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America’s Best Idea?

A Historical Analysis of How the Ideological Basis for the Legislation of Public Lands and Religious Freedom in the US Has Excluded Native American Religious Perspectives

Wilma Grønlund Arnesen

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Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages
Faculty of Humanities

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Christian Anglo-American ideas about religion and nature, and the relationship between the two, has affected the establishment of the National Parks System and the legislation of nature and religious freedom in United States since the late 19th century. The ideological basis for the NPS and subsequent legislation of nature and religious freedom is fundamentally Christian, and therefore fails to include differing views of what it means to be religious or how religion can be tied directly to nature. Consequently, Native American religions, especially, suffer under these legislations and concepts. Native religions have a relational approach to the natural world. Many Native religions see nature as innate with meaning, value, and sacredness. By looking at the establishment of the NPS it becomes clear how little value Native perspectives were given in the Progressive Era. Native religions and communities are increasingly understood more complexly by American society in the 21st century. However, much of the legislation regarding public lands and religious freedom in the US still lacks the depth of recognition and understanding needed to fully accommodate and include Native perspectives meaningfully.

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"They said as a Mexican, I would face discrimination, sure, but as an Indian, I would know a hatred that had to be endured to be fully understood. They thought they were giving me a better chance at life. That's this nation's policy toward us, always has been. If we want a better life, all we have to do is stop being Indian."

– Chairman Rainwater [1]

[1] Sheridan, dir, *Yellowstone*. Season 1. Episode 1. "Daybreak" (Paramount Network, June 20th, 2018)

Introduction

Standing at the beginning of the path that goes around the foot of Devils Tower in Wyoming, two things stood out to me. One was the wall of sound behind me, from motorcycle enthusiasts stopping at Devils Tower on their way to the yearly rally in Sturgis, South Dakota. The other was the colorful Native American prayer ties scattered among the trees, away from the path. The juxtaposition between these two expressions was striking. Both expressions stemmed from groups that had strong connections to this place. The Native people who placed prayer ties in the trees relied upon the traditions of their ancestors. Their peoples had been connected to this place for centuries, in their activity was an expression of that cultural and religious connection. The Lakota, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Arapahoe, Shoshone, and Crow all have cultural and religious connections to the Tower, and members of all these communities take part in the practice of placing prayer ties there.[2]

The motorcycle enthusiasts were also taking part in a tradition, and for many of them it was a yearly occurrence to visit the Tower with hundreds of others on their way to Sturgis. The rally dates back to the first half of the 20th century and has since grown to become the largest motorcycle rally in the world with over 500 000 yearly participants.[3] These two expressions of cultural belonging played out within walking distance of each other that day and have done so for a long time. The contrast between the two things was so strong in that moment that I wondered intently how the two could coexist? And what did each group feel about the presence of the other?

What I felt standing at the foot of the Tower has reverberated through conversations about the relations between national parks, public lands, and Native Americans in recent years. The Lakota, to whom the Tower is specifically significant, have fought for decades to have special protections put in place so that they can practice their rituals undisturbed, though they have achieved little success.[4] They have tried, for instance, to curb climbing at the Tower because of its sacred value to them. In an interview with *Wyoming Public Media* Waylon Black Crow Senior, from the Lakota of Pine Ridge Reservation, said that he finds it painful to watch people climb on the Tower. "'We see them climbing up there,' said Black Crow. 'And all we can do is watch.'"[5] To him and fellow Lakota that visit the Tower in the month of June, the Tower holds vast sacred value. Climbing and the roar of motorcycles may disturb the

[2] "A Sacred Site to American Indians - Devils Tower National Monument (U.S. National Park Service)."
[3] Gomez, "Have You Ever Wondered."
[4] Cross and Brenneman, "Devils Tower at the Crossroads," 25.
[5] Mullen, "Climbers Ignore Native Americans' Request At Devils Tower."

Native people who are trying to engage in rituals. The article also outlines that due to disturbances, and at times altercations and disputes between Native people and other users of the Tower, Native practitioners have taken to preforming the rituals in an as private setting as possible. The rituals are not very visible to outsiders, the prayer ties being the most prominent remnant of religious activity.

Conversations about who should dictate activities on public land that is also sacred to Native people has been going on for a long time. However, since the 1990s the interest in this topic has grown. In an article in *High Country News* in 1997, the journalists Smith and Manning asked these questions in relation to the topic:

> The question, then, is why should a butte that is sacred to Native Americans be treated differently than a mission or a church managed by the Park Service? Because the butte is a natural feature and Native American religions are harder to understand than Western ones? Or because hundreds of thousands of tourists come to Devils Tower each summer to see the nation's first monument - and the place where spaceships landed in Steven Spielberg's Close Encounters of the Third Kind?[6]

The conflict between the interests of the NPS and Native American interests have increasingly come to engage scholars in recent years. In his book *Dispossession of the Wilderness,* Mark David Spence examined the subject in unprecedented detail and his work has become canonical within the field. He maintained that "wilderness preservation went hand in hand with native dispossession."[7] In the wake of Spence's work more scholars looked to similar topics, with varying emphasis. Some, like Spence, put environmental discourse at the center, while others approached the issue through the history of Native activism, ideas of the West, or religious perspectives. I have chosen to situate my thesis in a religious studies approach to national park and public lands management.

Native American religions have historically endured little recognition by the federal government and within the US legal system. According to Charlton Bonham the outcome is predetermined in "the conflict between Native American religious practices, federal land management decisions, and recreation on public lands; unless both the law and society change, Native American religious freedom may ultimately lose."[8] Frances Kaye agreed with this sentiment and contended that through US history federal policy and law regarding Native Americans has been based on the notion that "that Christian, Amer-European principles of economy, society, and culture are inherently superior to Indigenous principles of economy,

[6] Smith and Manning, "The Sacred and Profane Collide in the West."
[7] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 3.
[8] Bonham, "Devils Tower, Rainbow Bridge, and the Uphill Battle Facing Native American Religion on Public Lands," 163.

society, and culture."[9] Native religions have been suppressed and discredited, especially in the 19th century. When restorative measures have been introduced, like acts promising religious freedom for Native people, they have often not considered Native perspectives on land and sacredness. Kaye further asserted that Native communities and religions generally value "regional association, based on people living not only *on* a specific plot of land but *with* the land as a meaningful aspect of community."[10] Many Native religions place inherent sacred value on specific places, for instance the sacred role Devils Tower has to the Lakota. This notion being overlooked by the federal government has led to the precarious position that many Native communities find themselves in today, where they try to practice their religious traditions within a system that disregards the importance of land to Native religions. This conflict results in instances like Devils Tower, where Native activists have to fight for their right to practice their beliefs in accord with their traditions, but still they usually come up short and their issues gain little recognition from the general Anglo-American public and officials.

A long history of discrimination toward Native religions and continued lack of understanding of the religious importance of place in these traditions and rituals makes this topic valuable for study. Especially viewed through the lens of national parks and public lands in the US, we can see the how American society, politics and legal system are embedded with ideas about nature and wilderness that do not and never will accommodate Native imaginings and relations to nature. Due to these differing notions Native activists continue to experience little to no success in protection of land despite its sacred value. This thesis examines how this has come to be.

Through looking at the beginning and vast expansion of the NPS in the Progressive Era, this work will examine how new ideas about conservation and wilderness, coupled with negative and incorrect receptions of Native people in the era, produced a several policies that would contribute to large-scale dispossession of Native people and that inherently disregarded the importance of sacred land in Native religions. The first chapter will focus on these issues in the Progressive Era. The reason the Progressive Era was chosen as the period of inquiry was because this era saw both the establishment and expansion of national parks, efforts to remove Native people from their homelands, and force assimilation policies that would lead to cultural genocide of Native traditions and practices.

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[9] Kaye, *Goodlands*, 330–31.
[10] Kaye, 323.

The notion of sacredness and place-based religion will be further examined in chapter two, as well as 20th century developments regarding Native American religious freedom and civil rights, that mostly further prohibited the power and agency of Native people. The thesis will conclude with an examination of modern Native activism in the 21st century, what land issues look like today, and what points of contention continue to be difficult to solve. The topic of modern developments and activism are chosen in order to show how these issues tie into current and future discussions and continue to be crucial topics of inquiry even after the religious freedom of Native American people has been expanded in the 20th century. There was not enough room to go into as much detail about the concrete developments in the 20th century as it was more pertinent to the topic to give more space to the discussion of ideas of nature in Native religions in the second chapter. By looking at the Progressive Era we see where many of the modern issues and questions are rooted. Thus, we can better understand why changing relations to nature and land in American society in the 21st century are so crucial to Native American history and religions. These are the reasons the scope of the thesis has been selected as it has.

The developments and issues examined in this work are not only of direct importance in US contexts of Native American rights and public lands management. The conversation around these topics also relates to larger global discussions about repatriation, climate change, and displacement. The last couple of decades have seen global interest in the return of cultural artefacts and remains. Nations globally are calling for repatriation of items taken during a time when their country were under colonial rule by the looting nation. This is for instance the case with Nigeria's call to the British to return the Benin Bronzes taken by the British without permission in 1897, when Nigeria was under British rule.[11] The call for repatriation has been growing in the 21st century, and across the world governments and museums are debating the ethics and possibilities of repatriation.[12]

Also, within the US, Native people have called for the return of ancestral remains from American museums. For instance, senators in Alaska are calling for ancestral remains to be returned quicker and for museums to be more cooperative with these types of claims. In an article in *Anchorage Daily News* Senator Dan Sullivan asserted that this issue should not be a controversial topic, return of remains should simply be the norm, because "Can you imagine somebody going to your ancestor's grave and taking their bones, digging up their bones and

[11] Tremayne-Pengelly, "The UK Has a 60-Year Old Law Prohibiting Repatriation of Art. Is That About to Change?"
[12] Oltermann, "Toxic Dilemma Faced by German Museums Repatriating Artefacts."

then when you go back saying, 'I'd like my great-great-grandfather's bones back,' and they're not being cooperative?"[13] As the issue of repatriation gains traction globally, scholars and Native activists within the use are inquiring whether or not public lands should be included in repatriation efforts as well. Native activists have been fighting for the "Land Back" cause for decades, arguing that public lands should be returned to Native Americans, as they were taken by colonial force. This thesis will therefore discuss how public lands management in the US and historical dispossession of Native people can be seen in light of global conversation on repartition.

Additionally, the dispossession and displacement that US federal policy has caused Native American people is becoming relevant as the world faces the issue of people being displaced due to climate change. Climate refugees do not have legal status as refugees and have not yet been given any special protections. An article by *NPR* in 2018 outlined that "Since 2008, an average of 24 million people have been displaced by catastrophic weather disasters each year. As climate change worsens storms and droughts, climate scientists and migration experts expect that number to rise."[14] These refugees receive relatively little political attention globally and the consensus is that most countries are not ready to receive the vast amounts of people that will become displaced in the decades to come. Only in 2022, 3 million people were displaced in the US due to effects of climate change. There are currently few initiatives regarding climate displacement in the US, and the housing market and local governments are not ready to deal with the impact climate displacement will potentially have on their communities.[15]

With no legal recognition and little political attention, climate refugees find themselves in a position which is similar to that of Native Americans who were forcefully removed from their homelands in the 18th and 19th century. Climate refugees are lacking legal status, just as Native people lacked citizenship or any legal protections in the 18th and 19th century. Although the backgrounds for the situations are vastly different, one being the result of colonial conquest and the other of climate change, the similarities in the experiences of climate refugees and Native Americans that were displaced are striking. As the number of climate refugees rises worldwide, the US might be forced to deal with the impact that dispossession and displacement had on Native people in the past, as it reckons with the impacts of climate displacement across the nation. The history of Native American removal

[13] Rogerson, "Alaska's U.S. Senators Press Museums and Universities to Repatriate Indigenous Remains."
[14] McDonnell, "The Refugees The World Barely Pays Attention To."
[15] Bittle, "The American Climate Migration Has Already Begun."

and dispossession will thus take on a new relevance nationally, and perhaps globally, as repatriation, climate change and displacement become a part of global discussions.

I. Theory and Methodology

This thesis is situated within the field of new histories of the American West. Within this theoretical space scholars have developed a set of parameters for understanding the West, and my work aligns with these ideas of what the West means. Renowned Western historian Richard White writes in *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own" A New History of the American West* that "The West did not suddenly emerge; rather, it was gradually created."[16] New histories of the West apply the idea that the notion of the West itself was created and crafted within American minds over centuries. The West does not have natural geographical or demographic borders, or a logical point of origin in time. Take, for instance, the idea of the West as a vacant landscape open for the taking. This image has been an essential component of ideas about the West, but it fails to acknowledge the complex reality of the region. The West was never vacant, the people who inhabited it before Europeans were just conveniently left out of the narrative or physically removed all together.[17]

As historian Neil Campbell argued, early Western studies and ideas about the West had a need to create the West in a static image. Campbell maintained that "To examine the West in the twenty-first century is to think of it as always already transnational, a more routed and complex rendition, a traveling concept whose meanings move between cultures, crossing, bridging, and intruding simultaneously."[18] Reimagining and building new Western histories means taking stock of imaginings of the West that are rooted in a simple version of the past or that do not take into consideration the complex forces that have played out in the region and that continue to influence it today. Like White recalls in relation to the creation of the concept of the West as wilderness "The West was a wilderness to Anglo Americans only because they defined it as such."[19] New Western histories try to look at the West critically by keeping the notion of the "created West" in mind, and so will this thesis. The idea of West was created to serve a preferred perspective, but through new Western histories we can imagine the West more inclusively, complexly, and fluidly.

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[16] White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 4.
[17] White, 3–4.
[18] Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West*, 1–2.
[19] White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 57.

In addition to that the employment of new western histories perspectives this thesis employs theoretical perspectives from Indigenous studies specifically, and religious studies. Denzin and Lincoln outline the main theoretical aspects of Indigenous studies to be that:

> Critical indigenous inquiry begins with the concerns of indigenous people. It is assessed in terms of the benefits it creates for them. The work must represent indigenous persons honestly, without distortion or stereotype, and the research should honor indigenous knowledge, customs, and rituals. It should not be judged in terms of neocolonial paradigms. [20]

These ideas are the starting point for the Indigenous theoretical perspectives this thesis utilizes. Through engaging with Native voices and experiences, this thesis tries to address issues that concern Indigenous peoples and look at them through a lens where Indigeneity is a central feature. Indigenous studies, maintained Denzin and Lincoln, also engages in post-colonial ideas, where a critique of a colonialism is centered. But Indigenous studies specifically outline how the particularities of Indigenous experiences differ from those of, for instance, African Americans. Denzin and Lincoln contended that post-colonial and critical race theories in Indigenous studies take a new approach. When Indigenous knowledge and experience are centered, for instance by looking at the Reservation system in the US through a lens that features Native ideas of sacredness, the result becomes uniquely Indigenous as well.[21] This methodology and theoretical framework is similar to the one Graber outlines in her work. She argued that:

> Indeed, our histories mirror nineteenth-century policy goals in which white Americans occupy the center and Native people dwell on the periphery. (…) Placing Indian lands and nations at the story's center seems obvious when we consider that these lands made up most of the nation's massive expansion.[22]

This thesis attempts to utilize these perspectives to engage with the topic of public lands management in the US through an Indigenous lens. This is done through Indigenous studies methodologies, like engaging with oral histories and centering the experiences of Native people in the narrative, and through keeping an Indigenous theoretical framework in mind as the discussion progresses, trying to highlight the impacts on Native peoples' lives specifically.

The third and final theoretical framework for this thesis revolves around new religious studies theories about space and sacredness, as well as how we interact with the spaces of others. Jeanne Kilde asserted that "The tendency of Protestant-oriented scholars to perceive Protestantism as a-spatial, and thus to either disregard religious space and buildings entirely

[20] Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, 2.
[21] Denzin and Lincoln, 5–6.
[22] Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 14.

or perceive them as simply backgrounds for religious activity would remain influential in the academy for the next two centuries."[23] Newer religious studies scholarship takes a different approach to religious spaces. The newer approach is one that fits when looking at Native religions because it takes into account more than just built environments and because it takes on "interpretive approaches examining the function and meaning of religious spaces vis-à-vis the religious groups that create and use them", as Kilde puts it.[24] Thinking about space in this way applies well to Native American contexts because many Native religions interact with nature as a religious space in a way that an a-spatial Protestant scholarly approach would perhaps overlook. Ideas about space also relate to Indigenous studies through discussions about repatriation and public history. Knauer and Wolfowitz claim that "The sites can become microcosms for larger debates involving both state actors and varied publics (which do not always agree) over the boundaries of the state, its legacy, and who belongs to it."[25] They contended that keeping the different relations various publics may have to space, such as the difference between a Native approach a recreational approach to Devils Tower, is crucial to understand how public history and public sites can become hotbeds for conflict and why it is difficult for groups with divergent approaches to understand each other.

As for general methodological approaches, this thesis relies upon the methods of historical and religious studies. The examination of the issues in question will rely on primary source material and ethnographic reports. Additionally, for instance, oral histories, religious texts, speeches, newspaper articles are used to gain insight into the different periods and topics in question.

II. A Note on Terminology

Where possible I try to employ the names of specific nation names, like Lakota or Kiowa. This applies to describing the affiliations of different speakers and activists, and when I use examples of specific traditions or customs from certain communities. Generally, using these names is considered the most appropriate and is the preference of most of the communities themselves, and I therefore strive to use these names.

When referring generally to people from different Native nations I use the term "Native American" or "Native". These terms are commonly used in contemporary discussions and in modern legal contexts and are therefore my terms of choice in this thesis. I avoid using

[23] Kilde, "Thinking about Religious Space," 5.
[24] Kilde, 8.
[25] Knauer and Walkowitz, *Contested Histories in Public Space*, 8.

terms such as “Indian”, as the term is most used in older contexts and may at times have colonial or derogatory connotations. Though some Native people themselves use the term “Indian” to refer to themselves, I choose to employ the term “Native” or “Native American” to steer clear of possible negative connotations some people may have with the term “Indian.” Terms like “Indian” or “American Indian” are used in legal materials and discussions from before the 21st century. When quoting source material, the terms the sources apply will be referenced and at times used. These decisions are in keeping with recent influential scholarly publications within the same topic, like Dina Gilio-Whittaker’s *As Long As Grass Grows,* where she argued for some of the same word choices.[26] The same is true for the use of derogatory words like “savage”. That, and similar terms, will only be used in direct quotations from primary and secondary source material. The word Indigenous refers to a more global context and is generally used in this text when such contexts and connections are discussed.

I do generally tend to use the English names for places, for instance by referring to Devils Tower as such rather than the Lakota name Mato Tipila, meaning Bear Lodge. The reason for this decision is mostly due to recognizability by the intended reader, which will in most cases be non-Native and therefore more familiar with the English name. Although scholars who read this work may be familiar with certain Native place names, the English name is used for sake of clarity in case the Native name is not familiar. The English name is also used in most legal contexts and in media coverage about the Tower. For the topic of this thesis to be more recognizable and to situate the work within a larger context of media and political discussions, the English names for places like Devils Tower is used. I do, however, take care to mention and explain Native names where applicable.

As discussed in the theory and methodology section, this thesis is situated within the context of new western histories. This means that when the term “West” or “western” is used, the idea of the “created West” grounds the use. The use of the term in this work recognizes stereotypes that may come with the term but tries to reframe the use of the term in a context that sees the West as a more complex and malleable sphere and consider the decisions and developments that created the West.

When discussing non-Native people, I apply a range of terms depending on context. In the Progressive Era setting I tend to use terms that imply ethnicity and situation to distinguish non-Native people from Native people, such as “white settlers” or “white majority”. Generally, the distinction “majority” is helpful, and is often coupled with other terms in order

[26] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, x–xi.

to gain the wanted specificity. As for the use of the term "American", it tends to be used in combination with other distinctions to make it clearer. For instance, "the majority of Americans" or "Anglo-Americans" or "Christian Americans." But as Jennifer Graber contended in her note on the terms, "I use this term [American] to denote citizens of the United States in the nineteenth century.(…) When discussing assumptions that Americans had about culture and ethnicity, I employ specific designations such as Euro-American and Anglo-American."[27] The term "American" is used about non-Native white citizens. And even though Native Americans gain citizenship within the period of the first chapter, the term "American" is still used throughout to refer to non-Native people for the sake of clarity.

III. Limitations to my Perspective

It is also important to address the limitations of my own background in relation to this topic. I am not Native myself and will therefore never be truly able to understand the struggles that Native people have faced and continue to face in America. To address the issues that the limitations of my approach may bring I try to engage with Indigenous studies theoretical frameworks that center Indigenous experiences and lives. I also make use of primary sources that feature Native voices and try to present Native people, their beliefs and causes with complexity. This is also one of the reasons why I choose to employ the term "Native American" instead of "Indian", as "Indian" is more commonly used among Native people themselves in an attempt to reclaim ownership of the word. It is not my place to engage in that endeavor, and thus I use the word which is most appropriate for an outsider like myself to use when referring generally to Native people.

[27] Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, pt. A Note on Terms.

Chapter 1: Whose Progress? Progressive Reform, National Parks, and Dispossession

In the latter half of the 19th century American society experienced several major developments. Industries, like coal, railroads, and other types of manufacturing, became the backbone of the American economy. As the nation expanded westward, more resources became available for use, feeding the growing economy. The population grew as well, with large-scale European immigration as a great contributor, and more people settled around cities as jobs in and around the urban core became the norm. Industry provided stable jobs for many people, and so people came to the city to experience what the new, industrialized world had to offer. A fast pace, rapid economic growth, new technology, and large-scale urbanization characterized American society in the 1800s. The emerging Progressive movement tried to address some of the issues that these developments brought through political reform. Historians thus dubbed the period from 1890-1920 the Progressive Era. Gould and Shah contended that the reason reform was possible in the Progressive Era was because "it occurred during a time of prosperity when Americans felt that it was possible to make changes in their society without risking their economic future."[28] The country had just come out of a significant economic downturn in the early 1890s, and with increased economic prosperity in the period after this people experienced more economic stability than they had in the previous decade. Economic stability, and even prosperity, led to a renewed optimism about the future of the young nation. Gould and Shah maintained that "Americans could envision a future of expanding growth and greater social harmony. The nation's problems seemed manageable and open to satisfactory resolution" and that this was the main reason why reform was possible in this era.[29]

New printing technology made it easier and cheaper than ever to print newspapers and magazines. Cheap production also meant the magazines and papers were cheap to purchase, going for as little as 10 cents, making them available to the public. As the number of daily newspapers grew to almost 2000 across the nation, many journalists found platforms to address social, economic, and political issues more thoroughly.[30] With economic stability people had more time and effort to put into other aspects of their lives, and so many Americans became interested in reading about and engaging in politics and social issues.

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[28] Gould and Shah, *America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1917*, 19–20.
[29] Gould and Shah, 22.
[30] Gould and Shah, 26–27.

Journalists in this era increasingly shifted the focus of the public to the lack of economic oversight in big business, instances of political corruption, and labor issues such as unsafe working conditions, child labor, and unfair wages.

In an effort to meet these challenges, and the increased public attention on them, Progressive politicians sought reform across the board. President Theodore Roosevelt summed up the Progressive Era sentiment in his speech to the Convention of the National Progressive Party in Chicago in 1912.

> In a century and a quarter as a nation the American people have subdued and settled the vast reaches of a continent; ahead lies the greater task of building upon this foundation, by themselves, for themselves, and with themselves, an American common wealth which in its social and economic structure shall be four square with democracy.[31]

The idea that the Progressive Era was a time to establish what American society was supposed to look like in a modern, industrialized age came across in Roosevelt's speech. The speech also outlined some of the other main tangents of Progressive politics. Roosevelt argued for more control of businesses, social reform to benefit those who suffer most, and a government where the people to have more direct influence. He also maintained that the idea of conservation of nature was a crucial part of Progressive ideology.[32]

Conservation was a popular and growing idea at the time, and the movement around conservation reached its height in the late 1800s. The movement believed that it was crucial to protect natural resources, wildlife, and American wilderness against development and destruction. The idea was to preserve and protect American nature for future generations to enjoy. The movement caught on as more people became concerned with the effects of industrialization and the freedom of big business. The development of this movement and the ideas brought forth by it would prove to be a monumental force, and its impact changed America forever. The establishment of the National Parks System was a result of the efforts of advocates of conservation, as was the idea that government should protect nature in general.

Gould and Shah contended that through the Progressive Era and its reform efforts "the United States became a more just and equitable nation than it had been in 1890. Not all ills had been cured, but significant advances had taken place. Most important, the Progressive Era had defined the agenda of American domestic reform for much of the twentieth century that

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[31] "Address by Theodore Roosevelt before the Convention of the National Progressive Party in Chicago, August, 1912."
[32] "Address by Theodore Roosevelt before the Convention of the National Progressive Party in Chicago, August, 1912."

followed."[33] Historians have debated the impact of the Progressive Era ever since its close, but many agreed with the sentiment of Gould and Shah, that the era and its reforms made a positive impact on American society and its people. However, a problem with this sentiment is that it conveniently leaves out the fact that the Progressive Era policies mostly brought positive change for the white majority, and not the rest of the population. Native Americans in this era experienced growing dispossession and disenfranchisement. David Wrobel's characterization of the era aligns with this argument, highlighting the juxtapositions that came with Progressive Era reform efforts and the movements for social, economic, and environmental justice:

> Progressivism as a movement in America made no sense, and yet simultaneously made complete sense. Its apparent contradictions – social justice and social control, cultural empathy and base racism, Christian moralism and patently un-Christian disregard for the rights of others – merely represent the predictable array of responses to a perceived state of acute crisis and may well have been no more wide ranging than those of any other period in the nation's modern history.[34]

The conservation movement and its effects contributed to a devastating dispossession of Native American lands. The main reasons for this were the prevalent derogatory opinions of Indigenous people in this era and the continued erasure of Native people from the idea of how American nature should look. Native people lacked adequate representation and civil rights, and to most of them the Progressive Era proved to be just the opposite of what its name lays out.

This chapter will try to reckon with the impact of the Progressive Era conservation policies and the ideas of the conservation movement on Native people in the US. I aim to show how ideas about Native Americans and their role in nature in this time laid the groundwork for the dispossession that the Progressive Era and the conservation movement brought on Native people, and why it happened at this particular time.

1.1 The Progressive Era Setting and Changing Policies Regarding Native Americans

Reform happened across most sectors of public life between 1890 and 1920. The wide reach of reform was in some part justified by appealing to the people's right to rule. Arguments for more accurate representation and power to the people was prevalent. In Roosevelt's 1912 speech he also asserted that this was the time for "a genuine Progressive movement, Nation-wide and justice-loving, sprung from and responsible to the people themselves (…) while

[33] Gould and Shah, *America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1917*, xxi.
[34] Wrobel, *America's West*, 57.

representing all that is best in the hopes, beliefs, and aspirations of the plain people."[35] Progressive politicians maintained that they were working for the rights of the ordinary man, and to some extent that was true. Certainly, plenty of Progressive reform efforts tried to deal with unequal distributions of wealth and improve living conditions for the majority.

One of the main developments of the era was the sweeping regulation of big businesses. In his first annual address to Congress President Roosevelt advocated that what was needed was "to collect and publicize information about interstate industry, an act to expedite anti-trust prosecutions, and a railroad bill prohibiting rebates on freight shipments."[36] His administration followed through on these ideas, and established institutions for government oversight over industries like railroads and coal production. In 1904 the Department for Commerce and Labor was established, with the Bureau of Corporations as a subdivision. This divisions institutionalized government oversight, a radical idea in the American political sphere at the time. The Department had the power to carry out investigations into businesses to make sure they were not interfering with the free market or curtailing competition. No previous administrations had directly interfered with business operations in the way the Roosevelt administration did, cementing Roosevelt and his team as Progressive politicians.[37] The regulation of businesses was both a process that tempted to resolve corruption and that tried to stabilize the American economy by making sure that big business participated honestly. The regulation would in turn make it easier for smaller businesses participate on an equal ground, framing the regulation policies as something that benefitted the regular American. The new Department of Labor and Commerce also had the power to investigate labor situations, like unsafe working environments. This was an important aspect of the impact for working Americans, as in 1900 only "Around 1 million workers were wounded and somewhere between 25,000 and 35,000 died in US workplaces."[38]

The Progressive Era did not only see top-down reform. Many of the social reform movements at the time were grassroots movements, for instance, the movement for women's suffrage. The West, in particular was, early on a leading region in the fight for women's rights. In the West many women had secured the right to vote before the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1920. Some of the earliest states were Wyoming and Utah, were women gained the right to vote in consequently 1869 and 1870.

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[35] "Address by Theodore Roosevelt before the Convention of the National Progressive Party in Chicago, August, 1912."
[36] Ricard, *A Companion to Theodore Roosevelt*, 155.
[37] Ricard, 158.
[38] Wrobel, *America's West*, 56.

These were however special instances; Wyoming was hoping to attract more settlers by giving women the right to vote and Utah gave voting rights to women as a part of the protection of Mormon plural marriage. Colorado and Idaho followed and implemented women's suffrage in the 1890s. In the first half of 1910s Washington, California, Nevada, the Alaska Territory, Montana, Arizona, Kansas and Oregon all granted voting rights to women, and in 1918 women could vote in South Dakota and Oklahoma. During that same period the only states outside the West with the same development were New York, Illinois, and Michigan.[39]

Several clubs and organizations, as well as publications and pamphlets, were used to advance the women's suffrage cause in the Progressive Era. Prominent national organizations were National American Woman Suffrage Association, American Woman Suffrage Association, and the Political Equality Club. They campaigned, demonstrated, wrote articles, and held lectures to engage other women in the issue and to garner political attention. For instance, the Geneva Political Equality Club held lectures with prominent suffragettes such as the British suffragist Beatrice Forbes-Roberson who spoke to the club about the importance of securing the vote for women in 1910. In her lecture she maintained that "that a man does not represent his family at the polls, that he votes merely for his own selfish self and that if women desire the enactment of laws, beneficial to themselves the only way they can get them is to first get the franchise and then use their power as voters to get those things."[40] She and other women asserted that their voices needed to be heard and that their needs were equally important to those of men. Women's rights activists were successful in many states in the Progressive Era, securing the right to vote for many women, especially in the West. Even though suffrage for all women in the US was not achieved until 1920, the Progressive Era generally saw improvements in the political rights of women.

Although some groups were experiencing breakthroughs in terms of rights and living and working conditions, such as more women being able to vote, states enacting anti-child labor laws, and working conditions generally improving for industry workers because of increased government oversight, marginalized groups generally saw little improvement. The experiences of African American and Native Americans illustrate some of the darker aspects of Progressive Era rhetoric. Gould and Shah asserted that "The power of the state could be used in ways that diminished tolerance and diversity to achieve the goal of a racially purer and more homogeneous society. Reform was not a self-defining concept or one that insured

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[39] Wrobel, 59–60.
[40] "Why Women Should Vote; Beatrice Forbes-Roberson Lectures at Kirkwood Hotel."

the social virtue of whoever identified with change."[41] In this era the influence of the government over sectors of public life expanded, but this influence was not always for the better. There were several political developments limiting the freedom of African Americans in this era, which together with continued segregation, especially in the South, made life more difficult for black people. For instance, laws preventing interracial marriages between blacks and whites were passed in several western states in the 1910s. Another example is the fact that several states, for instance Texas in 1902, passed laws to disenfranchise African American voters.[42] African Americans were, however, not silent on the troubling developments facing them. Especially African American authors were prevalent advocates for civil rights and desegregation in this era, with influential voices like W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington at the forefront. In his famous Niagara Movement speech in 1905 Du Bois argued that "We want full manhood suffrage, and we want it now, henceforth and forever."[43] However, racial injustice and racist stereotypes and imagery continued to fill American society. In 1915 the controversial and influential film *Birth of a Nation* came out.[44] The publication of such a film showed how common, and even accepted, racist stereotypes were. The continuation of segregation and disenfranchisement of African American showed that the Progressive Era was not at all that progressive for certain marginalized groups.

Wrobel asserted that there are similarities in the experiences of African Americans and those of Native Americans in this era. He contended that:

> In both cases the government was essentially abandoning a sizeable minority population in an entire region of the country to the will of the political and racial majority. African Americans, so the misguided reasoning went, with the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments in place, had the legal foundations to fend for themselves in the South. Likewise, Native Americans, with the Dawes Act and its accompanying pathway to assimilation in place, could do the same in the West without special protections from the federal government.[45]

The Dawes Act, or the General Allotment Act as it is also called, was merely one of many political and legal developments in the Progressive Era that limited the freedom and rights of Native Americans, even though it was argued by those in favor of the act that it would better the lives of Native people. The taking of land by the federal government and the removal of Native peoples from the land they inhabited was one of the main tactics used by the federal government to control Native people. Richard White agreed with Wrobel's points, and

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[41] Gould and Shah, *America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1917*, 12.
[42] Wrobel, *America's West*, 75–77.
[43] Du Bois, "Niagara Movement Speech."
[44] Wrobel, *America's West*, 77.
[45] Wrobel, 79.

outlines that the Progressive reforms regarding Native people had three main features. He contended that the reforms were built on:

> suppression of Indian norms of family life, community organization, and religion. Reforms tried to accomplish this suppression by persuasion when possible and by force when necessary. Simultaneously, reformers tried to educate Indian children in order to instill American Protestant values in place of tribal values. Finally, reformers sought a policy of land allotment that would break up communal landholding patterns and create private ownership. In the end, Indians would be Christian farmers living in nuclear families on their own land.[46]

In the Progressive Era, Native people experienced greater dispossession than ever before. Policies that allowed for and expanded dispossession of Native people had devastating effects, especially from 1887 onwards, as Keller and Turek illustrated: "Over the next forty years land allotment in private tracts would reduce tribal territory from 138 million acres to under 47 million; some tribes lost over 90 percent of their reserves."[47] However, dispossession and removal of Native people from their homelands was a reality in the US long before the Progressive Era. To clearly see how detrimental Progressive Era land policies were for tribes across the US, we need to examine the history of removal prior to the era as well and what views these policies were built upon.

Removal policies began in earnest with Indian Removal Act of 1830, which aimed to move Native peoples living in the Eastern parts of the US, West of the Mississippi, into the still undeveloped Western territories. The policy led to widespread removal of tribes from their homelands and gruesome situations, like the Trail of Tears for the Cherokee. Tribes in the Eastern United States were forcefully removed from lands they had inhabited for centuries, from the ancestral and religious holy sites important to them and relocated to areas where they would be forced to change their lifestyle radically due to new climates and resources.[48] Elias Boudinot of the Cherokee spoke out against removal in 1828, questioning how "Which proof have they that the system they are now recommending, will succeed? (…) We are fearful that these men are building castles in the air, whose fall will crush those poor Indians who may be so blinded as to make the experiment."[49] Boudinot's fears would prove to be valid, as the project of removal was detrimental to many tribes, including his own. On the Trail of Tears an estimated 4000 Cherokee died.

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[46] White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 109–11.
[47] Keller and Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, 19.
[48] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 14–15.
[49] Hurtado and Iverson, *Major Problems in American Indian History*, 210.

In the mid-1800s a new solution to the issue of what to do with the Native American population was drafted, namely, to place them in designated areas called reservations. This would lessen potential opportunities for conflict with new white settlers and keep the tribes away from the settlements and towns that were emerging in the West. This solution was also one that took into account the fact that the endless westward expansion would soon end, as the settlers would hit the West coast and less land would be available.

In the 1850s and 60s there was more conflict with tribes in the West and white settlers than the beginning of the century. As a consequence, more settlers were pushing for the containment of Native peoples to protect white communities. Instances like the Minnesota Uprising of 1862 left many new settlers frightened and pushing for more control over Native people. The 1862 uprising by the Santee and Yankton Dakota was in protest of violations of agreements between their tribes and the federal government. The uprising resulted in widespread violence and over 200 white settlers and soldiers were killed. The federal government reacted in turn by hanging 38 participants from the uprising, the largest ever execution in US history.[50] Conflicts like the Minnesota Uprising underpinned arguments that Native people needed to be contained for the protection of white settler communities. Thus started the reservation system in the mid-1800s, and it only continued to grow toward the Progressive Era. The federal government arranged for the relocation of tribes to more remote and undesirable lands, opening lands fit for successful agriculture to new, white settlers. The relocation onto reservations meant made it easier for the government to control Native peoples and eventually try to assimilate them into white American society.[51] The relocation of tribes onto reservations was done in spite of previous land agreements with tribes, which showed how little regard the US had for the rights of Native people in this era.

Up until the 1870s the United States had signed treaties with tribes in order to establish boundaries and safe passage across territories inhabited by Native peoples in the Western states. These treaties were supposed to be official agreements on what land belonged to different tribes and how the US government and its citizens could interact with that land. Mark Spence claims that these treaties would become particularly important to various tribes in the future because they would "set the geographical parameters for future land cession agreements".[52] One such treaty was the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 between the United States government and seven Western tribes, among them the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Crow.

[50] Kaye, *Goodlands*, 59.
[51] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 29–30.
[52] Spence, 49.

This treaty guaranteed Native rights to the land in, for instance, the Black Hills in South Dakota and the Teton areas of Wyoming for the Sioux. The United States government also promised in Article 3 of the Treaty that it would protect the tribes from attacks and violence instigated towards them, even by the US itself.[53] None of the provisions in the Treaty were upheld, as was so often the case in treaties between the US and tribal nations. Dina Gilio-Whittaker contended that treaties were most often a way for the American government to enter into a temporary state of agreement with tribes in areas they needed to access. The federal government did not consider the treaties to be binding legislative documents.[54] Paul Baumgardner agreed with this sentiment and claimed that "What land was not forcefully taken was oftentimes extracted through coerced treaties and duplicitous promises. A streak of nineteenth-century Indian law cases 'extinguished all Native American proprietary land interests and claims.'"[55] The justification to continuously break agreements made with tribal nations and dispossess them of more and more land were laid out in ideas about the right of white settlers to explore and expand developed in the early 1800s.

Ideas such as Manifest Destiny and the Christian Doctrine of Discovery justified westward expansion and Native dispossession to a large extent. The Christian Doctrine of Discovery was woven into the American legal fabric in 1823 in the case of *Johnson v. M'Intosh.* This was the first case concerning Native Americans to make it to the Supreme Court, and it set a strong precedent for how the American legal system would come to treat Native people from then on. The opinion of the court was that the Europeans were superior in comparison with the Indigenous inhabitants of the land and that Native religions and character were not something that could measure up to the standards of the white settlers and thus did not need to be privileged.[56] Gilio-Whittaker maintained that this doctrine "would become the legal rationale for the continued violent appropriation of Indian lands and the engine powering Indian federal law still in place today." She also argued that the religious dimension of both this doctrine and Manifest Destiny were crucial, since they showed clearly how Christian ideas were being used to control non-white, non-Christian inhabitants of the United States and make them inferior both in the legal system and in the eyes of most Americans. The language that was used in arguments for both doctrines had a derogatory undertone, with words like inferiority and primitivism being used in relation to all non-Christian people to undermine

[53] Hurtado and Iverson, *Major Problems in American Indian History*, 239.
[54] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 131.
[55] Baumgardner, "Your Land Is Holy to Me," 211.
[56] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 55–56.

their role as important actors in society.[57] This was only the beginning of a long tradition of dispossession of Native lands under the influence of these doctrines.

After *Johnson v. M'Intosh* came a series of legal decisions that even further dispossessed Native Americans in the years leading up to the turn of the century, such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the General Allotment Act of 1887. To a large extent, the central legal developments that dealt with Native Americans in the 1800s were connected to ideas of property and land. With westward expansion came debates about who owned the land in the West that white settlers were moving into and what rights the owners of that land had over those areas. Conflicts between white settlers and tribes in local areas were not uncommon and put pressure on the American legal system had to take a stance on the legal status of land in the West. Conflict often ended with widespread violence on both side, such as the case with the Washita Cheyenne massacre in November of 1868, where as many as 50 Cheyenne died. Earlier on in the same year Cheyenne and other allied tribes had attacked white settlers in several places, for instance in Kansas. At least 15 white settlers died in the conflict. The conflict originally stemmed from disagreements over treaty violations and the Cheyenne argued that the land white settlers were moving into was owned by them.[58]

The widespread conflicts over land ownership in this era were partially due different ideas of land held within Native and white-Anglo culture. As Baumgardner claimed, Native Americans typically had a more communal approach to land, where no one person was the sole owner or caretaker, but all contributed to the fair preservation of land and thus had a right to use the land. Nature was typically viewed as something that cannot be owned or decided over by man, but rather something with autonomy and rights of its own. This perspective was not treated as valuable by the federal government, and no regard for the concept comes across in the acts and court decisions regarding land from this era, as is evident with the *Johnson v. M'Intosh* decision.[59] The communal land idea did not align with the view of property that the became leading in American society and legal fabric in this era. The American legal system based its decisions mostly on the concept that one person or one government had ownership of land and that only the courts or government policy could put limitations land management. Communal land ownership did not fit with this image and was certainly not agreeable with the needs of new white settlers in the West. Settlers needed land they could call their own and the

[57] Gilio-Whitaker, 55.
[58] Kaye, *Goodlands*, 65.
[59] Baumgardner, "Your Land Is Holy to Me," 210.

government need to own and protect the land that it did not want to be private property. The Christian Doctrine of Discovery and ideas about Manifest Destiny made this possible.

One of the ways in which the breaking up of tribal lands became a reality was through the passage of the Dawes Act of 1887, popularly named after Senator Henry L. Dawes from Massachusetts who was one of the main advocates for the act. The act was also referred to as the General Allotment Act, which gives more insight into the content of the act itself. The passage of the General Allotment Act laid the legal basis for breaking up treaty land and imposed the system of private property onto Native peoples even more than before. The act gave the government the right to divide up land owned by tribes and impose the system of allotments, which was a system that was common when it came to other land in the Western states where each family or homestead received an allotted piece of land that became their property. As Keller and Turek asserted, the Act was a product of a period where the government wanted Native peoples to assimilate to mainstream American culture. Allotment was supposed to encourage Native Americans to take up agriculture and live more similarly to their white neighbors.[60]

Allotment ended any chance of communal ownership of land for tribes in the Progressive Era and severely restricted more traditional Native activities such as hunting, gathering of medicinal plants, and access to sacred sites, because they no longer owned land outside their allotted area. The reason so much of the tribal territory was lost was because land left over in tribal territories when all members had received their allotted land was deemed to be surplus land. This land was opened for settlement by white Americans or transferred into government ownership. Much of the land the government came to own would later become national parks and forests. Giving surplus lands to white settlers was also an important way for the government to compensate for all the land withdrawn from the public to become national parks.[61] The General Allotment Act helped the federal government manage land in the West efficiently, as more and more people started moving into the Western states no land could go unused. The eventual establishment of the national parks system was built on this legal foundation and on the steady stream of surplus land into the government's hand from the late 1880s onwards. When Theodore Roosevelt came to power the General Allotment Act was already in place and the process of taking the land from Native people despite treaty obligations was well underway.

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[60] Keller and Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, 19.
[61] Keller and Turek, 27.

Several Native activists spoke out against the policy and how Native lands and rights were diminishing, among them Carlos Montezuma. Montezuma worked to have the voices of Native people heard both through written advocacy and through helping found the organization Society for American Indians. In an essay in the *Quarterly Journal* from the Society of American Indians in 1914, Montezuma stated his views about the effect of reservations on Native people, especially after they have been made even smaller by allotment policies. Montezuma maintained that "Reservations are prisons where our people are kept to live and die, where equal possibilities, equal education and equal responsibilities are unknown."[62] He also contended that even if a Native person had cultivated a large area of land, they would never be permitted to have more than their allotted share of ten acres because having vast property was viewed to not do Native people any good. Montezuma maintained that this was the view the government and the Indian Bureau, who managed the reservations, had of Native people and that the Allotment policy proved this. The passage and implementation of the General Allotment Act proved, in his opinion, that the federal government believed Native people could not and should not manage land, as they had not used them appropriately in their time before white settlers arrived.[63]

Another court case concerning Native American land and rights in the latter half of the 1800s also helped this ideas further take hold. The case that cemented the disregard for treaty rights in the American legal system was *Ward v. Race Horse* in 1896. The original case came from the District Court of Wyoming and was a dispute over hunting rights of Native peoples in Wyoming. Tribes in the state were afraid of losing their treaty bound right to hunt outside the official season, a right that they argued was clear in the Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868. The District Court of Wyoming decided that the tribes were in the right and that hunting rights as stated in the treaty overruled Wyoming state law. This did not go down well with all parties, however. The district attorney appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, which reversed the original decision. In its decision, the Supreme Court claimed that one had to view the treaties in light of the context they were made in. Since the conditions had now changed in the area, since Wyoming was now a state which had not been in 1868, the treaty rights did not have to be upheld. The court also maintained the case that the government negotiators had always imagined that the conditions of the area would change and that the treaties therefore were temporary agreements more than binding legal documents that needed to be upheld as such.[64]

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[62] Hoxie, *Talking Back To Civilization*, 93.
[63] Hoxie, 93.
[64] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 67–68.

The *Ward v. Race Horse* decision set a disturbing precedent for how the American legal system would deal with disputes over treaty rights in the future. From this decision forward the general legal consensus was that the treaties were made in a specific time and place that had later changed too much to uphold the terms of the treaties. This was however not how Native peoples had thought the treaties functioned, and they would from this decision forward have to fight for any rights that were formulated in a treaty. The general disregard of treaties by the government made it even easier to dispossess tribes of their lands than before, of which the government took full advantage.

A point made by Mark Spence is that the removal and relocation of Native Americans was always characterized by a pendulum swinging between assimilation and removal.[65] Often one ended with a combination of the two, and we can see that the policy of the 19th century is no exception. First with the removals through the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the development of reservations the pendulum swung in favor of removal. The General Allotment Act was an effort to assimilate Native peoples and make them live off agriculture instead of their traditional ways of life. But the breaking of the treaties over Native land rights, which was made official by the *Ward v. Race Horse* decision of 1896, speaks once again for removal. Another development in the Progressive Era that spoke for removal was the establishment of national parks, a system that relied heavily upon lands previously occupied by Native people.

1.2 The Establishment of the National Parks

The same pieces of legislation that were key building blocks in the continued dispossession of Native people, also built the foundation for the national parks as we know them today. The dispossession of Native people made the national parks possible, but another important aspect of why the system grew so exponentially was the Progressive Era setting. As David Stradling explained:

> Only twice in American history have environmental issues worked their way toward the top of the national political agenda: first, in the Progressive Era, roughly the two decades surrounding 1900, during what we call the conservation movement; and, second, in the 1960s and 1970s during the florescence of the modern environmental movement.[66]

The Progressive Era was a special time for environmental issues in the US. Due to consequences of expansion, urbanization and industrialization, a growing group were

[65] Spence, 14.
[66] Stradling, *Conservation in the Progressive Era*, 3.

advocating for environmental issues. The cause was not called environmental issues then, but rather they talked about ideas of conservation and preservation, and people were increasingly vocal about their concerns towards the end of the 19th century. Early advocates of the movement, like John Muir, had traveled in the West before large-scale settlement and reported back on its unique beauty. The beauty was a characteristic that he and a growing number of others claimed needed to be preserved for the world and future generations to enjoy.

The slowing and eventual ending of westward expansion in the 1890s made more people realize that land was not an infinite resource. The same was true for other resources such as timber and game, which were diminishing rapidly in some areas due to overuse and lack of regulation.[67] These issues were growing in tandem with the nation's economy and population, which were putting increasing pressure on the natural resources and the available land, especially in the West. Wrobel illustrated this by stating that "By the 1890s, the "myth of superabundance" of natural resources had exploded in the wake of extensive clear-cutting of forests and the consequent impact on watersheds."[68]An era was ending, and people were coming to terms with the need for policy concerning the West. It was not only the Western wilderness that concerned the growing conservation movement, but tightening urban cores meant that living conditions in urban areas became a subject of concern among people and politicians. People became engaged in issues relating to the air and water quality around their homes, for example through demanding regulation of smoke emissions.[69] For instance, in an address delivered to the Women's Club of Cincinnati in 1905 Charles Reed urged the women present to engage in the issue of smoke emissions in the city. He argued that this is an issue they should be concerned with because "Poison taken into the body through the lungs is just as much a poison as is some other poisons swallowed into the stomach. Poisonous air is probably more disastrous to infants than adulterated milk."[70] Reed also maintained that the issue was not only one that should concern the women of Cincinnati, but that it was an issue worthy of national attention.

Awareness about these issues was clearly becoming a part of the national agenda in the latter half of the 19th century, as is evident through the fact that the federal government took action on these issues and provided growing federal protection of nature and natural resources. One of the ways in which the government tried to address the growing concerns

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[67] Stradling, 4–7.
[68] Wrobel, *America's West*, 12.
[69] Stradling, 7-8.
[70] Stradling, 77.

about wilderness conservation was through the establishment of national parks. The first national park, Yellowstone National Park, was established in 1872 by President Ulysses S. Grant. The development marked the beginning of the government's protection of exceptional landscapes as parks, forests, monuments, and other designations. The Yosemite Valley received protection as early as 1864, though not did not become a national park officially until 1890. Though certainly, national parks were not the only way in which the government addressed calls for conservation, as Wrobel illustrated "Large-scale irrigation efforts were another part of the conservationist agenda, and Salt Lake City, Denver, Los Angeles, and California's Central Valley were among the major beneficiaries of this initiative in the 1890s."[71] National parks was, however, the project with the largest scale. Never before had American wilderness been protected in such large quantities. The project also had an extensive impact on how American's came to view their relation to nature, as national parks came to be an emblem of pride for many white Americans, both politicians and regular working people.

During the time of Roosevelt's presidency at the height of the Progressive Era, the national parks were vastly expanded. No president before or after ever increased the number of holdings in the national parks system as much. Although he did not create the first national park, Roosevelt is still considered the father of the national parks as they stand today. Roosevelt expanded the system to include new categories of protection and his legacy features the creation of "150 national forests, 51 federal bird reservations, 4 national game preserves, 5 national parks, and 18 national monuments", that were either created by him or expanded during his time as president, maintained Serge Ricard.[72]. Roosevelt was the first president to establish a National Monument with the creation the National Monument of Devils Tower in Wyoming in 1906. The category "national monument" had not existed prior to Roosevelt but has since become a popular category and today there are over a hundred national monuments. The creation of preserves and reserves for different animals and species was also something that Roosevelt was particularly concerned about and thus he made it possible to create such protections under those categories.

Until 1916 all these different types of protections for areas were scattered among different agencies in the government. However, in 1916 the Organic Act was signed, and the National Park Service was established. The NPS would come to manage a majority of federally protected lands, whether that be forests, parks, preserves or any of the other types of

[71] Wrobel, *America's West*, 12–13.
[72] Ricard, *A Companion to Theodore Roosevelt*, 183.

protected sites. Although these categories aim to protect different types of sites, they all fall under the umbrella category of the National Parks System. The Organic Act allowed the government to collect protections for nature, animals and historic sites under the same agency and it also forged into law the idea that the land the NPS managed should be for the enjoyment of all Americans.[73] Even though the Organic Act was not signed in Roosevelt's time as president he still helped set the standard for what the NPS could achieve and he expanded the federally protected lands more than any other president. But his work too was based upon the creation of important legislation from earlier in the 19th century. As Keller and Turek argued, the creation of the NPS "bequeathed distortions and ignorance about native history at Rainier, Yosemite, Yellowstone and many other of the thirty – six existing units. The Service would do little to rectify the situation until late in the century".[74] The NPS's creation did lead to a more centralized management of the national parks system. However, its creation and expansion generally also dispossessed Native communities. The establishment of national parks would prove detrimental to Native communities, especially because their interaction and history with the land was not a part of the narrative in the national parks.

1.3 A New Image of Nature and Wilderness

One of the reasons why Native people were absent from the narrative of the national parks was because of how nature and wilderness was viewed in the Progressive Era. Toward the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century the stage was set for new ideas about nature's role in American society, curtesy of the growing conservation movement. The movement was based on ideas from thinkers earlier in the 19th century but took rather a different approach to the role of Native people than previous thinkers. Men such as George Catlin, Henry David Thoreau, Thomas Cole, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John James Aubudon were some of the key influences from the Antebellum Era on the late 19th century conservation movement. Although there were certainly others as well, these men were central to the growth of ideas that would eventually lead others to establishing national parks in the late 19th and the early 20th century.[75]

In their time these men presented images of the West and the natural wonders that one could experience there. They were also some of the earliest advocates for protecting these landscapes so that they would be available for all Americans to see as the nation continued to

[73] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 115–16.
[74] Keller and Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, 26.
[75] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 10–11.

expand westward. George Catlin and Thomas Cole were both popular painters in the 1830s who focused their work on the American West, which they experienced through travels. Both men presented a highly romanticized version of the nature of the West. They incorporated Native American figures in their landscape paintings of the wilderness, which in turn both a romanization of Indian life and a situated them as a key component of wild Western scene. This is for instance evident in Catlins *Indians Encamping at Sunset, Upper Missouri* from 1832, showing the vast valleys by the Missouri River with a small and peaceful Native encampment at the forefront.[76] Similarly in *Picturesque Bluffs above Prairie du Chien* Catlin depicts two groups of Native people canoeing on the Mississippi with beautiful landscape behind.[77] In most of Catlin's work Native people have a strong presence in the wilderness. They are often featured doing some activity or in encampments, manifesting that Catlin viewed Native people as a central aspect of the nature in the West. The same can be said for several of Thomas Cole's paintings, although Native people were a much stronger feature in Catlin's art. However, they were still present in Cole's images of American nature as well, for instance in *Indian Pass* from 1847, which features a large mountain and roaring forests in the background and a sole Native person at the very front.[78]

Writers such as Emerson and Thoreau described the beauty of the West and the feelings it evoked for them in their work. Emerson presented a romantic picture of the West as somewhere one could escape from the trials and worries of the heavily urbanized East and feel close to God and feel the sacredness of God's creation. This religious ideal would prove integral for later conservation activists such as John Muir. The almost religious connection Emerson maintained nature provided is prominent in for instance his essay *Nature,* where Emerson writes:

> Here no history, or church, or state, is interpolated on the divine sky and the immortal year. (…) These enchantments are medicinal, they sober and heal us. These are plain pleasures, kindly and native to us. We come to our own, and make friends with matter, which the ambitious chatter of the schools would persuade us to despise. We never can part with it; the mind loves its old home: as water to our thirst, so is the rock, the ground, to our eyes, and hands, and feet.[79]

[76] Catlin, *Indians Encamping at Sunset, Upper Missouri*, 1832, oil on canvas, 11 1/4 x 14 3/8 in. (28.5 x 36.5 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum

[77] Catlin, *Picturesque Bluffs above Prairie du Chien*, 1835-1836, oil on canvas, 19 5/8 x 27 1/2 in. (49.7 x 70.0 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum

[78] Cole, *Indian Pass,* 1847, oil on canvas, 40 1/16 × 29 3/4 × 1 7/16 in. (101.8 × 75.6 × 3.6 cm), The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

[79] Emerson, *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 195–96.

Thoreau developed some of the key ideas about the wilderness in America in this age. His ideas contrasted with Emerson's as he did not view the wilderness as a relaxing escape but rather a place for people to connect with their humanity through direct contact with the earth. Thoreau also viewed Native Americans as holding special wisdom concerning how to connect intimately with nature, which he admired and believed it was important to try and emulate.[80] For instance, Thoreau wrote in a journal entry from 1841 that:

> The charm of the Indian to me is that he stands free and unconstrained in nature, is her inhabitant and not her guest, and wears her easily and gracefully. But the civilized man has the habits of the house. His house is a prison, in which he finds himself oppressed and confined, not sheltered and protected.[81]

Catlin, Cole, Emerson, and Thoreau, among others, developed the basis for what would become the conservation movement in the Progressive Era. However, their ideas about the integral place of Native people in the idea of wilderness would not be carried into the new era. The reverence for Native life and wisdom was a unique feature of the Antebellum era environmentalism. The conservation movement of the Progressive Era had other ideas about what nature in America looked like. They feared the nation could fall easily into the trap of overconsumption and destruction of the natural wonders that they argued were key defining features of the new nation and should therefore be protected at all costs.

One of the main advocates for conservation in the Progressive Era was John Muir, and he was also one of the foremost advocates for a new idea of American wilderness. Muir and many of his contemporaries believed in the idea of the pristine church of nature. This idea encompassed that the wilderness was a place that was removed from human intervention, and this notion became increasingly popular in the late 1800s and would overtake the Antebellum idea of Native presence in the wilderness as integral. Michael Pesses described what he calls "John Muir's Trap". Pesses claimed that Muir dissociated humans and nature, or more particularly Native Americans from nature. With presenting and idealizing nature as a place that was and should remain untouched by human intervention, Muir and his contemporaries removed the idea of Native Americans from the natural landscapes of the West.[82] The nature of the American West was not, however, untouched like Muir described it. It was a place where Native Americans had lived for centuries and where they had continually affected the landscape that Muir was seeing in different ways. Mark Spence agrees with Pesses and writes that these new post-Civil War ideas about Native Americans and the wilderness shaped both

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[80] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 20–21.
[81] Thoreau, "Thoreau's Journal (Part I)."
[82] Pesses, "Environmental Knowledge, American Indians, and John Muir's Trap," 119.

policy and the conservation movement. The idea that the wilderness in the West was untouched or unoccupied was part of the creation and the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The new park did not acknowledge the Native American presence and settlement in the area.[83] The latter half of the 19th century, and especially the Progressive Era, saw extensive growth of such ideas about wilderness and Muir was one of its foremost advocates.[84]

Muir believed in the sacrality and the inherent value in all nature and wrote about this perspective on the nature of the American West in particular. For instance, Muir wrote that: "Everybody needs natural 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. This natural beauty is manifest (…) in our significant National parks – the Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia etc."[85] Muir had an almost religious approach to nature and to the protection of it, which reached and inspired many Americans on the East Coast through his writings in several magazines. He was not only a prolific nature writer, but he was also an activist. In 1892 he established the Sierra Club, an initiative which worked to preserve the nature of his home state of California. He was also a central voice in the fight for the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890.[86] Muir's religious connection to nature was common thread in nature writing of the Progressive Era, both because it reflected a prevailing way of viewing and relating to nature and because this religious angle was a way to enthuse readers to care about the cause. It was inspired by the ideas of nature enthusiasts earlier in the century like Catlin and Emerson, but it had taken a different turn under Muir.

These new ideas became highly influential, and even animated White House discussions. In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt gave a speech to the Conference of Governors at the White House which showed that even the foremost leader of the nation supported for conservation. Roosevelt delivered this towards the end of his presidency, but conservation was something that he was committed to throughout his presidency. In the conclusion of his speech Roosevelt stated:

> Finally, let us remember that the conservation of our natural resources, though the gravest problem of today, is yet but part of another and greater problem to which this Nation is not yet awake, but to which it will awake in time, and with which it must hereafter grapple if it is to live--the problem of national efficiency, the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the Nation.

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[83] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 39.
[84] Pesses, "Environmental Knowledge, American Indians, and John Muir's Trap," 120–21.
[85] Stradling, *Conservation in the Progressive Era*, 98.
[86] Ricard, *A Companion to Theodore Roosevelt*, 174.

> When the People of the United States consciously undertake to raise themselves as citizens, and the Nation and the States in their several spheres, to the highest pitch of excellence in private, State, and national life, and to do this because it is the first of all the duties of true patriotism, then and not till then the future of this Nation, in quality and in time, will be assured.[87]

He framed the issue of conservation and protection of natural resources as something that was of great importance to the future of American society. Roosevelt's speech shows how important the issue of conservation was in the Progressive Era. He took the issue of conservation to the people, making it a focus of campaigns and speeches, in the hope that elected officials would listen to their voter base if they became concerned with the issue of conservation.[88] The ideas grew popular not only among influential people within government, but also among many average Americans of both genders.

Outlining Theodore Roosevelt's life and presidency, Ricard argued that "TR was the first president to recognize that a coherent national policy was necessary to protect the natural environment of the United States."[89] Other presidents before him had started to realize that something needed to be done to protect nature and natural resources in America, but when President Roosevelt took office in 1901, environmental policy became part of the political agenda on an unprecedented scale. Urban progressivism with its growing regard for equality, working and living conditions and, later, environmental concerns of the city affected Roosevelt's political views heavily. He brought these progressive sensibilities into the White House.[90]

The movement's ideals of conservation for the good of the future generations and fairer management of resources was easily married with key ideas of Progressivism that Roosevelt advocated for. As president, Roosevelt had the key political position to advocate for conservation and push through legislation on the issue, which he did to a great degree. Perhaps more than any others, he was responsible for the reach and growth of the conservation movement, because he not only put conservation on the political agenda but also put it on the public's agenda through his speeches and addresses to people across the nation. The sentiment reached across the nation and compelled people of both genders to advocate for the cause. For instance, in an address to the National Conservation Congress in 1912, Progressive Era artist Marion Croker spoke to the importance of conservation to protect nature for future generations. She contended that if conservation is not taken seriously "there

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[87]"Theodore Roosevelt, 'Conservation as a National Duty,' Speech Text," 12.
[88] Ricard, *A Companion to Theodore Roosevelt*, 176–77.
[89] Ricard, 177.
[90] Ricard, 42.

will come a time when the world will not be able to support life, and then we shall have no need for conservation of health, strength or vital force, because we must have the things to support life or else everything else is useless."[91] She argued that conservation was a crucial field, because if it was not taken seriously then life itself might be in danger for future generations, as nature maintains life on earth as it is known.

Other conservation enthusiasts continued to influence Roosevelt once he took office, for instance, Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot was Chief US Forester from 1898 – 1910 and served as one of the main advocates of conservation in Roosevelt's government.[92] Pinchot believed that protection had to coexist with use in order to work, as is evident in the principles of conservation he outlined in his book *The Fight for Conservation*. Here Pinchot contends that

> The first great fact about conservation is that it stands for development. (…) Conservation does mean provision for the future, but it means also and first of all the recognition of the right of the present generation to the fullest necessary use of all the resources with which this country is so abundantly blessed.[93]

Michael Smith pointed out that Pinchot's stance was well received, since it took economics and development more into consideration and maintained some business interests. Pinchot and other conservationists capitalized on the Progressive idea of less power to big business and asserted that in order to use and manage these resources well, the federal state had to serve a key role as administrator.[94] This was one of the main reasons why Pinchot became so influential on Roosevelt's conservation politics. He balanced the economic side of resource management with the ideal of the duty to conserve nature. Pinchot's idea of nature management worked well with Roosevelt's policies, since it meant that he could place vast areas of land under federal protection through the creation of parks, monuments, forests, and reserves, and still use these resources to an extent.

Influential figures such as Muir, Pinchot and Roosevelt were important in spreading the new idea how American wilderness looked and what should be done to protect it that prevailed in the Progressive Era. Their positions in American society made their influence and reach vast. The conservation movement of this era built upon the work of Antebellum Era thinkers, which was already familiar to many Americans, but changed it slightly. The new version kept focus on the beauty, uniqueness, and importance of American nature, but the image of that nature became one that was pristine and untouched. This depiction made it

[91] Merchant, Carolyn, *Major Problems in American Environmental History*, 336.
[92] Smith, "The Value of A Tree," 760–61.
[93] Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation*, chap. IV.
[94] Smith, "The Value of A Tree," 769–71.

easier to advocate for the needed protection of these lands; since they were undamaged by human interference they certainly deserved to remain so. The Progressive Era conservation movement also concentrated on framing conservation in a patriotic image. This reframe fitted well into the developments in American society at the time, as many Americans were trying to envision what kind of future they wanted in this nation and advocated for changes they felt were needed in order to make this vision come true. Conservation ideas became embedded with specifically Progressive ideals, which framed conservation to fit the political moment.

1.4 "Uncivilized Savages" – Progressive Era Ideas About the Native People

Although ideas about conservation were presented as a crucial duty to all people in America, this sentiment was only extended to proper citizens. Native Americans did not at the time of Roosevelt's presidency hold citizenship or voting rights and were thus not of particular concern to the elected officials in Washington. Native people were not included in Roosevelt's notions of conservation as a national duty for citizens of the new nation, because they were not citizens. In this same speech Roosevelt made it clear that he believed Native people were generally less developed and responsible than the white American:

> Savages, and very primitive peoples generally, concern themselves only with superficial natural resources; with those which they obtain from the actual surface of the ground. As peoples become a little less primitive, their industries, although in a rude manner, are extended to resources below the surface; then, with what we call civilization and the extension of knowledge, more resources come into use, industries are multiplied, and foresight begins to become a necessary and prominent factor in life.[95]

Roosevelt equated responsibility and care for nature with societal development and what in Western eyes was seen as civilization. Civilization in this context was equated with development of industries, resource use, and an expansion of knowledge. The speech represented a value system where development towards "civilization" placed the white American population above Native peoples, a common notion at the time, argued Ricard.[96] These views were often not based on extensive evidence or experience with Native peoples, their character, or way of life but reflected anecdotal stories of Native Americans and made-up narratives. They might have reflected truths about a single individual someone had interacted with that were unfairly placed as the standard for a varied network of tribes and a multitude of individuals.

[95] "Theodore Roosevelt, 'Conservation as a National Duty,' Speech Text," 4.
[96] Ricard, *A Companion to Theodore Roosevelt*, 188–89.

Roosevelt's view is telling of the general sentiment toward Native people in the Progressive Era. Influential contemporaries like Muir shared Roosevelt's notions. Muir believed Native people to be inclined towards savagery, less civilized than himself, dirty and lazy, among other things. Pesses explained that Muir did not only held these views privately, but that they were prevalent in his published work, which reached wide audiences.[97] For instance, when writing about the West in 1901 Muir described an adventure to the West as such: "When an excursion into the woods is proposed, all sorts of dangers are imagined – snakes, bears, Indians. (…) As to Indians, most of them are dead or civilized into useless innocence."[98] From Muir's statement it is clear that he thought little of the Native people that called the areas that became national parks home. He believed it to be for the best that they were dead or removed to become civilized.

In an article in the *New York Tribune* in 1890 a representative from the Indian Rights Association remarked that this attitude was common among residents of Colorado as well. The sentiment, the author described, was generally that the residents wanted little to do with the Native people in the region, the Ute. The article described that after speaking with many residents in the state what came across for the author was that the people of Colorado wanted the Ute to be removed and placed elsewhere, away from their neighborhoods. The author argued that this attitude comes from feelings of "malice and the usual racial prejudice" and further contended that the region "will never be satisfied until they [the Ute] are dumped into the Pacific."[99]

Policy from the Progressive Era reflected the idea of the white man's right to expansion and development under the flag of patriotism and showed little understanding or regard for Native traditions and life. For instance, to Native people certain areas and natural features were considered sacred and embedded with spirit. Proposals that outlined cutting down Redwoods to use for timber or to build a road through certain areas, did not take this significance under consideration.[100] This sentiment was also evident in the policies of assimilation the Department of the Interior placed upon residents of reservations. For instance, in a letter from the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1902 it was stated that the Superintendent of the Round Valley Reservation in California should tell the residents of said reservation that they should cut their hair short and stop painting their faces. This was to be

[97] Pesses, "Environmental Knowledge, American Indians, and John Muir's Trap," 120–21.
[98] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 13.
[99] Indian Rights Association, *The Ute Indians; Why People in Colorado Want Them to Be Removed.*
[100] Smith, "The Value of A Tree," 773.

done because it would "hasten their progress towards civilization."[101] The letter also indicated in order to achieve this change the Superintendent could withhold rations from the residents, if they refused to comply willingly. The letter shows how clearly Anglo-American values, traditions and ways of dress were valued higher than Native American ones. It also shows that the general belief was that to become "civilized", Native people needed to assimilate.[102]

In a statement recorded 1925 a Native American woman laments how harmful the white man's conservation ideas have been to Native people. She contended that:

> But white people plow up the ground, pull up the trees, kill everything. The trees say "Don't. I am sore. Don't hurt me." But they chop it down and cut it up. The spirit of the land hates them. They blast out trees and stir it up to its depths. They saw up the trees. That hurts them. (…) But the white people pay no attention. When the Indians use rocks, they take little round ones for their cooking. The white people dig deep long tunnels. They make roads. They dig up as much as they wish. They don't care how much the ground cries out. (…) Everywhere the white man has touched, it is sore. It looks sick.[103]

Her statement both clearly illustrated what she thought about the white man's way of engaging with nature and how that was different from her own. She believed nature to be endowed with a sense of spirit, which needed to be taken into account. She felt that white settlers did not understand the inherent value nature had, which led them to continue practices that were directly harmful to the landscape.

There were organizations of non-Natives who claimed to work for the advancement of Native people, but even these were built upon derogatory images of Native people. These organizations and people affiliated with the cause are generally referred "Friends of the Indians". "Friends of the Indians" believed that they were working for the interests of Native people, but it is evident that even their efforts were based upon ideas that devalued Native traditions and ideas. For instance, James Rhoads, the co-founder of the Indian Rights Association, wrote in a statement about the state of Native American life that the goal is to turn Native people into "Christian American citizens."[104] It came across in the letter that Rhoads believed that such a goal could only be achieved through extensive assimilation, for instance through educating Native children in off-reservation boarding schools away from their traditions and their community. The sentiment that assimilation was the preferred

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[101] Department of the Interior, "'Long-hair' letter from Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Superintendent, Round Valley, California," Digital Public Library of America, https://dp.la/item/c1cf983b4c95bbfcfe6e53cb95ee407f.
[102] Department of the Interior, "'Long-hair' letter from Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Superintendent, Round Valley, California"
[103] Merchant, Carolyn, *Major Problems in American Environmental History*, 365–66.
[104] Rhoads and Indian Rights Association, *Our next Duty to the Indians*, 5.

method of making Native people into citizens came across in Rhoads' arguments, even if he also proposes that Native people should gain citizenship. Similarly, in a statement at the Lake Mohonk Conference in 1886, Charles C. Painter argued for the rights of Native people to become full citizens. The statements was, however, still embedded with ideas that were negative toward Native people. Painter's statement was a call for that the way to solve the "Indian problem" was by removing any assistance Native people got from the federal government. By giving them allotted land and citizenship, they no longer needed any other help.[105] Painter's statement underlines the argument made by scholar David Wrobel, that the American government abandoned Native people by giving them what they asserted were the means to be self-sufficient.[106] Even the arguments by so-called "Friends of the Indians" were built upon faulty ideas about what benefitted Native people, why they should change and that what the American government was doing was helping Native people. "Friends of the Indians" celebrated the passage of the General Allotment Act and pushed for boarding school education for Native children, even though both would prove to have harmful effects on the lives of Native people.[107] Negative views of Native people was prominent in most groups in society in the Progressive Era, and they made it possible for policies that would limit Native traditions and communities and further dispossess them of land, to be enacted without too much resistance in the Anglo-American population.

1.5 Native Peoples Feel the Effects of Progressivism

Native people were not silent about how they felt the policies of the Progressive Era were harming their communities. Progressive policies like the expansion of reservations, boarding school education of Native children, and the growth of NPS land holdings proved to have lasting negative consequences for Native communities. Native communities and people experienced trauma, fractured families, loss of connection to culture, tradition, land, and religion. The effects were devastating both on an individual level and on a communal level. Native activists and leaders spoke out on a range of topics that effected their lives, like the need for citizenship, the effects of land loss, education, and religious freedom. These issues all encompassed revolved around the central idea of further self-determination for tribes, which permeated Native activism in the Progressive Era.

[105] Prucha, *Americanizing the American Indians*, 73.
[106] Wrobel, *America's West*, 79.
[107] Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 177.

Among those who advocated for Native issues in this era was Lakota activist Zitkala-Ša. She wrote under her given name Gertrude Bonnin for much of her career but gave herself the Lakota name Zitkala-Ša when she began to write about her traditional Sioux heritage to connect herself to this part of her history.[108] She used her role as editor of the *American Indian Magazine* to speak out on the topic of citizenship many times. For instance, in 1919 she stated that "The Red man asks for a very simple thing – citizenship in the land that was once his own, - America. (…) He loves democratic ideals. What shall world democracy mean to his race?"[109] Native people would not gain citizenship until 1924, and by then they had already experienced decades of policies placed upon them without having any say on the matter.

Other activists that spoke out alongside Zitkala-Ša were Lakota leaders American Horse and Hollow Horn Bear. They travelled to Washington in 1891 to air their opinions on Progressive policies on the reservations. In a meeting with the Secretary of Indian Affairs they addressed several issues on the reservations. American Horse asserted that Native people deserved to have more power on the reservations, for instance that they should be able to be Indian Agents. He contended that as it was at that moment, many white politicians viewed Native people as lazy, but still restricted them from taking on positions where they could put in work for the betterment of their people. American Horse wanted Native people to have greater influence over their own situation.

Hollow Horn Bear spoke out against violence against Native people and argued that the white man had broken his promises to keep the peace. He also contended that the people on the reservation had been promised that schools would be built, and that this had not happened. Hollow Horn Bear maintained that denying Native children the means to learn was a cruel practice that should be rectified. In addition to this he also mentioned the bad quality of the land on the reservations, for the purposes of agriculture. He ushered the government to instead invest in cattle for the Native people on the reservations, as the lands were not suited for agricultural purposes.[110] From these statements it is clear that Native people opposed a variety of the policies of the era. They advocated for their rights and for further self-determination and power. However much Native advocates fought for their perspectives to be heard, the reality was that many Native people suffered under the policies of the era and that the opinions of the advocates were seldom taken into account by politicians and lawmakers in Washington.

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[108] Hoxie, *Talking Back To Civilization*, 69.
[109] Hoxie, 131.
[110] "Had A Long Powwow - The Sioux Chiefs State Their Grievances in Washington," 7.

One aspect that suffered extensively under the assimilation policies of the Progressive Era was Native American religions. Christian missionaries tried convert Native peoples to Christianity, as they generally believed that making Native people Christians would aid them on the path to becoming "civilized." Missionary expeditions onto reservations and tribal land in this era were widespread. The missionaries came from a variety of Christian traditions and tried to influence tribes across the American West. In *The Gods of Indian Country,* Jennifer Graber recounted how Christian missionaries flooded the West from 1890 forwards. There was variation in the kind missionaries of this era, both Catholics and Protestants went in large numbers in addition to Baptists, Methodists, and other groups. However, Protestant Christianity became most prominent, mostly due to its growing influence in white America.[111] Graber useed the example of the Kiowa tribe, a southern – plains tribe, and how they experienced this time as a reference point. For instance, she described how the influx of Christian missionaries changed the landscape of the reservations, and how the missionaries and their efforts came to have a strong physical presence on the land. "In 1885, Kiowas had no full-time missions or religious schools. By the mid-1890s there were at least a half dozen fledging missions holding regular services and almost as many denominational schools."[112] Graber also described that the missionaries often sought to use Kiowa sacred spaces for their activities, to reimagine them in a Christian context. Missionaries used sites that had previously been used by the Kiowa for their Sun Dance rituals, a large communal ritual common in many Plains tribes, to gather for their services. Missionaries also took advantage of other reservation systems, such as when the Kiowa gathered to receive rations from the federal government, to try to influence them to take up Christian practices.[113]

Graber pointed out that these experiences were not uncommon for tribes across the Western states at this time. Tribes across the West experienced regular visits from Christian representatives in this era and many of the missionaries stayed with tribes on the reservations for years, on a mission to convert and teach. Religion was an essential part of American expansion into the West because "'Religion' served to mark one of many differences Protestant Christians perceived between themselves and others. It played a central role in American debates about Native peoples' place in the nation's future."[114] The Progressive Era was when American society came more into its role as a Protestant nation and this development in turn made the conversion of Native peoples important in expansion westward.

[111] Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 179–80.
[112] Graber, 180.
[113] Graber, 180–81.
[114] Graber, 12.

In the eyes of many Christian Americans of the traditions of Native peoples uncivilized, and the notion of primitivity had strong links to Native religions, like rituals related to traditional medicine and hunting. The Christian missionaries that came to convert the tribes generally thought of Native religions the same way that many people understood Native Americans in general, as something that needed to be changed in order for them to become a productive participants in American society. Certain practices, such as the use of peyote in rituals, was particularly improper according to the missionaries, due to its narcotic properties.

The use of peyote grew in the Progressive Era as a movement called the Ghost Dance spread among tribes across the nation. This movement focused on rituals that would bring healing to the tribes and the land and that would bring their ancestors closer in this time of immense pressure from settlers from the East. The use of peyote was common in Southeastern parts of the US like Texas and Oklahoma and in Northern Mexico, where the plant grew naturally. For thousands of years tribes like the Lipan Apache and the Tonakwa, who lived across these areas, had used the plant in their rituals. However, the use of peyote spread to tribes that had not formerly used this as a component of their rituals in the Progressive Era, like the Kiowa, Comanche and Lakota, who lived further North. The spread of the use of peyote and the Ghost Dance movement concerned white settlers and missionaries alike. On both the local and federal level measures to prevent the use of peyote were put in and in many places the use of peyote was illegal well into the second half of the 1900s, even in ritual contexts.[115] Graber claimed that one of the main reasons that many tribes engaged in the use of peyote and adopted Ghost Dance rituals in this time was because of immense pressure from the encroaching white settlers and the laws and policies that gave them less and less power over their land and their lives.

Tribes across the nation felt increased pressure to assimilate. One of the clearest examples of this pressure and the anxiety it brought with it was the issue of schooling. Politicians and missionaries argued that it was important to separate Native Americans from each other in order to achieve full assimilation. Schools forced Native children to assimilate by banning the use of the Native language, clothes, rituals and minimizing contact with their parents. These schools, both on and off the reservation reservations, forcefully alienated children from their local communities and removed them from environments where they could learn about and live according to the traditions of their tribes. This was especially true

[115] Graber, 189–90.

in terms of the boarding school experience.[116] Dana Dupris, a Cultural Preservation Officer for the Cheyenne River Sioux, described what the boarding school experience was like in the Progressive Era for members of her family. She explained that Native children were separated from their communities and “rounded up and put on a train and sent to a boarding school in the east coast—and once they got there, there’s no support for them, for the children. The only time they were allowed to return home was when they completed their studies.”[117] Native children in boarding schools had little to no contact with their families and communities, depriving them of that connection and familiarity. Dupris further expressed that the main goal was assimilation and control:

> The policy of the school was to separate the siblings so that they could not communicate or be a resource to each other. (…) Through forms of punishment and control, the government succeeded in the process of acculturating us to a different society or different world. They stripped us of our identity, so to speak. Once you come to the boarding school in the fall, you’re under their control.[118]

Control was imposed by cutting of the hair of Native children, making them attend church on Sundays and banning them from expressing their Native identity or using their languages.[119] The experiences described by Dupris were unfortunately common across Native communities. Dupris’ story illustrates clearly how devastating boarding school was, not only for the children themselves but also for the families and communities that were left behind.

Native American parents recognized the separation and alienation that was happening, but often had little say how the schools were run, what was taught, or how their children were treated. As Graber explained in the instance of the Kiowa tribe the “Kiowas struggled to secure their children’s futures through schooling without losing touch with them entirely.”[120] This anxiety around whether or not to send their children to schools and what it would mean for their communities were a central struggle for many Native Americans in this era.

On top of concerns about their children’s connection to Native traditions came the anxieties surrounding allotment and loss of land. The rapid loss of tribal land holdings in the Progressive Era often led to worse living conditions for Native communities, as they lost access to key resources and food sources that had served them for centuries. Government policies like the Lacey Act of 1894 prohibited hunting on federal lands, especially enforced in the National Parks areas. The Lacey Act did not prohibit Native hunting off reservations and

[116] Graber, 182.
[117] Coombs and Mallioras, “Boarding Schools and the Cultural Genocide of the Lakota People.”
[118] Coombs and Mallioras.
[119] Coombs and Mallioras.
[120] Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 187.

in National Parks when it was first passed, because that would violate treaty rights, but as the validity of treaty rights was almost totally diminished through decisions like *Ward v. Race Horse* in 1896 Native hunting opportunities off reservations and on federally owned land dwindled.[121] One of the ways Native Americans responded to these developments was to engage in new types of rituals to maintain their attachment to the land and to protect it, like the Ghost Dance. Anxieties around land loss and preserving the community were high after landmark developments like the General Allotment Act, and thus many tribes used new rituals in order to gain more protection. Graber illustrated this in her book and stated that "Kiowas, both individually and collectively, engaged in a variety of practices and affiliations—including Feather (Ghost) Dancing, peyote rites, and Christianity—in order to preserve their people's place in the Kiowa homeland."[122] Christianity was part of the practices helped preserve and protect land. Many Native Americans mixed different religious traditions and rituals to gain the best protection, which shows how vital land was to Native peoples.

Land was of chief concern for many Native peoples not only because of the way the loss of land affected resources, but because land was intricately tied to many aspects of Native religions and traditions. Jack Forbes has looked at commonalities in Native religious traditions across the US and has found that one of the central ideas that resonates across different Native religious expressions is the idea that all things on Earth are alive and coexist and that a gratitude is felt to this gift of being on existing on Earth. Forbes argued that Indigenous ideas about nature are overall quite different from those of the mainstream white American society. He maintained that nature takes on an active role in many Native religions, where certain places, animals or natural forces are assigned inherent value and agency.[123] In his work on Native American religions Martin contended that the main point where Native religions differentiates themselves from Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism and other so called "world religions" is through how it is tied to specific pieces of land and nature. Rather than being universal or transportable, many Native religious traditions in the United States are fixed to certain places. The landscape in which Indigenous people and their ancestors have lived relate directly to their stories, religious practices, and traditions, which make it almost impossible to transport these religions anywhere else.[124]

Being removed time and time again from the places where their ancestors had lived, prayed, hunted, gathered and where they were buried was harmful to Native communities

[121] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 65.
[122] Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 176.
[123] Forbes, "Indigenous Americans," 285–86.
[124] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 8.

because it tore into the core of their religious traditions and removed key pieces. Both being forcefully moved to another part of the country and then having their land taken away was about being disenfranchised in matters concerning themselves and their lives. Dispossession resulted in a kind of social death. It affected most aspect of social life for Native people. Their family structures, their children's education, and their community activities were only some of the areas indirectly affected by removal and land loss. Removal was not only harmful to Native communities' sense of self-determination and their rights, but also specifically to their religious traditions.

This played out among tribes across the Western United States at this time, but the example of the Black Hills area in South Dakota illustrates this development well. The Black Hills is an area of forests and special mountain formations West in today's South Dakota and parts of Wyoming. The area was of importance to several tribes, but it mattered in a special way to the Lakota. The Lakota, a tribe of the Sioux nation, had a long history of living in the Dakotas and surrounding states and tied many of the stories in their religious traditions to these lands. They were one of tribes that entered the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, but they would later find, as many tribes of this era also found out, that the rights to the land of the Black Hills that they secured in the treaty were not upheld by the United States.[125] The Black Hills themselves were protected as a Forest Reserve in the national parks system from 1897 forward, officially revoking any Native ownership of the land. The area was colonized white settlers from the East through allotment procedures as early as the 1870s, as the area had mountains where gold had been discovered. The Black Hills forests and mountains are central to Lakota stories of origin and is where the spirits of their ancestors reside. Special places within the Black Hills, chiefly Devils Tower, are fundamental in their origin stories.

Thus, when Devils Tower was designated as a National Monument by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 and placed under the management of the Department of Agriculture, fear surfaced among the Lakota.[126] Devils Tower was the first National Monument to be set aside and it came into being because Congress passed the Antiquities Act in 1906. This act aimed to protect historic sites and artifacts and came as a response to several instances of looting and destruction of culturally significant sites across the West, especially sites with Native American significance. The act was the first significant step towards preserving historical artifacts relating to Native American history, but it did unfortunately not protect such sites in a way that could easily coexists with living Native traditions. Raymond

[125] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 49.
[126] Dustin et al., "Cross-Cultural Claims on Devils Tower National Monument," 81–82.

Cross and Elizabeth Brenneman argued that the Antiquities Act's mandate protected only inanimate objects, which meant that the protection of continued and living Native traditions concerning these sites and artefacts failed profoundly. [127] Places like Devils Tower were not dead or static to the tribes that they mattered to. They was quite the opposite. Even if the Antiquities Act meant well in its protection of historic sites and artefacts, it too failed to consider Native religious expressions.

The Progressive Era worked to implement reform across American society. Some reforms improved the lives of many, for instance making workplaces safer and stabilizing the economy, but for Native Americans Progressive Era policies generally had negative impacts. The General Allotment Act resulted in vast land loss for Native people. The same was true for the expansion of the national parks. Removal and confinement to reservations also meant loss of control over several aspects of their own lives for many Native people. The reservations functioned as a way for the federal government to control Native people. For instance, the extensive missionary activity that was allowed tried to "civilize" Native people and make them fit with Christian Anglo-American ideas of how people were supposed to act and believe. The same was true for the boarding school system. Progressive Era policies generally tried to make Native people fit into a white man's image of civilization. The policies enacted by Congress in this time showed evidence of the derogatory ideas many Americans had about Native people and their traditions. As reservations, allotments, education, and missions tried to make Native people "civilized", the conservation movement removed Native people's existence from the idea of the wilderness to further their cause. In sum, Native people in the Progressive Era experienced removal on several fronts and the policies that were implemented on Natives peoples held no consideration for Native perspectives, opinions, or traditions. As White maintained "By the twentieth century all available choices seemed bad for American Indian peoples. They had reached their population nadir, and in many ways respects their cultural and social nadir as well."[128] The effects of the era would follow Native Americans throughout the 20th and 21st century. The impacts of these policies would serve as some of the key issues of opposition for Native activism in modern times, and still do.

[127] Cross and Brenneman, "Devils Tower at the Crossroads," 16–17.
[128] White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 116.

Chapter 2: Interconnectedness, Blending and the Survival of Native Religions in the 20th Century

2.1 The Role of Nature in Native American Religious Traditions

Renowned Native American intellectual and advocate Vine Deloria Jr. argued that one of the major theological differences between Native American religions and Christianity is how much value they put on space vs. time in creation stories. Deloria claimed in his book *God Is Red* that:

> Christianity has traditionally appeared to place its major emphasis on creation as a specific event while Indian tribal religions could be said to consider creation as an ecosystem present in a definable place. In this distinction we have again the fundamental problem of whether we consider the reality of our experience as capable of being described in terms of space or time.[129]

Deloria further described how this distinction manifested itself in the worldviews and traditions of the two religions. Christianity's tendency to use time as a theological framework for creation instead of space puts events and progress at the center of a Christian worldview. All life can be seen as moving from the point of creation towards the end of time, and it is time that ties all life to creation rather than space. Native American religious traditions on the other hand place space at the center of creation. That has meant that they have tended to give greater value to the spatial and physical aspects of the world as it was created, rather than events or instances in time.[130]

This distinction is vital to understanding how the creation of public lands such as National parks and monuments can and have negatively impacted Native religions and traditions. The use of time as a main theological framework in Christianity makes the religion less tied to the physical specifics of the world, making it more transferrable and universal as it can exist any place. Its origin is a point in time and not a place. Many Native religions on the other hand have specific places of origin, tying their religious world to physical places and endowing these places with value. By having origin stories tied to specific places, Native religions become less transferrable. Jennifer Graber described the Kiowa connection to the Plains in her work and outlined that the Kiowa connected "to Sweetwater Creek, Medicine Blu, and the surrounding landscape. Living there meant adapting to the place and relating to the sun, buffalo, mountains, rivers, and plants."[131] The Kiowa connected their sense of

[129] Deloria, *God Is Red*, 91.
[130] Deloria, 93–96.
[131] Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 9.

sacredness to the landscape, and this sacrality was not easily removed from that certain place, as it built upon a long history of religious tradition and connection.

Catherine Albanese's work on nature in Native religions in North America emphasized that discussing commonalities across North American Native communities and religions in such a manner that, for instance, Deloria did can be difficult because of the vast diversity among the communities. In addition, boiling the different religious traditions down to common features can and will sometimes take away from the individuality and uniqueness of each community. The same can, of course, be said about juxtaposing these common features among Native religions with a general Christian perspective, since Christianity also contains vastly different perspectives and manifestations within the one religion. However, looking at and finding commonalities across different Native religious traditions is helpful when we juxtapose Native religions with Christianity, because Native religions generally have more in common with each other than they do with Christian religious understandings. The same can be said of Christian traditions. We will thus accept the convenience of comparison between Christianity and some common features across Native religions.[132] When examining the relationship between Native peoples and religion and nature for instance, we find inherent differences from Christianity, argued Albanese. In this context, when comparing larger themes and religious understanding, looking at certain pan–Native features can be helpful. These commonalities between Native traditions illustrate key differences between Native religions and Christianity and shed light on how they manifested in society. Joel Martin agreed with Albanese on this point, and argued that "by retracing the history of Native American religions, we discern major discontinuities and disruptions that have affected Native American religion."[133] Building on Martin's statement, keeping common features of many Native religions in mind as we look at legislation, societal and cultural change can help us discern how these developments generally implement faulty or misunderstood general notions of Native religions and traditions.

Scholars observe that a close connection to specific physical places and areas are referred to as space-based or land-based religions. Martin maintained that this tie to specific sites and spaces is a feature of almost all Native religions across the US. For different groups different sites and places are of importance, but these places are often tied to the origin stories of religious traditions.[134] Brent Woodfill agreed with this sentiment and asserted that "that

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[132] Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, 19.
[133] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 13.
[134] Martin, 8–9.

these places do not simply stand for the realms of specific divinities but are themselves divine. Fundamentally, these locations are the physical manifestation of a living being who owns the surrounding landscape and controls everything that occurs in his or her domain. These beings have names, personalities, desires, and life histories."[135] Martin further claimed that this framework creates a system where it is more natural for places to become endowed with value in Native religions than it is in Christianity. It is often not only places from origin stories that become sacred sites, but also places where important visions took place, where ancestors are buried or where other important religious stories take place.[136]

The Devils Tower monument exemplifies these themes. To several Native American tribes residing in surrounding areas, the monument holds a sacred status because of its place in their legends and religious traditions. The National Park Service has collected some of the oral histories pertaining to the Tower from the tribes in the area. The different stories show how the mountain came to be important in the religious framework of the tribes in the area. The different legends the NPS has collected reveal similarities in imagery and stories, as well as close ties to the landscape. In each of the stories there are images of bears and bear–people who interacted with the landscape in different ways to either make the Tower itself or shape it to have the characteristic scratches that it has across the surface. In the stories people from the tribe come into contact with the Tower and the bears, and the Tower is often a place of refuge or a place where extraordinary feats of bravery or sacrifice happen.[137] The landscape itself and how it came to look the way it does, are central features in tribal stories about Devils Tower across the different tribes. Even each legend is distinct, the Tower comes to hold a significance to the tribe at the end of each story. The stories show that the form of the landscape itself is vital to the sacred status of the Tower. For example, in the story told by Crow tribe member Ride-The-White-Hip-Horse significance is placed on the unique features of the Tower and how it has protected the people:

> The girls climbed the rock but still the bear could catch them. The Great Spirit, seeing the bear was about to catch the girls, caused the rock to grow up out of the ground. The bear kept trying to jump to the top of the rock but he just scratched the rock and fell down on the ground. The claw marks are on the rock now. The rock kept growing until it was so high that the bear could not get the girls. The two girls are still on top of the rock.[138]

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[135] Woodfill, "Pre-Columbian and Indigenous Religious Spaces in Mesoamerica," 20.
[136] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 12–13.
[137] "First Stories - Devils Tower National Monument (U.S. National Park Service)."
[138] Ride-The-White-Hip-Horse, interviewed by Dick Stone, interpreted by Goes-To-Magpie. Datoe unknown. "First Stories - Devils Tower National Monument (U.S. National Park Service)."

Both what happened on the rock and how the Tower itself was formed and came to look like it does to this day are essential religious features of the story. Across all the stories that the NPS has collected about the Tower, place plays a more prominent role than time does. The stories are set in the past, with the use of phrases like "once" and "long ago", but not in a specific instance in time. The stories are however set in a specific place. Each tribe has a different name for Devils Tower, many of them referring to bears, like the Lakota name Mato Tipila meaning Bear Lodge. All the legends describe certain the characteristics of this particular place.[139] The place in question cannot be anywhere other than the Tower. With its characteristic scratched surface and lonesome placement in the surrounding landscape it is unmistakable. The centrality of place in these oral histories about Devils Tower fit well with both Deloria and Martin's arguments. Catherine Albanese also explained that: "Indian peoples created religious geographies in which specific sites were inhabited with sacred powers and persons."[140] The sacredness of the Tower is tightly wound to the landscape itself and what happened at that spot, making the Tower part of the religious geography for several Native communities. The geography creates a framework of sacredness in the physical world tying people and communities closely to the space they inhabit and frequent.

Naturally, having sacred sites in the physical world is not a religious feature belonging exclusively to Native religions. Christianity has a myriad of holy places in Jerusalem, for instance, that are connected to the story of Jesus' life that are important points of pilgrimage for many Christians and that are central in religious stories. But the difference, Albanese maintained, lies in the way that in Native religious view the natural world, with it its sacredness, to be in constant communion with Native peoples. Albanese argued that Native worldviews are mainly relational, meaning that people and the world around them work together to create harmony and balance. Sacredness is inherent in the material world, with some spaces being endowed with certain spirits or connected to especially important religious stories that make them even more central in the sacred geography. But the essential idea is that the material world itself is a space where sacredness exists all the time.[141] For instance, the Kiowa had their main settlements near the rock formation Medicine Bluff and close to Sweetwater Creek, both endowed with sacredness that informed their both their religious traditions and most parts of their daily life spiritually.[142] Denise and John Carmody also agreed with Albanese on this point in their work on Native American religions. They claimed

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[139] "First Stories - Devils Tower National Monument (U.S. National Park Service)."
[140] Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, 21.
[141] Albanese, 23–24.
[142] Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 1–2.

that many Native religious groups believe that "Human beings did not dominate nature or transform it. They reacted to it more than they altered it to fit the forms in their mind."[143] This description of Native religions aligns with Albanese's arguments that the feature of interconnectedness with the physical world sets Native religions apart from Christianity. A central idea in Christianity about the physical world is that this creation was given to humans to care for and to be stewards of. The way Christianity views people in relation to nature is not relational and interconnected in the same way that it is in many Native religions, but rather has a more hierarchical sense.

The interconnectedness of the natural world appears in the traditions and stories of most Native communities and religions, among them the Lakota and other tribes in the Great Plains region. Frances Kaye described the relationship that the tribes of the Great Plains area have had with the landscape:

> During Blackfoot and Lakota times when many nations shared the culture marked by the bison, the Sun Dance, and eventually the horse the Great Plains was the centre of the universe, the place where creation began. Full of sacred sites as well as both faunal and vegetal abundance, linked to trading routes that provided any wants the Prairies did not produce, this region was no hinterland until it was encountered by Europeans.[144]

To the Native peoples of the Plains, the landscape was everything. The places they frequented held much meaning and were populated with spirits from their religious stories. The natural resources they used were part of a web of interconnected pieces that made up an ecosystem, forming a rich religious geography. The buffalo, for instance, was central to both the religious traditions and the survival of Plains communities before the arrival of white settlers. The buffalo's presence in important tribal religious stories speaks of the animal's central place. In the Lakota story "The Coming of the Ikce Oyate," which tells the story of the first people who emerged onto the world's surface from the underworld of the spirits, the buffalo is one of the first beings they meet, and it helps them navigate this new world. The story goes that when they "did not know where to go, a great shaggy beast appeared among them, and led them to where there were fruits to eat and water to drink and trees and caves in which to shelter."[145] The sacredness of the buffalo is reinforced in other religious stories of the Lakotas, like the story of the "White Buffalo Calf Woman." This story centers around how the Lakota received the pipe and the religious ceremonies that come with it from a woman who later transformed

[143] Carmody and Carmody, *Native American Religions*, 66.
[144] Kaye, *Goodlands*, 20.
[145] Dooling, *The Sons of the Wind*, 122.

into a buffalo. The transformation again references the place of the buffalo in Lakota tradition and shows that it provides them not only sustenance but also important religious knowledge.[146] The buffalo, *tatanka* as it is called in the Lakota language, continued to be integral for the Lakota people by providing them food to eat, hides to create clothes and shelter from and by serving as a central religious being in their communities. Through rituals involving the making of sacred bundles out of buffalo hides for instance, the holy men of the Lakota call on the powers of the spirits for help.[147] The buffalo is one among many things on the Plains that has become a part of Lakota religious geography and stories. Such is also the case with other elements of the surrounding landscape and nature, for instance local plants and herbs are used in healing rituals.

2.2 Vision Quests and the Significance of Black Elk's Narrative

Another example of the landscape's centrality in Lakota spirituality is the role that place plays in vision quests. Vision quests are often performed by a few tribal members as a step in a larger ritual context leading up to the Sun Dance, one of the main rituals in Lakota religion. Elizabeth Grobsmith described the importance of vision quests in her fieldwork among the Lakota of the Rosebud reservation and argued that the purpose of these vision quests is multifaceted. They act both as a step in the larger ritual process of the Sun Dance, as well as being a ceremony of their own. The quests are also a way for individuals to solidify their Lakota identity, as the ritual is a central part of Lakota tradition. Grobsmith pointed out that the process of seeking a vision quest as a long and tedious one. It has traditionally been a process undertaken mostly by men, but Grobsmith described that in her work at Rosebud in the 80s more and more women were seeking visions too and there seemed to be a generally understanding that it was an act open to both genders.

Seeking a vision is an act that can be performed at any stage in life. The seeker must be approved for the quest by a medicine man, sometimes also called a holy man, then guided by them and taught the proper ways to seek out a vision, and then finally go on a quest of their own. The process may vary in length but has traditionally taken up to a year. The latter part of the process, the solitary period of seeking out the vision, is almost trance like. The individual seeks out a special hill in the nearby area, which is designated as a sacred spot and then resides there for days in prayer, without food or water, to hopefully gain a vision. The vision,

[146] Grobsmith, *Lakota of the Rosebud*, 65.
[147] Dooling, *The Sons of the Wind*, 129–30.

if one has one, may grant you special ritual insight, spiritual power that you can call upon or maybe even a calling to become a medicine man.[148] Al Fast Horse from the Brule Sioux tribe described the vision he had in an interview in 1977. He explained that "The person doesn't have to be seeking for a vision or asking for guidance. This, vision has perhaps, one might say, he has that all his life, come to him."[149] In Fast Horse's opinion the vision is something that is within you already and that could come to you under the right conditions.

Whatever an individual may gain from the vision, the spot where the vision takes place plays a central role in the ritual. The sacredness of the place that one picks to undergo the vision quest is central to the success of the ritual, as it is believed that certain places are more appropriate and right for such a quest than others and that the place itself gives the seeker a hand in the process of the quest. Place also becomes important after the vision quest is over. If the person has a vision, especially one that becomes significant or even famous in the community, the place that it happened can become even more endowed with sacred value and become a sacred site for people in the community.

This was for instance the case with Black Elk Peak, formerly named Harney Peak, in South Dakota. This peak was the place where famous holy man of the Lakota Black Elk had his "Great Vision" at the age of nine. The vision he had there and the importance of this place has been shared with the masses through of John Neihardt's bestselling *Black Elk Speaks,* where Black Elk told Neihardt of his visions, his religious views and his life story. [150] The "Great Vision" and Black Elks' work as a holy man among the Lakota became influential not only on Lakota religiosity, but more widely influential for Native people across the US and among non–Natives too. The widespread influence was greatly helped by Neihardt's book, which came out in 1932. The popularity the work gained in the latter half of the 20th century cemented Black Elk as one of the foremost Native religious thinkers of his time. The site of Black Elk's vision became a place of pilgrimage for many people seeking visions, as well as for fans of Black Elk himself. The peak was renamed in honor of Black Elk in 2016 after many Native people, especially the Lakota, had protested the previous name, Harney Peak. Harney Peak referenced the US General William S. Harney, who amongst other things had led fights against the Sioux Nation in the Indian Wars. Harney's involvement in the wars and

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[148] Grobsmith, *Lakota of the Rosebud*, 67–68.
[149] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Al Fast Horse, Interview Date: 1977 May 12, Date Digitized: 1/30/2017, MSS0018_au006. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40483
[150] Black Elk and Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 43.

his brutality towards Native people in these battles were the main arguments for the removal of his name from the peak, as the peak serves as a sacred place for many tribes in the area. So, due to the name's offensive nature it was changed to Black Elk Peak.[151] The name now also references the story of Black Elk receiving his most important vision in this place.

Black Elk's visions were not only experienced at a certain place in his local natural surroundings, but the visions were also filled with nature–based symbolism and figures. Nature and animals take on central roles in Black Elk's vision and are endowed with religious importance. The bison for instance is a key character in the vision, bringing with it gifts of sacred herbs and strength to the people. Black Elk recalls to Neihardt that "I know now what this meant, that the bison were the gift of a good spirit and were our strength, but we should lose them, and from the same good spirit we must find another strength."[152] Both key animals like the bison and sacredness of certain herbs and plants come to light in Black Elk's vison for the Lakota people.

Another aspect that comes across clearly in the vision is the idea of the relatedness of all things in the natural world. The Grandfather spirits that Black Elk encounters in the vision tell him that all beings in the world are related to him.[153] Black Elk's vision also emphasizes an interconnected view of nature and people through the image of all the beings in the world around him dancing together in harmony and bliss. Black Elk described the world in his vision like this: "The leaves on the trees, the grasses on the hills and in the valleys, the waters in the creeks and in the rivers and the lakes, the four-legged and the two-legged and the wings of the air-all danced together to the music of the stallion's song."[154]

Of course, *Black Elk Speaks* was highly criticized for portraying a romanticized and essentialist view of Native religions in general, and especially of Lakota religion. Religious scholar Clyde Holler argued that "The ultimate message of the book, not merely its details, is Neihardt's, not Black Elk's," because of the significant stylistic, chronological, and thematic changes that Neihardt made to Black Elk's original words.[155] Holler maintained that the changes made by Neihardt make it clear that *Black Elk Speaks* is a literary work, and not an ethnographic one. The disparities between Black Elk's original words, which can be found in published versions of the transcript of Neihardt's interviews with him, and the written account

[151] Office of Communications and Publishing, "Highest Point East of Rockies Gets New Name | U.S. Geological Survey."
[152] Black Elk and Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 39.
[153] Black Elk and Neihardt, 29.
[154] Black Elk and Neihardt, 42.
[155] Holler, "Lakota Religion and Tragedy," 20.

of Neihardt were not made clear to the readers, and neither has the fact the *Black Elk Speaks* is more or less a work of literature. Holler claimed that the theology that is presented in the book as true Lakota religion is faulty because of what Neihardt chooses to leave out of his narrative. Neihardt's narrative lacks the ritual context of his meetings and interviews with Black Elk, the parts of Black Elk's visions that showed military imagery, in addition to Black Elk's connection to Catholicism.[156]

However, one of the biggest changes that Neihardt made to the narrative was to make it seem like Black Elk himself thought that Lakota religion died after the tragedy at Wounded Knee. However, this notion became one of the most prominent takeaways for many readers.[157] In Holler's examination of the original transcripts it is clear that Black Elk did not agree with this idea, but that it was seemingly put there by Neihardt in order to create a dramatic ending to his work. From the transcripts Holler contended that we could see that Black Elk had a firm belief in the Lakota religion being alive and practiced, and that he himself still performed rituals as a holy man and participated in religious traditions of the Lakota.[158] His actual perspective and continued practice of the religion shows that the belief in Lakota religious ideas and sacred spaces remained strong within both the community and with Black Elk himself. This remained a fact in the community even when faced with a tragedy such as the massacre on Wounded Knee, and for Black Elk personally with the adoption of Catholic beliefs in addition to his Native ones. His beliefs and the beliefs of the Lakota community did not disappear in the face of tragedy or new religious ideas but continued to adapt and remain a strong force for the Lakota.

Neihardt's changes to Black Elk's original narrative alters both our view of Black Elk and of Lakota spirituality as readers. The narrative omits aspects of Black Elk's interviews that complicate the otherwise straight forward version of Lakota spirituality that Neihardt presents. The narrative leaves out ideas about the mixing of Christian traditions and Lakota traditions, as well as thoughts about the use of military force, which in turn makes the vision of the Lakota and of Black Elk that the book presents a simple and harmonious one. In fact, these visions were more complex. Roy Ellen argued Neihardt's image of Native American peoples of the Plains was heavily influenced by Western ideas about Native religions and traditions, rather than providing an accurate representation. Ellen maintained that Neihardt's

[156] Holler, 20–21.
[157] Holler, 37.
[158] Holler, 38.

book plays into Western ideas about Native Americans living primitively and always in utter harmony with nature.[159]

Still, Black Elk's narrative and the original interviews still provides useful insights into the relationship between nature and people in Lakota spiritual thinking. Even though Neihardt left out ideas in the narrative that made it less complex, the imagery in Black Elk's vision nonetheless points to the relational view of nature that several scholars maintained is a vital part of many Native religions, among them the Lakota. Black Elk's visions as well as other aspects of Lakota spirituality, such as the importance of the places the visions took place and natural imagery in their major stories, reiterate the fact that the way the Lakota have viewed their relation to nature has been more in terms of interconnectedness and relation than for instance the Christian perspective.

It is not only the fame of visions like Black Elk's that can make certain spots popular for vision quests. The centrality of a place in religious stories can also make places popular among vision seekers. Such is the case with Devils Tower and Bear Butte, both popular places to seek visions for the Lakota and other local tribes. The place one chooses to seek visions is typically endowed with sacred value in one's community or is special to one personally. Bear Butte is one of the most holy places for the Lakota in the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming because it is believed to be the place where the Lakota heard word of their creators.[160] Thus it has become a popular place to seek communication with the spirits, as have the many other places in the sacred geography of the Great Plains. When talking about how people have interacted with the Great Plains area, home to among many others the Lakota, Frances Kaye asserted that the Native American peoples of the Plains have "understood the land as part of a sacred tradition of earth and sky; (…) the human response to the Great Plains, until a few hundred years ago, was to use it, appreciate it, learn it, and manipulate it, but not to replace it or make drastic changes."[161] Kaye's argument highlights the way that interaction with nature in this area changed when the white settlers began to take interest in the land.

Roy Ellen held that relationship between Indigenous people and nature cannot be told as simply harmonious. However, it still starkly contrasted the way the white, Christian majority that moved into the American West in the latter part of the 19th century related to nature. Laws and norms about how one could interact with or own the land came to

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[159] Ellen, "What Black Elk Left Unsaid," 10.
[160] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 121–23.
[161] Kaye, *Goodlands*, 4.

complicate Native peoples' religious expression in their local landscape and keep many from interacting with the landscape they held sacred in the way that they wanted to. Several developments regarding Native civil rights and religious freedom in the 20th century made this a reality.

2.3 Native Religions Face the American Justice System and Society in the 20th Century

The issues surrounding the concept of religious freedom and expression for Native peoples becomes readily apparent through the lens of public lands. The legislation of religious freedom and civil rights for Native people interacts with directly with questions about land, through issues of identity and belonging. The white settlers in the West were attracted to many of the same landscapes and landmarks that had enticed Native communities for centuries. These places, like Devils Tower, had a sacred place in many Native American communities, but they also became important features of white America's Western ideal. They became etched into the minds of many Americans through the writings of explorers and conservationists like John Muir, who wrote of the natural wonders of Yosemite National Park "however mysterious and lawless at first sight they may seem, are only harmonious notes in the song of creation, varied expressions of God's love."[162] Muir's contemporaries wrote similarly about the wonders of the West, often with references to Christian religious imagery. The fight to preserve these areas legislatively showed little sensitivity to Native American religious and cultural systems. Legislation such as the General Allotment Act and the Lacey Act and court decisions like *Ward v. Race Horse* and the establishment of National Parks restricted Native American access to land and opportunity for traditional activities for Native People across the US. As Sarah Dees argued in her discussion of Federal Indian policy in the US:

> Religion has played a significant role federal in Indian law and policy in five key ways: as a justification, method, target, challenge, and refutation. That is, European and Euro-American forms of Christianity have served as an ideological basis and method of settler colonial assimilation practices. In the context of settler colonialism, Indigenous religions have been a target of as well as a form of resistance to destructive US federal Indian policies.[163]

Efforts to control Native American religions and traditions continued and expanded in the 20th century. *The Code of Indian Offences* the was introduced in 1883 forbid aspects of

[162] Muir, *Our National Parks*, 119.
[163] Dees, "Religion and Us Federal Indian Policy," 280.

Native religious practice. The Code directly outlawed both activities that had longstanding traditions in Native communities and aimed to outlaw new practices that were on the rise. The Code forbid rituals like the Sun Dance that were central to Lakota religions. Scholars note that the Sun Dance was popularized in response to the growing Ghost Dance movement that was spreading at the same time. The popularity of the Ghost Dance, with its focus on large group ritual efforts like Sun Dances, sparked anxiety among the white reservation administrators because the ritual was perceived to strengthen the sense of identity Native communities. People banded together around a common religious activity would often strengthen their bonds and maybe come together to fight for what they wanted, which worried government officials.

Vine Delora Jr. contended that the Ghost Dance was gravely misunderstood by Indian agents and missionaries on the reservations as promoting war and violent tendencies, proving the ignorance of missionaries and bureaucrats on the reservations. Deloria explained that the Ghost Dance was a way for many Native peoples to deepen their relationship with their culture and its traditions in the face of the immense pressure to assimilate. It was also, he argued, centered around the idea of interconnectedness between the Native people and nature, using ritual practices like the Sun Dance.[164] This was, however, not how it was received by the government at the time. In the *Code of Indian Offences* Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller claimed that "These feasts or dances are not social gatherings for the amusement of these people, but, on the contrary, are intended and calculated to stimulate the warlike passions of the young warriors of the tribe."[165] The Commissioner for Indian Affairs Hiram Price agreed with Teller's logic. The *Code of Indian Offences* outlawed the practice of the Sun Dance, limited the work of medicine men, prohibited plural marriages, and outlawed practices that were deemed destructive to property, such as certain burial practices where the burning of a deceased person's belongings was customary. The Code also established courts on the reservations to enforce the new rules.[166] Many Native people opposed the new regulations, even turning into violent clashes between Ghost Dance adherents and the US government. One such instance was in 1890 at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, where a clash between adherents of the Ghost Dance and federal troops resulted in a large massacre, killing over 250 Native people. One of these people was prominent Lakota medicine–man Sitting Bull.[167] This event marked the end of the Ghost Dance.

[164] Deloria, *God Is Red*, 250–51.
[165] Price, "Rules Governing the Court of Indian Offenses."
[166] Price.
[167] Carmody and Carmody, *Native American Religions*, 78.

From the late 1800s into the first few decades of the 1900s the assimilation of Native people continued and expanded throughout the US. Assimilation policies from this time illustrate how the federal government failed to consider the centrality of space to Native communities and religions. For instance, during World War I the Indian Office allowed for the leasing of land, both land that was still held communally by the tribe and allotted land. The policy of leasing was supposed to only be temporary, as a war relief strategy to increase farming, but it did not come to an end until years after the war's close, in 1934. One of the tribes hit hardest by these policies was the Lakota. The Indian Office leased three quarters of its reservation lands in South Dakota by the end of the war.[168] Policies such as leasing of tribal land underline how the federal government viewed land as a commodity that could be used and accessed.

The leasing policies were staunchly opposed by, for instance, the Lakota, and several prominent members of the tribes spoke out against the policy, among those was James H. Red Cloud. Red Cloud's Statement to the Committee of Indian Affairs in 1920, implored "We wanted it to come to an end when the war was over (…) It is pretty hard there for us on the reservation. The reservation is covered with cattle like a whole lot of worms on it. I can not raise any garden and can not do anything."[169] His sentiment was shared by fellow Lakota Joseph Horn Cloud, who asserted that "We are the original owners of this land, and we are having the most suffering."[170] A large part of what little land tribes had left was rendered appropriate for the government to use as they pleased because of the war. The land of Native communities like the Lakota was overrun with cattle and broken up by large-scale farming. The ability to maintain a garden was important to many Native communities. These produced the necessary herbs and plants for traditional rituals and medicines, since they could no longer roam free to collect them as they pleased in the areas that had become part of the NPS. The federal leasing of land during and after the war and reactions like these statements from Red Cloud and Horn Cloud show that what was important about a piece of land was staunchly different in the eyes of the federal government and the Native people who lived on that land. To the Native inhabitants the land was a source of crucial religious and cultural resources, to the federal government it was a resource that could be used for economic and political benefit.

It was not until the middle of the 1920s that policies started to change for the better for Native Americans. In 1924 came the Indian Citizenship Act, granting constitutional

[168] Hoxie, *Talking Back To Civilization*, 148.
[169] Hoxie, 155.
[170] Hoxie, 152.

protections to Native Americans for the first time.[171] In 1928 a report came out titled *The Problem of Indian Administration*, often referred to as the Meriam Report after Lewis Meriam who oversaw the survey team. The report recommended the government take a more considerate and informed approach when dealing with Native affairs and stated that "In all these activities the Indian point of view and Indian interests should be given major consideration."[172] The report laid the foundation for the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934, enacted under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Indian Reorganization Act was successful in part due to support from the new Commissioner for Indian Affairs, John Collier.[173] The act allowed tribes greater self-determination by allowing them to organize their own tribal governments to manage communally owned land and resources.

The restructuring of tribal land management under this act made it more possible for tribes to gain economically from the land they still owned, even if it the tribal land holdings had diminished vastly during the Assimilation Period. The IRA stopped leasing and new allotments, while also lessening the use of boarding schools and decriminalizing traditional religious activities like the Sun Dance. The developments in land management were crucial to Native communities, as policies like leasing and allotment were generally inconsiderate of Native ideas about land. Leasing and allotment practices did not take into account how land was a fundamental asset in Native religious practice, for instance how certain pieces of land produced plants that were important parts of medicine bundles, whereas other land did not.

Gilio-Whitaker argued that the act also made for a positive shift in the living conditions of Native people and for the way the US government related to tribes. One the other hand, she pointed out, the Bureau of Indian Affairs still supervised the reservations.[174] The act also changed little in terms of how much access Native people would have to public lands or lands under the NPS. The act was a shift in a more positive direction, setting up for a working relationship between the US government and tribal governments that was more efficient and just. Ending the assimilation processes of the previous era contributed to lessening the damage being done to Native religions. For instance, the abandoning of boarding schools, which took children away from their families and from traditional life, made a positive impact on children and young people. Indigenous children were able to grow up more closely connected to their communities and traditions, and to their sacred landscape.

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[171] Dees, "Religion and Us Federal Indian Policy," 282–83.
[172] "Meriam Report: The Problem of Indian Administration; National Indian Law Library, Native American Rights Fund (NARF)," 25.
[173] Dees, "Religion and Us Federal Indian Policy," 283.
[174] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 101–2.

Denise Lajimodiere spoke about the impact that boarding schools had on her family and explained that her story is very similar to that of many Native families across the nation. She described that "My father never spoke Cree again; that was completely beaten out of him, (…) So, now, at my age, I'm trying to relearn Ojibwe. Ojibwe is the language of our ceremonies — and our ceremonies have come back very strong."[175] What happened to many Native children at the boarding schools had an impact on their families, their traditions and their communities for decades after, and many lost their connection to their traditional upbringing and their religions. That the IRA put an end to the assimilation policies of the Progressive Era was therefore a crucial step in the right direction for the survival of Native religions.

The positive turn in Native affairs did not last long, however. The middle of the 20th century marked an era that has been dubbed the Period of Termination, a time in which the purpose of Native American policy once again shifted towards assimilation. The period started early in the 1940s and lasted until about 1960. In 1953 Congress passed the Termination Bill, a resolution that was supposed to provide extended freedom for Native people and communities by lessening the federal oversight on reservations and over tribes. It did, however, have other intentions and opposite effects. Gilio-Whitaker contended that "Under termination, tribal governments were dissolved, their lands transferred into white settler ownership, and more than twelve thousand individual Indians absorbed into the American mainstream"[176]

The Termination Bill was to some extent even more devastating than the General Allotment Act at the beginning of the 20th century because it set in motion another round of removals and it dissolved much of the organizational and political power and framework of the tribes. That tribal governments were dissolved as tribes lost recognition was devastating to tribal lands, as a large part of the land held by the unrecognized tribes was transferred into government control. Once again Native communities lost land to the federal government, all under the guise of self-determination. During this period 109 tribes lost their federal recognition, and with it came a string of problems and losses of rights.[177] Thousands of Native American people were relocated into urban areas in order to assimilate to white mainstream society. The relocation into urban areas once again ripped people away from not only their communities, but also from traditional ways of life, communal religious practices, and their

[175] Gunderson, "'I've Never Told Anyone.'"
[176] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 102.
[177] Keeler, 84.

sacred landscape. Education director for the Omaha Alfred Gilpin spoke about what termination had meant in an interview in 1977. He maintained that:

> You people should concern yourself about our situations there in this manner than what you are doing. You're trying to get yourselves shed of us. You want to push these kids out the front door here then they're not able to walk, yet. Meaning that they're still nowhere near ready to be terminated. They're not ready for termination. (…) But I says at least the federal government should stand up to its responsibility and see to it that we live a normal, safe life on our reservation. Here you got a piece of legislation that you gave to five states. That is enacted now, doing nothing. That's law.[178]

In his opinion, termination was the government's way of ridding itself with the responsibility for Native people, even if many Native communities did not have the means to be self-sufficient at that time. It was effectively the federal government enacting that it would do nothing. Some Native communities had problems concerning crime and poverty that was not being dealt with effectively even before termination. Gilpin argued that these issues would only worsen if the federal government abandoned these communities. He described the situation on the reservation as such "We've had murder, rape, boot legging, knock down drag outs. All of this is happening on our streets. It's unsafe for our people, especially our aging people or our women who walk the street."[179] Concern for what would happen would happen after termination was spreading, and many of the concerns that Gilpin laid out became a reality.

One of the most significant effects of the bill, wrote Keeler, was how devastating it was to Native lands and to Native identity. The bill intended to end all treaty obligations for the federal government and eliminate the protection of lands held by the tribes in trusts. This meant that land became available for the federal government and that many tribes across the US lost even more of the already fragmented territory they had left after the General Allotment Act.[180] The Termination Bill essentially extended the effects of the General Allotment Act, as well as further weakened the treaty rights of the mid-1800s. Maintaining an identity as distinctly Native American and from a certain tribe continued to be important throughout the 20th century, but developments such as termination made it harder and harder for people to stay connected to this identity. Regina Brave, a Sioux activist from Pine Ridge,

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[178] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Alfred Gilpin, Interview Date: 1977 May 20, Date Digitized: 2/9/2017, MSS0018_au014. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40490

[179] Ibid.

[180] Keeler, "Putting People Where They Belong," 84.

explained that “I don't want to jump in that kinda melting pot and forget about my people because we're a people who have been able to survive because we cared about each other.”[181]

In the 1960s and 70s Native American activists, especially in cities and on colleges across the nation, organized to fight termination and to expand their rights. The environment was ripe for change as people across the nation fought for similar causes. Campaigns for civil rights for African Americans, women’s liberation, to stop the war in Vietnam and the push for environmental action were just some of the causes people rallied around. The massive influx of activism made Native causes visible in media and at times provided gains for Native civil rights. For instance, activists spoke out in newsletters widely distributed among Native people in favor of Native civil rights and self-determination. In a newsletter from the National Council on Indian Opportunity called *NCIO news* Taos Pueblo Indian member John C. Rainer asserted the importance of continuing to fight for Native holy lands. He described in the newsletter that:

> For decades the Indian people have struggled to gain a responsive audience in Washington to their voices of dissatisfaction with Indian policies. The 48 000 acres of sacred Indian lands at and near Blue Lake in New Mexico is a dramatic case in point. The United States Government wrote a bitter page in Indian history when it expropriated these lands to create a national forest in 1906. Since that time we have fought to restore the rightful possession of this holy lake and watershed area to our people. These holy lands are a symbol of all religious and territorial rights for Indians everywhere.[182]

The Taos Pueblo Indians gained the land near Blue Lake back in 1970 after decades of fighting to get it back. In the statement from Rainer, it is clear that he believed lands to be a crucial part of Native identity, and especially important to the survival Native religions. His statement outlines how Native activists and representatives in this era used land as a main argument in their fight for civil rights. They tried to make the American government and public better understand what land meant to many Native people, that it was both religiously and culturally fundamental, and how that view was inherently different from the Anglo-American view of land. The importance of land to Native activism in the 70s is echoed by Sioux activist Regina Brave in an interview from 1976 where she stated that she believed that:

> You've got to stop, you've got to think about what you're gonna leave for your future generations. And I guess in a lot of sense, the Indian people are saying that by fighting

[181] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Regina Brave, Interview Date: 1975 November 7, Date Digitized: 1/24/2017, MSS0018_au024. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40530

[182] Rainer, “Self-Determination is the Answer.” Excerpt from *NCIO news.* 1970. Digital Public Library of America, https://dp.la/item/129fbca0da4a5fe3154c925edca1d0a4.

> for their treaty, by fighting for their land rights, that if we can set aside enough land that would be passed on to our children and keep it from further development, then we'd at least have that patch of land left for our children. 'Cause at the rate this is going, you wonder what's gonna be left.[183]

A group of Native American activists founded the American Indian Movement (AIM) in Minnesota in 1968, with the aim of fighting for Native rights. The organization also hoped to foster pride in one's Native identity. The group gained a reputation for being aggressive and confrontational in the fight for civil rights, a description that held some truth, but they also worked to revitalize parts of Native communities like traditional foods, arts, and religious traditions, and make people see that they could be adapted to modern life.[184] Regina Brave claimed that AIM "spoke to all different people. It gave Indian people a voice. Indian people didn't have to sit back and wonder if they were the only ones fighting for their life. (…) Because, you know, getting the fact that prior to this that a sense of being Indian, that they were somebody after all."[185] To her AIM was important to the Native civil rights campaign because the organization and its work provided because it provided a space for people to gather, to fight and an identity for those who had lost their sense of what it meant to be Native American.

AIM was not always welcomed by Native communities, some were skeptical, especially because of the reputation the organization had gained. That was largely due to the violent tendencies of the organization. Some argued that militarism was "un-Indian", while others championed the work AIM had done and the light it has helped shine on Native issues.[186] This sentiment is echoed by Al Fast Horse. He believed that AIM's work and use of more militant strategies was not heling the Native cause. He explained that he believed "that's not Indian way. That's no way to accomplish anything" and that what helps the cause is rather legislative measures and political action.[187] In memorandum from 1973 staff assistant for the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs Forrest Gerrard, of the Blackfeet Nation, addressed

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[183] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Regina Brave, Interview Date: 1975 November 7, Date Digitized: 1/24/2017, MSS0018_au024. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40530
[184] Grobsmith, *Lakota of the Rosebud*, 102–3.
[185] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Regina Brave, Interview Date: 1975 November 7, Date Digitized: 1/24/2017, MSS0018_au024. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40530
[186] Grobsmith, *Lakota of the Rosebud*, 107–8.
[187] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Al Fast Horse, Interview Date: 1977 May 12, Date Digitized: 1/30/2017, MSS0018_au006. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. Accessed through: https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40483

concerns with AIM's methods in regard to the occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. He expressed that representatives from the Tribal Chairman's Association had concerns about the effect that AIM's activism has on the work being done in legal and political channels by other Native organizations. He explained that some of the representatives "were becoming fearful that their efforts are being overshadowed by the more bizarre actions of militants"[188] Thus, it is clear that not everyone was pleased with the way AIM went about their fight for Native civil rights in this era.

Throughout the 60s and 70s the Red Power Movement used protests and occupations to draw attention to Native issues and stand up to federal authority. Bruce D'Arcus observed that the three occupational protests of this era were instrumental in the fight for Native rights and the gains that the fight brought. The three main occupations, he explained, were of "Alcatraz Island in 1969, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) headquarters in Washington, DC in late 1972, and a few months later, Wounded Knee."[189] The occupation of these places was essential because each was a highly publicized event that drew media attention and public support to Native issues. The Red Power Movement utilized symbolic spaces in protests, like the site of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where the massacre had taken place in 1890. The use of such historically significant places, D'Arcus maintained, was a highly effective move for the Red Power Movement and a tactic that tied directly into the unique Native American sense of space. Places where, for instance, ancestors had lost their lives were endowed with importance and symbolic value.[190] The use of sacred spaces in protest also highlighted the centrality of land in Native American questions about identity and rights.

The Wounded Knee occupation hit close to home for many Lakota, both because of the historical significance of the space and because the protest took place on Oglala Lakota land at Pine Ridge. Accordingly, many Lakota joined the occupation and were in support of its cause, while others remained skeptical. For instance, Regina Brave of Pine Ridge joined the occupation at Wounded Knee. She stated in an interview in 1975 that she joined AIM and the fight at Wounded Knee because "Indian people have the base to fight and the treaties to fight, and the right to be recognized as a separate nation. The right to be recognized as a

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[188] Memorandum from Forrest Gerard to Jerry T. Verkler and Bill Van Ness Regarding the American Indian Movement (AIM) Occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota; 3/2/1973; Special Action Files of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs for the 93rd Congress; Special Project Files, 1951 – 1968. Accessed through: https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/memorandum-regarding-the-occupation-of-wounded-knee
[189] D'Arcus, "Contested Boundaries," 420.
[190] D'Arcus, 421.

people."[191] Her statement placed land and treaty rights to that land at the center of Native activism at Wounded Knee, which is why she though it important to support the cause. The elders of the Tribal Council were not as supportive of the occupation as many younger Native people on the reservation and saw it as a challenge to their local authority.[192] Even if the Wounded Knee occupation and the methods and work of AIM and the Red Power Movement were contested points within Native communities, there was no denying that their protests were making Native issues heard.

The 1970s and 80s saw the pendulum shift towards self-determination and recognition of Native rights in the eyes of the federal government once again. For instance, some Native land was transferred back into Native control in the form of trusts, like the case mentioned earlier with the Taos Pueblo land claim for the land around Blue Lake. From the 1970s forward there were several significant legal developments on Native American and tribal rights. In 1975 the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act was passed, an act which encouraged the participation of Native people in the running of reservations, and distributed funds for the development of programs, education, and the administration of reservations in this new fashion.[193] In 1978 Congress enacted the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA). According to Marc Fonda, the act "cites ignorance and insensitivity as two major reasons for encroachments on Native American Indian religious expression and seeks to remedy free exercise infringements within the limited scope of the federal agencies."[194] In his opinion the aims of the act were ironic since it was mostly symbolic in practice and did not address the devastation caused by land ceases and forced removal onto Native religions.

Fonda asserted that even if the act tried as it proclaimed to deal with past ignorance of Native religions in the American justice system, it does not succeed, since the basic understanding of religions did not change. The act was still inherently Anglo-Christian. Lori Beaman agreed with Fonda on this and observed that religious freedom in the US has been constructed around a Christian framework, which does not accommodate or even recognize Native religious systems and traditions. She claimed that laws such as AIRFA and the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act have not accomplished their stated goal of giving extra

[191] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Regina Brave, Interview Date: 1975 November 7, Date Digitized: 1/24/2017, MSS0018_au024. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40530
[192] D'Arcus, "Contested Boundaries," 427–28.
[193] Irwin, "Freedom, Law, and Prophecy," 43.
[194] Fonda, "Are They like Us, Yet?," 9.

protection to religious minorities. Nowhere in the acts where there made changes to the American understanding of space in connection to religious freedom, which meant that the act was largely inefficient for Native American religions.[195]

The *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protection Association* from 1988 shows how elusive Native American religious freedom continued to be even after ARIFA. This decision also showed how government agencies, like the Forest Service, continued to have preferential treatment over Native Americans in legal decisions about land. The question concerned whether a road was to be constructed in an area of religious and ceremonial importance to several Northern California tribes. The government owned the land and Forest Service managed the project, but it was still an area of great spiritual significance. The court ruled that the construction of the road would not be an infringement of tribal religious freedom because it did not indirectly coerce, prohibit, or penalize them into not practicing their religion. The court argued that Free Exercise rights under the First Amendment only protected religious freedom if it was endangered in one of those three ways and ruled that the building of the road was not enough of a burden in the tribes. Religious freedom was not endangered enough to be protected by the First Amendment or AIRFA in this instance, the court held.[196] Beaman further maintained that "The profound differences between colonizer and Native American understandings of land, and humans' relationship to it, are impossible to overstate, and result in the desecration of sacred Aboriginal sites for the convenience of the colonizer."[197] Even though ARIFA was supposed to create better circumstances for religious freedom for Native people and give them extended rights to fight for this freedom, the *Lyng* decision shows that since ARIFA did not adequately address the legal issues related to nature and sacred space it did not end up being an effective way to protect Native American religious freedom. It did not change the protections for what Native people themselves viewed as most valuable, namely sacred lands.

The legal developments in the 80s and 90s were, however, a step in a positive direction and signified a change to the federal justice system's treatment of Native American religion. Acts like AIRFA have helped make significant progress in the protection of Native religions, making it easier and safer for practitioners and keeping these religions alive across generations. Ute Sundance Chief Kenny Frost stated in an interview with the *Smithsonian Magazine* about the 40th anniversary of AIRFA in 2018 that "This act was the first step to

[195] Beaman, "Aboriginal Spirituality and the Legal Construction of Freedom of Religion," 135–36.
[196] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 140–41.
[197] Beaman, "Aboriginal Spirituality and the Legal Construction of Freedom of Religion," 142.

ensure that Native people can continue to worship. The extent to which this is or isn't the case, however, depends on federal policies."[198] Shirod Younker of Coquille maintained that "The practices to remove and destroy our culture started more than 150 years ago, in the 1840s and '50s. It will take at least that amount of time to come close to restoring what we lost."[199] Their view of AIRFA is in line with other Native people interviewed in the article. The consensus among them was that although AIRFA has been an important first step and has made significant impact, it was just that, a first step.

In the face of the efforts to at times assimilate, other times remove and occasionally empower Native people, Native religions changed to meet the changes to Native life in the 20th century, like urbanization, termination and civil rights fights. Some Native people adopted Christian beliefs more widely, while others blended certain Christian ideas with their traditional religions. Traditional Native religions struggled to keep afloat in the face of assimilation and termination, but similarly to Native activism to fight these issues Native religions adapted and people fought to revitalize them.

2.4 Native Religions and Traditions Throughout the Twentieth Century – Changes and Revitalization

The 20th century saw changes and adjustments in Native religious expressions, both as a reaction to certain policies, but also because of cultural needs of modernization and globalization. Though Native American people adopted new rituals and customs during the 20th century, land was still critical even in new Native religious expressions. Some of the key developments in this century were new Native versions of Christianity. One aspect of old Native traditions that would be taken up in new, Christian settings in the 20th century was the use of peyote.

As the Ghost Dance spread in the latter half of the 19th century, promoting communal rituals that aimed to draw people closer to nature, another ritual form was also developing among Native Americans. Peyote, a plant known for its hallucinatory effects, had long been integral for many Native people in the Southern parts of the US, close to the Mexican border. The use of the plant in rituals grew in the 1890s and the early 1900s, and movements involving sacraments centering around peyote and its ritual use and effects thrived in many Native communities. For instance, it became popular among the Comanche, but also made its

[198] Zotigh, "Native Perspectives on the 40th Anniversary of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act."
[199] Zotigh.

way to the Lakota.[200] The movement continued to develop alongside the Ghost Dance and was similarly viewed with skepticism by the white majority. The *Code of Indian Offences* outlawed the use of Peyote, even in a religious context. Regina Brave described that Peyote was not seen as a drug in Native contexts, rather "peyote is a religion. But it had to be recognized under the government, United States government before Indian people were allowed to practice it."[201] To outlaw the use of peyote showed yet again how the federal government often misjudged Native religious expressions, approaching them with suspicion instead of trying to understand, just as it had done when the Sun Dance was outlawed.

Joel Martin outlined how Peyote religions in the early 1900s often blended the use of the ritualistic plant and its properties with Christian ideas and teachings. Peyote religion practitioners who wanted to promote the new religion and make it less alien to the surrounding white Christian community established the Native American Church in Oklahoma in 1918. The group that started the Church were made up of several well-known peyote practitioners from Oklahoma, among them Mack Haag who was Cheyenne, Frank Eagle and Louis McDonald who were Ponca and George Pipestem who was Oto. Among the early members were several Kiowa, Cheyenne, Oto and Osage representatives, but the Church spread beyond these tribes to, for instance, the Navajo and the Sioux in the first half of the 20th century.[202]

The NAC is still a major presence among Native American communities to this day. Martin reveals that the NAC provided an easier and more manageable way to practice Native religions for many Native people in modern times. The rituals of the NAC often concentrated around the use of Peyote, prayer, and conversation. Practitioners were meant to feel closer to the sacred world and to God. Rituals might be in small groups or even done alone. The rituals associated with NAC are less extensive than many rituals in traditional Native religions, such as the Sun Dance, which takes five days to accomplish and requires many people. The NAC rituals were more easily combined with modern life, Martin explained, as they did not require large rituals or vast knowledge of traditional Native language, for instance, to be practiced. Martin claimed that the NAC has been welcomed as a supplement by many Native people,

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[200] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 101–2.
[201] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Regina Brave, Interview Date: 1975 November 7, Date Digitized: 1/24/2017, MSS0018_au024. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40530
[202] Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 225.

another way to approach their spirituality that supplements their traditional religious ceremonies and beliefs.[203]

The NAC dealt well with the modern realities of Native life. It was less closely tied to communal practices, as more Native people lived in urban areas and away from the community on the reservation. The NAC brand of belief also responded to the loss of language and tradition that many Native people experienced throughout the 20th century, due to policies of assimilation and later termination. As Native people fought to maintain their homelands and connections to it through the course of the century, some adopted beliefs systems like the NAC that responded better to the new life many Native people were facing. Because the NAC has promoted itself as a version of Native religions tied closely to Christian ideas it has often received more protection from the federal government than other Native religious groups that do not associate their practices with Christianity. Even so, members of the NAC have also seen their fair share of discrimination and challenges, especially due to Peyote being labeled as a drug because of its effects, even if its use is associated with religious rituals.

In 1990 the Supreme Court ruled in a landmark decision *Oregon v. Smith* that it had been permissible for a company to fire a man who had used Peyote in a ritual setting. The court ruling made it clear that the ritual context in which Peyote had been consumed made no difference. This decision delt a significant blow to the recognition of the NAC.[204] The decision was amended in the 1994 Amendment to AIRFA, which permitted the use of Peyote in a ritual context for Native Americans and stated that they should not suffer discrimination for the use of it as a consequence.

Elisabeth Grobsmith noted that peyote and the NAC never became very popular in Lakota communities and that most Lakota have looked at it with indifference. This has been the attitude of the Lakota throughout the 20th century, she argued. Grobsmith attributed this both to the continued prevalence of traditional rituals and culture among the Lakota, which has held a steadfast place in Lakota communities through the 20th century despite being banned in the earlier half, and due to the influence of other Christian churches in these communities.[205] Tribes like the Lakota, who did not suffer from termination in the 50s had an easier time of holding on to their traditional religions. The tribal government and official framework of the community was taken away for the tribes that were terminated. This made it

[203] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 107–8.
[204] Martin, 109.
[205] Grobsmith, *Lakota of the Rosebud*, 80.

hard both to maintain communal ritual practices, as many were forced to move away after termination, and to fight for the protection of their lands and sacred areas through government channels without official tribal leadership.

As a response to the calls for assimilation in the 20th century, many Native people started to blend their traditional religions with Christian beliefs. The NAC was one of the ways this was done, but the practice of blending was common with other strands of Christianity as well, like Pentecostalism, Catholicism and Baptism. This effort to blend the traditions was called the contextualization movement and became particularly popular in the latter half of the 20th century. Among adherents to this new tradition was Lakota evangelical Christian Richard Twiss whose ideas about the syncretism of Lakota and Evangelical traditions have remained influential within the community. He claimed that merging Native traditions and Christian ones can be a way to deal with the colonial oppression Native people have suffered under.[206] Through years of exposure to Christian missionaries many Native people have adopted Christian ideas and beliefs, and even mixed them with their own traditional religious practices. Some might agree with Twiss, that it is a way for them to deal with the harsh history of Christian oppression. However, for many Native people the adoption of certain Christian traditions has been a natural process and not something that has been done purposefully or entirely consciously. Regina Brave explained in her interview that she believed that:

> Spiritual Indian people could not survive without spiritualism. We're not Christian, not the Christian concept of spiritualism where we only put in our time, 15 minutes for, you know, at the end of one week. Like say on Sunday, out of that 24 hour period on Sunday we don't just take 15 minutes off and say thank you for all the good things. It's very much a part of our life where we can wake up in the morning and the ground we walk on. We live our spiritualism.[207]

In this statement it comes across that Brave believed that Native spiritualists and Christians experienced and practiced belief in inherently different ways. That might also be why when Native people adopt Christian beliefs, they tend to blend them with their traditional religion. For many Native people, like Brave, spirituality is always all encompassing and a part of their whole world. In mixing the two traditions, Native people may keep these ideas about interconnectedness between spirituality and the world, as it does not exist in the same

[206] Tarango, "Native American Christians and the Varieties of Modern Pentecostalism," 336–37.
[207] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Regina Brave, Interview Date: 1975 November 7, Date Digitized: 1/24/2017, MSS0018_au024. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40530

way within Christianity. Native Christians thus often practice a wholly syncretic version of Christianity, that becomes distinctly Native.

Though some Native people maintained their traditional religions through the century, many also experienced a loss of ties to traditional religious practice. In addition, there have been, and still are, challenges with keeping traditions and languages alive, because of a loss of connection, a more urban Native population, and the loss of elders in communities. The relocation of many Native people to more urban areas, away from their reservations, in the termination period led to a lessening of contact with traditional culture on an everyday basis. In the decades that followed more Native people were growing up off reservations, as well as moving into the urban areas in search of better opportunities. Living and growing up further away from their traditional culture and communities has made it harder for many to connect with their background and their religions, argued Martin, especially for Native youths. [208] Al Fast Horse agreed with Martin's point, underlining that learning Native traditions was something of a communal education.

> This is the only and the right way. It cannot be attended, public schools or other, education institutions for 12 to 20 years and expect to know all the traditions of your tribe. This is also our education system. The child, or the person that's gonna be passed on all this tradition, and the capstones. They approach the child and the parents at a very early age, and then this is when the education starts, as soon as the child is able to talk. Be able to understand things, that is the primary part of it.[209]

Growing up away from the reservation thus made it hard to keep in touch with traditional beliefs and learn practices and traditions, as this was something that happened through a lifetime of everyday education inside the community.

People on reservations also face several issues that make it hard to keep their traditions and their cultures alive. Many reservations are plagued with poverty, unemployment, and illness, especially diabetes. For instance, in Oglala Lakota County in South Dakota in 2021, almost 50% of the inhabitants lived below the poverty line.[210] On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota "The tuberculosis and diabetes rates are eight times the national averages, while the cervical cancer rate is five times more than the US average," according to statistics from 2007.[211] These bleak conditions make it hard to keep religions and traditions going, as

[208] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 128.
[209] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Al Fast Horse, Interview Date: 1977 May 12, Date Digitized: 1/30/2017, MSS0018_au006. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. Accessed through: https://archives.nebraska.edu/repositories/4/archival_objects/40483
[210] "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts."
[211] Strickland, "Life on the Pine Ridge Native American Reservation."

they need a well-functioning community to be kept alive. Violence, crime, alcoholism and mental illness have grown in many Native communities in the face of these conditions as well, which adds to the hardships.[212] On Pine Ridge more than 80% of the population struggle with alcoholism, and many children struggle with conditions brought on by being born from an alcoholic parent.[213] According to research by Amnesty International USA in 2011, Native women are over twice as likely to be raped or sexually assaulted as non-Native women.[214]

As Martin wrote "Such conditions can breed despair and cynicism, undermine hope and confidence, and sap the spirit of Native American individuals."[215] This sentiment is evident in statements from Native people themselves. Olowan Martinez, resident of Pine Ridge, maintained that "Politicians give big words and big promises. When it comes down to it, the people back here on these dirt roads are forgotten."[216] Native activist Nick Estes agreed with this sentiment, underlining how colonialism continues to affect Native peoples' living conditions. He argued that "Misunderstanding the ways in which Native bodies are made poor and [are] criminalized makes it impossible to understand the structure of settler colonialism as a precondition for that poverty"[217] When individuals suffer, the community suffers as well, and as a result Native religions continue to face harsh conditions in modern times. It becomes increasingly hard for people to come together around community activities if they have to deal with such extensive issues at home. Engaging in activism or communal outreach is also preconditioned by the fact that one has to have enough in order to give back.

However, in the face of these challenges many Native people have actively sought out their cultures and religions to learn more, connect and revive. This has led to a cultural revival in Native arts, literature, television, and music in recent decades. An example of this is Lakota artist Colleen Cutschall from Pine Ridge who has used her artistic skills to depict and convey Lakota legends. Taking up traditional art and music has also been a way for people to connect with their community and their spirituality. Many of these forms of expression often have a spiritual component to them, Martin explained.[218] Language revival programs and bilingual schools have also contributed to Native people having more opportunities and staying in touch with their culture. Grobsmith pointed out that the readily available Lakota language programs on the Rosebud reservation have made a large impact on the young people in the community,

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[212] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 124–25.
[213] Strickland, "Life on the Pine Ridge Native American Reservation."
[214] Amnesty International, "Maze of Injustice."
[215] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 125.
[216] Strickland, "Life on the Pine Ridge Native American Reservation."
[217] Strickland.
[218] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 129–31.

making it easier for them to connect with their elders and their traditions, as well as instilling a sense of pride in their cultural heritage. The same can be said for the development of Native Studies programs in colleges and reservation schools, she observed.[219]

Martin also noted that many Native people today "work to regain land, retrieve tribal artifacts housed in museums, and rebury their ancestral dead."[220] This work helps bring culture and traditions back to life, as it starts to repair bonds to heritage that had been broken by colonialism and suppression. These efforts have been made possible by acts such as the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act of 1990, which gave tribes ownership and control over Native remains and burial grounds on federal lands.[221] This act gave Native people access and some ownership over certain parts of lands and areas owned by the federal government. This is an unprecedented development that proves that a significant shift in federal policy was underway.

As Christian ideas laid the basis for American society from its conception, it is not surprising that Christian ideas about what religion was and how it was practiced also been the basis for religious freedom legislation in the US. Legislation throughout the 20th century has failed to acknowledge the inherent differences in how Native religions and Christianity relate to physical space, even when that legislation has tried to improve upon religious freedom for Native Americans. As a result, Native religions have not fared better conditions or much legal or political recognition in the 20th century, despite extensive growth in Native activism with important organizations such as AIM. In the 20th century Native communities experienced developments that shook their communities' core. For instance, termination proved devastating to many communities and individuals, as did urban relocation. The different issues and struggles that faced many Native people in this time made it hard to keep traditional religious practices alive and to teach them to the next generation. In response to pressures to assimilate some adopted more Christian variations of religion, creating new and impactful versions of traditional religious expressions, proving that Native religions could adapt and survive under immense pressure. All throughout the century interconnectedness to land and the inherent in sacrality of land stood central to Native activism and was generally disregarded in policy from the federal government. But the activism in this century and the positive legal developments, like citizenship, would prove to build a basis for the possibility of more successful protection of Native spaces in the late 20th and early 21st century.

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[219] Grobsmith, *Lakota of the Rosebud*, 97–99.
[220] Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 136.
[221] Rep. Udall, "H.R.5237 - 101st Congress (1989-1990)."

Chapter 3: Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ, New Alliances, and the Future of Public Lands Management

The media and the public focused greater attention on Native American activism over the course of the last two decades. That focus had a growing politically impact as well. One of the reasons for this recent development is the growing concern with environmental issues among the general population in the US and globally. Environmental activist groups and Native American activist groups have not always seen eye to eye, but in recent decades the two camps seem to have found themselves fighting the same battles more often. The growing working relationship between the two camps has also resulted in them having more success politically. That is not to say that environmental activists and Native American activists always fight for the protection of, for instance, a river for the same reason, but the interests of both parties has tended to align more often in the 21st century than they have previously. The alignment of Native activism and environmental activism has also resulted in successful protection of sacred places in modern times, for instance in the case of Keystone XL Pipeline.

Environmental and Indigenous activists banded together to halt the Keystone project. They feared that possible oil spills from the pipeline would destroy nature, sacred places, and agricultural areas in the states it was supposed to run through. The Black Hills, sacred to the Lakota, was among the areas that the pipeline was supposed to run through. Building the pipeline in this area would have been detrimental to the religious landscape of the tribe, as well as a major environmental threat to the area's nature.[222] The successful coalition of the environmental movement and Indigenous communities in the case of Keystone is only one example, but there are many others. Dina Gilio-Whittaker contended that the cooperation between the two groups was instrumental to success in the fight to stop the pipeline's construction. The fight also received major media attention, further highlighting the coalition and their shared concerns.[223] The successful cooperation between the two communities in recent years begs the questions: Why did it happen or why now? And how has this coalition impacted Native activism in the 21st century? To answer this, one must focus on past relationships, as well as what has changed within the communities. Finally, attention must be put on the political agenda in recent years that has brought them closer.

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[222] Brady and Banerjee, "Developer Abandons Keystone XL Pipeline Project, Ending Decade-Long Battle."
[223] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 142.

3.1 From the "Crying Indian" to Successful Allies

The two groups once had a strained relations. In part that was because Progressives who promoted conservation, preservation, and the pristine, untouched wilderness, were highly ignorant of Native perspectives on land. Ignorance was not only a feature of the Progressives, but also marked those in the modern environmental movement of the 1960s. Gilio-Whittaker wrote that the movement applauded stereotypes of Native people as "the 'ecological Indian', a revamped version of the noble savage who became a stand-in for an environmental ethic the US should aspire to."[224] The image of the "ecological Indian" set an impossibly high standard for how Native people. The "ecological Indian" was perfect, always lived in harmony with nature and possessed ancient wisdom on how to take care of nature, all while being dressed in a way that "looked Indian". Paul Nadasdy agreed with Gilio-Whittaker and contended that "The stereotype denies the realities of native people's lives, reducing the rich diversity of their beliefs, values, social relations, and practices to a one-dimensional caricature."[225] Environmental campaigns used this stereotype in the 60s and 70s, as in the infamous Keep American Beautiful commercial with "The Crying Indian," and followed Native peoples for decades after. The stereotype and the demands that came with it made it hard for Native people to engage in environmental activism on their own terms.

However, in the 1990s something began to change within the environmental movement. Gilio-Whittaker described how the environmental movement grew in the 90s due to more research on climate change and with concerns about a need for immediate action. More people across the globe, as well as in the US, became concerned with environmental issues and engaged themselves in the fight against climate change.[226] The UN held its first United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, marking one of the first global efforts on a political level to engage with climate change. 192 parties in the UN ratified the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which aimed to cut greenhouse gas emissions.[227] As the environmental movement grew, more people within the movement also began to recognize how certain marginalized groups had been alienated by the movement for a long time.

Environmental scholars of the 90s also began to shed light on ideas about environmental inequality and the need for environmental justice, noted Shepard Krech III. For instance, the horrific impact of mining projects on Native communities became a topic of

[224] Gilio-Whitaker, 103.
[225] Nadasdy, "Transcending the Debate over the Ecologically Noble Indian," 293.
[226] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 109–10.
[227] United Nations, "Marking the Kyoto Protocol's 25th Anniversary."

scholarly conversation. Books like *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice,* edited by Jace Weaver in 1996, and *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life,* by Winona LaDuke in 1999, were just two of many works that emphasized Native American perspectives on environmental issues.[228] The ideas of environmental inequality and environmental justice highlighted how abuse of land and climate change often impacted marginalized communities more so than the majority. The same was true for rural and poorer communities. Many Native communities fit this description well, especially those living on reservations. These new ideas made more room for the struggles of marginalized communities, like many Native communities, in the environmental movement. That environmental groups began to recognize environmental inequality and the way Native voices had been silenced made it easier for Native people to be understood in their complexities. The new focus on unique struggles of marginalized communities made the majority view Native people with more complexity, slowly but surely breaking down the stereotypes they had suffered under for decades. Newfound recognition of Native struggles and perspectives meant that Native people gained a certain agency in the environmental movement, an agency that made it easier for others to see them as valued and equal participants and partners in the fight against climate change and for environmental justice.

Nonetheless, that the environmental movement became more focused on inclusivity was not the only reason an increasing number of Native people joined the fight for environmental justice in recent decades. Native people were feeling the impacts of climate change directly on their homes and communities. Reservation lands have been more acutely exposed to the effects of climate change, such as drought, extreme heat, and wildfires. Farrell et al revealed that tribes have been more likely to suffer as a result of climate change exposure living on their present-day land holdings than they would have experienced on their historical lands. For instance, 36.3% experience increased drought on the lands where they reside today and 47.7% of tribes have an increased wildfire risk on their lands, versus what they would have had on their historical lands. [229] Farrell et al. also argued that policy on climate change needs to account for the effects of land dispossession in the US. They concluded that "as society seeks to address its greatest problems—climate change, land degradation, and

[228] Krech III, "Reflections on Conservation, Sustainability, and Environmentalism in Indigenous North America," 82.
[229] Farrell et al., "Effects of Land Dispossession and Forced Migration on Indigenous Peoples in North America," 4.

economic and social inequality—we ought to construct policies with the scientific knowledge that these problems disproportionately affect Indigenous peoples." [230]

Many Indigenous people agreed with this sentiment and felt the challenges that climate change brought to their lands. Even though Farrell et al.'s research is recent, from 2021, it recognized that the effects of climate change have long been disproportionately negative for Native people. As a response to the increased knowledge and attention that climate change gained in the late 20th century, Native people started to increasingly engage in the issue. There was a growing sentiment among Native people of the 80s and 90s that the Indigenous perspective was lacking in the fight against pollution, destruction of lands and climate change, and therefore organizations with specifically Native points of view on climate change were formed in this period. Native environmental activists, such as Tom B.K Goldstooth and Winona LaDuke, established national groups like Indigenous Environmental Network and Honor the Earth in the early 90s. Alongside the national initiatives local variants sprung up, including Sweetgrass Hills Protective Association in Montana. Native environmental organizations fought especially to stop environmentally destructive development on Native lands and advocated for the negative effects such developments and climate change were having on Native communities.[231]

Native women spearheaded the movement, taking on leadership roles in several Native environmental groups. Winona LaDuke of the Ojibwe Nation, for instance, was a founding member of Honor the Earth, and is still the CEO of the organization and has been an active contributor in Native environmental activism over the last few decades. The emergence of the internet in the early 2000s made it easier to organize than ever, which has led Native environmental groups to continue to grow in the last couple decades. There are both local, national, and global organizations, tied together easier than ever in the digital age.[232]

Native environmental activism brought unique perspectives to the environmental movement, maintained Vikcery and Hunter in their work on Native American perspectives in environmental justice research. They hold that Native reflections on place and nature bring new dimensions to environmental justice. This includes key themes like the sacredness of ancestral landscape, the importance of healing plants that grow in an area or access to the landscape for religiously significant activities, such as hunting, brought a new relevance and significance to environmental justice.[233] Doherty and Doyle claimed that the addition of this

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[230] Farrell et al., 7.
[231] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 109.
[232] Gilio-Whitaker, 119–20.
[233] Vickery and Hunter, "Native Americans," 4.

new dimension brought by Native activists showed something important about developments more generally in the environmental movement at the time. They argued that social movements of the late 20th century were stepping into the environmental movement, bringing with them unique perspectives, while still advocating for particular challenges relating to their social group. This development was similarly true for Black activists, feminists, and Native American activists.[234] Native American environmental activism gave nature and place another layer of importance, in addition to the importance it had in the eyes of the non-Native environmental movement. Most importantly, Native battles to protect nature and land were not only a matter of preserving the Earth for future generations, they also sometimes had a cultural and religious dimension to them.

As Indigenous people started organizing to fight for the environment, the white majority within established environmental organizations along with scholars started to recognize Native perspectives and voices more. Jochen Kemner explained that this development was based mainly on the growing concern and advocacy for human rights internationally in the 1960s and 70s. Human rights received growing attention from this period forward, and in the 80s Indigenous perspectives started to be included more and more in this in human rights campaigns. The inclusion of Native concerns in the environmental movement builds on this development.[235] With the growing recognition for Indigenous human rights as a foundation, fruitful cooperation between Native and non-Native activists became more common from the 90s onwards in America.

One instance of this successful collaboration was in the case of Panhe in Southern California, a sacred ancient village essential in the religious geography of the Acjachemen. In 2006 a private transportation company proposed building a road through the San Mateo Creek watershed to alleviate traffic from the main road. The new road would cross into the state park where Panhe was located and run just a few feet away from the ancient site. In addition, it would run close to the Trestles surf break and be a danger for animals living in the creek bed. The proposed road was controversial, and Native activists, surfers, and environmental activists banded together under the campaign “Save Trestles, Stop the Toll Road” to save the area. Different factions deemed the effort important for different reasons. Panhe was sacred to the Acjachemen, the Trestles held an almost sacred position to the surfers too, and the road would cause major environmental damage to fragile coastlines, riling the environmentalists.[236]

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[234] Doherty and Doyle, “Beyond Borders,” 704.
[235] Kemner, “Fourth World Activism in the First World,” 278–79.
[236] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 132–33.

In a *New York Times* article from 2007, surfers and bureaucrats go head-to-head. The surfers asserted that the construction of the road would destroy a world class surfing spot, while the bureaucrats maintained their view of how important the road was for the growing population of Southern California. The article also mentioned the environmental concerns of the "Save Trestles" movement, with one surfer interviewed saying that "You can take a walk down to Trestles and it's actually beautiful. You can watch pelicans. Put a freeway in there and you destroy everything."[237] The article does not mention the Native concerns about Panhe, but Indigenous activists were essential in the campaign to save the area.

The road project was successfully stopped, after extensive backlash from local activists. Native activists worked to protect Panhe by establishing the United Coalition to Protect Panhe (UCCP) and alerting the California Coastal Commission of the religious importance of Panhe and how it would be threatened by the construction of the road. The UCCP also formed alliances with the environmental organizations involved, like the Sierra Club, along with surfers rallying to the cause. This collaboration led to the eventual protection of the coastline and Panhe. The Coastal Commission decided to halt the construction of the road due to negative environmental, recreational, and archaeological it would have. The commission also expanded on this and stated that the significance of the area for local Native communities had been vastly ignored in the plans for the road.[238] Acjachemen activists have since continued to spread awareness of Panhe's religious importance, hoping to stop future threats to the area and other similar sacred sites. Local Native people, among them Rebecca Robles, started an initiative to celebrate the site yearly, both to honor it and to educate the public. The annual event is still going and Robles has remarked that the event continues to be important because "It's our history as the Acjachemen people, but it's a huge portion of California history that's written out, that we don't hear anything about."[239]

Collaborative efforts like the coalition to protect the Trestles have proven that it is possible for Native activist groups and other parties, particularly environmental groups, to developed successful working relationships, even if they have had a strained relationship in the past. In the last few decades more examples of successful collaboration between Native activists and environmental activists have taken place. Activists linked up around the same causes and working towards the same goals, albeit sometimes with differing reasons. The rise of environmental justice ideas within the environmental movement has led to more

[237] Higgins, "In Southern California, Surfers Unite."
[238] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 134.
[239] Brazil, "First People of Orange County to Spread Message of Preservation at San Clemente Event."

recognition of marginalized perspectives and experiences, creating more room for Native activists and causes in the movement. Native activists have engaged in the movement not only to fight for environmental issues to be taken seriously, but also as a way to share their unique struggles in way that will be heard. What Native communities may gain from environmental activism is complex, and successful collaboration and engagement may help a variety of issues Native people face. As Anna J. Willow held:

> although the forms Indigenous-environmentalist alliances take and the circumstances that inform them vary, First Nations participants share an understanding of environmental protection as one key component of multi-dimensional and multi-generational campaigns to ensure the continuance of the land-based subsistence on which their survival as culturally distinct and politically autonomous peoples depends.[240]

Instances like Panhe and the Keystone XL Pipeline show that Indigenous activists, while still engaging in the environmental issues of the cause, also often bring their cultural and religious experiences into the fight for land protection. The added dimensions of sacredness of place and nature make for compelling arguments in the battle to protect land across the nation. Bringing these perspectives into the environmental movement has proven an effective way of gaining protection for sacred sites as well as protecting nature. For Native activists of the 21st century it is not only about climate change and environmental concerns, as place for many Native people is interconnected with parts of their identity, religion, ancestry, and culture. Accordingly, the fight to protect all land, not just the most sacred places, is of graver importance.

However, Gilio-Whittaker contended that "Indigenous resistance is increasingly a shared struggle, and negotiating the tricky terrain of environmental justice frameworks that work for Native peoples' is challenging and demands coordinated responses in ever more creative and innovative ways."[241] To her point, the relationship between the environmental movements and Native activists is not always an easy one. There are still points of dispute, for instance when it comes to traditional activities such as whaling. The Makah in Washington State have, traditionally, hunted grey whales. The hunt has had religious significances, as one of the main rituals of the tribe for thousands of years. It has also had and cultural significance. It was a way to collect food, materials for traditional arts, clothing, and a bonding activity for the community. The Makah have not hunted the grey whale since the late 1920s, when they

[240] Willow, "Strategies for Survival: First Nations Encounters with Environmentalism" in Clapperton and Piper, *Environmental Activism on the Ground*, 26.
[241] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 145.

gave it up after the whale population dramatically decreased when Europeans started hunting whales as well.

However, since the 1970s the Makah have tried to take up whaling again. Alma Beck holds that reinstating whaling held importance to the Makah across several aspects of their lives. Beck explained that "Clearly, the Makah's interest in whaling goes beyond an assertion of legal rights. Whaling is also an attempt to reclaim a fundamental piece of cultural heritage, and in doing so, to strengthen the ability of a people to prevail over the effects of economic poverty and cultural alienation."[242] The Makah's right to whaling was protected on paper in the 1885 treaty with the US government, and the tribe has continued to try to have this right recognized by the modern federal government and American society at large. The conservation movement of the 70s, however, strongly opposed this and fought for the continuation of the ban on whaling. Whaling has been a contested point between the Makah and the conservation movement ever since.[243] Makah Chairman Timothy Green described the importance of whaling to the Makah in an interview with *National Geographic* as such: "Being disconnected from our spiritual practices has a negative impact. Imagine a Catholic person not being able to go to Mass. The training and spiritual preparation we go through helps make our community whole and really be who we are."[244]

Even with the importance of whaling as a communal ritual to the Makah there still have been environmental activists who opposed the practice, like the organizations Green Vegan and The Sea Shepard Conservation Society. However, the environmental community has become more split in recent years, with major activist organizations like the Sierra Club voicing support for the Makah's fight to keep their traditions alive. [245] The wide range of opinions within the environmental community in recent decades is evident in the case of the Makah whaling question. Beck explained that the question of whaling showed how differently environmental activists relate to questions concerning Native American traditions. On the one hand, some were strongly opposed to the killing of whales, no matter the reason, while for others the concern was about what impact allowing whaling among the Makah may have on commercial whaling activities. The latter did not necessarily believe that the Makah should not be allowed to take up whaling but were rather concerned about repercussions in other spheres of society.[246] Whaling continues to be a point of contention between the Makah and

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[242] Beck, "The Makah's Decision to Reinstate Whaling," 361.
[243] Marris, "A U.S. Tribe Wants to Resume Whale Hunts. Will Conservationists Support Them?"
[244] Marris.
[245] Marris.
[246] Beck, "The Makah's Decision to Reinstate Whaling," 362.

environmental activists, and the disagreements in this issue are telling of the fact that environmental activists and Native communities still do not always see eye to eye. Issues that involve killing animals or for instance burning grass, which is a common tactic in agriculture among Plains tribes, continue to be faced with skepticism and at times outrage from some environmental activists.

Even though collaborations between Native activists and non-Native environmental activists have generally been more fruitful for Native communities in the 21st century than ever before, issues like whaling show that there is still quite a way left to go. Native concerns are being more widely incorporated in environmental fights, but still fail to fully fathom Native traditions, religions, and cultures. As Willow claimed, "these partnerships empower Indigenous people only within an inherently inequitable (post) colonial social system."[247] Environmental activist groups are becoming more inclusive, but the environmental movement still struggles to contend with some of the Eurocentric principles it was founded on. Continued activism, representation and recognition is a way in which Indigenous people around the world engage with issues that face them in the 21st century, and such activity might affect the remnants of colonialist ideas within the environmental movement nationally and globally.

3.2 National and Global Developments in the Recognition of Indigenous Peoples

In 2007, after almost 25 years of negotiation, the UN laid out the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Although the proposal of the declaration had taken decades longer than many Indigenous people would have liked, it still proved a landmark development for the global recognition of Indigenous rights. At first, the US voted against the implementation of the declaration, together with Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, but later reconsidered.[248] The Obama administration issued its support in 2010 in a press release from the State Department, which stated that "The United States underlines its support for the Declaration's recognition in the preamble that Indigenous individuals are entitled without discrimination to all human rights recognized in international law, and that Indigenous peoples possess certain additional, collective rights."[249]

[247] Willow, "Strategies for Survival: First Nations Encounters with Environmentalism" in Clapperton and Piper, *Environmental Activism on the Ground*, 25.
[248] Kunze, "'The United States Lags behind' on the Rights of Its Indigenous Peoples, Natives Say."
[249] "Announcement of U.S. Support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

The extent to which the declaration has actually been adopted in its entirety by the US government has been debated. Andrea Carmen of the Yaqui tribe, who participated in the negotiations of the declaration in the UN, contended that the federal government has not adopted the point of informed consent to the extent that the declaration calls for. Carmen held that even if the State Department in its statement claimed to continue to consult tribes on policies that will affect them, this did not represent consent in the way that the declaration intended. In an interview with *Native News Online* Carmen asserted that "the U.S. conflates consultation with consent. The difference is that 'consent means the ability to say yes or no.'" [250] Generally, the declaration was a step toward further recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples and nations in many different situations and locations. Even if the implementation of the declaration in the US was lacking, the declaration itself was still an important tool in the fight for Indigenous rights worldwide and nationally.

It is not only within the US that Indigenous people have been fighting for and gaining more recognition in the latest decades. Struggles in the US were part of a larger trend among Indigenous communities globally. This is evident in the fight for Sámi rights Norway and Finland. In Finland in recent months, the Sámi population is fighting for to get the Sámi Parliament Act approved. The act would radically redefine the relationship between the Finnish and Sámi governments, strengthening the rights of the Sámi people in Finland. Relatedly, in April of 2023 the Norwegian Sámi population demonstrated to stop the construction of wind farms on Sámi land.[251] Similarly, in Japan the Indigenous population has been working to reclaim their identity and get their special rights recognized, and in Australia the Aboriginal population has been fighting to protect sacred land from industrial development and pollution.[252] Globally, Indigenous communities have been connecting over their shared causes. Their campaigns are also receiving more media attention, as there is growing international pressure from institutions like the UN to recognize Indigenous rights and work to protect these. 21st- century Native American activism is strengthened by international attention and pressure turning to Indigenous issues, making it somewhat easier, if not more relevant, to continue to fight.

Additionally, representation of Native American voices is growing in the media and political debates in the US. Growing representation is a positive development as it can lead to more understanding for Native issues and platforms to voice these causes. Seeing Native

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[250] Kunze, "'The United States Lags behind' on the Rights of Its Indigenous Peoples, Natives Say."
[251] MacDougall, "Europe's Indigenous Sámi Take Fight for Rights to United Nations."
[252] Ozawa, "Japan's Indigenous Peoples Fight Stigma to Reclaim Identities." And Zhuang, "Indigenous Australians Fight to Protect Sacred Art From Industry and Pollution."

people on screen and in government can also enforce a sense of identity among Native people, especially younger generations. Representation can instill pride in Native identities and make more Native people inclined to engage and believe that they have a place and a platform to do so. According to Leavitt et al., meaningful representation is crucial to the self-image of a group, especially a minority like Native American. They contended that "the limited representations associated with minority groups in the media, in terms of both quantity and quality, are likely to convey to group members that they do not belong and cannot be successful." Additionally, they hold, "Native Americans, more than other social groups, are seen and learn to see themselves through the lens of negative stereotypes or they look to the messages projected about the contemporary world and simply do not see themselves represented."[253] For these reasons, quality and quantity representation is essential for Native Americans. Not only will it help foster a better self-image of what they themselves can become and do, it will also spread awareness about Native concerns, traditions and life through American society. Both political, activist, and media representation can aid these developments, and in recent years representation of Native Americans in American society has grown. The representation has also become more varied in its expressions, showing different Native experiences and traditions, contributing to a truer representation of complex Native lives.

2022 marked the first time in history that all three major Indigenous groups in the US – Alaska Natives, Native Americans, and Native Hawaiians – were represented in the House of Representatives. Mary Peltola was elected to represent Alaska in 2022, becoming the first Alaska Native representative to sit in Congress. Her election represented a historic leap for American Indigenous inclusion in politics.[254] Deb Haaland became the first ever Native American head of the Department of the Interior under President Joe Biden in 2020. Haaland stated that she intends to "make sure tribal leaders – and all marginalized communities – have a seat at the table" in issues concerning environmental justice, land management and natural resources.[255] Under President Biden the NPS will for the first time be led by a Native American director, Charles F Sams III from the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Many Native leaders have met the election of Sams with positivity. These leaders believe that he could make positive changes to the NPS and bring tribal perspectives forward. Fawn Sharp from the National Congress for American Indians said in an interview with *The Guardian* that she

[253] Leavitt et al., "'Frozen in Time,'" 41.
[254] Diaz, "U.S. Congress Reaches a Milestone in Indigenous Representation."
[255] Lakhani, "'I'll Be Fierce for All of Us.'"

believed this to be "an opportunity to reconcile that past, to heal that past, and to recognize the deep knowledge and wisdom that a Native American brings to that post."[256]

In the mainstream media Native people have become more visible too, especially within the last five years. Shows such as Reservation Dogs, Dark Winds and Rutherford Falls have become increasingly popular in the mainstream, featuring several Native actors, writers, and directors. Professor of Native American Studies Liza Black, of the Cherokee tribe, argued that:

> when you have Indigenous storytellers at the table and directors and producers and amazing talent, you have the ability to tell complex, authentic stories about complex people who can be messy or funny, good guys and bad guys, and to be able to do that in a way that's not harmful[257]

Truthful representation is a way to fight the continued erasure and misrepresentation that many Native American groups have faced for decades. The visibility of Native peoples' in government and media, as well as growing global activism and awareness can help combat erasure of Indigenous issues and voices, and it is contributing continually to this development.

3.3 The Centrality of Land to Native Activism in the 21st Century

Growing interconnectedness and complexity are features of modern Native activism. Environmental concerns intertwine with the sacred nature of certain places and landscapes to bolster complex arguments for land protection. Issues of land and sovereignty mix with environmental ideas, creating ideas about bio-sovereignty and tribal land management. Increased complexity is a central theme of modern Native activism, as for instance in the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) controversy. Indigenous resistance against the DAPL project, dubbed #NoDAPL on social media, gained widespread attention, especially at its peak in 2016. Lakota activists were central in the efforts to organize protests against the construction of the pipeline, especially women and young people, who set up the initial camps at Standing Rock. These became hubs for DAPL resistance. Among the central activists were LaDonna Brave Bull Allard and Jasilyn Charger, who helped set up prayer camps. For the Lakota, the fight against DAPL was complex. Not only was the pipeline set to be built on sacred lands, where the Cannonball and Missouri Rivers meet, but it would also threaten the water security of the Standing Rock Sioux, who relied heavily on clean water from the river. The rivers themselves had sacred value, but there were also sacred sites such as burial

[256] Golden, "'Heal the Past.'"
[257] Horton, "'It's a Completely New Day.'"

grounds and old Sundance locations close to the rivers. These sites were not only sacred to the Lakota, but also Arikara, Mandan, and Northern Cheyenne.[258] Yet, not only were there issues of sacred ground and water security, but the land on which the pipeline was set to be built was land belonging to the Lakota according to the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. The fact that the land was tied up in the treaty made the DAPL resistance movement about sovereignty and treaty rights too, adding a further layer of nuance.[259]

The movement garnered much attention from the public and from mainstream media, in ways that no other Indigenous environmental protest had. Anna Brígido-Corachán claimed that "The #NoDAPL movement has significantly altered public debates at large on environmentalism and Native sovereignty."[260] Katie Grote and Jay Johnson agreed with this point, maintaining that the increased media attention the protests at Standing Rock received started a conversation among the majority and in mainstream media about how Native Americans have been represented. Often, Native causes have been reported in a simplified manner, for instance, by presenting the #NoDAPL movement as only being about water rights and sacred sites. The reality, however, is that Native issues are usually vastly more complex than that.[261] As Brígido-Corachán contended it is "easier to say mni wachoni (water is sacred) than it is to discuss intergenerational trauma, abject poverty, abuse, racism, sexual violence, and ongoing coloniality", which were all at play in the Standing Rock protests.[262]

The movement and its causes was at times presented simply in the media, but it still gathered monumental amounts of attention. The protests gathered thousands of Native and non-Native supporters and made the public aware of Native issues in a way that many had not been previously. The protests were also a sign of positive collaboration between Native and non-Native activists. Gilio-Whittaker asserted that the support from non-Native activists was instrumental in creating the needed media attention and donations for the cause.[263] The Standing Rock protests were an example of modern collaborative efforts to fight issues that face Native people today. Native issues were now being described and debated in more detail and nuance, which led to greater success in collaborative efforts between Native and non-Native activist groups. The Standing Rock protests were also centrally about place and how place was understood and valued in many Native communities. The protests contributed to a

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[258] Brígido-Corachán, "Material Nature, Visual Sovereignty, and Water Rights," 72.
[259] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 131.
[260] Brígido-Corachán, "Material Nature, Visual Sovereignty, and Water Rights," 74.
[261] Grote and Johnson, "Pipelines, Protectors, and Settler Colonialism," 487.
[262] Brígido-Corachán, "Material Nature, Visual Sovereignty, and Water Rights," 78.
[263] Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows*, 110.

shift in public debates to include a more complex notion of place, as Native voices and activists got more of a say in how their causes were reported. As Native issues and voices filled the media around the time of the protests an image of place as not just being material, but also cultural, spiritual, and communal started influence Americans. Standing Rock provided a platform for the spread of Native ideas of place to reach the white majority, as well as a platform for Native voices and issues.

Place and its meaning to Native people has been central to almost all Native activism in the 21st century. How place connects to sacredness, sovereignty, and community has been a fundamental part of many campaigns and projects started by Native people to promote their causes. An example of such an effort is the #LandBack campaign. The #LandBack campaign has become a global slogan for many Indigenous people to voice issues about land repatriation. Native organizations such as the NDN Collective spearheaded the campaign in the US. The NDN Collective's mission has been to defend, develop and decolonize. Moreover, they have argued that "We must continue to defend our people, communities, and nations against negative resource extraction that poisons our people, pollutes our water, destroys our land, contributes to climate change and violates our human rights."[264] Their mission is directly linked to how land connects to most issues Native activists are taking up in the 21st century. Land is a central factor. But these issues are also connected to environmental concerns, community, health, and human rights, showing clearly that modern Native activism maintains that land is a fundamental factor in the interconnected array of issues facing Native communities.

Nick Tilsen, founder of the NDN Collective and prominent Lakota activist for many years, expressed the same sentiment in his TedxRapid City talk "Building Resilient Communities" from 2015. Tilsen believed that "to really understand the challenges that exist in Indian country today, you have to really understand our connection to land," further underlining the point that land and the meaning it has to Native people and communities is paramount to Native activism.[265] Tilsen further held that land is integral to Native identities, and that the destruction of land and the removal of people from culturally significant lands makes it harder for Indigenous communities to maintain their identity and their cultures. Tilsen also contended that to build strong Native communities for the future, the interconnectedness of land to almost all aspects of Indigenous life needs to be recognized and

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[264] "Our Mission."

[265] *Building Resilient Communities*, 2:39-2:49.

taken seriously. He used the Lakota saying "Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ," which translates to "We are all related," to illustrate this.[266]

Not only are Native people fundamentally connected to their ancestral lands, but the issues that face many Native communities, like poverty, health struggles, and lacking opportunities, are not singularly the responsibility of those communities. By understanding that all is connected, society at large could see that the issues facing Native communities are not severed from life outside those communities. Tilsen emphasizes that we have seen a fundamental change in modern Native activism and that Native issues are interconnected to the surrounding society and to physical space in which they play out. More often than not, most issues can be related to questions about land.

3.4 Co-Management and the Uncertain Future of Land Management in the US

As Native activism has had an upsurge in the 21st century, with collaboration with the environmental movement and garnering attention from the media, the National Parks have become a relevant issue once more. The parks and the NPS will forever be tied to a history of land grabbing and colonialism on part of the federal government. In recent years many Native and non-Native activists have started to question the existence and the management of federal land holdings. Campaigns like #LandBack and the global and national attention on Indigenous rights have made the National Parks a relevant issue again. Now more of the public is sympathetic with Indigenous rights campaigns. A survey published by Ipsos in October 2021 found that 90% of Americans support honoring treaties between the federal government and tribal nations. In addition, 89% support protection of Native American sacred sites through federal land designation. Political affiliation made little difference to these opinions; people were generally supportive of both efforts.[267] The numbers from the poll show that support for Native American causes is widespread in the 21st century. Honoring treaties would in many cases mean giving tribes control over land that is now public property, for instance national parks. What that would mean for the NPS is hard to say, but the fact that honoring treaties is widely supported in the American population means that these questions might have to be addressed by the NPS and by politicians in the future.

The discussions about the place of national parks and the NPS in the 21st century takes on many forms. Some support full repatriation of all federal lands to Native peoples, among

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[266] *Building Resilient Communities*, 14:05-14:46.

[267] Jackson, Azevedo Lohr, and Wiseman, "Majority of Americans Agree the U.S. Should Honor Treaties with Native Americans."

them David Truer, who made his case in a widely read piece in the *Atlantic* in 2021.[268] He has continued to be a vocal champion of this cause in the media, for instance, in an interview with *PBS* he stated that "if the parks were run by a consortium of all of the tribes of the United States and managed on behalf of all Americans, this would be good for Native people, of course, but it would also be good for American people and good for parks."[269] Dina Gilio-Whittaker sided with Truer. For Gilio-Whittaker:

> Land return does not mean that everyone who is not Indigenous to what is today called the United States is expected to pack up and go back to their ancestral places on other continents. It does mean that American Indian people regain control and jurisdiction over lands they have successfully stewarded for millennia.[270]

Not all go as far Gilio-Whittaker and Truer, making the argument that full repatriation of federal lands would be a good idea. But new ideas about how to manage the parks in the future are being discussed. Many believe that tribes near to the parks should be more actively involved in the management, and that shared solutions between the NPS, and tribes could be a way forward. In March 2022 the NPS committed itself to further co-management between the NPS and tribal nations. NPS director Charles Sams remarked that they will work to "increase opportunities for Tribes to participate in their traditional stewardship of present-day federal lands and waters and the integration of thousands of years of Indigenous knowledge and sustainability practices into federal management and operations, subject to the interest of each Tribe."[271] At the time Sams made this statement four national parks were already co-managed by the NPS and tribes: the Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Glacier Bay National Park, Grand Portage National Monument, and Big Cypress National Preserve.

The idea of co-management has been inspired by the case of Uluru-Kata Tjutu in Australia. The Australia government and the Anangu people successfully co-managed the area since 1985. Co-management strategies have become a popular idea globally, as a way for governments to meaningfully engage with Indigenous knowledge and deal with contested claims to lands. Other nations that have started to use co-management strategies of its public lands to better involve Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous activists are increasingly lobbying for co-management as strategy that will benefit them. In Taiwan, the Truku are lobbying for expanded co-management of Taroko National Park. Their hunting rights in national parks are limited at the moment, and they argued that through co-management Truku perspectives and

[268] Treuer, "Return the National Parks to the Tribes."
[269] Sy and Thoet, "Should Native Americans Control National Parks?"
[270] Gilio-Whitaker, "Environmental Justice Is Only the Beginning."
[271] "Tribal Co-Management of Federal Lands."

traditions may be better understood and their needs better implemented in the management of the national park.[272] In Canada, the Kluane are a consulted and are part of co-management in the Yokun. They do however have quite a minimal role, and therefore many Kluane are lobbying for greater representation and for decision-making powers to be given to them in more instances than it is now.[273] Co-management is not perfectly or widely implemented, but it is a strategy that is becoming more popular, also in the US.

In all the parks that are co-managed in the US tribes and the NPS have different relationships and agreements outlining how tribes take part in management. For instance, in Glacier Bay the Hoonah Indian Association has collaborated with the NPS to be able to continue harvesting gull eggs in the park, a culturally significant activity for the Huna Tlingit. They have worked together to figure out how to ensure the harvest continues sustainable and safely for the gulls. In addition, the Huna Tlingit have contributed to a range of cultural programs in the park to integrate more of their Native culture and history into park management in a meaningful and representative way.[274]

In June 2022 a fifth park was added to the group: the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah. The monument will be co-managed by the Bears Ears Commission, consisting of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, and Ute Indian Tribe, and the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.[275] The co-management of Bears Ears has been especially meaningful, since the monument was significantly reduced in size under the Trump administration, only to be restored again under the Biden administration. Bears Ears has for many years been a site of intense debate in terms of management. The new co-management plan with the Bears Ears Commission is a result of years of battle Native and environmental groups have waged to protect the land. The monument has been debated since it was established by President Obama in 2016, facing backlash from conservatives who claimed that its establishment is proof of the undue influence environmental organizations and causes have over Democratic presidents.[276] Tribal representatives, on the other hand, are positive about co-management of Bears Ears. Cynthia Wilson, member of the Diné and founder of the project Women of Bears Ears, stated that:

> We have that government-to-government right, in collaborating with the federal government. This is a test to that relationship, and it's also a part of healing. Since the beginning of Bears Ears, it started through prayer and with the mission of healing, not

[272] Simon, "Of Boars and Men," 227.
[273] Simon, 222.
[274] "Tribal Co-Management of Federal Lands."
[275] Oaster, "What Indigenous Leaders Think about Co-Managing Bears Ears with the Feds."
[276] Siegler, "Utah Sues to Stop Restoration of Boundaries at Bears Ears, Grand Staircase Monuments."

> just for Indigenous people, but for all people in America. Because to us, Bears Ears is a peacemaking place.[277]

Similarly, Mark Maryboy, Diné and Paiute and co-founder of the Utah Diné Bikéyah organization, argued that even though co-management never will make up for the destruction that dispossession caused in the first place, “For the moment, that is a solution that we came up with, having no experience in creating a National Monument. That’s the best we can do, and we believe that’s a solution.”[278] Native leaders have been positive, but apprehensive, in the face of co-management of Bears Ears. However, it is clear that they believe that co management is a better way forward than no collaboration at all.

Co-management though, is not the only way the NPS collaborates with tribes in relation to the parks. They also have a variety of co-stewardship agreements that center around collaboration and cooperation. In 2022, the number of such agreements was 80, showing a commitment by the NPS and tribal nations to work together to carve out a future for the parks.[279] Most of these collaborative efforts began in the late 90s or early 2000s, and the number of them have continued to grow in the 2010s and the 2020s. Full co-management is a more recent step, and the four co-management agreements between the NPS and local tribes were entered into after the year 2000. The Biden administration has put forth several plans to expand tribal influence and management in national parks. The NPS issued new policies for co-stewardship in 2022. So did the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management. These policies could strengthen the framework within the departments to continue and expand co-stewardship and make their collaboration with local tribes about more than just consultation. These might result in meaningful collaboration.[280]

Both these new policies and the NPS commitment to expand co-management came in light of the Joint Secretarial Order 3403, that the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture signed in November 2021. Order 3403 laid out that the federal government has a responsibility to Native people across the concerning the management of land. It stipulated that this management must “protect the treaty, religious, subsistence, and cultural interests of federally recognized Indian Tribes including the Native Hawaiian Community” and that in future co-stewardship should move beyond mere consultation and

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[277] Oaster, “What Indigenous Leaders Think about Co-Managing Bears Ears with the Feds.”
[278] Oaster.
[279] “Tribal Co-Management of Federal Lands.”
[280] “National Park Service Issues New Policy Guidance to Strengthen Tribal Co-Stewardship of National Park Lands and Waters - Office of Communications (U.S. National Park Service).”

bring in Native voices and expertise in all areas of park management.[281] With this order and the subsequent policy changes within the NPS and other branches of the DOI and DOA, the Biden administration has committed itself to Native interests in national parks issues in an unprecedented way. Never has tribal management and influence in the parks been so clearly detailed as part of government policy, and the federal government has never committed itself to follow in the way it has now.

Recent scholarship on co-management has questioned whether or not co-management actually give true power and recognition to Native people, and whether co-management should be the future of the NPS. Willow explained that that co-management is usually perfect on paper, but often fails in real life. She held that "even collaborations that have resulted in productive public pressure and withdrawals of resource development plans frequently see Indigenous interests misinterpreted by environmentalists."[282] Paul Nadasdy agreed with this sentiment. He has found that the case more often than not is that when Indigenous populations are consulted in co-management projects, their knowledge is viewed as less true or less valuable than the knowledge of, for instance, scientists. Nadasdy claimed that one of the main problems that faces co-management as a strategy is that it is still built on Eurocentric ideas of what wildlife management is and what kind of knowledge is valuable when approaching questions and issues in such management. For this reason, most co-management today fails Indigenous perspectives, and until traditional knowledge is valued as equally important co-management will never fully succeed.[283]

The success of the policy is yet to be determined in a US context. One question that often surfaces in debates about the effects of co-management strategies is how Indigenous knowledge about things other than resource management can be integrated. As Nadasdy pointed out "A cornerstone of co-management is the recognition on the part of biologists and scientific resource managers of the existence of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and its potential value in the management process."[284] This definition begs the question of why ecological knowledge is the main or only Indigenous knowledge component that co-management favors. Indigenous people also possess vital knowledge of an area's religious and cultural importance in their history. The emission of other areas of Indigenous knowledge

[281] "Joint Secretarial Order on Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters."
[282] Willow, "Strategies for Survival: First Nations Encounters with Environmentalism" in Clapperton and Piper, *Environmental Activism on the Ground*, 26.
[283] Nadasdy, "Reevaluating the Co-Management Success Story," 377.
[284] Nadasdy, 367.

from the co-management strategy outlines the limitations of the strategy, and also further underlines how this strategy still relies upon heavily Eurocentric ideas about wilderness. In the case of the US, co-management that hinges only on Native ecological knowledge perpetrates the notion that the idea of wilderness in America is still one where nature is seen as a commodity or resource. Native communities across the US connect to the landscape around them in various ways; through religious, cultural and community connection. If the Native notion of interconnectedness of all areas of life with the natural world is absent from co-management policies in the NPS, co-management will not fully commit to meaningful engagement with Native concerns. When ecological knowledge is valued higher than other knowledge connected to the area, Native religious connections to land and the sacred place land can hold and does hold in Native communities is yet again devalued by the federal government.

The first two decades of the 21st century has in general been more successful for Native activists than previous decades. Collaboration with environmental organizations has proven fruitful in several instances and helped gain protection for Native sacred sites and areas. There is growing concern for Native issues among the general public, as well as within the environmental movement, as a result of several developments that strengthen Native rights, representation and global movements of Indigenous people fighting to be heard. Better and increasing representation of Native people and lives in media and politics is has helped to fight negative and derogatory stereotypes left over from the previous century, and increasingly more people are starting to imagine Native people with greater complexity. Co-management and Native involvement and representation within the NPS in the 21st century is generally regarded as successful, but there is evidence to suggest that even though these developments may be positive and a step in the right direction, they are not enough. Believing that co-management strategies enough contribute well enough to meaningful participation and recognition of Native peoples would be to settle for imperfection. As Keller and Turek conclude in their exploration of the relationship between Native Americans and national parks: “Today, Indian and Park Service relations remain in flux, leaving the future unpredictable.”[285]

[285] Keller and Turek, *American Indians and National Parks*, 238.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have explored how Christian Anglo-American ideas of nature and wilderness have impacted policy and legislation of nature, and in turn Native American religious freedom and recognition. The ideas in question encompass thinking of land as an entity that can be used or taken by people, rather than something with inherent value on its own, without relation to people. The influence of these concepts on American law, politics, and society has meant that there is little room for Native American ideas about nature and how religion relates to nature. Native American religious and cultural ideas about interconnectedness, sacrality, and relation are continually diminished by the ideas of Anglo-American, Christian lawmakers, politicians, and environmentalists. This was, as I have shown, especially prevalent in the Progressive Era and became apparent in the establishment of the national parks, the expansion of the NPS, and early conservation movement. Through looking closer at common features across Native American religions and their relation to nature, the discrepancy between the Christian Anglo-American view of nature and Native ones have become clear. In the 20th century these differences in views impacted policy regarding Native American rights, for instance religious freedom, and made religious freedom and true recognition of Native religious ideas unreachable. In the 21st century we see promising developments in the relationships between Native communities and activists and the environmental movement. However, as the final chapter of this thesis reveals, Native American notions of how spirituality and nature is connected remains unrecognized, even though public and political opinion are more than ever before aware and engaged with Native issues.

The first chapter of this work harkens back to the idea that the West as a concept was created. This was also true for the idea of nature and wilderness in the West, and both were created within the image of a white, Christian colonizer. In the wake of rapid changes in American society, Progressive reform won through. Progressive reform tried to address the needs and issues of the 19th century regular working American. The reforms included child labor laws, regulations of the market and economy to benefit regular people and to curb big business, and improvements and oversight in working conditions, among other things. The federal government more than ever before a vital player in the lives of Americans, and many appreciated what was done for them by the government. The victory of Progressive politics also made the federal government more powerful and made projects like the establishment of the national parks possible.

Another reason this development became a reality in this era was because of what attitudes permeated society and culture at that time. The expansion into the West was built upon ideas about Manifest Destiny and the Doctrine of Discovery, both ideas perpetuated the superiority of the white man and that he was endowed with special rights and abilities. Painters such as Catlin and Cole and writers like Thoreau and Emerson largely helped create the concept of the West. Their imaginings of the West showed all the beauty and greatness that Western landscape held, forever mythicizing it for the people. The Native American inhabitants of the areas were also portrayed with an air of mysticism and quaint primitivity by the Antebellum Era nature enthusiasts. The fascination with the West continued into the Progressive Era, with influential ideas being brought forth by the growing conservation movement. Progressive Era thinkers tried to create an image of the West as an uninhabited wilderness. This image either removed Native Americans interlay from the story or portrayed them as uncivilized and in need of changing. Influential advocates for what became the conservation movement aligned themselves with these ideas, like John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt. Their opinions these advocated had of Native Americans reflected the fact that Native people were generally viewed and disregarded by American people at the time.

As the conservation movement gained popularity, their ideas about protection of nature and how nature should look became influential. Under the Roosevelt presidency, the national parks expanded rapidly. The NPS and the idea of the national park became a cornerstone of federal policy in the Progressive Era and was long viewed as one of the greatest ideas to ever come through the federal government. The national parks were built upon a call for protection from the conservation movement, and as their ideas of the Western wilderness was one that was open and uninhabited, which quickly became true. The establishment of the national parks enabled a system of continued dispossession of Native American people. Native populations needed to be removed in order to fit the image of what the West and the national parks looked like, and so they were. Under the guise of the NPS and the conservation movement in the Progressive Era, Native Americans experienced some of the largest land losses to date. Through a range of developments and policies like forced allotment of Native lands, surplus lands being transferred to federal control, disregard of earlier agreements and treaties with tribes, and the formalization of the Doctrine of Discovery, Native people were dispossessed of land and of rights.

The degree of devastation that these developments brought to Native communities is blatantly clear when one considers the central role of land in Native religions and cultures, as is done in the second chapter. Evidence from origin stories, visions, cultural and religious

movements, as well anecdotes from Native people, and ethnographic studies and scholarship showes that land is at the center of most aspects of Native religions. Ancestral lands, specific landmarks, animals, and the general natural world around a Native community informs their religious expression immensely. In common features across Native religions one can see that land and nature is viewed as much more than just a resource, land is interlaced with religion, culture, and identity on all levels. Being deprived of land through forced removal and broken treaty agreements was thus not only a loss of resources. It encompassed a loss of access to sacred sites, to religious places of origin, burial grounds, to plants and animals needed for traditional practices, to name just a few of many issues. To many Native people, the immense loss of land in the Progressive Era and beyond shook the core of their identities, making it harder to practice their cultures and religions as had been the tradition for hundreds of years and impacting generations to come.

In the 20th century several policies furthered the devastating losses already facing Native communities. For instance, the practices of urban relocation, termination, and forced leasing of tribal land put a further strain on how Native people could keep connected to their lands, and thus to their religions, cultures, and identities. Vast assimilation policies tried to force Native people to fit into the into Anglo-American ideas of civilization, but these efforts and policies were not met with silence. In the latter half of the 20th century Native American activism grew strong and impactful, with organizations like AIM leading the cause. Through this century Native people's rights had also been expanded, their right to religious freedom and citizenship for instance, and Native activists thus gained a stronger platform to fight upon. They could contend decisions that affected them in court, citing policies that were supposed to protect them, and they had a right to make their voices heard as citizens.

In the 21st century, the road ahead for the protection of sacred sites seems more hopeful than before, as Native activists engage in successful alliances with environmental organizations. These collaborations, when successful, often result in dual gains on the part of Native communities. They can gain both protection of a sacred landscape and environmental protection, which has become more important as Native people also rally around issues like climate change. Representation of Native people in media and politics has also grown in recent years, which has helped Native people overcome negative stereotypes that have followed them for decades and given American people a truer and more representative understanding of Native lives. Tribes have also engaged in co-management and co-stewardship with the NPS. Generally, recognition of Indigenous causes, traditions, and struggles has grown, as Native American struggles also have gained attention from global

Indigenous efforts. Even though we have seen positive developments in the 21st century, Native communities still struggle to have their issues heard and their experiences taken into account in policy decisions. This is the case with, for instance, co-management, where Native people have more power than previously, but still experience that their knowledge is misrepresented and undervalued. Thus, even though the 21st century is promising in some regards, Native communities continue to be misunderstood and suffer the consequences.

Further research could be done into alternatives to the current co-management strategies. As we have seen, co-management is an imperfect practice, but one that many Native people still take part in because, for the time being, co-management is a large step in the right direction. It is also one of the ways in which Native communities can have the most control and impact over NPS lands currently. There should, however, be better ways for the NPS and Native communities to work together. The NPS and the federal government should also strive to engage Native perspectives on more than just ecological questions. Though we do see that the NPS commits to, for instance, more Native representation in its staff and in stories in the parks, the management of land still lacks a complex understanding of Native communities and true implementation of Native cultural and religious knowledge. There is a definite need for more scholars look at how the land management in the US can engage with Native knowledge, beyond just knowledge of ecology and landscape. As full repatriation of Native lands seems unlikely due to the many unanswered questions around it, how to achieve true co-management and implementation of complex Native knowledge can be a logical next area of research.

In conclusion, Native American life, especially religion, continues to be limited by the Christian Anglo-American notions of what religion is and how to relate to nature. Even though recent developments have shown promising developments for Native causes, such as increasingly gaining protection for sacred sites through collaboration with environmental activist groups, the reality remains that these developments are only a small part of the changes needed. What is lacking still is genuine understanding and consideration for Native religious ideas within American society, especially within the legal system and within public land management. Co-management serves as a proxy for legitimate inclusion of Native perspectives in the management of public lands and national parks in the US. Laws and policies relating to Native Americans and to public land lacks inclusion of how Native American religions actually function. Until the laws for religious freedom and public lands management include the parameters which Native religions exist within, Native Americans will not experience rightful representation or recognition of the damage they suffered.

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