African-American Wildland Memories

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Collective memory can be used conceptually to examine African-American perceptions of wildlands and black interaction with such places. The middle-American view of wildlands frames these terrains as refuges—pure and simple, sanctified places distinct from the profanity of human modification. However, wild, primitive areas do not exist in the minds of all Americans as uncomplicated or uncontaminated places. Three labor-related institutions—forest labor, plantation agriculture, and sharecropping—and terrorism and lynching have impacted negatively on black perceptions of wildlands, producing an ambivalence toward such places among African Americans.

. . . acknowledging the ambiguous legacy of nature myths does at least require us to recognize that landscapes will not always be simple "places of delight"—scenery as sedative, topography so arranged as to feast the eye. For those eyes, as we will discover, are seldom clarified of the promptings of memory. And the memories are not all of pastoral picnics.

—SIMON SCHAMA[1]

INTRODUCTION

Maurice Halbwachs argues that memory is only retained in groups or communities of people.[2] For events to withstand the test of time, there must be a mutual sharing of information about such events; otherwise memories die. Certain memories do not exist apart from social milieus and in fact are particular or especially salient only to those who are members of a given group or mnemonic community. Because most of humankind lives as social creatures and not isolated individuals, we cannot escape the shadow of the past which continually reminds us of the glory, pain, or shame experienced by the various collectives or communities to which we belong.[3] A ready example of this type

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[1] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. 18 (emphasis added).

[2] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

[3] Eric Zerubavel, "Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past," *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (1996): 283–99.

of "collective memory" is the experience of Jews during the Holocaust and the "memory" of the Holocaust by successive generations of Jews. Although younger generations of Jews in contemporary Germany and elsewhere have no personal memories of the Holocaust, they may recount vividly stories related to them by parents, older relatives, and others who lived these experiences.[4]

As noted by May and also as indicated above, much of the scholarship on collective memory has focused on events of political or cultural significance or national figures—for instance, Marten-Finnis' study of German and Polish national identities or Schwartz's study of Abraham Lincoln.[5] In contrast to these national-level sociocultural and political memories, there have been few theoretical or empirical considerations of collective memories about wildlands[6] for particular racial or ethnic groups in U.S. society. An exception is the extensive documentation of Native American land disfranchisement and Native American recollections of the same.[7] But relatively few studies have explored the historical relationship of African Americans[8] to wildlands, and how the collective experience and memories that derived from the land may influence a contemporary black wildland view.[9] We focus on black impressions of wildlands because these landscapes are considered to form the core of American national identity. Yet, empirical studies show some of the greatest black/white differences in outdoor recreation participation occur with wildland interaction.[10]

We propose that collective memory can be used as a conceptual tool to consider African-American perceptions of wildlands and black interaction

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[4] Lynn Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, Identity, and Jewish-German Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[5] Reuben B. May, "Race Talk and Local Collective Memory among African American Men in a Neighborhood Tavern," *Qualitative Sociology* 23 (2000): 201–14; Susanne Marten-Finnis, "Collective Memory and National Identities: German and Polish Memory Cultures: The Forms of Collective Memory," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 28 (1995): 255–61; Barry Schwartz, "Collective Memory and History: How Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial Equality," *Sociological Quarterly* 38 (1997): 469–96.

[6] We define wildlands as primitive, backcountry areas. These are undeveloped or roadless areas that retain pristine attributes or those which otherwise have the character of "the woods" or wild nature. Federally designated wilderness areas are included in this definition, but "wilderness" used herein does not necessarily refer to lands in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

[7] John C. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972); Dee Alexander Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: H. Holt, 2001).

[8] African American and black are used interchangeably.

[9] Dorceta E. Taylor, "The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm: Injustice Framing and the Social Construction of Environmental Discourses," *American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (2000): 508–80. See also Schama's extensive analysis of the widely accepted historical myths and memories European and North American societies hold toward nature in *Landscape and Memory*. Dorceta E. Taylor, "Meeting the Challenge of Wild Land Recreation Management: Demographic Shifts and Social Inequality," *Journal of Leisure Research* 32 (2000): 171–79.

[10] James H. Gramann, *Ethnicity, Race, and Outdoor Recreation: A Review of Trends, Policy, and Research*. Miscellaneous Paper R-96-1, March 1996, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

with such areas. As indicated, collective memory involves the relaying or handing down of cultural history from generation to generation. Successive generations can be influenced by events that impact a nation, ethnic/racial group, or gender even though subsequent generations have no direct memory of such events. For example, current generations of African Americans have no personal memories of slavery; and the proportion of blacks who labored in southern turpentine and lumber camps or who were alive when lynchings routinely occurred is small relative to the entire African-American population. Still, similar to Jews, blacks may recollect stories told to them by family members or other public information about hardships that occurred in wildland, backcountry type areas. These "memories" may contribute to ethnic identity formation for African Americans.

Stokols refers to the historical symbolism of places or landscapes as social imageability or the perceived social field of a milieu.[11] This is the "capacity of a place or type of place to evoke vivid and collectively held social meanings among its occupants or potential occupants." Social imageability can arise through environmental symbolism, which is a gradual process of assigning meaning to a place or landscape based on past experiences. According to Stokols, this symbolism can come about even for people who have no direct contact with a area.[12] For example, the history of a place can be passed down to successive generations via word of mouth or some other medium; and the place can come to symbolize a certain atmosphere or mood although no direct personal contact has been established.

The white, middle-American view of wildlands and wilderness constructs these areas as benign places—spiritual, sanctified refuges distinct from the profanity of human modification (see Schama's description of Yosemite valley).[13] Middle America imagines wildlands as mystical places having the power to transform one's essence because wild nature is perceived as sacred. One enters a wilderness but emerges somehow changed. One of American wilderness' earliest advocates, John Muir, located the divine in nature. He describes wild nature as a "window opening into heaven, a mirror reflecting the Creator."[14]

The idea of wildlands as benevolent entities also abounds in the secular realm. Turner proposed that wilderness, the actual physical aspects of primeval forests and unchartered territory, helped to establish American democracy.[15]

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[11] Daniel Stokols, "Group X Place Transactions: Some Neglected Issues in Psychological Research on Settings," in David Magnusson, ed., *Toward a Psychology of Situations: An Interactional Perspective* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980), pp. 393–415.

[12] Daniel Stokols, "Instrumental and Spiritual Views of People-Environment Relations," *American Psychologist* 45 (1990): 641–46.

[13] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, pp. 7–9.

[14] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 125.

[15] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1953).

Tyranny, contrasted with democracy, is contained in civilized society, not in the wild. Turner evokes an environmental determinism, the "frontier thesis," which posits that the behavior and ideas of a people are strongly influenced by the physical environment. Because early white Americans had the unique experience of vast, open lands, and the freedom to explore these places and appropriate them, this unrestricted freedom resulted in American "individualism, independence, and confidence," ideal characteristics which distinguish Americans from others.[16] Similarly, Hammond argues that wilderness is good because it contributes to a uniquely American character and is symbolic of American national heritage.[17] But to whose heritage or character? We agree that there is a homogeneity across the varying racial and ethnic subgroups in America, and that there is something that can be described generally as the American character. However, we disagree that the exact same set of values, ideals, or social movements, for instance, resonate to the same extent among all sub-populations in American society. Perhaps many African Americans do not consider wilderness as a heritage value.

We take the position of Greider and Garkovich that the *perception* of the natural environment is a social construction[18]; and we would add that this interpretation is largely the result of the observer's imaginings—images which are influenced, in part, by a group's past relationships with particular environments. Wild places are not objective entities which hold the same value, meaning, or symbolism for all who behold them. Wildlands do not exist in the minds of all Americans as beneficent or uncontaminated places, detached from society's ills. Mainstream environmentalists frame wildlands, singularly, as healing, revitalizing "therapeutic landscapes" or "fields of care,"[19] having the power to recreate the human spirit. However, for African Americans, these same terrains may be what cultural geographers refer to as "sick places" which evoke horrible memories of toil, torture, and death.[20]

We consider the contradictory relationship blacks have demonstrated toward wildlands. On the one hand, we review evidence suggesting that black collective memories of labor involving work on forests, slavery/plantation agriculture,

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[16] Roderick Nash, "Qualitative Landscape Values: The Historical Perspective," in Ervin H. Zube, R. O. Brush, and J. G. Fabos, eds., *Landscape Assessment: Value, Perceptions, and Resources* (Stroudsburg: Dowden, Hutchinson, and Ross, 1975), pp. 10–17.

[17] John L. Hammond, "Wilderness and Heritage Values," *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985): 165–70.

[18] Thomas Greider and Lorraine Garkovich, "Landscapes: The Social Construction of Nature and the Environment," *Rural Sociology* 59 (1994): 1–24.

[19] Wilbert M. Gesler, "Therapeutic Landscapes: Medical Issues in Light of the New Cultural Geography," *Social Science Medicine* 34 (1992): 735–46.

[20] Robert D. Bixler and Myron F. Floyd, "Nature Is Scary, Disgusting, and Uncomfortable," *Environment and Behavior* 29 (1997): 443–67; Dorceta E. Taylor, "Blacks and the Environment: toward an Explanation of the Concern and Action Gap," *Environment and Behavior* 21 (1989): 175–205; Yi-fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).

sharecropping, and lynching have contributed to a black adversarial relationship with wildlands. The institutions of slavery, forest work camps, and sharecropping exploited black labor, and lynchings were essentially terrorist acts perpetuated against blacks in wildland areas.

Despite these experiences, however, there are also indications that there has been a connectedness between blacks and wildlands. African Americans have always fished and hunted in wildland settings and are returning to the rural South to establish homesteads adjacent to the wild. To better understand these apparent discrepancies and to set the discussion of black land memories in context, the following section reviews the literature on black interaction with wildlands, including African-inspired ontology, black concern for the environment, and the progression of American environmentalism. Black working relationships with both wildlands and other natural areas are discussed and set in the context of the evolution of mainstream environmentalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

African Americans and Wildlands

National parks and forests, federally designated wilderness areas, and other wild, primitive outdoor settings are esteemed national treasures. These areas have come to be held in such regard in large part because of the conservation and preservationist ideas advanced by early environmentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, William Law Olmsted, and George Perkins Marsh, among others. These conservationists and preservationists were, in turn, influenced by romantic conceptions of nature which originated among European intellectuals during the Enlightenment.

Because of its foundations in European intellectualism and romanticism, Taylor[21] argues that the American environmental, wilderness, and wildland recreation movements have largely been a concern of white, middle-class males.[22] Indeed, surveys of visitors to federally designated wilderness areas show that the overwhelming majority of recreationists are white, college educated, middle to upper income wage earners.[23] More general research on

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[21] Taylor, "Meeting the Challenge of Wild Land Recreation Management"; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*.

[22] White women have also contributed significantly to environmental thought and action. Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (Routledge, 1995), approaches ecology from a feminine perspective.

[23] Robert C. Lucas, "A Look at Wilderness Use and Users in Transition," *Natural Resources Journal* 29 (1989): 41–55; Alan E. Watson, Daniel R. Williams, Joseph W. Roggenbuck, and J. J. Daigle, *Visitor Characteristics and Preferences for Three National Forest Wildernesses in the South*, Resource Paper INT-455 (Ogden: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Intermountain Research Station, 1992).

wildland recreation also shows a relative lack of black participation in outdoor activities that occur in such areas. Goldsmith reports that national park visitors are also mostly white, despite the park service's intent to attract a more ethnically and racially diverse visitor base.[24] Also, regional-level household surveys show blacks are significantly less likely than whites to interact with wildlands, even when blacks live adjacent to such areas and socioeconomic factors are held constant.[25]

In a review of ethnic and racial research in outdoor recreation, Gramann also found African Americans were less likely than whites to engage in wildland recreation, the exception being fishing and hunting.[26] But even for a wildland-based activity like hunting, Marks' multi-ethnic investigation of rural, male hunters in North Carolina showed that blacks, compared to whites and Native Americans, were much less likely to report that they enjoyed the aesthetics of nature when hunting.[27]

In contrast, recent empirical analyses of national level data show few significant differences between blacks and whites for wilderness concern.[28] Moreover, Mohai, Jones and Carter, Arp and Kenny, and Parker and McDonough question the assumption of black apathy for the environment.[29] Though blacks may be less active than whites in joining mainstream environmental organizations or voting for environmental agendas, this difference should not be taken to mean that blacks are not concerned about nature. Rather, African American interest may be demonstrated in non-conventional environmental forms such as concern for community integrity (i.e., clean, crime-free neighborhoods and work place conditions) rather than in traditional concern for wildlands and wildlife habitats.

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[24] Jack Goldsmith, "Designing for Diversity," *National Parks* 68 (1994): 20–21; Myron F. Floyd, "Race, Ethnicity and Use of the National Park System," *Social Science Research Review* 1, no. 2 (1999): 1–24.

[25] Cassandra Y. Johnson, Patrick M. Horan, and William Pepper. "Race, Rural Residence, and Wildland Visitation: Examining the Influence of Sociocultural Meaning," *Rural Sociology* 62 (1997): 89–110.

[26] Gramann, *Ethnicity, Race, and Outdoor Recreation.*

[27] Stuart A. Marks, *Southern Hunting in Black and White* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[28] H. Ken Cordell, J. M. Bowker, Carter Betz, and Cassandra Johnson, "Wilderness Awareness and Participation: A Comparison Across Race and Ethnicity: Preliminary Results: NSRE 2000," presentation at the National Wilderness Workshop, Washington, D.C., U.S.D.A. Forest Service, July 2000.

[29] Paul Mohai "Black Environmentalism" *Social Science Quarterly* 71 (1990): 744–65; Robert Emmet Jones, "Black Concern for the Environment: Myth Versus Reality," *Society and Natural Resources* 11 (1998): 209–28; William Arp and Christopher Kenny, "Black Environmentalism In the Local Community Context," *Environment and Behavior* 28 (1996): 267–82; Julia Dawn Parker and Maureen H. McDonough, "Environmentalism of African Americans: An Analysis of the Subculture and Barriers Thesis," *Environment and Behavior* 31 (1999): 155–77; Robert Emmet Jones, J. Mark Fly and H. Ken Cordell, "How Green is My Valley? Tracking Rural and Urban Environmentalism in the Southern Appalachian Ecoregion," *Rural Sociology* 64 (1999): 482–99.

Again, to better understand the gap between positive black wildland and environmental sentiments, on the one hand, and a relative lack of black wildland interaction, on the other, we believe it useful to consider history. What were the chief concerns of black Americans during the formation of American environmentalism? In particular, what was the black relationship to land during these periods? We focus exclusively on the relationship of southern blacks to the land because the majority of blacks have lived in the South. Traditional southern culture provides the basis for much of contemporary black American culture, although the majority of blacks now live in non-rural areas.

American Environmentalism

Dorceta Taylor chronicles the rise of the American environmental movement and also considers the parallel and particularistic histories of non-whites and women during eras when environmentalism was being defined.[30] She identifies four periods of environmental thought. This comparison of mainstream white interests and the concerns of periphery groups shows how issues of basic civil liberties such as voting and worker's rights, immigration, and protection against domestic terrorism were chief concerns of marginalized groups during the time Anglo-Americans were concerned with environmental protection. The first environmental period is described as the pre-environmental movement era, between 1820 and 1913. The related environmental paradigm or environmental philosophy (exploitive capitalist paradigm) was based on exploitation and intense extraction of natural resources.

The next phase is the early environmental movement, which commenced in 1914 after the Hetch Hetchy dam dispute between San Francisco and preservationists. During this phase, between 1914 and 1959, environmental issues were embraced more by the wider populace; whereas prior to this time, environmental protection was advocated most often by artists, physical scientists, and other intellectuals. Passage of the 1897 Forest Management Act and later the Hetch Hetchy controversy, in some ways, marked a turning point for the environmental movement because of differences in goals between more biocentric environmental advocates (preservationists) and those who favored more utilitarian natural resource use (utilitarian conservationists).[31] The exploitive capitalist paradigm still prevailed as an environmental ideology, although the romantic environmental paradigm began to gain prominence. Romantic views of the environment framed the natural world in idealistic,

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[30] Dorceta E. Taylor, "American Environmentalism: The Roles of Race, Class and Gender in Shaping Activism, 1820–1995," *Race, Gender, and Class* 5 (1997): 16–62; Dorceta E. Taylor, "The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm: Injustice Framing and the Social Construction of Environmental Discourses," *American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (2000): 508–80).

[31] J. Douglas Wellman, *Wildland Recreation Policy: An Introduction* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1987), pp. 106–12.

hyper-real terms. As discussed earlier, romanticism endows wild areas with a mysticism which exceeds the actual physics of the resource.

The third environmental phase began in the early 1960s with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Even greater attention was focused on environmental concerns such as air and water contamination. Membership in mainstream environmental organizations increased appreciatively. During this time, the romanticized view of nature was replaced by the new environmental paradigm. This new paradigm and its advocates challenged the dominating, positivistic assumptions of technology and rationalism as providing the sole answers to social ills. The new environmental paradigm was personified in student environmental activists who protested against nuclear energy, the Vietnam war, and the general environmental exploitation of non-industrial peoples and their lands by Western nations.

The latest environmental phase is the post-Three Mile Island/Love Canal era from about 1980 to the present. In this present phase, like the preceding one, the new environmental paradigm is still the leading environmental frame of reference among most mainstream environmentalists. However, alternative environmental thought such as the environmental justice paradigm and ecofeminism, as well as more radical environmental activism (e.g., Earth First!) are emerging as competing environmental discourses.

Pre-Movement Era: Slavery, Sharecropping, Lynching

When the pre-movement environmental era began around 1820, there were approximately 1.5 million slaves in the United States.[32] There have been numerous accounts written of slavery and the "nightmare of drudgery" under which most blacks lived.[33] Some skilled slaves worked in southern cities as domestic servants, artisans, or factory workers, but the majority worked on various sized plantations where their primary task was toiling on the land.[34] An ex-slave is quoted in Bennett, *Before the Mayflower:* "it seems the fields stretched 'from one end of the earth to the other.'"[35]

Though slaves lived close to nature like other racial/ethnic groups of the period and extracted sustenance from the land (when permitted), they could not explore the wider environment. The very condition of being a slave dictated a life of extreme restrictions. The slave stood as antonym to the American myth of unrestricted wilderness exploration. Taylor[36] remarks that while free, white men had the privilege of discovering wildlands, slaves (and other oppressed people, e.g., women, Asian immigrants, the poor) were severely circumscribed in their

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[32] U.S. Department of State, *Census for 1820* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1821).
[33] Leronne Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower* (New York: Double Day, 1968), p. 87.
[34] Another exception is house slaves.
[35] Bennett, *Before the Mayflower*, p. 87.
[36] Taylor, "The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm."

movement by a white, male dominated society that enacted slave codes in each slaveholding state. Some of these laws prohibited blacks from assembling in large groups away from their plantations or forbade any slave from leaving the plantation without written permission. Even free blacks were subject to the circumscriptions contained in these laws.[37]

The ambiguity blacks appear to have with wildland environments may have begun with the slave experience. Blum writes that slaves assigned multiple meanings to wilderness.[38] Though black movement was severely restricted, slaves still managed to access wildlands covertly. Wildlands provided a place of escape, either temporarily or permanently, from the oppression of plantation life. Blum remarks:

> Slavery affected how blacks thought about the wilderness, altering and melding African beliefs. Slaves maintained some elements of their aesthetic, adapting and changing others to fit their new environment. In many African religions, for example, the wilderness or "bush," far from a place to be feared or avoided, actually was seen as a place of refuge and transformation. . . . Interestingly, this concept held by slaves mirrored in some ways the view held by white women and transcendentialists of nature as a place of refuge and spirituality. For the slaves, however, the concept of wilderness as a refuge remained a palpable reality, rather than a poet's or scholar's rhetoric.[39]

Blum's interpretation of early black American wildland interaction is more consistent with the growing preservationist sentiments described by Taylor during this era. At the same time, however, Blum also stresses that slaves perceived both fear and danger in wilderness. Slaves especially dreaded wild animals (poisonous snakes, panthers) and to a lesser extent other humans (both black and white), and supernatural forces believed to inhabit wildlands. The wilderness was a place to be avoided for many, and some slave parents were concerned that their children understand the potential danger wilderness contained. A slave quoted in Blum from the slave narratives talks about the defenselessness of humans in the wild: "De poisonous snakes strike wicked fangs into bare heels, danger hides everywhere in de streams too so we much know how to escape form [sic] hit. De wild animals have nimble feet and wings to save dem from de ones dat kill dem but de nigger had to save hisself."[40]

Whites also sought to discourage blacks from venturing into wilderness areas by telling blacks of the horrors that awaited them in the woods. Blum's description of slave wildland interaction suggests, again, that blacks did not

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[37] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

[38] Elizabeth D. Blum, "Power, Danger, and Control: Slave Women's Perceptions of Wilderness in the Nineteenth Century," *Women's Studies* 31 (2002): 247– 67.

[39] Ibid., p. 250.

[40] George Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1972), vol. 3.

view these terrains as romanticized landscapes removed from human influence but rather in more practical terms. Wilderness was both perceived and used as a haven but was also kept at bay.

In an article on black women's relationship to wilderness areas, Evelyn C. White also writes how the slave experience may have negatively influenced black impressions of such landscapes:

> The timidity African American women feel about the outdoors is colored, I believe, by our experiences of racism and sexism in this nation. It is steeped in the physical and psychic damage we have suffered as a result of being forcefully removed from Africa and enslaved on southern plantations. Ask yourself why a black woman would find solace under the sun knowing that her foremothers had toiled in the brutal, blistering heat for slavemasters [sic].[41]

As stated, we also argue that the actual work of plantation agriculture and related tasks in forested wildlands served to create a negative imagery of such places among blacks. While descriptions of black labor on cotton and tobacco plantations are plentiful, relatively few accounts exist of slave work specifically in wildland environments, such as naval stores operations (especially turpentining).[42] Yet, Starobin writes that during the antebellum period, turpentine extraction "was entirely dependent on slave labor."[43] Gay Goodman Wright's ethnohistorical account of turpentining in southern pine forests notes that black labor in the naval stores industry has been overlooked by historians because of confusion in the nineteenth century as to whether naval stores products should have been classified as industrial or agricultural products.[44]

During the colonial era, the British used pine derived naval stores products such as tar, pitch, gum, turpentine, and rosin in shipbuilding. When supplies in northern Europe became threatened, the British turned to the extensive pine forests in the American colonies for supplies.[45] Initially, small farmers in North Carolina produced naval stores, but as demand for these products increased, the planter class moved into the industry in the 1830s and 1840s, and naval stores operations became part of the plantation economy. By 1850, naval stores ranked

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[41] Evelyn C. White, "Black Women and Wilderness," *Outdoor Woman* (1991).

[42] James Battle Averit, "Turpentining with Slaves in the 30's and 40's," in Thomas Gamble, ed., *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution and Consumption* (Savannah: Review Publishing and Printing Co., 1921), pp. 25–27; Donnie D. Bellamy, "Slavery in the Microcosm: Onslow County, North Carolina," *Journal of Negro History* 62 (1977): 339–50.

[43] Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 26.

[44] Gay Goodman Wright, "Turpentining: An Ethnohistorical Study of a Southern Industry and Way of Life" (Master's thesis, University of Georgia, 1979).

[45] Thomas Gamble, *Naval Stores: History, Production, Distribution and Consumption* (Savannah, Ga.: Review Publishing and Printing Co., 1921), p. 17; Eldon Van Romaine, "Naval Stores, 1919–1939," *Naval Stores Review* 100 (1990): 6–16.

third in export products from the South behind cotton and tobacco[46]; and by 1860, roughly 15,000 slaves labored in the naval stores industry.[47]

Turpentining took place in remote pine forests. Workers used hatchets or hacks to make incisions into trees. Carved receptacles or "boxes" (later attached cups) collected the crude gum or oleoresin that flowed from the opened spots in the trees. Periodically, workers would empty collected crude gum into a larger storage bin for later distillation. The turpentine extraction period ran from about March or April until November. Until the 1930s, turpentining was a purely extractive operation. The longleaf pine forests were viewed much like minerals to be extracted rather than as renewable resources.[48]

In addition to turpentine extraction in forested wildlands, we also submit that the exploitation and subjugation associated with plantation agriculture during slavery influenced the way blacks perceive wild areas. This point is crucial because we believe that not only direct work in wildlands but work associations with land, generally, have informed black land memories. As Cronon remarks:

> Ever since the nineteenth century, celebrating wilderness has been an activity mainly for well-to-do city folks. Country people generally know far too much about working the land to regard *un*worked land as their ideal.[49]

> The dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living. . . . Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature. . . .[50]

Cronon suggests class differences in wildland appreciation: that the nineteenth century agrarian working class did not romanticize or idealize wildlands because their livelihood was more directly dependent upon land resources. Such was the case not only for African Americans involved in plantation agriculture, but also for poorer whites and other groups living close to the land. But what further distinguishes the historical black wildland relationship from that of white America is the intersection of class oppression with racism. African Americans have not belonged to the elite group that appropriated wild spaces as cultural ideal because the subjugated black position with respect to cultivated lands would not allow this association. But just as impressive upon

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[46] Wright, "Turpentining," pp. 33–35.

[47] Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, p. 26.

[48] Thomas C. Croker, Jr., "The Longleaf Pine Story," *Southern Lumberman* 239 (December 1979): 69–74.

[49] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1 (1996): 7–28; p. 15 (emphasis in the original).

[50] Ibid., pp. 16–17.

the collective black land memory is European racism which placed blacks on par with the wild and uncivilized. In contrast to the image of the overcivilized, middle-class white American,[51] blacks were believed to have retained a great measure of primitivism. As DeLuca remarks, ". . . within the context of whiteness, those not part of the white civilization are, at best, seen as part of nature."[52]

After the Civil War, blacks continued to be kept in a virtual system of "involuntary servitude" by both legal (e.g., Black Codes) and extra-legal means (e.g., fear tactics used by vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan).[53] In the post-bellum South, planters used debt incurred by blacks through sharecropping and tenancy arrangements to restrict black mobility. In effect, blacks were rendered immobile and compulsively tied to the land through planter-backed ordinances such as "enticement laws, emigrant agent restrictions, contract laws, vagrancy statutes, the criminal-surety system, and convict labor laws. . . ."[54]

Agrarianism remained the dominant economic system in the United States until the last decade of the nineteenth century. When slavery ended, blacks felt they had a right to land they had helped cultivate during slavery. They reasoned that their work had contributed substantially to both the southern and northern economies. Blacks realized that land ownership would be crucial in uncoupling them from the exploitative plantation economy. Harding writes of the newly freed slaves: "Of course the search for land, the need to hold on to land, was still central to the black hope for a new life in America."[55] Vernon Wharton,

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[51] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1953), pp. 2–4, encouraged European settlers to establish homesteads in wild nature so that they might reclaim their simpler, more natural character.

[52] Kevin DeLuca, "In the Shadow of Whiteness," in Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin, eds., *Whiteness: The Construction of Social Identity* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1991), pp. 217–46. In the eighteenth century, European philosophers reasoned that the African and European were different types of humans—blacks being closer to primates than whites. Blacks were seen as the ignoble savage. Hegel, in particular, held a decidedly negative view of blacks, likening Africans to children and describing blacks as a *Kindernation* or an infantile people who needed to be educated by whites. Later, both Schoepenhauer and Nietzsche interpreted these perceived differences in a more positive light, but Nietzsche also reasoned that blacks existed in a more primitive state than whites. This image of blacks continues to some extent and informs black wildlland memories. It has not been a black project to revert, however temporarily, to a more primitive state because in the European eye, blacks have never left this state. Blacks by contrast, have sought to dissociate from the primitive.

[53] William Cohen, "Negro Involuntary Servitude in the South, 1865–1940: A Preliminary Analysis," *Journal of Southern History* 42 (1976): 33–35; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

[54] Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 6.

[55] Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p. 315.

quoted in Mandle also states: "their [ex-slaves'] very lives were entwined with the land and its cultivation; they lived in a society where respectability was based on ownership of the soil; and to them to be free was to farm their own ground."[56]

However, the freedmen were disappointed when the federal government did not redistribute seized southern land to former slaves but returned it to former owners. According to Mandle, such land redistribution would have been a "radical act" which would have left white plantation owners landless. This denial of land to blacks left the overwhelming majority of blacks landless and effectively perpetuated the antebellum plantation economy, and with it continued black disfranchisement.[57]

Most blacks could not obtain land independent of federal redistributions because they had no means to buy land; also, many whites refused to sell land to blacks even when the latter could afford the asking price. Landownership after the Civil War became concentrated in the hands of fewer people, affecting both blacks and smaller white landowners.[58] The inability to acquire land, in addition to lack of industrialization in the South, left blacks with few opportunities for gainful employment, save sharecropping.

The 1890s marked the end of rural agrarianism as the dominant economic system in the U.S. By the early part of the twentieth century, industrialization had replaced agrarianism as the primary economy. The final decade of the nineteenth century was significant for wider black participation in American democracy because of Booker T. Washington's 1895 "Atlanta Compromise," which was an official black acquiescence of Jim Crow and social inequality.[59] The decade was also significant because of the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy* v. *Fergusson* decision that ruled that blacks had no rights which whites were bound to respect. Thus, the twentieth century started with blacks solidified in a subordinate position.

Early Environmental Movement: Black Migration, Turpentining, Lumber camps, Sharecropping, Lynching

In 1914, blacks were still, according to Mandle mostly "southern, rural, and poor,"[60] although the "Great Black Northern Migration" had already commenced and its net effect would continue over the next four decades. Blacks

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[56] Jay R. Mandle, *The Roots of Black Poverty: The Southern Plantation Economy after the Civil War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978), p. 106.

[57] Ibid., pp. 105–07.

[58] Daniel, *Breaking the Land*, p. 4.

[59] Louis R. Harlan, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), vol. 3, pp. 583–87.

[60] Mandle, *The Roots of Black Poverty*, p. 84.

remaining in the rural South before World War II were still mostly employed in agriculture and domestic or service positions because opportunities for other viable employment in the region remained limited.[61] The 1910 through 1940 censuses show that farm labor accounted for more than fifty percent of all black labor in the deep South states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.[62]

After the Civil War, naval stores operations moved from plantations to camps established by "producers" who secured financing for the operations. The industry also moved steadily southward as pine forests in the Carolinas became depleted.[63] Blacks continued to make up the overwhelming proportion of workers in the industry. In both 1910 and 1920, blacks accounted for at least eighty percent of turpentine laborers in twelve southern states.[64] The descriptor "Turpentine Negro" was a common term applied to blacks employed in this industry. In a 1971 report on contemporary turpentining, Tze I. Chiang, W. H. Burrows, William C. Howard, and G. D. Woodard, Jr. remark: ". . . it is thought by some that the nonwhites [blacks] are the only ones who can harvest gum because of their superior ability to withstand the heat during the summer months when production is at its peak."[65]

These woods workers lived either in turpentine camps and were shuttled to the woods for work; or they lived in backwood shanties near the work site. Sometimes the camps were located within the boundaries of national forests, such as the New Home community on the Choctawhatchee National Forest in Florida (circa early 1900s).[66] Todes describes typical conditions in the work camps:

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[61] Ibid., p. 84.

[62] U.S. Department of Commerce, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupation Statistics*, vol. 4 (1914); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupations*, vol. I4 (1923); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupations by States*, vol. 4 (1933); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, Population*, vol. 3 (1943).

[63] Archer H. Mayor, *Southern Timberman* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

[64] U.S. Department of Commerce, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupation Statistics*, vol. 4 (1914); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupations*, vol. 4 (1923); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupations by States*, vol. 4 (1933); U.S. Department of Commerce, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, Population*, vol. 3 (1943).

[65] Tze I. Chiang, W. H. Burrows, William C. Howard, and G. D. Woodard, Jr., *A Study of the Problems and Potentials of the Gum Naval Stores Industry* (Atlanta: Georgia Institute of Technology), p. 82. Zora Neal Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), also provides an anthropological look at southern turpentines. She focuses on the folk tales relayed to her by black turpentine and lumber workers. David G. Nichells, "Migrant Labor, Folklore, and Resistance in Hurston's Polk County: Refraining Mules and Men," *African American Review* 33 (1999): 467–70.

[66] Carroll B. Butler, *Treasures of the Longleaf Pines: Naval Stores*, 2d ed. rev. (Shalimar: Tarkel Publishing, 1998), pp. 127–39.

> Negroes predominate in the turpentine camps of Georgia and Florida where exploitation of the workers is notorious. Mexican and Negro workers only are employed in the insect ridden cypress swamps. To cut cypress, the workers must wade in humid swamps, often up to their hips in water, and must live with their families in house boats built over the swamps. Living quarters for Negro workers are "match-box" shacks or box cars, segregated from white workers.[67]

Aside from the dangerous working conditions, daily living conditions in the camps were also exploitative. Like plantations before them, turpentine camps continued to operate as micro-societies with a distinct set of morals, social norms, and economic guidelines.[68] Turpentine producers controlled all aspects of a camp's social and economic life. Producers established housing, schools, churches, and recreation in the camp, and a system of debt peonage bound the laborers to their work. Because of low wages, laborers had to borrow money from producers to pay off debts incurred at company stores. Again however, because of low wages, workers were usually unable to repay loans, so the worker was indebted to his employer and his labor was controlled by the same. Principally in Florida, a largely black convict labor force was also exploited in the industry.[69] By the 1960s, traditional turpentining had ceased to be a significant industry in the South, due mainly to the lack of an available work force.[70] Black respondents in Chiang et al.'s investigation cite exacting working conditions such as "foul weather, insects, loneliness, snakes, underbrush, and rough terrain" as reasons for seeking employment outside the forests.

In addition to turpentining, blacks also labored in the southern lumber industry. As stated, the forestry related industries moved southward in the latter half of the 1800s because of depleted resources in other parts of the country. In both 1909 and 1918, the southern region accounted for the largest percentage of lumber cut in the U.S., thirty-three and thirty-five percent, respectively.[71] Black males accounted for one-half of all southern forest laborers from 1910 to 1940.[72] During this period, forest workers were often migrants who moved across the South following timber jobs. More permanent lumber and mill towns were also erected adjacent to lumbering operations to

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[67] Charlotte Todes, *Labor and Lumber* (New York: International Publishers, 1931), pp. 83–84.

[68] Wright, "Turpentining."

[69] Jeffrey A. Drobney, "Where Palm and Pine are Blowing: Convict Labor in the North Florida Turpentine Industry, 1877–1923," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 72 (1994): 411–34.

[70] Chiang, et al., *A Study of the Problems and Potentials of the Gum Naval Stores Industry*, 1971.

[71] Industrial Workers of the World, *The Lumber Industry and Its Workers* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, p. 45).

[72] U.S. Department of Commerce, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupation Statistics*, vol.4 (1914). U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupations*, vol. 4 (1923). U.S. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Population-Occupations by States*, vol. 4, (1933). U.S. Department of Commerce, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, Population*, vol. 3 (1943).

house timber workers and their families. Conditions reported in these camps are similar to those described in turpentine camps with the same closed system of indebtedness and company dictated mores. According to Mayor, blacks performed the most dangerous work in timber processing. Typically, they loaded cut logs onto railroad cars that transported the timber to the sawmill or they comprised the "rail gang" which laid tracks for the makeshift rail line into the timber stands.

Todes also writes about working conditions for blacks in lumbering:

> To work at the heaviest jobs is the lot of the Negroes. In the woods, they fell and buck the trees, handle the hooks or tongs, form the labor gang in the skidder crew, work on railroad construction and do the heavy work in the loading process. In the mills, they ride the carriage or haul and stack lumber while the white workers handle the machines. In the Great Southern Lumber Company's camps where the white sawyers have an 8-hour shift, Negro workers riding the carriage or "rig" must work 10 hours a day. Whites workers get paid for two holidays a year but the Negroes get no vacations at all.[73]

Descriptions of blacks in post-bellum timber-related occupations provide a more direct account of black interactions with wildlands. These accounts should be contrasted with those presented by early wildland preservationists during the same period. Black working experiences in wildlands suggest blacks were in a more marginal position with respect to wild nature.

The collective memory of turpentining and lumbering has been relayed to successive generations by word of mouth. For instance, Chiang et al.'s study reports that older blacks who had been turpentiners strongly discouraged younger family members from becoming involved in the work.[74] Older blacks recounted the hardships involved in turpentining, and it was viewed as a low class occupation. Official knowledge of turpenting and lumbering has been kept alive in official memory sites such as the anthropological databases contained in the Florida Folk Life Collection. Songs and folk tales recorded by southern turpentine workers in the 1930s are included in this database compiled by the Work Project Administration in the 1930s.[75]

We also hypothesize that lynchings served to further alienate blacks from wildlands because some of these acts occurred in isolated woodland areas.[76] For instance, eight of eleven black lynchings that took place in Florida in the 1930s, happened in "open country" or wooded areas. The incidences of lynching lessened towards the middle of the twentieth century, but the threat of such

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[73] Todes, *Labor and Lumber*, p. 83.

[74] Chiang et al., *A Study of the Problems and Potentials of the Gum Naval Stores Industry*.

[75] http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/flwpahtml/flwpahome.html.

[76] Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), p. 6.

violence remained (The greatest number of lynchings occurred in the last decade of the nineteenth century).[77] According to an NAACP report, 4,743 people were lynched in the United States between 1882 and 1968; of these, 72.7 percent were black.[78]

Lynchings did not always take place in forested, wildlands. However, the fact that some of these murders occurred in wooded areas sufficed to influence black perceptions of wildlands. Because isolated wildlands are not familiar, everyday landscapes for most people, the backdrop or environment for such events become impressed in collective memorization, not just the act of terror itself. In such cases, the isolated rural landscape is not distinguished from large forested settings because for many African Americans, these settings represent the unknown "Other." For instance, White comments about fears black women, in particular, have of venturing into the wilderness: "Some black women shun the wilderness because we cannot erase the memory of Emmett Till. . . . As a child, my feelings about being outdoors were skewed by the powerful pictures of Emmett's beaten and bloated body displayed in the media."[79]

The murders of Emmett Till and Mack Charles Parker, both in Mississippi in the 1950s are two of the more recent collective recollections of lynchings. Neither of these lynchings took place in large, forested land tracts, still these murders are coupled with "the woods" and are especially salient to African Americans and influence the way some perceive wildlands.

Modern Environmental Movement: Environmental Justice and Black Return to the Land

In 1982 the environmental justice movement began in Warren County, North Carolina when African Americans protested the proposed siting of a hazardous waste landfill in their county.[80] The environmental justice movement focused attention on what some charge as the inequitable distribution of hazardous and toxic waste sites in lower income and minority communities.[81] Chief concerns of environmental justice advocates are issues relating to pollutants and environmental toxins which threaten the integrity of local neighborhoods and workplaces, both in urban and rural areas. These concerns of primarily female and lower-income groups have been contrasted with the goals of mainstream (majority white) environmental groups which seek to preserve federally

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[77] Robert L. Zangrando *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909–1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980).

[78] Ibid., pp. 4, 6–7.

[79] White, "Black Women and Wilderness."

[80] Andrew Szasz and Michael Meuser "Environmental Inequalities: Literature Review and Proposals for New Directions in Research and Theory" *Current Sociology* 45 (1997): 99–120.

[81] Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (Boulder: Westview, 1990).

designated wilderness areas and wildlife and fish habitats. In contrast, the environmental justice movement represents an effort by marginalized groups to preserve the "natural environment" of home and community.

The environmental justice movement coincided with another mobilization among African Americans in the 1970s and 1980s. This other movement involved the return of blacks to the South, including the rural South. In the decade from 1970 to 1980, more than one million African Americans migrated to the South from the Northeast, Midwest, and West. This migration compares with an out-migration from the South of 950,000 blacks during the same time period.[82] This trend remained throughout the 1990s and is expected to continue into the twenty-first century. Blacks, like other race/ethnic groups returned to the South because of better job prospects in the urban areas of the region, such as metropolitan Atlanta and Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina.

In *A Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South*, Stack notes that blacks are also returning to rural regions of the South, despite the lack of viable economic opportunities or improved racial relations.[83] According to Stack, social conditions in some rural areas have not improved appreciatively since blacks left en masse a half century ago. Still, some blacks are moving back to the rural South because of the need to reconnect with family and to reclaim the land. As Stacks notes:

> . . . by the end of the 1970s, the Great Migration had turned back on itself, and the old southern homeplaces were welcoming the prodigals. How could things change so quickly? What forces on earth could reverse such precipitous decline? The appeal of God's little acre crosses all bounds of race and time, but the urgency could seem shrill for African Americans. If security and liberty were to be found anywhere, wouldn't it be under one's own roof, safe on one's own land?"[84]

The black return to rural landscapes again highlights the paradoxical relation of blacks towards wildland environments. Blacks are returning to rural areas despite the hardships encountered in these places by earlier generations. The back-to-the land migration and an environmentally centered social justice movement suggest a black desire to engage wildlands rather than an avoidance of such landscapes. Certainly, rural residence would provide more opportunities for blacks to interact with wildland places, less inhibited now by the constraints which accompanied their fore parents.

This return migration indicates that there may be factors which mitigate black land memories, for instance increased urbanization and affluence among

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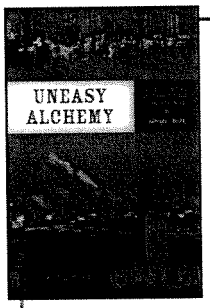
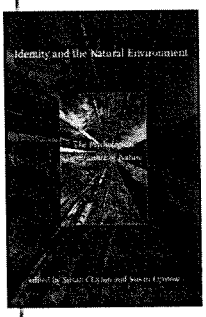
[82] K. E. McHugh, "Black Migration Reversal in the United States," *Geographical Review* 77 (1987): 171–82.

[83] Carol Stack, *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

[84] Ibid., p. 42.

African Americans. Because the mostly urban, black population is farther removed from the land than its rural predecessors, present generations of African Americans may also be farther removed from negative images of wildlands. There is also a larger black middle-class compared to fifty years ago with greater access to information about wildland recreation resources and official data concerning environmental degradation. If there has been a rupture in black collective land memory, blacks may now hold wildland attitudes more like middle-class whites, even though blacks interact with these resources less than whites. Precisely how these two movements, return migration and environmental justice, might translate into black interaction with wildlands is not known. Empirical investigations are needed to assess the degree to which environmental memories inform contemporary black views of wildlands.





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