously define that good to include the assuaging of modern urban nervousness or the improvement of physical health or the need for exposure to beauty, but fundamentally all of these elements tended to the greatest good, and highest use, that the public might find in pristine and primitive nature. At the beginning of *Our National Park*, Muir mentioned "the greatest good" that people might find in a mountain forest or a wild river; he wrote:

> The tendency nowadays to wander in wilderness is delightful to see. Thousands of tired, ... over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going mountains is going home; ... and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life. (ONP, p. 1)

Muir was acknowledging the value of wild lands when he remarked that people need "beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike" (Y, p. 127). He hailed the establishment of national parks as a sign that this aspect of wilderness was recognized. These parks were, Muir noted, "fountains of life" (ONP, p. 1). Wilderness was valuable because of the rewarding experiences and the "public good" (or the public interest) it provided (ONP, p. 361).

Nevertheless, interwoven through Muir's anthropocentric pleas there were also more subtle and radical bio-centric rationales put forward for preservation. Seeking a balance between what was best for people and what was best for nature in his later life, Muir did not emphasize "the public good" only (ONP, p. 361): He also stressed nature's good. In his defense of nature's good, Muir was often accused of placing its interests before those of humankind. Mayor James D. Phelan of San Francisco[17], for instance, remarked that Muir would "sacrifice his own family for the preservation of beauty" (as cited in Dorman, 1998, p. 152). It was true that in some passages humanity faded into the background and only the landscape of wild woods was depicted[18], as was shown in this passage about the California redwoods, another of the natural objects that Muir championed:

> It took more than three thousand years to make some of the trees in these western woods—trees that are still standing in perfect strength and beauty, waving and singing in the mighty forests of the Sierra. Through all the wonderful, eventful centuries since Christ's time —and long before that—God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests, and floods. (ONP, p. 365)

This delineation was a bio-centric argument, an argument of intrinsic worth. The tree's value was rooted, as was Muir's whole bio-centric viewpoint, in recognition of God's immanence throughout His creation. The implications of such argument brought down on Muir the charges of ignoring "the public good" (ONP, p. 361). Economic exploitation of the giant trees and other natural wonders, Muir proclaimed, was a sin of the highest order because in showing a "perfect contempt for Nature," the "tree-killers" also struck directly at "the God of the mountains" (ONP, p. 363).

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[17] He was one of Muir chief opponents in the Hetch-Hetchy fight.
[18] In his discourse of national park, Muir sometimes advanced his bio-centric arguments on the issue of value.

Despite the effort of Muir's critics to portray him as single-mindedly bio-centric and radical, uncaring for human needs, his arguments in this vein were rarely employed in isolation. The pursuit of nature's good and the public good were equivalent in Muir's national park discourse, mutually achievable. His entire purpose in educating his fellow citizens about protecting American's wild nature by creating national parks was to secure long-term preservation of the American wilderness. In the Preface of *Our National Park*, Muir explained that he wrote about the parks "with a view to inciting the people to come and enjoy them, and get them into their hearts, so at length their preservation and right use might be made sure"[19]. Through getting the wilderness into people's hearts, Muir wanted the public to be moved by America's forests and mountains and to support their preservation; he also hoped that the federal government could formulate and administer a permanent policy for the parks and reserves to protect both the public good and nature's interests.

Muir's Environmental Activism

An ardent educator who hoped his writings would create public support for efforts to preserve the wilderness in his own country, Muir institutionalized wilderness preservation as national policy goals. Muir, first in his support for establishing national forests and later in his environmental education about the establishment of national parks, believed that these designated public lands should be reserved to protect non-human species and to prevent ecosystems from the violence of exploitation by humans using the agriculture and technology of an industrialized society. In his support for the creation of national forests and forest reserves, Muir aligned himself with Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), the leader of American conservationists. Both Muir and Pinchot were responsible for promoting conservation into a national issue and were successful in influencing public policy. Due in no small part to the efforts of Muir, three national parks—Yosemite, Sequoia, and General Grant—were created in California by act of Congress in 1890. In the following year (1891), Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act.

In truth, at approximately the same time that the conservation movement (1890-1914), under the leadership of Pinchot, was defining itself against the forces of unbridled resource exploitation, the wilderness preservation tradition, represented largely by John Muir and the Sierra Club, was also emerging as a social force[20]. At first allied with Pinchot against the common enemy and under the common banner of "conservation," Muir parted ways with him over issues, such as leasing of lands in the federal forest reserves to commercial grazing corporations[21]. Although Muir first embraced the concept of "forest reserve" as buffers between wild nature and urban civilization, he finally realized that Pinchot's "wise" management of natural resources and

[19] The Preface of *Our National Park* was written by Muir in 1901; it was short and it did not contain any page number.

[20] Muir had been called a "preservationist" and his preservationist perspective had been contrasted with "conservationists" who, particularly under the leadership of Pinchot, proposed the ideology based on scientific principles of multiple uses of natural resources.

[21] Initially, Muir and Pinchot were close friends. They found much in common, since, by his own admission, Pinchot "loved the woods and everything about them" (as cited in Nash, 1982, p. 135). He had selected forestry as a career because it involved contact with the wild nature, and during the summer of 1896 he cherished those times that he and Muir left the others to talk around campfires alone in the forest (Pinchot, 1998, pp. 100-103). However, in the fall of 1897, when Muir was in Seattle on his way home from Alaska, he picked up a newspaper (Tolan, 1990, p. 47). There he saw Pinchot quoted as saying that sheep grazing would do little harm to the forest reserves. Muir was furious. On the forestry commission trip, Pinchot had agreed with him that such grazing was harmful (Tolan, 1990, p. 47). Now, he was saying what was acceptable to the sheep and cattle ranchers who had the political power in the Northwest. The break between Muir and Pinchot resulted in the division between the conservationists and the preservationists.

multiple, efficient use of nature was another name for human domination of and exploitation of the forest reserves[22]. Muir then embraced the idea of national parks as an institution protecting wild landscapes[23].

Perhaps the most famous event of Muir's environmental education and preservationist activism was the "everlasting Hetch-Hetchy fight"[24]. In 1900, the extent of the break between Muir and Pinchot became apparent when a plan to dam the Hetch-Hetchy Valley (a place inside the boundary of Yosemite National Park) in order to supply water for San Francisco was proposed[25]. Championing the policies of scientific (or technological) Resource Conservation and Development, Pinchot believed that damming the Hetch-Hetchy Valley was a "wise" use of natural resources; to Muir, however, such damming was a desecration[26]. If Hetch-Hetchy was dammed, Muir realized, the entire planet was open to scientific management, to economic development to serve the perceived needs of some humans rather than letting being be. In plenty of his environmental articles, Muir attempted to save the Hetch-Hetchy River from being dammed[27]. He extolled the beauty of the valley, arguing that San Francisco's need for water could be satisfied without sacrificing one of the country's most beautiful wilderness areas. In a chapter entitled "Hetch-Hetchy Valley" in *The Yosemite*, for instance, Muir refuted, one by one, all the arguments for damming the valley, likening them to "those of the devil, devised for the destruction of the first garden" (Y, p. 195). Throughout this chapter, he portrayed those who would dam the valleys as infidels seeking to destroy one of God's most beautiful creations:

> These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar.
>
> Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man. (Y, pp. 196-197)

In these lines, Muir denounced humans' commercial exploitation of nature and fought against the destruction of the wild land for commercial interest, regarding "the friends of destruction," "the tree-killers" (ONP, pp. 362-64), and the "temple destroyers" as fools[28] (Y, p. 196; SY, p. 207), for they were unable to see beyond their own immediate interests.

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[22] Describing the forest reserves as "virgin forests" in his second *Atlantic Monthly* essay in 1898 (as cited in Nash, 1982, p. 138), Muir wanted wilderness areas left intact and rejected the Resource Conservation movement's fidelity to an anthropocentric reduction of inherent worth. In fact, the personal break between Muir and Pinchot symbolized the conflict of values that was destroying the cohesiveness of the conservation movement. Withdrawing all support from Pinchot school, Muir labored to make his readers understand the intrinsic values of wilderness and the necessity of its preservation.

[23] After finding that the forest reserves in America failed to fight against the ravages of expanding industrial civilization, Muir turned to teach his compatriots about the concept of national park to protect the wilderness. It is ironic that now in the United States nearly every national park is being threatened by encroaching industrial civilization and industrial tourism; many national parks had been damaged by tourists who saw the parks as essentially natural "scenery" and recreational escapes from city.

[24] This "fight" began in 1903 and ended in 1913.

[25] In the 1870s, when Muir had explored the Yosemite, he had come upon a beautiful valley along the course of the Tuolumne River (Lyon, 1996, p. 662). The Indians called it Hetch Hetchy. At Muir's urging, it became part of Yosemite National Park when the park was established. Thirty years later, San Francisco was looking for a source of clean water and water power. Some political leaders decided that Hetch Hetchy Valley should be dammed to make a reservoir and the water should be piped to the city (Lyon, 1996, p. 662). They felt that providing water cheaply was more important than preserving the valley—even though Hetch Hetchy was part of a national park and even though other sources of water might be available.

[26] In fact, the issue of damming the Hetch Hetchy Valley involved many sub-issues: the integrity of the new national park system, the national interest versus regional interest, the "greatest good for the greatest number in the long run" (Pinchot, 1998, p. 326), and most important, for Muir the right livelihood, the way we should live, relating to places beyond civilization.

[27] During the years of the Hetch Hetchy struggle, Muir had also been doing other writing. In 1911, he published *My First Summer in the Sierra*, and in 1912, *The Yosemite*, a guidebook to the region.

[28] The comparison of the Yosemite Valley to "temples" was a common one for Muir, who hoped to evoke both an aesthetic and a religious response in the reader.

As a nature preservationist, Muir fought against the destruction of "Nature's sublime wonderlands" (Y, p. 193). Near the end of *The Yosemite*, he proclaimed:

> ... Hetch Hetchy Valley, ... is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples. . . .
>
> Sad to say, this most precious and sublime feature of the Yosemite National Park, one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people, is in danger of being dammed and made into a reservoir to help supply San Francisco with water and light, ... (Y, pp. 191-192)

In these lines, Muir vehemently denounced "the proponents of the dam scheme" (Y, p. 195), for they were "selfishly commercial" and were destroying "the first garden" (Y, p. 193)—"a high-lying natural landscape garden" (Y, p. 195). While Pinchot and the proponents of the dam saw only the narrower context of providing water to the expanding urban center of San Francisco and steadfastly believed the modern Western idea of rationality, development, and progress[29], Muir and his allies saw the broader implications of this dam and attempted to save wild nature for its own sake and for the sake of "the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people"[30] (Y, p. 192).

In 1913, the Pinchot-backed congressional act was signed; damming Muir's Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite to provide water for the growing city of San Francisco, an event some say broke Muir's heart (Sessions, 1995, p. 167). He died the following year (1914). In truth, Muir's reputation as an educator for wilderness preservation was enhanced by the Hetch-Hetchy battle even though he ultimately failed to stop the dam. The environmental pedagogy discourse of his final, losing battle, ironically, resonated even more forcefully than that of his earlier, more successful efforts to promote the establishment of a national park system and forest reserves.

The Legacies of John Muir

Muir was a powerful and influential figure in the literary and environmental heritage of America. Through his environmental education and wilderness pedagogy, he brought the assumptions regarding an anthropocentric view of the world into question and taught his compatriots the need to cultivate a renewed sense of the sacredness of nature. Educating his fellow citizens about revolutionary environmental ideas (such as the idea of interrelatedness on earth, bio-centric equality, the rights of nature, and so forth) in his literary texts, Muir became the harbinger for many modern environmentalist movements in the 20th century, especially deep ecology movement. Specifically speaking, deep ecology was a movement that emphasized the move from an anthropocentric to an eco-centric value of orientation. It encouraged an egalitarian attitude toward all entities in the ecosphere and it emphasized the interdependence of all living things. Deep ecology maintained that all beings were fundamentally interconnected and interdependent; it recognized the intrinsic value of all beings and viewed humans as mere one particular strand in the web of life[31]. The "contents" of Muir's environmental

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[29] In the previous chapter, I have argued that it is not appropriate to view Pinchot as a typical utilitarian conservationist writer: toward the end of his life, Pinchot infused a reform spirit into the conservation movement, introducing the notion of "new conservationism." Through "new conservationism," Pinchot told his readers that while they had to identify the manifold kinds of trees in a wild forest, they must have an understanding of the dynamic interrelations within the forest community and respect all members in this community; in this way, Pinchot asserted reverence for nature and reformed the utilitarian orientation of forestry most closely associated with his name.

[30] The ecological resistance and bio-centric ecological consciousness of Muir made him become a historical counterpart to Pinchot's resource conservation and development ideology.

[31] Deep Ecology advocated a revolutionary notion that nature had intrinsic value and consequently possessed "at least the right to exist" (Nash, 1989, p. 9).

pedagogy and wilderness advocacy was particularly relevant to the principal themes of deep ecology. Simply stated, Muir became a forerunner of deep ecology movement.

In truth, Muir's environmental education and his discourses about creating national parks and wilderness preservation did not merely anticipate the emergence of Deep Ecology movement in the late 20th century, but also influenced the wilderness discourse of a contemporary eco-poet Gary Snyder (1930-). Like Muir, Snyder is a "wilderness writer." Following in Muir's footsteps, Snyder resists human domination of nature, shows respect to nature's teachings, and believes in the essential oneness and interdependence in the world of wild nature.

In addition, an ardent environmental educator and wilderness advocate, Muir was instrumental in calling for federal legislation to protect the forests and in establishing national park system for America[32]. Writing plenty of books and magazine articles to educate his readers about the values of wilderness, he was intensively active in publicizing the idea of national park[33]. Muir's environmental pedagogy and wilderness advocacy galvanized his readers' and the federal government's support to establish American national parks; he introduced the issue of wilderness preservation into the realm of national policy and politics. As "popularizer and institutionalizer" of national park idea (Dorman, 1998, p. 129), Muir was effective and successful.

To conclude, in both an intellectual and political sense, the roots of the modern environmental movement can be traced directly to Muir and his environmental writings. The legacies of Muir principally rested on his environmental education and his institutionalization of wilderness preservation as national policy goals. As Muir wrote shortly before his death: "The people are now aroused. Tiding from near and far show that almost every good man and good woman is with us. Therefore be of good cheer, watch, and pray and fight" (as cited in Payne, 1996, p. 102).

Epilogue

In the late 20th century, two influential biographies about Muir, Stephen Fox's (1981) *John Muir and His Legacy* and Michael Cohen's (1984) *The Pathless Way*, appeared. These two books characterized Muir as one who abandoned Christianity and was sympathetic to Eastern religious system. Generally speaking, plenty of critics considered Muir to be a Taoist (or an Eastern mystic). In his biography of Muir, Cohen (1984) suggested that Muir was the "Taoist of the (American) West" (p. 120). Arne Naess (1995), another critic, called "John Muir a Taoist" (p. 79), contending that Muir's notion of reverence for life was similar to the central tenets of Taoism. What is more, Bill Devall (1982) in his "John Muir as Deep Ecologist" claimed that "Muir's nature mysticism" belonged in the realm "the eternal Tao" (pp. 66-67), arguing that there existed an intimate relationship between Taoism and deep ecology. However, Muir's most fundamental belief about the meaning of wilderness preservation could not entirely be contained within the bounds of Taoist, religious, or spiritual "frame"; it should also be contained within the "public frame." In other words, Muir's environmental education about creating a bio-centric consciousness and of establishing national park system should receive attention. Throughout his environmental pedagogy and his national park discourse, Muir defined the values of wilderness,

[32] Muir's abiding concern throughout his life was the preservation of America's forests and parks.

[33] In Muir's time, there were only four national parks: Yosemite, Sequoia, General Grant (now part of Kings Canyon), and Yellowstone.
In many of his literary works about national parks—such as *Our National Park* and *The Yellowstone National Park*, Muir surveyed the entire nation, outlining its natural features and their conservation need and recommending more preserves. Today, there are over 30 national parks in America (Jones, 1986, p. 2).

characterized the dangers to it, and proposed remedies (such remedies included the intervention of the federal government to establish forests reserves and national parks).

In *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1982), Roderick Nash made the claim that Muir, when he died in 1914, "had earned a reputation as the most magnificent enthusiast about nature in the United States, the most rapt of all prophets of our out-of-door gospel" (p. 122). Indeed, Muir is a person with a modern, ecological vision, a person ahead of his time; he helped create a lobby for wilderness at a time when the United States, having achieved its main territorial ambitions, was beginning to take a more critical look at itself[34]. In the last decade of the 19th century and the first of the 20th century, America was beginning to emerge from a more or less thoughtless expansionary mentality. Muir's great contribution was to give forthright literary expression to the significance of wilderness preservation and to advance his notion of national park through his numerous texts of environmental education, which had long been on the margins of American intellectual debate. Indeed, regarding the wild environment, no literary figure has had greater impact on the actualities of American politics and history.

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[34] Muir was a prescient pilgrim who, in his lifetime, figured "in the national political life," and he was the person on the furthest margins—in the wilderness—whose concerns made his message central to a whole historical era (Engberg & Wesling, 1999, p. 13).

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