

# African American Participation in Wildland Outdoor Recreation

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**ABSTRACT.** Outdoor recreation is an important aspect of the American culture, with a central tenant that all citizens have the right to enjoy the public wildlands. The present study analyzed African American wildland outdoor recreation behavior and found that this segment of the population, as a proportion, tended to participate in wildland outdoor recreation activities to a significantly lesser extent than their White counterparts. The findings suggest important public policy implications.

## *INTRODUCTION*

Americans have traditionally placed a high value on outdoor recreation and wilderness related recreation. It is central to the American culture, a unique perspective on quality of life, and a

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An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the Southwestern Marketing Association's 1993 Conference.

Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing, Vol. 2(4) 1994

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crucial component of the Western oriented outdoor heritage that all citizens have the right to enjoy the public wildlands.

Participation in outdoor recreation has been linked to a variety of individual benefits such as fitness (Paffenbarger, Hyde, and Dow 1991), a longer life (Paffenbarger, Hyde, and Dow 1991), family togetherness (Kelly 1975; Orthner 1975; Orthner and Mancini 1980; 1991), and stress reduction (Baum 1991). Participation in outdoor recreation also helps to achieve fundamental social goals such as a healthy, more educated, cohesive, and environmentally aware public (The President's Commission on the Outdoors 1987).

It is imperative for wilderness recreation planners and managers to analyze the needs and wants of the market segment(s) that they serve. An enhanced understanding will allow recreation planners to better cope with the dynamics of managing the public's land and water recreation resources, resulting in increasing the recreation consumer's level of satisfaction (Cato and Kunstler 1988).

Traditional recreation research has suggested that African Americans tend to be highly under-represented in participation in wildland related outdoor recreation compared to White Americans (Washburne 1978; Klobus-Edwards 1981; Hutchison 1988). Several explanations have been suggested for the purported under-representation of African Americans including: (1) income and/or time constraints (Willie 1975; McQuire, O'Leary, Alexander, and Dotavio 1987); (2) inadequate transportation (Washburne 1978); (3) perceived discrimination by the White majority (West 1989); (4) lack of access to adequate outdoor recreation facilities (Washburne 1978); (5) the negative emotions associated with public open land by African Americans and Native Americans (Meeker, Woods and Lucas 1973); and/or (6) a lack of wildland access from inner city urban areas (Klobus-Edwards 1981; Washburne 1978; West 1989).

Equity in the private sector suggests that the allocation of any product is based only upon the willingness and ability of consumers to exchange something of value (typically money) for the product. When the product is a public good, the concept of allocative equity suggests that all citizens must have equal opportunities to engage in its consumption. Because most wildland recreation occurs on publicly managed wildlands it is categorized as a public good. Public policy and federal agency guidelines mandate that all Americans

have equal access to public wildland recreation facilities, regardless of race, income, occupation, sex, age, or ability. This access may be through traditional means such as site visits or through innovative off site experiences such as interpretive programs, exhibits, films, or documentaries.

The perceived under-participation of African Americans in wildland outdoor recreation has emerged as a public policy issue (Washburne 1978). For example, public agency and citizen interest in ensuring African Americans access to public and private goods has dramatically increased as an artifact of the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

African American wildland recreation participation patterns are important from an economic development perspective, as well. If the needs of a segment, such as the African American population, were better met, attendance and revenues at these sites may tend to increase. An increase in attendance and revenue would provide valuable funding for the recreation site and revenues for tourism and travel related businesses in the surrounding communities. The economic effects of outdoor recreation and the associated multipliers are significant with a combined direct and indirect contribution to GNP of approximately \$100 billion (Americans Outdoors, 1987).

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this manuscript is to investigate whether there is a significant difference between African American and White American recreation participation in wildland and wilderness related activities in the United States. Prior research and anecdotal evidence suggests that African Americans tend to participate less in wildland recreation activities than Whites. However past research efforts were typically limited by sampling frame and size constraints which may have had a significant impact on their findings (Washburne 1978; Klobus-Edwards 1981; Stamps and Stamps 1985).

### **WILDLAND RECREATION**

The present study is designed to compare historical data on the participation rates for specific wildland recreation activities be-

tween African Americans and Whites. The specific wildland recreation activities to be analyzed have been adapted for the purposes of the present study from Miles, McDonald, Capella, and Cordell's (1993) analysis of wildland recreation consumption behavior. These activities include: (1) horseback riding, (2) canoeing/kayaking, (3) fishing, (4) hunting, (5) camping in primitive areas, (6) day hiking, (7) bird watching, (8) cross-country skiing, and (9) backpacking.

Wildland recreation experiences include both direct (on-site) and indirect (off-site) experiences. Direct experiences include the actual participation in the wildland activity, while indirect experiences pertain to the utility derived from the description of the activities in media, folk lore, or oral tradition. The interaction of the individual, the recreation activity, the situation, and the environment result in a unique service experience for the customer (Capella and Miles, forthcoming). It is important for both public sector wildland recreation managers and non-profit marketers that these services properly fulfill the needs and wants of their customers.

Designing and maintaining an effective service encounter is critical to the survival of these publicly supported wildland areas. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) suggest that developing an understanding of the customer and meeting the needs of relevant segments is a vital part of marketing services.

#### *WILDLAND RECREATION PARTICIPATION*

Wildland outdoor recreation has been traditionally considered a predominantly White phenomenon, and with social pressure for equal access at federal and state facilities. There is a need to determine if there are actual differences in wildland recreation participation rates between African-Americans and Whites. Purported African American under-participation in recreation activities has been an issue of continuing concern since the 1970s (Washburne 1978). Washburne (1978) suggests that there has been a "long standing goal of providing equal opportunity for participation in American culture" that has never been fully realized. A significant amount of research has been conducted on the differences in recreation and leisure activities between races. Much of this research has produced

conflicting results (Klobus-Edwards 1981; Washburne 1978; Stamps and Stamps 1985; McQuire, O'Leary, Alexander, and Dottavio 1987; Young 1983; Pittenger and Hunt 1984; Kelly 1980).

### *The Marginality and Ethnicity Perspectives*

Washburne (1978) offers two perspectives designed to better explain the differences between African American and White wildland recreation consumption: (1) the marginality perspective, and (2) the ethnicity perspective. The marginality perspective is based on a constrained resource framework and suggests "that African Americans do not participate because of poverty and various consequences of socio-economic discrimination" (Washburne 1978). Examples typical of purported socio-economic discrimination may include: (1) limited access to transportation, (2) income constraints, (3) educational limitations, and (4) limited opportunities due to the physical environment of the inner city.

The ethnicity perspective suggests that leisure patterns of African Americans are primarily influenced by their subculture, lifestyles, reference groups, values, and a very different "historical relationship to wildlands" than Whites have (Washburne 1978). This perspective suggests that differences in participation may not be due to discrimination, but simply because differences exist in the tastes and preferences of African Americans and White Americans.

Washburne (1978) also found, in an empirical test of the competing marginality and ethnicity perspectives, that when samples of urban Californians were matched by gender, income, age, education, and location of residence were drawn from the African American and White populations, there were differences in participation rates for the following wildland recreation activities: (1) visiting remote recreational areas, (2) camping, and (3) walking, hiking, and climbing ( $p = .001$ ). He found that urban African Americans tend to participate more in group or team activities such as basketball and attending spectator sports events than Whites (significant at the .001 level). In addition, he found that African Americans were less likely to travel outside the community to engage in recreation activities, with the exception of fishing, which was shown to be the primary activity which African Americans tended to participate in that required transportation.

Washburne (1978) further found that the main constraints for African American participation in outdoor recreation included: (1) the cost of the activity or equipment, (2) inadequate facilities, (3) transportation difficulties, (4) lack of time, and (5) limited social opportunities. These findings suggest support for the ethnicity perspective and fail to support the marginality perspective.

Klobus-Edwards (1981) likewise attributed differences in leisure behavior attributed to race. Her findings indicated that African Americans were more involved in non-wildland outdoor recreation, supervised recreational activities, and club membership than White Americans ( $p = .05$ ). She also found that White Americans tended to participate in wildland recreation activities to a greater extent than African Americans ( $p = .05$ ). Her analysis utilized a multiple analysis of variance analysis procedure controlling for the following socio-economic variables: (1) the head of households' age, (2) the educational level of the head of the household, (3) income of the household, and (4) people in the household. Hence, there was no support of the marginality theory, with the results providing support for Washburne's (1978) ethnicity perspective.

In an empirical study of the effects of race and social class on leisure participation Stamps and Stamps (1985) found that social class had no significant effect on outdoor recreation participation within either the African American or White samples studied. Whites were found to rank outdoor recreation as a more frequent activity than African Americans when social class was controlled for, exhibiting a Chi-square value of 9.88 ( $p = .002$ ). Whites tended to participate in reading, cultural activities, outdoor recreation, traveling, hobbies, yard work, and eating out, while their African American counterparts tended to participate more in socializing/partying, shopping, and resting and relaxing.

#### *Traditional African American Recreation Patterns*

Craig (1972) proposes that sub-cultural traditions are crucial in shaping "recreational activity patterns." His review of African American recreation research, which was done prior to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, suggests that the most important traditional recreation activity for African Americans was visiting friends and family. Craig (1972) studied the recreation par-

ticipation of a group of 300 employed, head of household urban African American males. His findings suggest that the subjects were victims of past discrimination both when engaging in recreation activities at parks and other facilities (resulting in preferences for different activities) and at work, with fewer and lower paying employment opportunities (resulting in lower incomes and occupational status). Hence, African Americans were less likely to develop preferences for many recreation activities because of their lack of exposure. Craig (1972) found that African Americans tended to participate more in reading, watching television, playing cards, visiting with friends and relatives; and much less in most types of outdoor recreation activities such as nature walks, hiking, boating, or trips to the beach.

Meeker, Woods, and Lucas (1973) suggest, that for some African Americans, the attitudes toward wildland outdoor recreation activities could be tainted by an association with slavery and land dependence. These strong negative emotions may tend to influence African Americans in their recreation consumption decisions. Rather than opting for the rural open spaces associated with participation in wildland recreation, African Americans might be more inclined to recreate in urban areas.

Willie (1974) suggests that African Americans have little free time available for participation in recreational activities because work is an all "consuming experience." Recreation for middle class African Americans typically consisted of social activities such as visiting relatives, social organization membership, and participating in church related activities.

Kelly (1980) found in a national study of outdoor recreation that Whites participate in camping, water-skiing, golf, and alpine skiing more frequently than African Americans. These findings may be artifacts of the intra regional geographic concentrations of African Americans. Income tended to negatively impact activities that involved a high monetary investment such as skiing, boating, and golf.

In 1987, the President's Commission on the Outdoors found that the three major activities which influenced recreation were (1) leisure time, (2) income, and (3) mobility. Orthner (1975) stated that free time is not leisure, and that leisure offers a source of family

integration and cohesiveness. This is especially true in the type of family where time spent together is so short. For example, a camping trip where the family is forced to be together and interact helps build the collectively of the family unit.

McQuire, O'Leary, Alexander, and Dottavio (1987) studied the constraints on leisure participation faced by both African American and White elderly (age 65 and over), using the data from the 1982-1983 National Recreation Survey. They found that both a lack of money and transportation limited the elderly African Americans from participation, while time and personal health reasons constrained the elderly Whites.

West (1989), in an exploratory study, empirically compared Washburne's (1978) marginality/ethnicity (subculture based tastes and preferences) explanations for "minority under-participation in outdoor recreation" with an alternative explanation based on interracial relations. The findings suggest that interracial factors tended to act as a constraint for multi-racial site utilization. In addition, the results failed to provide strong support for a subculture based explanation of African American outdoor recreation participation, while providing only limited support for the marginality perspective in explaining African American participation in "wildland recreation." West (1989) suggests that blatant and open discrimination is not required, simply that African Americans may be less willing to recreate at a predominantly White site, and Whites may be less willing to recreate at a predominantly African American site resulting in different types of recreation consumption behavior for different subculture and or racial groups.

#### ***RACE, ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ENVIRONMENT, AND WILDLAND RECREATION***

Jackson (1987) found a positive link between environmental attitudes and outdoor recreation. As attitudes toward the environment become stronger, there is a positive tendency to engage in outdoor recreation. A similar perspective is suggested by Taylor (1989), who found concern and action gaps exist between African Americans and Whites in their attitudes towards the environment based on differences in cultural upbringing. She found that African

Americans were generally less concerned with issues concerning the environment because of their predominate urban residence, and higher priorities for more crucial issues, such as providing food for the family, and shelter. Taylor's findings support Willie (1975) who suggested that African Americans of all social classes have little time available for leisure due to work and other obligations.

Other studies (Taylor, 1979; Mitchell, 1980; Kreger, 1973) have also found differences between African Americans and Whites in their feeling toward, or beliefs about, the environment. Kreger (1973) found that African Americans, in general, do not have as much interest or concern for ecological problems as Whites. Respondents in his study believed that most African Americans had more immediate problems such as meeting basic physiological and safety needs.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The most recent national study of wildland recreation behavior is from the 1982-1983 National Recreation Survey (NRS) dataset. The 1982-1983 NRS consisted of a sample of 6,720 households throughout the United States. Questions pertaining to outdoor recreation activities and preferences were solicited from a nation-wide random sample of the U.S. population of persons aged 12 and older. Respondents were asked if they had participated in the selected activities in the three months prior to the interview. Because the personal interviews were conducted in-home, and follow-up telephone calls were made by the United States Census Bureau, the response rate was approximately 100 percent, with 6719 households responding.

### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The weight of the literature (Craig 1972, Washburne 1978, Kelly 1980, Stamps and Stamps 1988) suggest the following hypotheses:

H1: African Americans participate less in horseback riding than Whites.

- H5: African Americans participate less in camping in primitive areas than Whites.
- H6: African Americans participate less in day hiking than Whites.
- H7: African Americans participate less in bird watching than Whites.
- H8: African Americans participate less in cross country skiing than Whites.
- H9: African Americans participate less in backpacking than Whites.

### *RESULTS*

A series of nine z-tests were utilized to test if the proportions of African American participants in selected wildland recreation activities were significantly different from the proportions of White participants. The results of the tests of proportion are presented in Table 1. African American participation in all of the selected recreational activities was less than White participation at the .01 level of significance.

### *CONCLUSIONS*

The research findings are important from both research and public policy perspectives. The findings support the work of many researchers, suggesting that race does have significant impact on wildland recreation participation. African Americans as a proportion of the population participated in all of the wildland recreation activities significantly less than Whites.

Further research is required to extend this test of the purported under-participation of African Americans in wildland recreation.

TABLE 1. Tests of Significance in Proportion of African American and White Participation in Wildland Recreation Activities

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Participation as a Proportion of Whites</u>	<u>Participation as a Proportion of African Americans</u>
Backpacking	4.1%	0.5% *
Birdwatching	11.4	4.3 *
Camping in Primitive Areas	8.7	1.3 *
Canoeing/ Kayaking	7.2	0.8 *
Cross Country Skiing	3.0	0.5 *
Day Hiking	13.3	1.4 *
Fishing	29.0	20.6 *
Horseback Riding	7.5	2.9 *
Hunting	9.8	3.6 *

\*Significant at the .01 level.

The 1993-1994 National Survey of Recreation will offer a comparative analysis of this data to assess changes in the wildland recreational activities by race in the United States since 1983.

Many issues pertaining to African American participation in wildland outdoor recreation still remain unsolved. Which attributes of the recreation experience are of importance to African Americans? Are any of these attributes more salient to African Americans due to sub-cultural differences? Are the wildland outdoor recreation opportunities and public facilities which African Americans typically wish to participate in being provided? The present study indicates the participation behavior of African Americans in wildland recreation, and thus may assist in developing the appropriate facilities to better serve the needs of the African American public.

The research findings have implications for both researchers and

public policy planners. Academics will have to re-visit the traditional body of literature including Washburne's (1978) marginality and ethnicity perspectives, exploring their applications in today's environment. Public policy planners must now explicitly consider recreation alternatives to the traditional urban recreation opportunities offered to African American participants.

### **PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Public sector planners and recreation marketers must redirect their wildland recreation strategies to attract an active and potentially growing segment of African American participants. The public interest may be best served if these efforts are designed to: (1) provide accessibility to all Americans regardless of race, sex, income, education, or disabilities; and (2) to help develop natural resource appreciation within the African American and other under participatory communities.

Public policy planners should consider both resource limitations and differences in tastes and preferences when attempting to address differences in participation rates in wildland recreation consumption between the African Americans and White communities. As African American educational attainment and income levels rise, problems pertaining to resource limitations should tend to be ameliorated. However, during the interim, public policy planners should utilize innovative strategies in an attempt to compensate for the transportation, income, education, and recreation skill constraints within the African American community. Examples of innovations designed to engender accessibility include the USDA Forest Service's Urban Tree House, the Youth Conservation Corps, the White House's urban youth "Summer of Service," and the National Forest Foundation's programs to provide wildland experiences for inter-city youth. These programs could potentially be expanded to provide further opportunities to develop an appreciation for wildland activities within the African American community.

Differences in tastes and preferences can be addressed through a primary/secondary school natural resource awareness program integrated into the natural science educational curriculum. In addition, wilderness recreation activity skills could be incorporated

into the physical education programs to offer all Americans an alternative to the traditional competitive sports oriented skill training.

The results of these and other efforts will be a much broader and stronger constituency base for the National Wilderness Preservation System, Federal land management agencies, and other natural resource oriented programs. In addition, public welfare will be enhanced as more Americans are able to enjoy the physical, social, and emotional benefits of wilderness activities.

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