

Beyond The Stereotype:

“White People Shit”

A Comprehensive Analysis Exploring the Barriers to
Black Participation in Outdoor Recreation in Massachusetts

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Abstract

This thesis explores the pronounced disparities in outdoor recreation participation between Black and White Americans in Massachusetts. Drawing insights from an extensive literature review and two sets of qualitative interviews, it examines the complex interplay of historical, sociocultural, and economic factors that have shaped the relationship between Black Americans and outdoor spaces. The literature review traces the historical exclusion of Black Americans from nature, the benefits of outdoor recreation, current participation trends, leisure constraints, and cultural perceptions. Intercept interviews with Black residents surface stereotypes, barriers, community influences, personal experiences, and calls for inclusivity in outdoor engagement. Semi-structured interviews with outdoor industry stakeholders highlight systemic issues like lack of representation, cultural and safety concerns, and challenges in funding community-driven initiatives. Key themes that emerge include the need to challenge stereotypes of outdoor enthusiasts, address economic barriers and lack of exposure, foster cultural relevance and belonging, and promote diverse leadership in the outdoor sector. The study proposes targeted recommendations such as representation in marketing, affordability initiatives, community partnerships, and investment in Black-led outdoor organizations. It underscores the transformative potential of inclusive outdoor recreation in promoting individual well-being, environmental stewardship, and social equity. By amplifying Black voices and experiences, this thesis contributes to the growing discourse on diversity, accessibility, and cultural relevance in outdoor spaces.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The pronounced lack of Black participation in outdoor recreation emerges as a poignant concern, particularly when recognizing the substantial benefits these activities bestow on individuals and communities. Engaging in outdoor pursuits such as running, hiking, camping, and skiing is not just a pastime; it shapes a strong sense of place and self. This is increasingly important in the context of climate change, where a bond with nature during formative years can nurture a lifelong commitment to environmental stewardship (Dunlap & Heffernan, 1975; Tanner, 1980; Lee, 2011). The mental and physical health advantages of regular interaction with natural settings—stress reduction (Hull & Michael, 1995) and lower obesity rates (Ghimire et al., 2017)—highlight the critical nature of such engagement. Despite these well-documented benefits, equitable access and enthusiasm for these activities are not universally experienced across racial lines.

This disparity is starkly illuminated by statistics indicating that of all park visitors, only 1.2% are Black, while a staggering 95.3% are White (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019). Although economic disparities, with Black Americans generally having less wealth, partially explain the participation gap in outdoor recreation and national park visitations (Stodolska et al., 2020), the underlying causes are deeply entrenched in a more complex matrix of historical and societal contexts (Goodrid, 2018). The concept of "leisure constraints"—encompassing language barriers, limited time, lack of knowledge, and programming that fails to meet needs (Scott and Lee, 2018)—further elucidates the nuanced barriers to entry. Interviews with African Americans have shed light on the profound impact of generational trauma related to slavery, lynching, reconstruction, and Jim Crow laws, which heighten

concerns for safety in outdoor environments (Goodrid, 2018). The confluence of these factors creates a daunting barrier that prevents a significant portion of the Black community from reaping the known benefits of outdoor recreation, signaling a call for action to redress this inequity.

Research Question: How and why do participation rates in outdoor recreational activities (running, hiking, camping, skiing, climbing) vary so drastically between White and Black Americans in Massachusetts?

- What have been the historical explanations of the disparity? Can contemporary interviews of key actors confirm the causes and reveal new ones?
- What solutions have been used to encourage minority participation as well as improve access to green space, and what were the outcomes of their implementation?
- What policies might be in place, in the private and public sectors, to promote increased racial diversity in outdoor participation? What roles can non-profits and educational institutions play in this transition to a more diverse and equitable outdoor experience?

The disparities in participation rates in outdoor recreational activities, including running, hiking, camping, skiing, climbing, and more, between White and Black Americans in Massachusetts give rise to several critical questions. First and foremost, it is crucial to understand why these participation rates vary so drastically between these two racial groups in this state. Is it primarily due to financial difficulties, cultural perceptions, a lack of awareness, or a combination of these factors?

Moreover, identifying predictors that could encourage increased participation in outdoor recreation among Black communities is of paramount importance. To achieve this, we must delve into the existing perceptions of hiking and other outdoor activities within the Black community in Massachusetts.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to inquire what has been done so far to increase Black participation in outdoor recreation and whether private or public organizations are actively incentivized to promote this increased participation. To gain a comprehensive understanding, we must also delve into the motives behind their actions. Addressing these questions collectively can help to pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable outdoor recreational landscape that caters to the diverse interests and needs of all communities.

With the completion of this thesis, I aim to provide qualitative (via interviews) findings that may enlighten several stakeholders. The interviews will include both formal, structured interviews with non-profit/for-profit social impact administrators focused on outdoor recreation and corporate representatives of outdoor gear retailers. Intercept interviews will also be used to better understand sentiments about outdoor recreation in the Black community. Administrators for national or state parks may use this information to help make more informed decisions about the initiatives they employ to garner more engagement from black Americans. Outdoor recreation companies may use these insights to inform hiring practices or improve programming to accommodate multiple identities. Given the limited timeline in which I must complete this thesis, I will focus my research solely on Massachusetts given the wealth of connections I have forged in this region. Moving forward, this thesis delves into the underlying reasons behind this pronounced gap between Black and White Americans' experiences in outdoor recreation. Through a comprehensive examination of historical, social, and economic factors, I aim to shed light on the complex interplay of forces contributing to these disparities and explore potential pathways toward a more equitable and inclusive outdoor experience for all.

Organization

The thesis at hand is meticulously organized to critically examine the lower rates of outdoor recreation participation among African Americans in Massachusetts. It is divided into five comprehensive chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in the exploration and analysis of this multifaceted issue.

Chapter One – Introduction: This chapter lays the foundation for the study. It begins with a succinct summary of the problem, outlining the disparity in outdoor recreation participation rates between Black and White Americans. The background sets the stage by emphasizing the importance of outdoor recreation and its implications. The problem statement is then clearly articulated, followed by the presentation of the research questions that guide the inquiry. A brief overview of how the thesis is organized is provided, along with definitions of key terms such as 'Black', 'outdoor recreation' with its exclusivity, 'leisure constraints', and 'BIPOC' to establish a clear framework for the study.

Chapter Two – Methodology: This chapter details the methodological framework used to answer the research questions. It describes the research design and the data collection process, which includes survey development and implementation, along with in-depth interviews. The strategies employed to ensure the robustness and validity of the data are also discussed, establishing the credibility of the research findings.

Chapter Three – Literature Review: An extensive review of the literature provides the contextual backbone of the thesis. It encompasses the benefits of outdoor recreation, including its health, psychological, and social advantages, and explores the connection between outdoor activities and environmental stewardship. The historical context of outdoor recreation and institutional racism is scrutinized through a historical overview and case studies that reflect past disparities. The chapter also

delves into current participation disparities and demographic statistics and identifies the critical factors contributing to these disparities, such as leisure constraints and lack of representation.

Chapter Four – In-depth Interview Analysis: The fourth chapter presents a qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts. This analysis uncovers themes and patterns within the interviewees' experiences and motivations, providing a deep understanding of the personal and societal factors influencing outdoor recreation participation rates. The integration of these findings with the survey data offers a comprehensive view of the issue at hand.

Chapter Five – Conclusions, Recommendations, and Limitations: The concluding chapter synthesizes all findings from the interviews and literature review to identify the key factors contributing to the disparities in outdoor recreation participation. It highlights case studies of successful interventions and articulates policy and programmatic recommendations to reduce these disparities. The chapter concludes with potential strategies aimed at increasing African Americans' participation in outdoor recreation, offering a roadmap for future initiatives and research.

Definitions

Both definitions provided have been written by the author. These definitions are not generalizable and are an attempt to categorize complex ideas that inform this thesis.

- **Blackness:** A multifaceted identity marker primarily associated with people of Sub-Saharan African descent but not confined to biological characteristics. It encompasses a shared historical experience of diaspora and colonization, cultural expressions and practices, and a political identity shaped by experiences of racialization and resistance against oppression. Blackness is

both a self-identified and socially perceived identity, reflective of a complex interplay of individual, community, and global dynamics (Du Bois 1903; Fanon 1952; Gilroy 1993).

Note on terminology: *In this thesis, I use the terms “Black” and “African American” interchangeably when referring to self-identifying American citizens of (Hispanic or non-Hispanic) African descent.*

- **Outdoor Recreation:** A voluntary engagement in leisure activities that are conducted primarily in natural or semi-natural settings, intended for enjoyment, leisure, or physical challenge that is distinct from routine daily activities and organized competitive sports. These activities typically involve exploration, adventure, or relaxation in environments such as parks, forests, rivers, and mountains, and are pursued for personal satisfaction, health benefits, and enhancing one’s connection with nature.

Chapter Two: Methodology

To answer my research questions, I completed the literature review provided later in this paper and conducted intercept and semi-structured interviews.

Literature Review

To complete the literature review, I continued to use various publishing platforms available to students through Tufts University such as JSTOR, ERIC, T and F, PubMed, and print resources found within Tisch Library. Some of this research was completed in the spring of 2022 as a part of a directed study in which the historical and current inequities in outdoor recreation within the United States were analyzed. Some of the keywords used in the search for resources were “Outdoor Recreation”, “Benefits

of Outdoor Recreation”, “African Americans and Outdoor Recreation”, “Rates of Participation in Outdoor Recreation”, “History of Racial Inequality”, “Racism in the Outdoors”, “Green Space Racism”, “Racism in the Conservation Movement”, and “Increasing African Americans’ Participation in Outdoor Recreation”. Sources from grey literature were also used, including government and professional reports, policy and advocacy literature, working papers, newsletters, and blogs.

Intercept Interviews

In addition to the literature review, my focus was on exploring the lack of African-American participation in outdoor recreation in Massachusetts. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, I employed qualitative research methods. A key component of my data collection involved conducting intercept interviews in various outdoor areas around Boston such as Ramsay Park in Roxbury, Downtown Crossing, Boston Common, and President’s Lawn at Tufts University. The primary goal of these interviews was to gather firsthand data on public sentiments regarding African-American participation in outdoor recreation. I approached all 20 participants randomly, and all participants included in this thesis self-identified as Black. These brief, structured interviews centered on perceptions and experiences related to African-American participation in outdoor activities. An example of this came from the question, “What does an outdoorsy person look like to you?” The responses provided insight into what type of person African Americans believe currently engages in outdoor recreational activities. Whether their answers provided a model that looked like them or someone completely different, all responses were carefully documented, and with the participant’s consent, video and audio-recorded for accuracy. The intercept interview guide is attached at the end of this document.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to intercept interviews, I conducted formal interviews with two groups: representatives from the outdoor retail industry and representatives from non-profit groups/for-profit impact ventures involved in outdoor recreation. Interviewees were recruited through the use of web research, my personal network, and the snowball method to identify additional interviewees.

The first group of interviews aimed to understand the role and response of the retail sector regarding the disparities in African-American outdoor recreation participation. I engaged in semi-structured interviews with representatives and decision-makers from major outdoor recreation retail companies, namely, REI Co-op and Janji Running. These interviews delved into the companies' policies, initiatives, and perceptions regarding African-American engagement in outdoor recreation. With consent, these interviews were recorded via Zoom. The transcripts from these interviews were analyzed in detail to extract relevant insights.

The second group of interviews was with representatives from non-profit/for-profit impact ventures promoting outdoor recreation among Black youth and adults. The purpose here was to gain insights into these nuanced perspectives and their initiatives to address disparities in outdoor recreation participation. Again, I leveraged my network from my personal and professional work and utilized the snowball method to find more interviewees. These detailed, semi-structured interviews with key figures in relevant non-profit/for-profit social ventures explored their efforts and the challenges they faced in promoting African-American participation in outdoor recreation (See Table 1). An example of what I was looking to identify was: Are their challenges mostly financial or are they related to larger social issues? This inquiry, along with several related ones, was comprehensively addressed, thereby offering a thorough understanding of how these unconventional organizations have approached the issue of lower

outdoor recreation participation rates among African Americans. The semi-structured interview guide is attached at the end of this document.

The data collected through the qualitative research methods described above was meticulously analyzed to uncover themes pertinent to the investigation of low African-American participation rates in outdoor recreation in Massachusetts. The primary analytical technique involved thematic analysis of the transcripts from intercept and formal interviews conducted in various settings across Boston. Upon completion of the interviews, each transcript was carefully reviewed to identify recurring themes that emerged across different participant responses. These themes were used as categorical anchors for organizing the data.

Specifically, relevant quotes from interviewees were extracted and grouped under identified themes. This approach allowed for a detailed exploration of both the perceptions and experiences of African Americans with regard to outdoor activities. By focusing on direct quotes that fit each thematic category, the analysis provided nuanced insights into the views and narratives held by individuals and key stakeholders, such as representatives from the outdoor retail industry and non-profit/for-profit impact ventures. The themes served as a framework to critically examine the factors influencing participation rates and the various strategies employed by organizations to address these disparities.

The thematic categorization not only facilitated a deeper understanding of the underlying issues but also highlighted the diverse perspectives on what constitutes barriers to and opportunities for increased engagement in outdoor recreation among African Americans. This structured analytical approach ensured that the findings were grounded in the actual words and expressed sentiments of the participants, thereby lending authenticity and depth to the subsequent discussion and conclusions of this study.

Table 1: Semi-Structured Interviewees

Outdoor Retailers	Non-Profit / For-Profit Social Ventures
Dan Kihanya - Director, REI Path Ahead Ventures	Darren Josey - Founder, First Seed Sown Sales and Marketing LLC
Aly Simmons - Employee Engagement Manager, REI	Mardi Fuller - Director of External Relations, Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE)
Dave Spandorfer - CEO, Janji Running	Elliot Rivera - Executive Director, Youth in Action
	Malik tha Martian - Director and Athlete, The North Face and Outside.com

Chapter Three: Literature Review

To answer some of my research questions about the disparities in outdoor recreational participation between White and Black Americans, I conducted a literature review. The specific questions I aimed to address were:

- How and why do participation rates in outdoor recreational activities (running, hiking, camping, skiing, climbing) vary so drastically between White and Black Americans?
- What have been the historical explanations of the disparity?
- What solutions have been used to encourage minority participation in outdoor recreation and what were the outcomes of their implementation?

The findings from the literature were grouped into two main sections. The first section provides an overview of the problem and includes five topics: 1) Benefits of Outdoor Recreation, 2) Historical Exclusion of Black Americans from Nature, 3) Current Trends, 4) Leisure Constraints, and 5) "White People Shit". This section establishes the context and background for understanding the racial disparities in outdoor recreation.

The second section focuses on solutions proposed in the literature to address these disparities. It covers four key areas: 1) Safety and Representation, 2) Education, 3) Social Interaction, 4) Partnerships and 5) The National Park Service.

This organization of topics, starting with the problem definition and then moving to solutions, serves to build a comprehensive understanding of the issue. It supports the subsequent analysis and recommendations by first establishing the historical and contemporary factors contributing to the racial gap in outdoor recreation, and then examining potential strategies and interventions to bridge this divide. The literature review thus provides a foundational framework for addressing the research questions and informing future efforts to promote equitable access and participation in outdoor recreational activities.

Outdoor Recreation and Black Americans

Prior to exploring the reasons for the exclusion of Black Americans from outdoor activities, it's essential to acknowledge the multitude of benefits associated with proximity to natural settings, engaging with the outdoors, and embracing the spirit of adventure with ease and comfort.

The Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

The significance of outdoor recreation transcends mere physical activity; it is a multifaceted experience that enriches human life in various dimensions. The following section provides a comprehensive overview that synthesizes insights from diverse sources, illustrating the profound benefits of engaging with the natural world.

The stress reduction theory (Ulrich et al. 1991, Ulrich 2023) and the attention restoration theory (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989) provide frameworks for understanding how nature exerts its beneficial effects

on mental health. The stress reduction theory posits that natural environments promote recovery from stress through physiological responses, such as lowered blood pressure and reduced cortisol levels. Concurrently, the attention restoration theory suggests that nature replenishes depleted cognitive resources, allowing for improved focus and concentration. Both theories underscore the capacity of outdoor environments to mitigate the effects of mental fatigue and stress, contributing to overall mental well-being.

A pivotal moment in this field of study came in 2005 when the concept of "green exercise," which refers to physical activity conducted in natural environments, was coined. Early research by Pretty et al. (2005) has been foundational, demonstrating that green exercise not only boosts physical fitness but also significantly enhances mood and self-esteem. Their findings emphasize the dual benefits of engaging with nature, highlighting its critical role in supporting both physical and mental health. Central to the narrative is the indispensable role of nature in child development. Bourdeau (n.d.b) emphasizes that children harbor an intrinsic need for nature, which critically underpins their holistic growth. The natural environment not only sparks curiosity and fosters a sense of wonder but also promotes exploratory behaviors crucial for cognitive and emotional development. Furthermore, a 2009 study denotes that students who regularly engage in outdoor activities not only demonstrate academic improvements but also exhibit significant personal growth, indicating that outdoor experiences are pivotal in shaping well-rounded individuals (Strife and Downey 2009). Further, students who engage more frequently with outdoor environments, including those from economically disadvantaged groups, often show improved performance on standardized exams, exhibit greater eagerness for learning, and experience fewer absences from school (Ernst and Stanek 2006). Research indicates that the presence of increased tree coverage in a community can be linked to up to a 13% improvement in academic outcomes among students. This beneficial impact is most pronounced in schools confronted with

significant socioeconomic obstacles (Wells 2015). The benefits of outdoor recreation are not, however, limited to children.

The concept of "nature-deficit disorder," as introduced by Richard Louv (2008) and discussed by Isaacson and Almonte (2022), further delineates the critical need for outdoor recreation. This concept, while not recognized medically, vividly encapsulates the adverse effects of a life removed from nature, such as heightened anxiety, attention deficits, and a pervasive sense of disquiet. The metaphor of nature-deficit disorder compellingly argues for the restoration of our bond with the natural world as a means to counter these effects, advocating for outdoor activities as essential to both mental and physical health (Isaacson and Almonte 2022, Louv 2008).

The communal benefits of outdoor recreation are also worth noting, fostering a sense of connection and belonging through shared experiences like hiking, camping, or leisurely walks in the park. Such activities not only strengthen social bonds but also engender a collective stewardship and appreciation for our natural surroundings. This communal aspect of outdoor recreation contributes to building resilient, supportive communities that value and protect their natural surroundings (Puhakka 2023).

At the individual level, several scientific findings have further advanced our understanding of the benefits that come with outdoor recreation. Significantly, research indicates that spending upwards of 120 minutes per week in nature yields substantial health benefits. This threshold effect, as documented by White et al. (2019), reveals that individuals surpassing this benchmark report markedly better well-being and fewer health problems compared to those who spend less time in nature. This insight suggests an optimal engagement duration with nature, offering a concrete, attainable goal for enhancing health and happiness through natural interaction.

In another study similar in its aims, Bratman et al. (2015) provided compelling evidence of the psychological benefits of nature exposure. The researchers found that participants who walked for 90

minutes in a natural environment reported lower levels of rumination—a key marker of depression risk—compared to those who walked in an urban setting. This study suggests that spending time in natural settings can directly influence mood and mental state, potentially reducing the risk of depression (Bratman et al. 2015).

Regarding specific mental health disorders, research indicates that regular engagement with nature can be particularly effective in combating anxiety and depression. A study by Berman, Jonides, and Kaplan (2008) found that memory and mood significantly improved after participants walked in a park, highlighting the cognitive and emotional benefits of interacting with natural environments. In 2018, Twohig-Bennett and Jones conducted a systematic review and found that exposure to green space significantly reduces cortisol levels, suggesting a strong link between nature exposure and stress reduction. Finally, a meta study completed in 2021 states that “46 out of 51 selected studies reported at least one positive association between nature-based recreation and mental health, including improvements in affect, cognition, restoration, and a sense of well-being,” (Lackey et al. 2021).

In conclusion, this examination of outdoor recreation's myriad benefits unveils the profound and lasting impact that nature exerts on human health, well-being, and developmental trajectories throughout one's life. The journey from foundational theories of stress reduction and attention restoration to groundbreaking studies on "green exercise" weaves a rich tapestry that ardently supports integrating the natural world into the fabric of our everyday lives. The therapeutic virtues of nature, demonstrated through marked reductions in stress, enhancements in mood and cognitive function, and bolstered physical health, affirm nature's indispensable place within a harmonious lifestyle. Moreover, the exploration of child development alongside the exploration of "nature-deficit disorder" casts a spotlight on the imperative for early and sustained engagement in the outdoors. This not only champions personal growth and educational advancement but also confronts the pressing mental health issues of our time. The social benefits derived from collective outdoor endeavors further amplify the

importance of communal experiences in nature, fostering deep bonds within communities and engendering a shared reverence for our natural surroundings. Thus, this section does not merely catalog the advantages of outdoor recreation but advocates for its critical role in enhancing public health, strengthening community resilience, and ensuring that future generations maintain a vibrant and meaningful connection with the natural world.

Historical Exclusion of Black Americans from Nature

If nature yields so many critical benefits, it is particularly damaging that some groups of people have been historically excluded from or harmed in the outdoors.

“For me, the fear is like a heartbeat always present, while at the same time intangible, elusive, and difficult to define. So pervasive, so much a part of me, that I hardly knew it was there.”
(White 1999)

To some, this quote may seem like a fitting description of one’s emotional recounting after a life lived in a war-torn country. To others, it is a sort of vindication as it proves that they are not the only ones who may have felt this way in the outdoors. The quote above was pulled from a short article titled, *Black Women in Wilderness*, in which author Evelyn White (1999) described her sentiments through her first true experience in the western wilderness. Highlighted is the emotion of fear that in some cases comes from the collective memory of both slavery and Jim Crow laws which continue to inform the outdoor recreational experiences of Black Americans even today (Finney 2014).

The "Red Summer" of 1919 provides a crucial historical backdrop for understanding disparities in outdoor recreation among African Americans compared to their White counterparts. This period was marked by a wave of white supremacist terrorism and racial riots across the United States, deeply affecting African American communities and their relationship with public spaces.

During the "Red Summer" of 1919, the Chicago Race Riot emerged as one of the most intense confrontations among the roughly 25 race riots of the period. This particular outbreak was sparked by the tragic drowning of Eugene Williams, a Black teenager. Williams had unknowingly drifted over a fabricated segregation line at 29th St. Beach in Lake Michigan, setting off a chain of events that emphasized the deadly consequences of racial boundaries. His death, and the subsequent refusal of the police to arrest the White aggressors, led to a week of violent clashes between Black and White residents in Chicago, resulting in 38 deaths (23 Black, 15 White) and leaving over 500 people injured and more than 1,000 Black families homeless (Bates and Fuller 2019).

The aftermath of these riots, particularly the Chicago Race Riot, significantly impacted African Americans' relationship with public spaces, instilling a sense of fear and exclusion that persisted over generations. The memory of these events, such as the death of Eugene Williams, served as a stark reminder of the racial violence that African Americans could face in supposedly public and safe spaces. This historical context is essential for understanding the long-term effects on outdoor recreation behaviors among Black communities, influencing attitudes toward such activities and access to recreational spaces.

Addressing the theme of summer and urban recreation, public swimming pools have historically presented barriers for Black individuals in urban areas. In his book, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*, Professor Jeff Wiltse identified two separate periods in which swimming rates in the US boomed. Marked by the construction of roughly 2,000 new public pools throughout the country, the first boom was in the 1920s and 1930s when recreational swimming became popular. The second was in the 1950s and 1960s when swimming as a sport reached the mainstream. A 2010 report suggests various reasons for the higher likelihood of drowning among Black children and teenagers, including poor parental swimming skills, lack of early training, and insufficient lifeguard presence at pools frequented by Black families (Weiss 2010). These factors contribute to the pervasive stereotype that

Black people cannot swim, underlining a complex interplay of social, economic, and educational disparities that have led to this misconception.

Yet another popular pastime of White Americans that was unavailable to their Black counterparts was the exploration of national parks. The historical tapestry of America's national parks is woven with the contradictions of inclusion and exclusion, reflecting broader societal attitudes and policies. Despite the pivotal roles played by the Buffalo Soldiers and other BIPOC figures in serving as early park rangers and maintaining and mapping these natural treasures, discriminatory practices barred these very contributors from enjoying the fruits of their labor (Clark 2023). This exclusion starkly contrasts with the national parks' intended ethos as spaces of natural beauty and refuge for all Americans. The enduring legacy of such exclusions is a poignant reminder of the systemic barriers that have historically dictated access to outdoor spaces, underscoring a need for a critical reevaluation of how these natural spaces serve the public (Schatz 2022).

The persistence of racially discriminatory names in over 1,000 towns, lakes, streams, creeks, and mountain peaks across the United States stands as a testament to the deeply ingrained legacy of racism within the American landscape (Contreras 2021, USGS 2022). Such designations, which include derogatory terms, endure despite a national movement to confront and rectify historical injustices through the renaming of public spaces and the removal of Confederate monuments. This landscape of exclusion extends beyond mere nomenclature to the very access and use of national and state parks, which were historically conceived and managed as domains exclusive to White Americans (Associated Press 2020, Brune 2020, American Trails n.d.a, Asmelash 2021, Purdy 2015, Moore 2022).

The segregation of national parks, emblematic of wider societal segregations, was not formally abolished until 1945 (Mills 2020). Yet, this policy change did not instantly translate into universal accessibility; local resistance persisted, underscoring the deeply entrenched nature of racial segregation within the United States. KangJae Lee's research into the racial gap in outdoor recreation reveals that

national and state parks were explicitly designed and maintained as white spaces, contributing to what is now recognized as “the adventure gap” (Mills 2014; Scott and Lee 2018, Asmelash 2021). This gap not only reflects disparities in physical access but also signifies a broader disenfranchisement from the cultural and psychological benefits afforded by close interaction with nature (Schatz 2022). Even as late as 1952, the exclusion was starkly quantifiable: Black Americans had access to only 12 of the 180 state parks across nine southern states (Moore 2022). This statistic is not merely an artifact of past injustices but a stark illustration of the systemic barriers that have historically dictated who benefits from America’s natural resources.

Since its inception, the leaders of the movement to deploy the idea of national parks, also known as “America’s best idea” (Burns 2009), had connections to deeply troubling ideologies such as racism and eugenics (Brune 2020). The movement, in its infancy, was marked by a paradox: the pursuit of preserving the pristine and untouched wilderness, while simultaneously endorsing policies and practices that excluded or displaced those who lived in harmony with these lands for centuries. A quote from a 2015 article stated this eloquently when the author wrote, “They created and preserved versions of the wild that promised to exclude the human qualities they despised,” (Purdy 2015, para. 9). These connections, while perhaps not immediately apparent, are pivotal to understanding the complex legacy of conservation in the United States and its implications for social justice and environmental policy today. Born in 1913, Madison Grant was a conservationist whose efforts led to the protection of numerous natural areas and the establishment of several national parks. He was instrumental in saving the American bison from extinction, supported the establishment of the Bronx Zoo, and played a key role in the creation of Denali and Glacier National Parks (Wagner and Meldon n.d.). As a co-founder of the Save-the-Redwoods League, Grant also contributed to the preservation of ancient redwood forests. This, however, is only one piece of the story. In 1916, Grant published *The Passing of the Great Race, or The Racial Basis of European History*. Grant’s racial theories, which categorized Nordics as a superior “natural

aristocracy," significantly influenced early 20th-century policies and ideologies, including the Immigration Act of 1924. This Act, deeply rooted in Grant's beliefs, severely restricted immigration from regions deemed "inferior," such as Eastern and Southern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The endorsement of Grant's book by figures such as Adolf Hitler, who referred to it as "my Bible," and its influence on contemporary extremists, highlights the deeply troubling impact of these racial theories on global and historical scales of violence and discrimination (Purdy 2015).

The connection between conservation and eugenics is further illustrated through the commendation of Grant's work by President Theodore Roosevelt, a pivotal figure in the American conservation movement. Roosevelt's praise for *The Passing of the Great Race* underscores the entwined nature of conservationist ideology with eugenic and racist beliefs at the time. This praise was not merely private admiration but was publicly acknowledged, appearing as a blurb on later editions of the book, thereby lending presidential endorsement to its eugenicist content (Purdy 2015).

Gifford Pinchot, a leading figure in American conservation, also exemplifies the intersection of conservation with eugenic ideologies. His roles as a delegate to the International Eugenics Congress and a member of the advisory council of the American Eugenics Society cement his and the conservation movement's ties to eugenics. Pinchot's influence extended deep into the institutional frameworks of American conservation, appointed by Roosevelt to pivotal positions such as the head of the National Conservation Commission and the new Forest Service. These roles allowed Pinchot to shape conservation practices with an ideology that, at its core, was influenced by eugenic beliefs (Purdy 2015).

John Muir, another iconic figure in the conservation movement and founder of the Sierra Club, was contemporaneous with these other leaders, suggesting that the ideological environment of the time was ripe with overlapping themes of conservation and eugenics. While Muir is primarily celebrated for his contributions to the preservation of natural spaces and his Romantic naturalist philosophy, the broader context of his era and his associations with figures like Roosevelt and Pinchot raise questions about how

these interconnected ideologies influenced the goals and methods of the conservation movement (Associated Press 2020, Brune 2020, D. Taylor 2016, Q. Taylor 1998).

With all of this in mind, it is important to examine the differences in ideologies when it comes to existing in nature amongst Black and White Americans. The conceptualization and interaction with nature have historically been framed within distinct cultural paradigms, influenced by the geographical, social, and historical contexts of the Eastern and Western worlds. However, within the Western context, particularly in the United States, these interactions and conceptualizations are further complicated by racial ideologies and biases that have pervaded societal attitudes and behaviors toward nature and wilderness. This exploration delves into the nuanced differences in how Black and White Americans perceive and engage with the concept of existing within nature, underpinned by historical legacies and racial frames that shape these interactions.

At the core of these differences lies what Feagin (2013) describes as a "White racial frame," a pervasive worldview that systematically privileges white perspectives and behaviors while casting those of people of color in a negative light (Feagin, 2013, p. 3). This racial framing extends into perceptions of nature and wilderness, influencing who is seen as belonging in or entitled to interact with natural spaces. The American narrative of wilderness exploration and settlement has been predominantly constructed around white experiences and achievements, often ignoring or undermining the complex relationships that people of color have with the land.

The historical context of the United States' westward expansion further exemplifies the racialized dynamics of interacting with the wilderness. The movement westward, often romanticized in American history, was fraught with violence and dispossession, particularly against Indigenous peoples. However, lesser known are the instances where Black individuals and communities were implicated in these colonial endeavors. Taylor (1998) highlights a moment in 1833 when the Black-led Third Annual Convention for the Improvement of Free People of Color in Philadelphia advocated for the emigration of

Black people to Mexican Texas. At the same time, White-led conventions framed the wilderness as a space to be conquered and settled, mirroring the settler colonial logic of the time (Taylor, 1998, p. 81). This narrative complicates the simplistic dichotomy of oppressor and victim by revealing how the intersections of race, colonialism, and nature were navigated by Black communities.

These historical episodes underscore the importance of recognizing the diverse and multifaceted ways Black Americans have engaged with the concept of wilderness. Far from a monolithic experience, the relationship between Black people and natural spaces has been shaped by a myriad of factors, including forced displacement, survival, and the search for autonomy and freedom. The call for emigration to the "western wilds" by Black leaders in the 19th century reflects a nuanced understanding of wilderness not just as a site of displacement or alienation but also as a potential space for liberation and self-determination.

These examples expose the key differences in both the thoughts and observed experiences that exist between White and Black/African Americans. As explained by David Lowenthal, biblical texts that informed many Europeans and early settlers of the Americas asserted that wilderness, as a whole, should be domesticated and subdued (Lowenthal 2000). This stands in sharp contrast to the beliefs of many farming and hunting communities like those in pre-colonial America and Africa who believed and continue to believe that the land and their cultural ties to it should be thought of as sacred (Meeker 1973). Neither perspective lends itself to the experience of Black Americans due to the subdual of enslaved Africans in the nation's early history. These Africans and their descendants worked the land for centuries which gave them an acute understanding of the natural environment around them while also providing valuable insight into what crops they may be able to grow for their personal gardens (Stewart 2006). Slaves also spent time hunting and fishing to provide additional nutrients which were likely invaluable to being able to properly feed both themselves and their families (Giltner 2006).

Yet all of the time spent harvesting and hunting for both themselves and a master could not cultivate the same emotional ties that Native Americans had to the land, nor did it create the desire to dominate the ground they stood upon. Writer and prominent member of the Black Panther Party, Eldridge Cleaver, attempted to inform audiences why this may be and concluded that centuries of subjugation and punishment led to a point in which, "Black people learned to hate the land" (Cleaver 1969, 84). The societal imprint that slavery has left through centuries continues to impact the participation rates in outdoor recreational activities seen among Black Americans. But what other factors have created such a divide between this group and their White counterparts?

Current Trends

The statistical landscape of Black Americans' participation in outdoor recreational activities, as outlined in various studies and reports, sheds light on the current state of affairs in this domain. These statistics are crucial for understanding the extent of engagement and the disparities that exist in access to and utilization of outdoor spaces by Black individuals compared to other demographic groups. A 2014 study highlighted a significant racial disparity within environmental organizations, where Whites occupied 89% of leadership positions, suggesting a broader trend of underrepresentation of Black Americans in the environmental sector (Purdy 2015). This disparity extends to the visitation of the country's 424 national parks, where Black people constituted only 6% of visitors in 2018 while White Americans were 88%-95% of all visitors, according to the most recent data from the National Park Service (Adams 2023; Swanson 2023; NPS 2023). Additionally, 83% of National Park Service employees are White, and 62% are male (Askew and Walls 2019). Such underrepresentation is stark when considering the increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the United States, with projections indicating that a majority of the population will be people of color by 2044 (Armstrong and Greene 2022, Vespa et al.

2020). The demographics of long-distance hikers further illustrate the disparities, with 94% to 96% of Appalachian Trail thru-hikers identifying as White (Evans 2020). Despite these challenges, Black Americans in a 2019 survey reported more support (88%) than discouragement (35%) when participating in outdoor recreational activities, underscoring the importance of social support in encouraging participation (Jones 2020).

Research has further shown that participation rates differ among different demographic groups in outdoor recreation. Women of color, individuals with low-income status, and those residing in rural areas participate less in outdoor recreation compared to White men, with participation rates being even lower for individuals belonging to more than one marginalized social group (Shores, Scott and Floyd 2007; Yousefian et al. 2009; Burns and Graefe 2007; Powers et al. 2020). Again, this disparity is further highlighted by economic factors, with Americans with household incomes over \$150,000 being far more likely to visit national parks than those with incomes less than \$10,000, underscoring the intersection of racial and economic barriers in outdoor recreation participation (Taylor et al. 2011; Xiao et al. 2021). Along with economic factors, the reasons why individuals decide to recreate outdoors or not are also quite telling. Historical trauma associated with natural environments, as reported by 66% of participants in a 2018 study, suggests that the legacy of slavery and lynchings during the Jim Crow era continues to impact the perceptions of forests and outdoor spaces among African Americans (Goodrid 2018). Such historical associations likely contribute to feelings of fear or discomfort in these settings, especially if these beliefs are further compounded by the ostracization of an individual who desires to adventure in those historically racist spaces.

Data regarding access to outdoor spaces can also be a very telling piece of this larger issue. Communities of color and low-income communities face heightened nature deprivation, with 74% of communities of color and 70% of low-income communities living in areas with limited access to natural spaces. This contrast is stark when compared to White communities, of which only 23% are nature-

deprived (Rowland-Shea et al. 2020). In Massachusetts, the disparity is even more pronounced, with 94% of Black residents living in nature-deprived areas compared to 14% of White residents (Rowland-Shea et al. 2020).

The statistics outlined thus far vividly illustrate the current state of Black Americans' engagement with outdoor recreational activities, drawing attention to the marked discrepancies in access and participation rates. This significant underrepresentation, especially in environmental leadership roles and national park visitation, points to deeper systemic issues necessitating concerted actions to enhance diversity and inclusiveness within these spaces.

Leisure Constraints

While seemingly traumatizing for some citizens, the opportunity to explore the American wilderness is largely regarded as an activity of privilege. According to two studies by Taylor et al. (2011) and Xiao et al. (2021), who both analyzed a 2008-2009 National Park Survey, 69% of Americans with household incomes of over \$150,000 reported that they had visited one or more national parks in the past two years, compared with only 22% of Americans with household incomes of less than \$10,000 (Taylor et al. 2011, Xiao et al. 2021). To look at the issue of wealth in America more broadly, ten years later the Census Bureau reported that in 2019 the median income for White American households was \$76,057, about \$30,000 higher than Black Americans' median income of \$46,073 (Semega et al. 2020). Such a vast gap may, in part, explain the difference in participation rates given that the lack of access to financial resources is considered a "leisure constraint". A term coined by David Scott in 2005, leisure constraints are factors that limit people's participation in, use, and enjoyment of leisure activities such as visiting national parks (Scott and Lee 2018). Lee and Scott have defined leisure constraints as a combination of three critical yet separate elements that come together to form a more comprehensive

understanding as to why Black Americans may recreate outdoors with less frequency than their white counterparts. The three elements are (1) limited socioeconomic resources, (2) cultural factors and boundary maintenance, and (3) discrimination and White racial frames (Scott and Lee 2018).

Concerning the financial burden of venturing into the great outdoors, an article from 2000 surveyed citizens from New Hampshire and Vermont to understand how user fees impacted park and forest visitation rates. Although racial demographics were not studied, the differences in attitudes among three different income brackets – lower, middle, and upper – were substantial. These differences were highlighted when researchers asked low-, middle-, and upper-income groups if an increase in access fees of \$5 (equates to \$8.81 as of 2024) per visit would influence their participation in winter/spring activities. They answered yes at the rate of 49.2%, 36.7%, and 33.3% respectively (More and Stevens 2000). While the study categorized the low-income group as individuals or households making \$30,000 or less in 2000, it is worth mentioning that 46.5% of non-Hispanic Black households in 2022 earned \$50,000 or less per year (Statista 2023).

Taylor et al. (2011) further prove this point by noting that affluent Americans are substantially more likely to engage in such visits compared to their economically disadvantaged counterparts. The correlation between household income and park visitation rates starkly illustrates how economic disparities curtail access to leisure activities that are otherwise perceived as universally available. Scott (2013) and McCarville (2008) discuss the multifaceted nature of leisure constraints, emphasizing that low-income Americans, irrespective of race, face a myriad of barriers, including a lack of information, concerns over safety and equipment costs, poor English speaking skills, transportation issues, and other financial limitations that collectively deter participation in outdoor recreation.

Discrimination and racial bias deeply permeate the experience of Black Americans in outdoor recreational settings, reinforcing the belief that these amenities are not intended for them. The historical context of segregation, alongside ongoing discriminatory practices, exacerbates feelings of alienation

and unwelcomeness in predominantly white spaces (Lee and Scott 2016, Sharaievska et al. 2014). This exclusion is maintained not only through direct acts of discrimination but also through a White racial frame that privileges white norms and behaviors, effectively marginalizing and scrutinizing the actions of Black individuals in outdoor settings (Feagin 2013, Austin 1997-1998).

The outdoors are often perceived as a neutral space free from societal biases. But racism in the outdoors can manifest in various direct and indirect ways that profoundly affect African American adventurers (Goodrid 2018, Evans 2020, Asmelash 2021, Segran 2021, Curtis 2020, Pires 2018). The experiences of Black Americans in natural settings highlight the pervasive nature of racism, extending even into the realms considered to be escapes from the urban social fabric. For instance, the act of vandalism encountered by an African American fisherman, where his truck's tires were slashed and brake lines "yanked out" by unidentified individuals after a day of fishing, serves as a stark illustration of targeted racial hostility (Brown 2020). Furthermore, accusations on social media of "taking" fly-fishing from white people substantiate the sense of entitlement and proprietary attitudes held by some white individuals towards outdoor activities, falsely portraying these spaces as their exclusive domain (Brown 2020). Other instances of racism in the outdoors include a Black family from Sacramento who was harassed and threatened at a Nevada campground (Gay 2020), the experiences of a Black queer woman hiking the Appalachian Trail (Curtis 2020), a Black hiker who was almost lynched near Lake Monroe in Indiana (Flynn 2020), and tragically, a Black man who was hanged from a tree in 2024 along a popular trail in the Swallow Creek Wildlife Management Area, Georgia (Morris 2024).

These incidents are symptomatic of a broader historical context where racism has been a constant element in the lives of people of color, shaping their interactions with society and nature alike. The assertion that America's racial issues are a "boiling pot of water that has passed its boiling point" encapsulates the enduring struggle of POC against racism's pervasive influence (Brown 2020). This

historical canvas is critical to understanding the challenges faced by African Americans in outdoor spaces, which are not immune to the racial power dynamics that govern broader society.

The framing of outdoor recreation as an open and accessible activity, devoid of any formal barriers like applications or tests, fails to acknowledge how Whiteness operates within these spaces. Responses to an article by the Sierra Club titled, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Hiking and How to Solve It", about the racial exclusivity of outdoor activities reveal a refusal to acknowledge racial disparities, with some asserting that the absence of overt barriers implies a level playing field for all. Two comments that accentuate this point are as follows:

- "Seriously? ? Anyone can go to a national or state park and walk around. If certain people don't go it's because they have no interest in going, why in the world am I "unbearable" just because I'm white? ? Freakin racists. You people are morons."
- "'The Unbearable Blackness of Basketball and How to Solve It' = RACIST
'The Unbearable Blackness of Africa and How to Solve It' = RACIST
'The Unbearable Jewishness of Hollywood and How to Solve It' = RACIST
'The Unbearable Jewishness of Israel and How to Solve It' = RACIST
'The Unbearable Whiteness of Hiking and How to Solve It' = PROGRESSIVE"
(Vestal and Nichols 2016, comments on article).

This perspective overlooks the subtle yet impactful ways in which racial biases manifest, from social exclusion to the assumption of African Americans' disinterest in outdoor activities. The discomfort, anger, and defensiveness that arise when confronting these issues further highlight the resistance to acknowledging racial inequalities in the enjoyment of nature.

The pervasive nature of racism in the outdoors, as experienced by African American adventurers, underscores the need for a concerted effort to promote inclusivity and dismantle the racial biases that mar the enjoyment of natural spaces. From overt acts of hostility to the denial of racial factors influencing outdoor recreation, these experiences reveal the multifaceted challenges that African Americans face in seeking solace and enjoyment in the great outdoors. Recognizing and addressing these issues is crucial in ensuring that outdoor spaces truly serve as sanctuaries for all, regardless of race.

“White People Shit”

The last of the three categories of leisure constraints relates to the group norms and boundaries that exist within the Black community. Cultural dynamics play a pivotal role in shaping leisure preferences and perceptions of outdoor spaces among Black Americans. The ethnicity hypothesis, as explored by Floyd and Stodolska (2014), suggests that cultural norms and socialization practices significantly influence leisure activities, leading to a pronounced underutilization of outdoor recreational areas by African Americans. This underutilization is further compounded by historical associations of wilderness areas with trauma and oppression, making these spaces less appealing and even distressing for many within the African American community (Johnson and Bowker 2004). This becomes abundantly apparent when examining a tweet from 2023. A user had posted a tweet explaining that until the Civil Rights Act was passed, Black people were not allowed entry into State and National Parks, a resource that has since been deemed, “America’s Best Idea” (Burns 2009). In response to this, another twitter user known as Dwele posted, “Nah this is true because growing up, anything outdoorsy we referred to as ‘white people shit.’” (Dwele 2023).

The perceptions and participation of Black Americans in outdoor recreation are characterized by a diverse range of opinions and experiences, reflecting broader cultural narratives and personal apprehensions. These perspectives range from enthusiasm and recognition of outdoor activities as a natural birthright to skepticism and feelings of exclusion based on racial identity.

Some individuals within the Black community express excitement about engaging in outdoor activities such as camping, wilderness first aid, and water safety. However, this interest is often met with mixed reactions from friends and family, with some echoing the sentiment that such activities are predominantly “White people stuff” (Adams 2023). This dichotomy highlights a broader societal indoctrination that has led some Black individuals to internalize beliefs that they do not belong in

outdoor spaces. Safety concerns and feelings of unease in outdoor settings are also very prevalent among Black adventurers, with some wishing for a carefree experience where they can embrace nature's healing potential without fear (Brown 2020). Selecting companions for outdoor activities becomes a crucial consideration for individuals concerned about keeping pace and ensuring a sense of security and belonging on the trail (Dorwart et al. 2019). This assumes that someone has a group of people who would want to try activities such as hiking, kayaking, or rock climbing, which is very often not the case for Black Americans, especially those who live in urban settings (Dorwart et al. 2019). The concept of a "racialized outdoor leisure identity," described by Martin (2004), further captures the societal stereotype that associates wildland recreation with being young, rugged, adventurous, and predominantly White. This perception may alienate urban Black individuals who identify more with cosmopolitan values, thus discouraging participation in outdoor recreation due to a perceived mismatch with their self-image (Martin 2004).

Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition within the Black community of the need for healing and reconnection with the outdoors. This understanding is grounded in the belief that access to nature and outdoor recreation is a fundamental right (Adams 2023). Robert Lee's (1972) pioneering observation that outdoor recreational settings are culturally contextualized further highlights the importance of acknowledging and valuing the diverse meanings different groups attach to these spaces (Lee 1972). This means that all visitors, regardless of their cultural background, must accept that their fellow recreators might conceptualize and use an outdoor space differently than they would. Amid these diverse viewpoints, some Black individuals actively challenge misconceptions by affirming their presence in outdoor spaces and engaging in activities like hiking, fishing, and camping. These affirmations serve to dispel the notion that outdoor recreation is exclusive to any particular racial group (Sun 2022) even though common channels of media do not always represent this truth in earnest.

Many individuals' attitudes and behaviors are significantly shaped by their concerns about how they are perceived by others, a phenomenon that is particularly pronounced within the Black community. Many strive to be "authentically Black", hoping to counteract negative societal perceptions (Finney 2014). This quest for authenticity has inadvertently fostered a narrow view of Black identity, often excluding participation in outdoor recreational activities beyond common sports like basketball or soccer. This cultural constriction has led to a notable absence of Black adventurers in mainstream media, reinforcing the belief among Black youth and adults that outdoor recreation is not a typical pursuit for Black people. Carolyn Finney, in her book *Black Faces, White Spaces* (2014), powerfully illustrates this issue of underrepresentation. Finney's analysis of 44 issues of the magazine *Outside* revealed that out of 4,602 images featuring people, only 103 depicted Black individuals, most of whom were portrayed in advertisements rather than as enthusiasts of outdoor activities. This stark disparity not only reflects the editorial perspectives of predominantly white media outlets but also underscores the connection between media representation and the low engagement of Black Americans in outdoor activities (Finney 2014).

This examination sheds light on the broader issue of how societal perceptions and media portrayals significantly impact the participation of Black Americans in the great outdoors. In conclusion, the exploration of leisure constraints within the Black community, influenced by cultural dynamics, historical associations, and societal stereotypes, presents a multifaceted challenge to increasing participation in outdoor recreational activities among African Americans. Despite the enthusiasm of some individuals and the recognition of outdoor activities as a natural and fundamental right, prevailing misconceptions and fears, coupled with a societal push towards a narrowly defined "authentic" Black identity, have significantly hindered broader engagement. The impact of media representation, or the lack thereof, further exacerbates these issues, as demonstrated by the minimal presence of Black individuals in outdoor recreation imagery. Yet, amidst these barriers, there is a growing

movement within the Black community towards healing, reconnection, and the assertion of their rightful place in outdoor spaces. By actively challenging misconceptions and embracing the diversity of experiences and identities within their community, Black Americans are paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable outdoor recreational landscape. This shift towards inclusivity not only enriches the outdoor experience for all but also serves as a crucial step toward dismantling the racialized barriers that have long defined the boundaries of outdoor engagement.

Solutions

Safety and Representation

The need for outdoor spaces to provide a sense of safety and inclusivity to its diverse visitors is a critical consideration for promoting outdoor recreation among minorities. The following section explores various strategies and initiatives aimed at fostering welcoming environments in outdoor recreational areas. These approaches collectively highlight the potential for increased feelings of safety and representation which in turn should positively impact minority participation in outdoor activities.

Though largely understated, the names of the geographical area in which outdoor recreation occurs can be critical indicator as to who is more likely to recreate in that space. The Department of the Interior's Secretary's Order (S.O.) 3404, issued on November 19, 2021, represents a significant step toward fostering inclusivity and respect within the United States' outdoor spaces. This order explicitly identifies the word "squaw" as derogatory, mandating the replacement of this term in all geographic names of natural features on all federal, state, local, and private land. The establishment of a 13-member Derogatory Geographic Names Task Force, comprising representatives from various bureaus within the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service, underscores a

comprehensive approach to addressing and rectifying the use of derogatory geographic feature names (USGS 2022).

The task force's mandate aligns with the Board on Geographic Names (BGN)'s existing policies against derogatory and offensive names, reflecting a longstanding commitment to eliminating pejorative terms from federal maps and publications. Notably, this effort builds on historical precedents set in 1963, when the word "negro" was banned, and 1974, when the BGN responded to requests to replace derogatory terms for African American and Japanese individuals in geographic names (USGS 2022). The significance of S.O. 3404 and the work of the Derogatory Geographic Names Task Force in making BIPOC adventurers more comfortable outdoors cannot be overstated. By actively removing derogatory terms from geographic names, the DOI demonstrates a clear commitment to creating outdoor environments that respect the dignity and identities of all individuals, particularly those from BIPOC communities. This action not only acknowledges the harm caused by the continued use of such terms but also plays a critical role in promoting a sense of belonging and safety for BIPOC adventurers. The proactive stance against derogatory names fosters a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere in outdoor spaces, encouraging greater participation and engagement from BIPOC communities in outdoor recreation and conservation efforts. With this in mind, what else can be done to make BIPOC visitors feel more welcomed in these outdoor spaces?

Firstly, the presence of security personnel in outdoor spaces is a nuanced issue. While individuals desire to feel safe on trails, there is a clear preference for non-police security measures. "Ambassadors" or "park rangers" are favored for their friendlier approach, in addition to infrastructure like call boxes in areas where safety is a concern (JEDI 2021). This approach addresses the need for safety while avoiding the historical discomfort associated with police presence.

Secondly, the design and infrastructure of outdoor spaces can greatly influence their perceived safety and accessibility (Lapham et al. 2016). Market research among residents of underserved

communities identified a strong desire for trails that act as green oases within urban environments, offering peaceful respite through creative design elements like water features, urban greening, and colorful landscapes (JEDI 2021). Similarly, clear signage that connects local trails to broader networks can encourage exploration and enhance the sense of welcome and orientation within these spaces (JEDI 2021).

The visibility of diverse groups enjoying outdoor spaces is also crucial. Representation in promotional materials and outreach efforts reassures BIPOC communities that they belong in these spaces. Leveraging local social media influencers to showcase diverse groups engaging in outdoor activities can help reshape perceptions and build a new, inclusive constituency for outdoor recreation (JEDI 2021).

Finally, the importance of confidence and the affirmation of belonging in outdoor spaces cannot be overstated. Inclusionary planning and programming activities can help to build outdoor spaces such as trails as well as a sense of ownership and belonging among users (Raskin 2020). Encouraging narratives, via digital and/or physical assets, that explicitly welcome BIPOC visitors and highlight their right to enjoy natural spaces is essential for overcoming barriers to participation. Moreover, integrating Black narratives into the storytelling and programming of parks, as aimed by interpretive and education specialists, emphasizes the need for diverse historical and cultural representation in outdoor spaces while also providing a more comprehensive understanding of the history of many outdoor spaces (Comeriatto 2020). Another possible avenue for intervention comes as a result of white encouragement. With experienced and open-minded White individuals serving as a guide or liaison of outdoor spaces, some Black hikers may feel more comfortable while adventuring outside. A quote from a 2016 article phrased this succinctly when a Japanese contributor said, "Because the outdoors remains a largely white domain, it is up to white America to invite communities of color in, to enlist us as allies." (Vestal and Nichols 2016). While safety remains a priority for those involved in outdoor recreation, it is essential that

the public is informed of both the amenities available to them and the benefits that come from recreating outdoors.

Education

The integration of educational offerings in outdoor spaces plays a pivotal role in fostering a deeper connection with nature among diverse visitors, particularly minorities. Regarding children, experts emphasize the lasting impact of early childhood interactions with the natural world, noting that such experiences can significantly influence a person's self-confidence and enjoyment of nature into adulthood (Askew and Walls 2019, Bourdeau n.d.a, b). This implies that by simply educating and encouraging children to play outside, a parent or guardian may be providing the child with a healthy coping skill that could benefit them into adulthood.

Education about the benefits and risks associated with recreating outdoors must, however, continue after childhood. One perspective provided from a 2019 article regarding the physical demands of outdoor activities underscores the importance of preparing individuals for the unique challenges posed by nature. This highlights the need for the physical fitness and readiness that differs significantly from indoor gym exercises (Dorwart et al. 2019). This view points to the necessity of incorporating educational components that prepare individuals for the physicality of outdoor recreation, ensuring they have the confidence and skills to engage fully in these activities. Similarly, clarity and inclusiveness in promoting outdoor activities are essential for making outdoor recreation more accessible. Dr. L. Michelle Baker emphasizes the importance of using clear, objective language in marketing materials to ensure that all potential participants, regardless of experience level, feel welcomed and adequately informed about what to expect (Taylor 2016).

The development of workshops and education programs for employees and partners, as practiced by organizations like Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI), further illustrates the value of education in enhancing the outdoor recreation experience for all visitors (REI 2021). By equipping staff with the knowledge to understand and address leisure constraints, park managers are better positioned to create strategies that facilitate visitation and engagement among diverse groups (Scott 2013). Providing information through storytelling could also serve as an excellent educational series within an outdoor space. Arrye Rosser, an interpretive and education specialist, highlights an initiative at the Cuyahoga Valley National Park to diversify its visitorship by incorporating Black narratives into the park's storytelling and programming (Comeriato 2020). This approach not only aims to broaden the park's appeal but also to ensure that its educational content is inclusive and reflective of the diverse histories and contributions of all communities to the natural landscape.

It is also important that park administrators and operators, like park visitors, be educated on both the history of a space and the potential hesitations that BIPOC individuals may hold preceding their visit. The application of psychological theories of motivation, such as those explored by Driver and colleagues, offers insights into the goals or reasons behind participation in outdoor activities (Driver et al. 1991; Manfreda et al., 1996). The Recreation Experience Preference (REP) scales, emerging from numerous studies, provide a framework for understanding visitor preferences across a wide array of outdoor activities and settings (Manning 2011). This knowledge enables park managers to allocate resources effectively, align offerings with visitor needs and preferences, mitigate conflicts, and plan for future opportunities that resonate with diverse communities.

Social Interaction

The creation of inclusive outdoor spaces that foster a sense of community among diverse visitors is essential to enhancing minority participation in outdoor recreational activities. Through a series of insightful perspectives, the importance of communal amenities, engaging activities, social interaction, and leadership representation is highlighted as pivotal in cultivating an environment where minorities feel welcomed and valued.

The provision of amenities designed for gathering and relaxation is a fundamental aspect of creating inclusive outdoor spaces. Features such as picnic areas, barbecue spots, playgrounds, and benches not only cater to the practical needs of families and groups but also serve as invitations for communal engagement and enjoyment of nature (JEDI 2021). Further, studies have shown that additional amenities that are well maintained improve the perception of safety within these parks which has been shown to lead to increased visitation by local citizens (Lapham et al 2016). These amenities support the social aspect of outdoor recreation, encouraging families and friends to spend quality time together in natural settings with assurance that they will not be harmed in the process.

Moreover, the organization of vibrant events and activities tailored to the tastes of diverse communities is instrumental in overcoming feelings of exclusion. Offering an array of compelling events, including live music, festivals, pop-up shops, and food trucks, signals a heartfelt invitation to community members, thus making outdoor spaces more appealing and accessible (JEDI 2021, Raskin 2020). These activities not only enhance the recreational experience but also strengthen community bonds and cultural appreciation. Special care should be taken to ensure that the programming is culturally relevant and that it appeals to a wide range of demographics (i.e., race, age, gender, ethnicity, etc.).

Research underscores the role of social interaction and the development of positive place meanings in fostering a sense of inclusion among trail users of all backgrounds. Encouraging interactions

among users increases the feeling of belonging and contributes to the creation of inclusive narratives associated with outdoor spaces (Armstrong and Greene 2022). This new sense of inclusion and pride for a given space has also been shown to correlate with increased levels of environmental stewardship later in life (Dunlap and Heffernan 1975, Tanner 1980, Lee 2017) which could be a critical inflection point as efforts to combat climate change continue.

Another important aspect of inclusion and community building can come from the formation of a BIPOC-centered advisory council. This act reflects a commitment to ensuring that the voices and perspectives of minority leaders are integral to shaping strategies for diversity, equity, inclusion, and environmental justice in outdoor recreation (REI 2021). Much like municipal planning, this approach underscores the necessity of authentic representation and leadership in guiding efforts to address inequities in outdoor access.

Finally, it is imperative not only to foster connections and leadership among minority participants in nature but also to cultivate a broader societal expectation and acceptance of diverse presences on the trail. As mentioned earlier, both white and black sentiment have shown a belief that certain activities are only for one race or another which conflicts with the goal of increasing BIPOC participation. Such a paradigm shift is crucial for normalizing and celebrating the participation of African Americans and other minorities in outdoor recreation (Scott and Lee 2018).

In sum, creating outdoor spaces that provide a sense of community for its diverse visitors is a multifaceted endeavor that requires thoughtful amenities, engaging activities, meaningful social interactions, dramatic shift in belief systems, and inclusive leadership. By implementing these strategies, outdoor spaces can become more welcoming and accessible to minorities, thereby promoting greater participation and enriching the outdoor experience for all.

Partnerships

The strategic formation of partnerships between for-profit ventures, non-profit organizations, and government agencies plays a crucial role in enhancing access to outdoor recreational activities, particularly for minority communities. These collaborations aim to address financial, social, and cultural barriers that traditionally limit minority participation in outdoor recreation. This synthesis examines various aspects of these partnerships and their potential to positively impact minority engagement in outdoor spaces.

The Outdoor Equity Grant Program, initiated by the state of New Mexico, is an innovative example of how governments can democratize access to outdoor spaces and promote BIPOC participation in outdoor activities. Established in 2019, the program provides grants to eligible organizations to support outdoor recreation and education programs for underserved youth, covering expenses such as equipment, fees, transportation, and staffing (Askew and Walls 2019). The program prioritizes funding for organizations serving communities with significant disparities in access to outdoor recreation opportunities and emphasizes culturally relevant and responsive programming. By collaborating with outdoor recreation businesses, the program leverages additional resources and expertise to enhance the quality and impact of funded programs.

The Outdoor Equity Grant Program not only supports individual participants but also builds the capacity of local organizations to serve as long-term advocates and providers of outdoor recreation opportunities. By investing in the development of a diverse and inclusive outdoor recreation workforce, the program lays the foundation for a more equitable and sustainable future for the outdoor industry. Further, programs like the Outdoor Equity Grant Program serve as powerful models for how governments can proactively address barriers to outdoor participation faced by BIPOC communities. Through targeted funding, cross-sector partnerships, and a commitment to cultural relevance and

representation, these initiatives can create a more accessible, welcoming, and empowering outdoor recreation landscape for all.

Non-profit organizations like the Outdoors Empowered Network and Bay Area Wilderness Training further contribute to this ecosystem by offering resources such as gear libraries and outdoor leadership training. These initiatives are pivotal in lowering financial thresholds and building competencies among underserved communities, facilitating greater engagement with the outdoors (Bourdeau n.d.a).

A notable partnership between Sun Outdoors, a Recreational Vehicle (RV) campground and excursion company, and Outdoor Afro, a national non-profit organization connecting Black Americans to outdoor recreation, showcases how for-profit entities can collaborate with non-profits to inspire and nurture Black connections and leadership in nature. Such partnerships not only broaden the scope of outreach but also ensure that efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion are informed by authentic insights and experiences from the communities they aim to serve (BPRW 2022).

One of the most prominent non-profit organizations in this field is Outdoor Afro. Outdoor Afro is a pioneering organization dedicated to connecting and engaging Black Americans with the natural world, while also fostering leadership in outdoor recreation, nature conservation, and environmental education. Founded by Rue Mapp in 2009, Outdoor Afro grew from a simple blog to a nationwide movement, and is now a significant force that challenges conventional narratives around who engages with the outdoors. With over 100 volunteer leaders in 60 cities across the United States, the organization reaches a network of 60,000 individuals, creating transformative outdoor experiences for the Black community (Outdoor Afro 2023).

Outdoor Afro operates under the principle that nature is a space for everyone, emphasizing the importance of inclusion and representation in outdoor activities. The organization offers a wide range of activities, from birdwatching and hiking to camping and environmental stewardship projects, tailored to

engage Black Americans of all ages and backgrounds. These activities not only aim to foster a deeper connection with nature but also to build a community around shared experiences in the outdoors. The organization's approach is multifaceted, focusing on overcoming the historical, cultural, and economic barriers that have traditionally limited Black Americans' participation in outdoor recreation. By prioritizing leadership development among Black individuals in the environmental sector, Outdoor Afro addresses the lack of diversity in outdoor and conservation leadership roles. This focus on empowerment and representation is crucial in creating a more inclusive and equitable outdoor culture.

Partnerships play a key role in Outdoor Afro's operations, collaborating with for-profit companies and non-profit organizations to amplify its impact. Currently, Outdoor Afro has partnerships with 16 organizations, which it classifies as "Summit" and "Adventure" partners. Summit partners include Sun Outdoors (outdoor vacations), The North Face (outdoor clothing and gear), REI Co-op (outdoor clothing and gear), Stanley (tools and outdoor gear), Keen (athletic footwear), Clif (energy bars and drinks), the Waverley Street Foundation (climate solutions with local leaders), and the Disney Corporation. Adventure partners include the Winnebago Industries Foundation, Eagles Nest Outfitters (ENO), Smartwool, Cerveza Pacifico Clara, Nuun Hydration, Kleen Kanteen, Hydro Flask, and Blundstone boots (Outdoor Afro 2023).

REI Co-op, a specialty outdoor retailer and the largest consumer co-operative in the country, has been at the forefront of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within the outdoor recreation sector. Through partnerships with organizations like Outdoor Afro, REI has influenced the industry's approach to DEI, leading to the development of more inclusive products and marketing strategies (REI 2022).

Founded in 1938, REI Co-op has 23 million members and 16,000 employees (REI 2024). The company's commitment to evolving the brand image of the outdoors reflects a broader industry-wide effort to demonstrate inclusion and expand opportunities for diverse communities. The REI Product

Impact Standards set expectations for diversity, equity, and inclusion among its brand partners, highlighting the significance of diverse representation and culturally sensitive product offerings (REI 2021).

Central to REI's strategy is the establishment of a BIPOC-centered Advisory Council, composed of external experts and leaders tasked with guiding the implementation of the Co-op's racial equity strategy and ensuring its authenticity and effectiveness in addressing outdoor access and environmental justice issues (REI 2021). REI also commits to fostering diversity within industry leadership and workforce through partnerships with organizations like Camber Outdoors (REI 2021).

Investments in a broad cohort of local, regional, and national nonprofits, such as Outdoor Afro, Latino Outdoors, Adaptive Adventures, Black Girls Do Bike, and many others, are crucial to REI's efforts in creating affirming spaces for historically underrepresented groups (REI 2023). These partnerships aim to connect diverse communities with the outdoors and build capacity among inclusion partners.

REI's commitment extends beyond the outdoor industry, advocating for issues at the intersection of race and the outdoors, such as environmental racism and climate justice. The Cooperative Action platform, launched in 2021, mobilizes REI's community and employees to address pressing societal issues, while the company's participation in the Time to Vote coalition and flexible scheduling options for employees underscore its dedication to civic engagement and empowerment (REI 2021). A myriad of organizations, spanning both for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, are dedicated to addressing the disparities in outdoor recreation participation among minority communities. These entities are at the forefront of pioneering initiatives aimed at dismantling the barriers to access and engagement in outdoor activities, fostering a culture of inclusivity, and promoting environmental stewardship among underrepresented groups. Their efforts range from providing financial assistance and educational programs to enhancing representation and leadership within the outdoor industry. The collaboration between these organizations and their partners underscores a collective commitment to creating

equitable outdoor experiences for all, regardless of socioeconomic background, race, or ethnicity. To facilitate further research and engagement, a comprehensive list of these organizations, detailing their missions, programs, and impact, is provided at the end of this thesis. This resource aims to not only highlight the extensive network of allies working towards a more inclusive outdoor community but also to inspire continued advocacy and participation in these transformative efforts.

The National Park Service

National Parks and other outdoor recreation agencies have recognized the lack of diversity among visitors and are also taking steps to address this issue. The National Park Service (NPS) has launched several initiatives to increase relevancy, diversity, and inclusion within the parks. In 2013, the NPS established the Office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion (RDI) to "build a safe, inclusive, [and] inviting environment" (Djossa, 2018). The RDI has taken this a step further and implemented internal programs such as Allies for Inclusion, which facilitates discussions among employees on topics like police violence and transphobia. Additionally, the NPS collaborates with nonprofits like Pride Outside to address the legacy of discrimination within public lands (Djossa, 2018).

An inventory of Relevance, Diversity, and Inclusion (RDI) programs revealed that approximately 60% of reported efforts encouraged community members and youth to experience the NPS (Schultz, 2019). Furthermore, almost 54% of reported RDI programs collaborated with external partners, signifying an opportunity for the agency to expand their partnerships and cultivate greater diversity in community relationships (Schultz, 2019). Stanfeld McCown et al. (2012, as cited in Schultz, 2019) highlighted the importance of ensuring target audiences gain in-depth experiences and establish long-term relationships with National Park sites. Strengthening the depth of these relationships will enable managers to provide

diverse audiences and communities with an opportunity to understand the NPS, its mission, and available careers in the agency (Schultz, 2019).

To encourage visitation from diverse communities, the NPS introduced the Every Kid Outdoors initiative in 2015, which offers free admission to fourth graders and their families (Box, 2022; Djossa, 2018). This program helps break down cost barriers and enables schools, particularly Title IX schools, to receive reimbursement for transportation costs through National Park Foundation grants (Djossa, 2018). Similarly, California State Parks launched the Adventure Pass, providing free day use for fourth graders and their families at 19 parks for a year. The California Golden Bear Pass also offers free vehicle day-use passes to low-income families at over 200 parks and beaches (Mercer, 2022).

Other agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), have also developed programs to engage urban and diverse audiences. The U.S. Forest Service launched the Urban Connections program, while the USFWS introduced the Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative to increase the agency's relevancy to urban citizens and diversify the conservation constituency (Schultz, 2019). State-level initiatives, like the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation (MOOR), provide grants to organizations that facilitate inclusive and accessible outdoor recreation events, aiming to make Massachusetts the most welcoming, diverse, and accessible place for outdoor recreation (MOOR, 2024).

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

In this study, I conducted two distinct types of interviews to better understand the experiences and perceptions of Black Americans as it related to outdoor recreation. Further, I wanted to gather insights from stakeholders within the outdoor industry to gain insight into how these professionals

conceptualize the issue of the lack of Black participation in outdoor recreational activities. The first set consisted of intercept interviews with 20 Black Americans, each ranging from five to fifteen minutes in duration. These brief intercept interviews were designed to capture immediate and current reactions and thoughts from participants regarding their perception and/or engagement in outdoor activities. The second set involved semi-structured interviews with seven stakeholders from the outdoor industry. These interviews, lasting between thirty and 60 minutes, allowed for a more comprehensive and in-depth discussion, providing valuable perspectives on systemic issues, potential interventions, and strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing diversity and inclusivity within the outdoor recreation sector. Together, these interviews provided a multifaceted view of the challenges and opportunities at the intersection of race, accessibility, and outdoor recreation.

Intercept Interviews

1. Stereotypes and Outdoor Perceptions

A. Challenging the Stereotype of the "Typical" Outdoorsy Person

As expected, these interviews revealed a common perception among African Americans that the "typical" outdoorsy person is associated with a specific, stereotypical image. However, several participants challenged this notion, emphasizing that anyone, regardless of race or appearance, can engage in outdoor activities. Lex, who initially associated being outdoorsy with a "stereotypical image (white, raw almonds, Birkenstocks)," has since broadened his view to include anyone, stressing that outdoor activities provide balance, purpose, and interconnectivity (Lex 2024). When asked the same question, A. Dottie echoed this sentiment, by stating, "A human. There's no specific look for an outdoorsy person." Esther also defied the stereotype by sharing her diverse interests in hiking, camping,

and kayaking, despite not fitting the traditional "outdoorsy" mold. The importance of challenging and dismantling stereotypes that limit the perception of who can participate in outdoor recreation is highlighted by these interviewees' testimony (A. Dottie 2024). Recognizing and dismissing these stereotypes can help African Americans begin to feel that they belong in outdoor spaces, regardless of their appearance or background.

B. Perception of Certain Activities as "White People Stuff"

Despite the desire to resist stereotypes, many interviewees acknowledged a prevalent perception within the African American community that certain outdoor activities, such as hiking, camping, and skiing, are often seen as "white people stuff" or "white people shit." Two Tufts undergraduate students, Lori and Nia recognized the phrase "white people shit" as relating to outdoor activities, indicating a common association within their community (Lori 2024, Nia 2024). Other words used that express this sentiment were, "crunchy" and "granola". Ace described "white people shit" as a lifestyle linked to economic status rather than specific activities, suggesting a perception that lifestyle opportunities are divided along racial and economic lines (Ace Boogie 2024). Shane and Valerie, as well as Carl and Meron, also referenced the phrase "white people shit" when discussing outdoor pursuits, underlining the pervasiveness of this sentiment (Shane 2024, Valerie 2024, Carl 2024, Meron 2024). Sakhu deviated slightly from this framing by his reference to a "European" identity being the common denominator of those who recreate outdoors with frequency (Sakhu 2024). This perception of outdoor activities as being primarily for white people can act as a significant barrier to African American participation. It can lead to feelings of exclusion, discomfort, and a lack of belonging in outdoor spaces. Addressing and challenging this perception is crucial in creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for African Americans in outdoor recreation.

II. Barriers to Outdoor Engagement

A. Economic and Financial Constraints

A major barrier to outdoor engagement identified by the participants was the high cost associated with outdoor activities and equipment. Several interviewees emphasized that the financial investment required for activities like hiking, skiing, and camping was a significant deterrent for many in the African American community. A. Dottie explained, "Economic disparities are a major barrier preventing black people from participating in traditionally costly outdoor activities like hiking and skiing," (A. Dottie 2024). Ace reinforced this point, stating, "Finances are probably the primary barrier preventing black people from getting outside more. You need financial freedom to afford the necessary gear and experiences," (Ace Boogie 2024). These economic factors play a crucial role in limiting access to outdoor recreation for African Americans. The high costs associated with gear, travel, and participation fees can make outdoor activities seem like a luxury rather than an accessible pastime. Addressing these financial barriers through initiatives such as gear libraries, scholarships, and community-based programs may help increase access and participation among African Americans.

B. Lack of Access and Exposure

Another significant barrier illuminated in the interviews was the lack of access to natural spaces and exposure to outdoor activities. Lex, JR, and Devon mentioned that growing up in urban areas with limited green spaces and opportunities hindered their ability to engage with nature (Lex 2024, JR 2024, Devon 2024). Lex provided anecdotal evidence of this when he noted, "I grew up on Massachusetts Avenue, so I never really had an opportunity to see anything green. The closest thing to me was the Muddy River, the Esplanade, things like that, but that's not like real forest stuff," (Lex 2024). JR discussed the strategic placement of black communities in locations with limited access to nature, implying that these were not coincidental but systematic issues (JR 2024). Devon also identified accessibility and lack

of nearby natural resources as barriers to hiking and outdoor participation for urban dwellers, particularly those from African American communities (Devon 2024). This lack of access and exposure can perpetuate the perception that outdoor activities are not for African Americans. Without easy access to green spaces and opportunities to engage with nature, many African Americans may not develop an interest or comfort level with outdoor recreation. Increasing access to parks, trails, and outdoor programs in urban areas could be a key intervention to bridge this gap and foster a stronger connection to nature within African American communities.

C. Cultural Norms and Perceptions of Safety/Risk

Cultural norms and perceptions of safety and risk also emerged as prominent factors influencing African Americans' engagement with outdoor activities. Demi expressed a perception that outdoor activities can seem dangerous and unnecessarily risky which may contribute to their characterization as "white people things" due to cultural differences in perceived safety and leisure activities (Demi 2024). Additionally, A. Dottie highlighted trust issues within the African American community, stemming from socioeconomic conditions, as a barrier that hinders social connections that could encourage outdoor activities. He then went on to emphasize the importance of familial trust over external social interactions such as those described earlier in this paper where Black hikers were harassed or discriminated against due to their race (A. Dottie 2024). These cultural norms and perceptions can shape the way African Americans view and approach outdoor recreation. Fear, distrust, and a lack of familiarity with outdoor activities can create psychological barriers that prevent participation. Addressing these concerns through education, community-building, and culturally relevant programming would likely shift perceptions and create a more welcoming and inclusive outdoor culture.

III. Influence of Family and Community

A. Role of Parents and Upbringing

In the spring of 2022, I conducted a study that yielded significant insights into the demographics and motivations of individuals who spend time outdoors. Over a two-month period, the survey attracted 543 responses. Of these, 424 respondents identified as white, and 33 identified as black. Analysis of the data revealed several predictors of outdoor recreation frequency, including race, annual income, and parental encouragement (Kelley 2018). Notably, parental encouragement emerged as the most significant predictor, strongly influencing the likelihood of individuals engaging in frequent outdoor activities as adults. The interviews underscored the significant role that family and upbringing play in shaping individuals' engagement with the outdoors. Lex, Izzy, Shane, Valerie, Nya, India, Leah, Maven, Nia, Sakhu, and Devon all attributed their appreciation for nature and outdoor activities to the influence of their parents or other family members (Lex 2024, Izzy 2024, Shane 2024, Valerie 2024, Nya 2024, India 2024, Leah 2024, Maven 2024, Nia 2024, Sakhu 2024, Devon 2024). Lex's father played a pivotal role in introducing him to outdoor activities, nurturing an appreciation for nature that led to personal growth and balance (Lex 2024). Similarly, Nia's involvement in outdoor pursuits, such as hiking, rowing, and swimming, was inspired by her father's shared interests (Nia 2024). Sakhu credited his uncles with introducing him to outdoor activities like fishing and camping, providing a foundational appreciation for nature from a young age. These findings suggest that familial connections and early exposure to the outdoors can significantly impact an individual's relationship with and engagement in outdoor recreational activities. When parents and family members model an appreciation for nature and involve children in outdoor experiences, it can foster a lifelong love for the outdoors that can also promote attitudes reflective of an environmental steward.

B. Importance of Community Support and Representation

In addition to the influence of family, the interviews also emphasized the importance of community support and representation in encouraging outdoor engagement among African Americans. Nia felt somewhat isolated in her interests compared to her friends, underlining a disconnect within her social circle regarding outdoor activities (Nia 2024). Shane, Valerie, Carl, Meron, and the group of girls (Nya, India, Leah, and Maven) suggested that having more accessible black-led outdoor groups and role models could encourage greater participation among African Americans in outdoor activities (Nya 2024, India 2024, Leah 2024, Maven 2024). Sakhu also called for more equitable support and resources from those in privileged positions to help bridge the gap in outdoor activity participation, emphasizing the need for community-driven initiatives (Sakhu 2024). This in turn emphasizes the crucial role that community-level support and representation can play in fostering a more inclusive and welcoming environment for African Americans to engage in outdoor recreation. Seeing people who look like them and share similar experiences can help African Americans feel more comfortable and confident in outdoor spaces.

IV. Personal Experience and Transformation

A. Transformative Outdoor Experiences

Many participants shared transformative experiences in the outdoors that positively impacted their lives. Lex expressed that being outdoors is beneficial for mental and creative stimulation, helping him feel connected to the earth. He finds joy in reading, writing, and engaging with nature, which helps him feel balanced (Lex 2024). Similarly, JR highlighted the physical and mental health benefits of spending time outdoors, such as exercise, fresh air, and a sense of peace and calm after engaging with nature (JR 2024). Devon's move to New Hampshire as a counselor introduced him to hiking, where he

climbed Mount Washington among other mountains, deeply enjoying the experience and finding it transformational given that he now knew he was capable of such feats (Devon 2024). These personal accounts demonstrate the profound impact that outdoor experiences can have on an individual's well-being and personal growth. Engaging with nature can provide a sense of connection, peace, and perspective that is difficult to find in other settings. By sharing these transformative experiences and the benefits of outdoor recreation, African Americans can inspire and encourage others in their communities to explore the outdoors and discover their own transformative moments.

B. Preference for Leisurely vs. Strenuous Outdoor Activities

These interviews revealed a range of preferences for different types of outdoor activities among African Americans. While some participants, like Lex and JR, expressed a deep connection with nature and a desire to engage in more immersive experiences, others, such as Carl, Meron, Demi, and Izzy, expressed a preference for less intense activities (Lex 2024, JR 2024). Carl and Meron, while engaging in outdoor activities like skating and hiking, expressed reservations about more immersive nature experiences like camping. Similarly, Demi and Izzy expressed a preference for leisurely outdoor experiences, like beach activities or snowboarding in unique locations, indicating a desire for enjoyable rather than strenuous outdoor activities (Carl 2024, Meron 2024, Demi 2024, Izzy 2024). These varied preferences accentuate the importance of offering a range of outdoor activities that cater to different interests and comfort levels. Recognizing that not everyone desires intense or strenuous outdoor experiences can help create more inclusive and accessible programming. By providing a variety of options, from leisurely nature walks to more adventurous pursuits, African Americans can find outdoor activities that resonate with their personal preferences and gradually build their comfort and confidence in outdoor spaces.

V. Education and Awareness

A. Need for Increased Exposure and Education

After several conversations, the need for increased exposure to nature and education about outdoor activities within the African American community became glaringly apparent. Lex described a deep connection with nature as revolutionary for black people, helping reclaim a connection with the earth that urban living has diminished (Lex 2024). Lori and Nia suggested that creating a supportive community, introducing outdoor activities from a young age, and improving accessibility to necessary resources could make outdoor activities more appealing and less intimidating for black individuals (Lori 2024, Nia 2024). Further, JR emphasized the need for self-knowledge and faith as prerequisites for feeling encouraged and welcomed in the outdoors, suggesting that black communities can benefit from following specific cultural or ancestral guidelines to foster a connection with nature (JR 2024). Sakhu also spoke to this point with his belief that spending time outdoors as a child is immensely beneficial when held in contrast with activities like playing videogames or watching TV (Sakhu 2024). These insights stress the importance of education and awareness in promoting outdoor engagement among African Americans. By providing early exposure to outdoor activities, creating supportive communities, and improving access to resources, African Americans can develop a stronger connection to nature and feel more comfortable and confident in outdoor spaces. Incorporating cultural and ancestral knowledge into outdoor education can also help create a sense of belonging and relevance for African Americans.

B. Importance of Overcoming Stereotypes

Overcoming stereotypes that label certain activities as "for white people" was reintroduced as a topic by many of the interviewees in this study. Esther emphasized the significance of overcoming these stereotypes, advocating for a mindset open to exploration and trying new activities to truly progress and

enjoy life. She suggested that community and social circles play a significant role in encouraging outdoor activities, hinting at the potential benefits of community support and group activities to increase engagement. Jayden's experience as one of the few people of color in her outdoorsy school and in other areas like classical music made her more conscious and prideful of her identity, suggesting that being a minority in certain spaces can enhance personal pride and identity awareness (Jayden 2024). In understanding this, the need to challenge and dismantle stereotypes that hinder African American participation in outdoor recreation quickly becomes apparent.

VI. Diversity and Inclusivity in Outdoor Spaces

A. Calls for More Inclusive Representation and Resources

More inclusive representation and resources in outdoor spaces were identified as crucial needs during several of my conversations. A. Dottie discussed using his influence to foster a spiritual and positive reconnection for black people with each other, not necessarily tied to being outdoors but to creating positive energy in general (A. Dottie 2024). Shane and Valerie suggested that having more black tour guides and organized groups for hiking could help encourage more black people to participate in outdoor activities, emphasizing the importance of community support and role models in increasing engagement (Shane 2024, Valerie 2024). Carl and Meron expressed interest in seeing natural wonders and participating in significant outdoor adventures if economic barriers were removed, indicating a latent desire to engage more deeply with nature under the right circumstances (Carl 2024, Meron 2024). Additionally, upon interviewing the group of girls, many of them expressed the desire to do things like surf, waterfall hunt, and explore the national parks thus indicating that this issue does not come as a result of a lack of interest. This reiterates the importance of inclusive representation and resources in

promoting African American participation in outdoor recreation. Through exposure to people who look like them in leadership roles and having access to culturally relevant resources, Black Americans can feel more welcome and supported in outdoor spaces.

B. Emphasis on Community-Driven Initiatives

For several interviewees, community-driven initiatives were identified as crucial tools of intervention for promoting diversity and inclusivity in outdoor spaces. Sakhu called for more equitable support and resources from those in privileged positions to help bridge the gap in outdoor activity participation, emphasizing the need for community support to enable more inclusive access to outdoor experiences (Sakhu 2024). He advocated for the importance of interacting with nature for mental, physical, and spiritual well-being, suggesting that being in tune with nature is essential for personal development. The group of girls hinted at the need for more inclusive community support and activities that encourage diverse groups to participate in and enjoy outdoor activities without the stigma of them being "white" activities (Nya 2024, India 2024, Leah 2024, Maven 2024). Findings such as these highlight the crucial role that community-driven initiatives can play in fostering a more inclusive and welcoming environment for African Americans in outdoor recreation. Through the empowerment of communities to lead and shape outdoor initiatives, and by providing the necessary resources and support, African Americans can create spaces that reflect their unique needs, interests, and cultural perspectives. In this way, community-driven initiatives can help build a sense of ownership and belonging in outdoor spaces and can catalyze wider systemic change toward greater diversity and inclusivity in outdoor recreation.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I. Barriers to Outdoor Participation for Underrepresented Communities

A. Language and Cultural Barriers

As explained earlier in this paper, there are a plethora of barriers that Black Americans and other people of color must overcome should they choose to participate in outdoor recreational activities.

Mardi Fuller, a writer, hiking guide, and outdoor enthusiast shared an experience in which she witnessed the impact of language barriers on trail accessibility. She recounted a heartbreaking moment when a Latina woman asked her, in Spanish, if it was safe to be on the trails for people “like her” (Fuller 2024).

Anecdotes like this highlight the negative experiences that come due to a lack of multilingual signage.

This emphasizes the negative impacts that can be felt with the lack of multilingual signage. This

experience was echoed by Darren Josey, a former VP of Marketing at NEMO Equipment, one of the largest camping gear suppliers. He emphasized the importance of providing accurate trail information and reviews in languages like Spanish to make the outdoors more welcoming and accessible for diverse communities. He emphasized that this description should be free of “esoteric hiker jargon” so that a first-time explorer may read it and comprehend it without needing years of experience in the forest or mountains. Having left NEMO, he has since founded his own marketing and strategy firm dedicated to supporting Black entrepreneurs, leveraging his extensive experience to foster growth and representation in the business world (Josey 2024).

Cultural barriers and historical trauma also play significant roles in deterring underrepresented communities from participating in outdoor activities. Elliot Rivera, the executive director of Youth in Action, highlighted that for many Black and Brown individuals, the woods evoke terrifying scenes—ranging from fleeing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to enduring the historical

atrocities of the American South. He pointed out, "White supremacy has been cultivated in the woods," (Rivera 2024). Although his views might attract criticism from those disconnected from the racial struggles of the 20th century, Rivera's perspective is deeply rooted in the elitist and colonialist history that characterized the early conservation movement.

When recounting her early days as an outdoor enthusiast, Mardi Fuller made mention of an interesting phenomenon that she was subjected to almost immediately. She explained that in many ways, she felt a sense of conditional acceptance by white people in these spaces, contingent upon her assimilation to their cultural norms, values, and comforts. She then stated that discussing topics such as race and politics or engaging in cultural expressions like playing music that deviated from the dominant white norms could lead to discomfort or disapproval from white participants. She believes this dynamic often creates an environment where Black Americans may feel the need to suppress aspects of their identity or cultural practices to be accepted in these outdoor spaces (Fuller 2024).

Fuller's testimony highlights the complex power dynamics at play in outdoor recreational settings, where Black individuals may feel pressure to conform to white cultural norms to gain approval and avoid alienation. This phenomenon of conditional acceptance can be further understood through the lens of white appropriation and selective acceptance of Black culture, as exemplified by the varying attitudes towards hip-hop music. Some white individuals in outdoor settings may enjoy and consume hip-hop music but simultaneously express discomfort or disapproval when Black individuals engage in cultural expressions that deviate from dominant white norms. This inconsistency reveals the often contradictory relationship that some white people have with Black culture, where elements of it are embraced when they align with white preferences but rejected when they challenge white comfort zones.

This dynamic can create a sense of cultural dissonance for Black individuals in outdoor spaces, leading to a suppression of authentic self-expression and a sense of alienation from one's own cultural

roots. Mardi Fuller's testimony underscores the urgent need for outdoor organizations and communities to move beyond superficial notions of diversity and inclusivity and actively work towards creating spaces where Black individuals can express their cultural identities without fear of judgment or rejection. By fostering environments where Black cultural expressions are not only tolerated but celebrated, we can create truly inclusive outdoor spaces that welcome and affirm the full spectrum of Black identities and experiences.

Mardi Fuller expanded on a cultural distinction observed between Black and White Americans regarding the language they use in outdoor settings, especially in relation to the prevalent "conquest mentality" among today's hikers. She observed that terms like "conquer," "crush," or "kill" are commonly used by climbers and hikers to describe their mountain summits. Fuller pointed out that these terms, often employed unconsciously, hark back to a militaristic and colonial past, revealing the deep historical layers beneath seemingly benign activities. She further explained that by embracing our "indigeneity," we divest from the conquest mentality and draw on the wisdom of those who nurtured the land long before it was known as "America" (Fuller 2024).

B. Lack of Representation and Relatable Role Models

The absence of diverse representation and relatable role models in the outdoor industry emerged as a significant barrier to participation during conversations with the interviewees. Darren Josey stressed the importance of representation, drawing a parallel to the impact of Mia Hamm's poster on young girls' aspirations in soccer. He emphasized that authentic representation can inspire underrepresented communities to see themselves in outdoor spaces and activities (Josey 2024).

Aly Simmons, an employee engagement manager at REI, shared her experiences in working with the organization both in her stores and on management teams. She noted, "18 years ago it was even less diverse." In many of the stores she worked at, she was the "only" in more than one way. She recalled

being the “only” in the sense that she was often the only woman, the only person of color, and by default, the only woman of color (Simmons 2024). This lack of diversity in leadership and staffing can create feelings of isolation and exclusion for underrepresented individuals, especially for those who are interested but are afraid to step out into a new world in which they are both isolated and highly scrutinized by the majority.

Malik tha Martian, a filmmaker, athlete, entrepreneur, and content creator recognized this issue and has taken steps to combat it by being the change he wishes to see. During our conversation, Malik stated, "I'm trying to knock down as many unconventional doors. So if you do come behind me in some sense, I might have some information that I can hand to you on where to go." His words emphasize the vital role of trailblazers in creating pathways for future generations, particularly in contexts where Black representation has historically been lacking, such as outdoor recreation. Malik expressed a deep commitment to pioneering new opportunities and overcoming barriers in unconventional spaces. By doing so, he aims to provide a roadmap and valuable insights for those who follow, demonstrating that these achievements are not only possible but replicable. The idea is that by successfully navigating these challenges, Malik has simplified the journey for future Black individuals in the outdoor space, offering them proof that "it can be done or it has been done," (Malik tha Martian 2024). This testament not only inspires but also equips future generations with the confidence and practical guidance needed to pursue similar paths.

C. Perceived Lack of Safety and Belonging

The perceived lack of safety and belonging emerged as another barrier to outdoor participation. Darren Josey highlighted the importance of creating a sense of safety and community, stating, "They may never go rock climbing. They may never go bird watching. They just need to meet someone, an authentic person of their community to say, you know what, now I know Darren and we do this" (Josey

2024) Building trust and fostering a sense of belonging through authentic relationships and community-based initiatives can help overcome this barrier. When implemented, a confidence is built given that an individual is no longer the “only” and does not feel as though the activity they are participating in is something Black Americans do not do.

Elliot Rivera also touched on the significance of creating safe spaces, emphasizing the need for intentional community building and support systems to help individuals feel comfortable and confident in outdoor settings. He stated, “Being outdoors is an invitation to just be.” Drawing on nearly a decade of experience working with minority youth, Elliot understands the formidable expectations often associated with outdoor activities. He noted that many young people hesitate to engage in activities like hiking, because they fear they might not be capable or worry about being isolated by their own communities for participating in what some may dismiss as “white people shit,” (Rivera 2024). Instead, by creating a safe space to learn and explore, these young people are empowered to continue adventuring given that they have the support of their peers.

In addition to fostering a safe space through the building of community, other factors like a lack of knowledge and training must also be addressed. Dan Kihanya, Director of REI’s Path Ahead Ventures, spoke about how inexperienced hikers of color may be deterred from recreating outdoors. He explained that if someone does not have the training to perform first aid on themselves or others, they may avoid enjoying the benefits of hiking because they believe the safety risks outweigh the benefits (Kihanya 2024).

D. Socioeconomic Constraints

Socioeconomic factors, such as financial constraints and limited access to resources, also emerged as significant barriers to outdoor participation during these interviews. Darren Josey pointed out that there are many families of color who earn significantly less than their white counterparts in cities

(Josey 2024). These financial disparities often force individuals to work multiple jobs just to afford the high cost of living, which in turn may reduce their ability or desire to spend free time outdoors. Additionally, these financial pressures can limit their ability to afford outdoor gear, travel to outdoor destinations, and dedicate large chunks of time to recreational activities.

Dan Kihanya also highlighted these financial barriers in novel fashion. When we discussed large treks that have taken place in extreme locations, he referenced a conversation had with the first African American woman to summit Mount Everest, Sophia Danenberg. She stated that although they may not fit the stereotype, 100 randomly selected Black kids from Roxbury could summit the tallest mountain on Earth if they received the same resources and training as their more fortunate counterparts. He further emphasized that accessibility to outdoor activities, both extreme and casual, is heavily influenced by financial resources and that there is a glaring need for targeted support and initiatives to bridge this gap (Kihanya 2024).

II. Lack of Diversity and Representation in the Outdoor Industry

A. Underrepresentation in Leadership and Decision-Making Roles

The interviews revealed a significant underrepresentation of people of color in leadership and decision-making roles within the outdoor industry. Darren Josey shared his personal experience, stating, that he has never been hired by a person of color. He went on to say that he has never been managed by a person of color, nor has he worked alongside a person of color as an executive (Josey 2024). This lack of diversity in upper management can perpetuate systemic barriers and limit the industry's ability to effectively address issues of inclusion and accessibility.

Dan Kihanya also highlighted the underrepresentation, noting, "By any measure, 1 percent or less of the people who own and run brands in the outdoor industry are people of color." He emphasized the need for increased representation in ownership and leadership to drive meaningful change and create more inclusive and sustainable businesses (Kihanya 2024). Additionally, Aly Simmons emphasized the crucial need for not just hiring but also retaining diverse talent. She pointed out that while it is commendable that companies are hiring more people of color, they frequently struggle to maintain positive working relationships due to the racial discrimination and isolation these employees often encounter (Simmons 2024). This issue was reflected in the experience of Darren Josey, whose tenure at NEMO Equipment was marred by the difficulties experienced by being the only person of color in high-level decision-making processes, ultimately contributing to his decision to leave the company (Josey 2024).

B. Disconnect Between Marketing and Targeted Audiences

A disconnect between the marketing efforts of outdoor brands and their target audiences was also revealed through these discussions. Darren pointed out that even though popular magazines like Outside Magazine feature advertisements with Black people, the campaign cannot be deemed as successful because it does not attract individuals who are not already engaging with this type of content. Instead, you are simply engaging with the same people who likely would have purchased the magazine, regardless of if they included diverse models or not. He then stressed the importance of diversifying marketing strategies and channels to effectively engage underrepresented communities when he stated, "A lot of these product-led companies aren't so much interested in advertising to folks at the frequency and volume that needs to happen to get the word out," (Josey 2024).

Dave Spandorfer, CEO of Janji Running, acknowledged the need and benefits of more authentic and diverse representation in their marketing materials. He stated, "We want to have people of all races

and genders wear our product." This is not only because he understands the benefits of showcasing Black and Brown bodies outdoors, but also because these diverse athletes often have an incredible talent for accentuating the quality and fit of the company's vibrant merchandise (Spandorfer 2024). This recognition of the importance of diverse representation in marketing by a small sporting goods company is a step towards creating more inclusive and relatable content for all potential outdoor enthusiasts.

C. Lack of Authentic Representation

The interviews highlighted a significant gap in authentic representation within the outdoor industry. Dave from Janji Running elaborated on the importance of authenticity in how Janji collaborates with artists for their bi-annual collections. The Janji team commits to working with artists from the regions that inspire each collection's theme, whether it's the French West Indies, Indonesia, or Greece. This approach ensures that the artistic expressions are genuine and rooted in local culture, avoiding superficial imitations of cultural motifs or styles. Dave stressed the value of forming lasting and sincere partnerships with local communities, aiming to foster representations that are both meaningful and respectful (Spandorfer 2024).

The responsibility to showcase authentic representation of Black Americans in outdoor spaces is not solely that of a corporation or municipality. Malik tha Martian, a filmmaker, athlete, entrepreneur, and popular Instagram content creator, has found success due to his talents as well as his outlook when it comes to creating content designed to encourage other people of color to spend more time outdoors. When asked about how an aspiring content creator might find success and secure brand sponsorships, he said, "Being brave enough to bet on myself and be as independent as possible is just what I've been trying to do on my journey." He believes that when a creator is both skilled and independent, they are able to increase the ownership they have over a certain project given that they are not beholden to the resources of a particular company (Malik tha Martian 2024). In seeing this, it is likely that Malik would

appreciate the perspective Janji has used to deploy their product. This is because although it may take more time and involve more work, he believes that this process births a superior product given that the output is a reflection of a real place and time while also ensuring that the artist is not being exploited.

III. Importance of Community Engagement and Grassroots Efforts

A. Partnerships with Local Organizations and Municipalities

These interviews further highlighted the importance of partnering with local organizations and municipalities to promote outdoor participation and inclusivity. During our interview, Darren Josey provided details on a project that he has been working on in Malden, a suburb of Boston. In short, the program Darren is looking to deploy is a comprehensive outdoor recreation program with secured funding geared toward making Malden's community members aware of the natural resources at their disposal. As of 2023, Asian-identifying individuals made up 27.5% of the population while Black-identifying individuals account for 13.3%. He remarked that when he is out hiking or climbing, the visitors do not reflect the population of the town meaning that it has not been his experience that 1 out of every 4 people he sees outside is asian nor is it the case that 1 out of every 10 people he sees is Black. Additionally, he has noticed that many of these recreators are not residents of Malden. As a result, the mission of this program is not only to increase BIPOC visitorship but also to increase visitation by Malden community members. Darren explained that he has worked closely with the city council for several months trying to pilot his outdoor recreation program. He also touted the support of the Mayor of Malden, Gary Christenson, as the two have worked closely to investigate and employ effective community engagement strategies as well as proactively assess any barriers that could impede the

success of the program (Josey 2024). These partnerships can help address systemic barriers, improve awareness, provide resources, and create more accessible and welcoming outdoor spaces.

Elliot Rivera also emphasized the value of community partnerships, noting that he is working with the city of Providence to increase the number of educators and guides who are people of color that can engage with and encourage segments of the population that have not historically engaged in outdoor recreational activities. He expounded on this point by explaining that there are already existing relationships between the city and organizations like REI and Paddle Boston which must be leveraged in order to adequately engage community members (Rivera 2024). These collaborations can create employment opportunities for young people, build local capacity, and foster a sense of ownership and belonging in outdoor spaces.

B. Collaborations with Community-Based Groups

The interviewees often stressed the importance of collaborating with community-based groups to engage underrepresented communities in outdoor activities. Darren Josey shared his work with various organizations, stating that he is currently working with the Chinese Culture Connection as well as neighborhood groups like the Friends of Oak Grove to ask, "What are you interested for outdoor rec opportunities? Are there some things you're already doing or some things you'd love to do?" By partnering with trusted community groups, and engaging them during the planning process outdoor organizations can better understand the needs and interests of diverse populations and develop targeted programs and initiatives. He also mentioned his appreciation for educational organizations that did not exist when he was starting as a young professional. He is now working with institutions like the Salemwood School and the Linden School in Malden to create the inspiration that he never had by educating young people on the opportunities that exist in the outdoor industry and by connecting them with role models who have had success in this space (Josey 2024). These early interventions can expose

youth to outdoor activities, develop essential skills, and create pathways for future engagement and leadership.

Elliot Rivera also stressed the importance of youth development, sharing how outdoor experiences can provide a reprieve from external pressures and foster personal growth. He noted that time outdoors with peers allows young people to build skills such as outlining what they need from a group, whether it be skills or resources, and obtaining it. He believes that by investing in youth programs and creating supportive environments, outdoor organizations can cultivate the next generation of diverse outdoor enthusiasts and leaders (Rivera 2024).

D. Empowering Local Guides and Leaders

Many of the interviewees also highlighted the importance of empowering local guides and leaders to promote outdoor participation and representation. Darren Josey highlighted the powerful influence of relatable role models in encouraging outdoor participation within one's own community. He suggests that when individuals from underrepresented groups, such as BIPOC communities, take on leadership roles and actively engage their networks in outdoor activities, it can create a ripple effect of inspiration and participation (Josey 2024).

By personally guiding and introducing others to outdoor experiences, relatable role models demonstrate that these activities are accessible and meaningful for people who share similar backgrounds and experiences. This representation and leadership can help break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and foster a sense of belonging in outdoor spaces.

Mardi Fuller, an outdoor educator and guide, also touched on the importance of empowering local leaders, sharing her approach of collaborating with young people to develop programming. She emphasized the importance of a collaborative and empowering approach when engaging with young people in the context of outdoor education and experiences. She suggests that older generations, or

"elders," should not simply dictate what young people should do and how they should do it based on academic theories or preconceived notions. Instead, she advocates for a more inclusive and interactive process where the elders share their experiences and insights while also actively listening to and incorporating the perspectives and ideas of the younger generation (Fuller 2024).

The relevance of her testimony lies in its emphasis on the value of intergenerational knowledge-sharing and co-creation in the context of promoting outdoor engagement among young people, particularly in the Black community. By acknowledging the expertise and lived experiences of older Black individuals while also empowering young people to shape and customize the curriculum or approach, this collaborative model can lead to more effective, relevant, and meaningful outdoor experiences.

IV. Challenges of Funding and Sustaining Grassroots Initiatives

A. Grant Funding and Public-Private Partnerships

These discussions revealed a significant reliance on grant funding and public-private partnerships to support grassroots initiatives in the outdoor industry, highlighting the challenges and complexities involved in securing these critical resources. Darren Josey shared his experience with the Great Malden Outdoors project, stating that all of the people who worked to create content advertising the project were paid through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. This funding paid not only the photographers and videographers working on the project, but also the individuals involved with creating the website, interactive maps, and the artwork for advertisements (Josey 2024). This quote highlights the importance of leveraging public funding and resources to support community-based outdoor initiatives.

B. Difficulty Securing Corporate Sponsorships

The interviews also highlighted the challenges of securing corporate sponsorships for grassroots outdoor initiatives. Darren Josey shared his experience, stating, "I've had a ton of meetings with national sponsors and basically almost everyone last year in the outdoor industry didn't have a great year". This is relevant because it sheds light on the intricacies at play when it comes to securing funding or sponsors. He explained that individuals who seek this kind of assistance become subject to market conditions meaning that in a year in which retailers have a surplus of inventory or a lack of demand, companies may be hesitant to provide resources given that they have overspent on a product that they are not obtaining adequate returns on. Darren called this the "bullwhip effect." He reiterated that economic challenges and shifts in the industry can make it difficult for smaller organizations to secure consistent support from larger corporations (Josey 2024).

Malik tha Martian also discussed the complexities of corporate partnerships, particularly highlighting his experiences with The North Face. He noted that he often relied on his relationships with key figures within the company to secure the resources he needed. Although he admitted to putting considerable pressure on The North Face team, his requests were largely met. However, Malik emphasized that such accommodations are not typical across brands, and navigating these relationships can be akin to walking a tightrope. Creators must balance their vision with the realities of working with profit-driven organizations, which may prefer to collaborate with individuals who demand fewer resources. Grateful for his status as The North Face's "guy" —a role he acknowledges is not guaranteed—Malik's experience underscores the intricate power dynamics and the pressing need for more equitable and supportive corporate partnerships (Malik tha Martian 2024).

My conversation with Dan Kihanya, director of REI Path Ahead Ventures, was extremely helpful in improving my understanding of what is possible when it comes to working with organizations to secure funding. As Dan explained it, the program aims to address the funding challenges faced by these

entrepreneurs and organizations, which Kihanya deeply understands from his extensive experience in the space (Kihanya 2024).

Path Ahead Ventures serves founders who self-identify as African American, Latino, Latina, Indigenous, and Asian Pacific Islander. The program supports these entrepreneurs through various entry points and initiatives. One such program is EMBARK, a 12-week virtual founder school that provides participants with the fundamentals of starting a business in the outdoors. This program is designed for those who have a well-thought-out idea or prototype but haven't yet fully entered the market. Another program offered by Path Ahead Ventures is NAVIGATE, which caters to established companies looking to scale their operations. These businesses already have revenue and have sold products, but they aim to reach the next level of growth (Kihanya 2024).

In addition to these programs, Path Ahead Ventures also operates a fund that directly invests in companies by providing equity checks to support their growth. This investment arm does not include a specific program and focuses on financial support for the selected businesses. Path Ahead Ventures supports a wide range of businesses, including those offering products such as gear, apparel, outdoor food, and skincare, as well as services, apps, and wearables that help people get outside, stay safe, be competent, and feel comfortable. The program focuses on for-profit businesses that are connected to enabling and enhancing outdoor experiences.

Dan reiterated that the driving force behind Path Ahead Ventures is its commitment to impact-driven investment models. He emphasized that the program prioritizes the impact aspect of the businesses they support, rather than setting ambitious goals for financial returns. This approach accentuates the importance of investing in organizations that generate positive social and environmental outcomes, aligning with REI's values and mission (Kihanya 2024). By providing targeted support, funding, and resources to founders of color, Path Ahead Ventures aims to create a more inclusive and diverse outdoor industry. The program recognizes the unique challenges faced by these entrepreneurs

and seeks to level the playing field, enabling them to build successful businesses that contribute to the growth and accessibility of outdoor recreation for all.

V. Redefining the Outdoor Experience

A. Shifting Perceptions of the "Outdoorsy" Person

Much like in the intercept interviews, these semi-structured interviews emphasized the need to transform perceptions about who qualifies as "outdoorsy" and to make the outdoor experience more inclusive. Aly Simmons highlighted this necessity, particularly concerning the stereotype of the "outdoorsy" image. She observed, "Bigger women are just like, oh, I don't think I can hike or I don't want to be out there," underscoring the importance of challenging prevailing assumptions about body types and physical abilities in outdoor activities. Additionally, she discussed a notable shift in terminology that REI has been exploring to foster inclusivity. The company is moving from using the term "Outdoors" to "Outside." Aly explained that the term "Outside" is perceived as less exclusive than "Outdoors," a sentiment supported by feedback from intercept interviews. The term "Outside" suggests something as simple as stepping out your front door, thereby dispelling notions that engaging with nature must be costly or strenuous. Aly outlined the fact that this linguistic change is part of a broader effort to redefine and democratize the concept of outdoor engagement amongst many of the major players in the outdoor industry (Simmons 2024).

B. Addressing Affordability and Elitism

The interviews also stressed the importance of addressing affordability and elitism in the outdoor industry to make activities more accessible to diverse communities. Aly Simmons acknowledged the

perception of outdoor gear and experiences as expensive, stating, "For whatever reason, being outdoorsy has come with a price tag." In being a person of color who is not particularly wealthy, Aly understood that this notion is not just perceived, but also felt in a very real way by those who want to participate but don't believe they can afford to. In contrast, she emphasized the need to challenge the notion that engaging with the outdoors requires significant financial investment by referencing popular activities that are not expensive such as going to the beach or hiking in nearby conservation lands. She also mentioned that there are ways to save money if one is deadset on buying equipment (Simmons 2024). One way is to rent equipment necessary for things like skiing and camping. Another way is to find brands that cater to adventurers who want a quality product for a fraction of the price, REI being one of those brands.

Aly then went on to shed light on REI's corporate initiatives aimed at increasing accessibility and affordability in the outdoor industry. These efforts represent a significant step towards breaking down the financial barriers that often hinder participation in outdoor recreation, particularly for Black Americans and other underrepresented groups. She highlighted REI's efforts to provide more affordable options through their in-house brands and gear. While acknowledging the limitations in controlling the prices of well-established outdoor brands like Arcteryx and The North Face, Simmons emphasized REI's ability to influence the cost of their own products. By offering more affordable in-house options, REI is actively working to make outdoor gear and apparel more accessible to a wider range of consumers, regardless of their financial means (Simmons 2024).

In addition to affordable gear, Aly also discussed the importance of REI's membership program in promoting accessibility (Simmons 2024). The co-op's membership model provides individuals with additional discounts and access to outdoor gear and experiences. She explained that by offering these financial incentives, REI is not only encouraging more people to engage with the outdoors but also fostering a sense of community and belonging among its members. The membership program serves as

a gateway for individuals who may have previously felt excluded or unable to fully participate in outdoor activities due to financial constraints.

Given how large of a company REI is, my conversation with the CEO of Janji Running, a small Somerville-based outdoor retail company, served as a useful counterbalance for the discussion of affordability. The CEO, Dave Spandorfer also recognized the challenges of affordability, sharing their approach of offering a tiered pricing system. He noted, "We want to have a product for you." During the discussion, however, he let it be known that Janji is not necessarily looking to provide a superior product for each price point. Dave continued by explaining that while quality is of course a priority at each price level, it is not financially possible for a small business to sell a top-of-the-line running jacket for the same price someone would buy a long-sleeved t-shirt (Spandorfer 2024). With both Aly's and Dave's testimonies at the front of mind, it becomes apparent that by providing a range of options at different price points, outdoor brands can help make their products and experiences more accessible to a wider audience.

C. Creating Inclusive Environments

The interviews with Aly Simmons and Mardi Fuller underscore the critical role that inclusive and welcoming environments play in promoting the participation and engagement of Black Americans in outdoor recreational activities. Their testimonies highlight the transformative power of intentional efforts to create spaces where diverse individuals feel a genuine sense of belonging and acceptance.

Aly shared a poignant story of a woman's experience at an REI store in Cambridge, illustrating the stark contrast between merely having an "okay experience" and truly feeling like one belongs. The woman's words, as recounted by Simmons, emphasize the importance of cultivating a specific "vibe" or atmosphere that goes beyond the absence of overt discrimination. It is about fostering an environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel seen, valued, and embraced for who they are (Simmons

2024). This story embraces the significance of creating spaces that actively invite and celebrate diversity, rather than simply tolerating it.

Mardi's testimony further reinforces the importance of belonging, particularly in the context of outdoor experiences. Her words, "We value being outside with our people in a way that feels safe," speak to the fundamental human need for connection, community, and security. For Black Americans and other underrepresented groups, the ability to engage in outdoor activities with a sense of safety and cultural relevance is paramount (Fuller 2024). Fuller's statement suggests that inclusive outdoor spaces should prioritize not only physical safety but also emotional and psychological safety, fostering an environment where individuals can fully be themselves without fear of judgment or marginalization. This comprehensive study on the experiences and perceptions of Black Americans in outdoor recreation combines insights from two types of interviews—intercept and semi-structured—to paint a detailed picture of the barriers and opportunities at play. Intercept interviews revealed significant stereotypes, with Black participants challenging the typical image of "outdoorsy" people and acknowledging the perception of certain outdoor activities as predominantly white-oriented. For instance, Lex pointed out that anyone can engage in outdoor activities, emphasizing that they are not limited by race or economic status. Key stakeholders in the semi-structured interviews discussed systemic issues and potential strategies for increasing diversity and inclusion within the outdoor industry.

Both interview types highlighted economic barriers and a lack of exposure as significant hurdles to Black participation in outdoor activities. Financial constraints were frequently mentioned as a major deterrent, with outdoor activities perceived as expensive and exclusive. The interviews collectively emphasized the need for more inclusive representation, community engagement, and the dismantling of longstanding stereotypes that outdoor recreation is "white people stuff."

The results suggest that creating accessible, inclusive environments where Black Americans feel welcomed and represented can significantly impact their participation rates. By addressing both

perceptual barriers and practical challenges such as affordability and accessibility, the outdoor industry can foster a more diverse community of outdoor enthusiasts. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions and community-driven initiatives to bridge the participation gap and ensure outdoor spaces are welcoming for all.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Limitations

As we transition to the conclusion and recommendations section of this study, it is vital to integrate the insights gleaned from both the literature review and the comprehensive interview analysis conducted on the participation of Black Americans in outdoor recreation. This final section aligns these insights and outlines policy and programmatic recommendations aimed at overcoming identified barriers, such as stereotypes and economic constraints, enhancing inclusivity and accessibility in outdoor activities. Additionally, I will discuss the limitations of the current study and suggest avenues for future research to explore unexplored aspects or reinforce findings. The goal is to propose effective, actionable solutions that address both the systemic issues and the personal experiences that shape the outdoor engagements of Black Americans.

Synthesis

Challenging Stereotypes

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the interviews was the concerted effort to challenge the stereotypical image of what an "outdoorsy" person looks like. Interviewees emphasized that outdoor activities are not confined to any specific racial or economic group, thus addressing and attempting to dismantle perceptions that see these activities as predominantly for white individuals or "White People Shit" (Dwele 2023). Lex, a participant in the intercept interviews, poignantly stated that his previous perception of outdoor recreation related to the stereotypical image of a white person who eats raw almonds and wears Birkenstocks, however he now understands that the outdoors is for everybody (Lex 2024). This sentiment was echoed by A. Dottie, who affirmed, "A human" when asked what an outdoorsy person looks like (A. Dottie 2024). These testimonies underscore the importance of challenging and dismantling stereotypes that limit the perception of who can participate in outdoor recreation, thereby creating a more inclusive narrative.

The literature review further contextualized these stereotypes, highlighting the historical and sociocultural factors that have shaped the perception of outdoor spaces as predominantly white domains. The concept of a "racialized outdoor leisure identity," as described by Martin (2004), captures the societal stereotype that associates wildland recreation with being young, rugged, adventurous, and predominantly white. This perception can alienate urban Black individuals who identify more with cosmopolitan values, thus discouraging participation in outdoor recreation due to a perceived mismatch with their self-image (Martin 2004). Carolyn Finney's analysis of the underrepresentation of Black individuals in outdoor media, as discussed in her book "Black Faces, White Spaces" (2014), further illustrates the impact of these stereotypes on the participation of Black Americans in outdoor activities.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a new narrative around outdoor recreation—one that celebrates diversity, inclusivity, and the inherent right of every individual to connect with nature. This requires a concerted effort from outdoor recreation companies, media outlets, organizations, and individuals to actively challenge stereotypes, showcase diverse representation, and create welcoming spaces for all. By doing so, we can begin to dismantle the long-standing barriers that have prevented Black Americans and other underrepresented groups from fully experiencing the joys and benefits of the great outdoors. It is only through this transformative shift in perception and representation that we can truly unlock the potential of outdoor recreation as a force for unity, healing, and empowerment for all communities.

Economic Barriers

Another significant theme that emerged from the interviews was the prevalence of economic barriers as deterrents to participation in outdoor recreation. Many participants highlighted that the costs associated with outdoor gear and activities are seen as prohibitive for many in the Black community, thus limiting their engagement in these pursuits. A. Dottie emphasized, "Economic disparities are a major barrier preventing black people from participating in traditionally costly outdoor activities like hiking and skiing" (A. Dottie 2024). Ace reinforced this point, stating, "Finances are probably the primary barrier preventing black people from getting outside more. You need financial freedom to afford the necessary gear and experiences" (Ace Boogie 2024).

The literature review provided a broader context for understanding these economic barriers. Taylor et al. (2011) and Xiao et al. (2021) noted that affluent Americans are substantially more likely to engage in outdoor activities compared to their economically disadvantaged counterparts. The correlation between household income and park visitation rates starkly illustrates how economic disparities curtail access to leisure activities that are otherwise perceived as universally available. Scott

(2013) and McCarville (2008) further discussed the multifaceted nature of leisure constraints, emphasizing that low-income Americans, irrespective of race, face a myriad of barriers, including a lack of information, concerns over safety and equipment costs, poor English-speaking skills, transportation issues, and other financial limitations that collectively deter participation in outdoor recreation.

The confluence of insights from both the interviews and the literature review paints a vivid picture of the significant role economic barriers play in hindering Black Americans' participation in outdoor recreation. The testimonies of A. Dottie and Ace Boogie poignantly illustrate the lived experiences of many in the Black community, where the costs associated with gear, equipment, and access to outdoor spaces are often prohibitively high. These personal accounts are further contextualized by the findings of Taylor et al. (2011), Xiao et al. (2021), Scott (2013), and McCarville (2008), which underscore the stark disparities in outdoor engagement between affluent and economically disadvantaged Americans, irrespective of race. The multifaceted nature of these leisure constraints, encompassing not only financial limitations but also issues related to information access, safety concerns, language barriers, and transportation, highlights the complex web of factors that collectively deter low-income communities, particularly those of color, from fully enjoying the benefits of outdoor recreation. Addressing these economic barriers will require a concerted effort from policymakers, outdoor industry leaders, and community organizations to develop targeted initiatives that promote affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity in outdoor spaces. Only by dismantling the financial and structural obstacles that disproportionately affect Black Americans can we hope to create a more equitable and diverse outdoor recreation landscape.

Cultural and Safety Concerns

The impact of cultural perceptions and safety concerns on the participation of African Americans in outdoor recreation was another prominent theme in the interviews. These concerns encompass fears related to historical trauma and racial discrimination in outdoor spaces, which discourage engagement from the community. Demi expressed a perception that outdoor activities can seem dangerous and unnecessarily risky, which may contribute to their characterization as "white people things" due to cultural differences in perceived safety and leisure activities (Demi 2024). A. Dottie highlighted trust issues within the African American community, stemming from socioeconomic conditions, as a barrier that hinders social connections that could encourage outdoor activities (A. Dottie 2024).

The literature review provided historical context for these concerns, shedding light on the enduring legacy of racial violence and exclusion in outdoor spaces. The tragic drowning of Eugene Williams during the Chicago Race Riot of 1919, as discussed by Fuller and Bates (2019), serves as a stark reminder of the deadly consequences of racial boundaries in public spaces. The aftermath of these riots significantly impacted African Americans' relationship with outdoor spaces, instilling a sense of fear and exclusion that persisted over generations. Furthermore, the historical backdrop of segregation in national parks, as highlighted by Kang Jae Lee's research (Scott & Lee 2018), underscores the systemic barriers that have historically dictated access to outdoor spaces for Black Americans.

Additionally, Mardi Fuller's testimony about having to assimilate to whiteness to be accepted by the outdoors community sheds light on the cultural concessions that Black Americans often have to make when participating in outdoor recreational activities. Fuller's experience highlights the challenges and pressures faced by Black individuals when navigating spaces predominantly associated with white cultural norms. She explained that in many ways, she felt a sense of conditional acceptance by white people in these spaces, contingent upon her assimilation to their cultural norms, values, and comforts.

Fuller noted that discussing topics such as race and politics or engaging in cultural expressions like playing music that deviated from the dominant white norms could lead to discomfort or disapproval from white participants. This dynamic often creates an environment where Black Americans may feel the need to suppress aspects of their identity or cultural practices to be accepted in these outdoor spaces (Fuller 2024).

Fuller's testimony resonates with the concept of "leisure constraints" discussed in the literature review, particularly the cultural factors and boundary maintenance that can hinder Black Americans' participation in outdoor recreation (Scott and Lee 2018). The pressure to conform to white cultural norms and the potential for discrimination or discomfort when expressing one's own cultural identity may deter Black Americans from fully engaging in these spaces. As highlighted by Finney (2014), the quest for "authentic" Blackness within the Black community has inadvertently fostered a narrow view of Black identity, often excluding participation in outdoor recreational activities beyond common sports like basketball or soccer. This cultural constriction, coupled with the underrepresentation of Black adventurers in mainstream media, reinforces the belief among Black youth and adults that outdoor recreation is not a typical pursuit for Black people (Finney 2014).

The complex relationship between white appropriation and rejection of Black culture, as exemplified by the varying attitudes towards hip-hop music in Fuller's testimony, further underscores the inconsistencies and selective acceptance of Black cultural elements by white individuals in outdoor recreation settings. This dynamic can create a sense of dissonance and alienation for Black Americans, who may feel that their cultural expressions are only welcomed when they align with white preferences and comfort levels.

Understanding these cultural and social barriers is crucial for addressing the disparities in outdoor recreation participation and creating more inclusive and welcoming environments for diverse communities. As emphasized by Mardi Fuller's experience, fostering spaces where Black Americans can

fully express their cultural identities without the pressure to assimilate is essential for promoting a sense of belonging and inclusivity in outdoor recreation. This requires a concerted effort from outdoor organizations, land management agencies, and the wider outdoor community to challenge dominant cultural norms, celebrate diversity, and create affirming spaces for Black cultural expressions. By acknowledging and addressing the cultural concessions that Black Americans often have to make in outdoor spaces, we can work towards dismantling the leisure constraints that hinder their participation and foster a more equitable and inclusive outdoor recreation landscape.

Promoting Inclusivity

The synthesis of insights from the interviews and literature review highlights the importance of promoting diversity and inclusivity in outdoor recreation to increase the participation of African Americans and other underrepresented groups. Aly Simmons' discussion of REI's efforts to foster inclusivity through language changes, such as shifting from "Outdoors" to "Outside," reflects a broader industry-wide movement to redefine and democratize the concept of outdoor engagement. This linguistic change aligns with the need to challenge stereotypes and perceptions that outdoor activities are exclusively for white, affluent individuals, as discussed by Martin (2004) and Finney (2014) in the literature review.

In addition to language, the interviews and literature review also emphasize the significance of authentic representation and storytelling in promoting inclusivity. Dave Spandorfer, CEO of Janji Running, highlighted the importance of collaborating with artists from the regions that inspire their collections, ensuring that the artistic expressions are genuine and rooted in local culture (Spandorfer 2024). This approach to authentic representation can be extended to the broader outdoor industry,

where showcasing the diverse experiences and voices of Black Americans and other underrepresented groups can help reshape the narrative around who belongs in the outdoors.

Malik tha Martian, a filmmaker, athlete, entrepreneur, and popular Instagram content creator, underscored the power of independent content creation in challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusivity. With his mindset of being "brave enough to bet on myself and be as independent as possible," Malik has been able to maintain creative control over his projects and ensure that they reflect authentic representations of diverse outdoor experiences (Malik tha Martian 2024). His success highlights the potential for Black content creators and influencers to drive change and shape more inclusive narratives within the outdoor industry.

Furthermore, the literature review and interviews stress the importance of community engagement and partnerships in fostering inclusivity. Darren Josey's work with local organizations and schools in Malden, Massachusetts, exemplifies the value of collaborating with community-based groups to understand the needs and interests of diverse populations and develop targeted programs and initiatives (Josey 2024). Similarly, Elliot Rivera's emphasis on youth development and creating safe spaces for personal growth through outdoor experiences underscores the significance of investing in the next generation of diverse outdoor enthusiasts and leaders (Rivera 2024).

The role of industry leaders like REI in promoting inclusivity through initiatives such as the REI Product Impact Standards and partnerships with organizations like Outdoor Afro and Latino Outdoors (REI 2021) cannot be overstated. These efforts demonstrate the potential for the outdoor industry to drive systemic change and create more welcoming and affirming spaces for historically underrepresented groups. By leveraging their resources and platforms, outdoor companies and organizations can amplify diverse voices, support community-driven initiatives, and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive outdoor recreation landscape.

Promoting inclusivity in outdoor recreation requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses language, representation, storytelling, community engagement, and partnerships. By redefining the narrative around outdoor engagement, amplifying diverse voices and experiences, and collaborating with community-based groups and industry leaders, we can work towards dismantling the barriers that have historically excluded Black Americans and other underrepresented groups from fully participating in and benefiting from outdoor recreation. It is through this comprehensive and sustained effort that we can cultivate a more inclusive, equitable, and vibrant outdoor community that celebrates the rich diversity of human experiences in nature.

Recommendations

Drawing from the insights gathered through the literature review and interviews, the following recommendations are proposed to address the barriers to Black Americans' participation in outdoor recreation and promote a more inclusive and accessible outdoor environment.

Challenging Stereotypes through Representation:

Challenging stereotypes through representation is a crucial step in creating a more inclusive and diverse outdoor recreation landscape. Outdoor recreation companies, media outlets, and other organizations have a significant role to play in this process by actively showcasing diverse representation in their marketing materials, advertisements, and social media content. This involves featuring Black Americans and other underrepresented groups engaging in a wide range of outdoor activities, thus normalizing their presence and participation in these spaces.

To effectively challenge stereotypes, representation should go beyond tokenism and instead aim to authentically portray the experiences and stories of diverse individuals in the outdoors. This can

include highlighting the achievements of Black outdoor enthusiasts, sharing their personal narratives, and celebrating their contributions to the outdoor community. By amplifying these voices and experiences, outdoor recreation companies and media outlets can help shift the dominant narrative and challenge the notion that outdoor activities are exclusively for white individuals.

Representation should encompass a broad spectrum of outdoor activities, from hiking and camping to rock climbing and kayaking, to showcase the diversity of interests and experiences within the Black community. This approach can help break down stereotypes that pigeonhole Black Americans into limited or stereotypical roles within the outdoor recreation context.

In addition to visual representation, outdoor recreation companies and organizations should also prioritize diversity and inclusion in their storytelling and content creation. This can involve collaborating with Black content creators, writers, and influencers to produce authentic and relatable content that resonates with diverse audiences. By elevating these perspectives and voices, outdoor recreation media can play a vital role in reshaping the narrative around who belongs in the outdoors.

Moreover, outdoor recreation companies should strive to create inclusive and welcoming environments both within their organizations and in the spaces they promote. This can involve implementing diversity and inclusion training for employees, partnering with community organizations that serve underrepresented populations, and actively seeking feedback from diverse stakeholders to inform their practices and initiatives.

By consistently and authentically representing Black Americans and other underrepresented groups in their marketing, storytelling, and organizational practices, outdoor recreation companies, media outlets, and organizations can contribute to dismantling the stereotypes that have historically excluded these communities from fully enjoying the benefits of outdoor recreation. This representation should be an ongoing commitment, embedded in the core values and actions of these entities, to create lasting change and foster a more equitable and inclusive outdoor culture.

Addressing Economic Barriers through Targeted Initiatives:

Outdoor recreation companies and organizations should develop targeted initiatives to address the economic barriers that hinder Black Americans' participation in outdoor activities. This can include offering discounted or subsidized gear rental programs, providing scholarships for outdoor education and training, and partnering with community organizations to create accessible and affordable outdoor experiences. Additionally, advocating for policies that promote equitable access to outdoor spaces, such as the expansion of urban green spaces and the development of affordable transportation options to natural areas, can help mitigate the financial barriers to participation.

Expanding on the recommendation for targeted initiatives to address economic barriers, outdoor recreation companies and organizations should develop comprehensive programs that not only provide immediate financial relief but also foster long-term engagement and sustainability regarding the health of the program. As highlighted by Stanfeld McCown et al. (2012), offering programs with varying repeated frequency is crucial for program sustainability, as opposed to one-off specialty events. Threshold or one-time programs have been shown to be unsuccessful at converting targeted visitors into continuous visitors (Santucci, Floyd, Bocarro, and Henderson, 2014), emphasizing the importance of creating initiatives that encourage ongoing participation.

When designing targeted initiatives, outdoor recreation companies and organizations should prioritize the development of meaningful and long-term partnerships with community members and organizations. These partnerships can promote program sustainability and help overcome challenges related to leadership turnover and relocation (Stanfeld McCown et al., 2012). Prior studies have shown that programs designed to engage diverse audiences have declined when a key individual who served as a conduit between the agency and the community left (Santucci et al., 2014, Stanfeld McCown et al.,

2012). Therefore, strengthening the capacity of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion (RDI) program officers in relationship-building with partner organizations is essential for achieving program sustainability and establishing enduring relationships with diverse communities.

Funding is another critical aspect that impacts program sustainability. The inventory found that 61.7% of RDI programs were supported by internal funding, while only 20.5% of programs relied on some form of external funding. Although securing internal funding is crucial for the survival of many programs, its continued security should be assessed in light of the more than \$11 billion infrastructure backlog of maintenance that continues to grow in the National Park Service (National Parks Conservation Association, 2018). It is uncertain how much longer internal funds will continue to be allocated at the same level towards programming, especially as the diversion of entrance fees away from the backlog during recent government shutdowns has raised concerns over long-term park damage.

To address these funding challenges, outdoor recreation companies and organizations should explore diverse funding sources, including public-private partnerships, grants, and sponsorships. Collaborating with community organizations and local businesses can help pool resources and create more sustainable funding models for targeted initiatives. Additionally, advocating for policies that prioritize funding for RDI programs and initiatives can help ensure their long-term viability and impact. By developing targeted initiatives that focus on long-term engagement, meaningful partnerships, and sustainable funding, outdoor recreation companies and organizations can effectively address the economic barriers that hinder Black Americans' participation in outdoor activities. These initiatives should be designed with the goal of creating lasting change and fostering a more inclusive and equitable outdoor recreation landscape.

Fostering Cultural Relevance and Safety:

To create culturally relevant and safe spaces for Black Americans in outdoor recreation, organizations and agencies must prioritize meaningful engagement and collaboration with Black communities. This involves going beyond surface-level partnerships and actively seeking input and guidance from Black-led organizations and community groups in the development and implementation of programming, events, and policies. By centering the voices and experiences of Black Americans in the decision-making process, outdoor recreation providers can ensure that their offerings are not only culturally relevant but also responsive to the unique needs and concerns of the community.

In addition to partnering with Black-led organizations, outdoor recreation organizations and land management agencies should invest in comprehensive cultural competency and anti-racism training for their staff, including park rangers, guides, and administrators. This training should go beyond a one-time workshop and instead be integrated into ongoing professional development and performance evaluations. By equipping staff with the knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, organizations can foster a culture of respect and belonging for Black visitors and employees alike.

Furthermore, acknowledging and addressing the historical trauma and racial violence associated with outdoor spaces is crucial for promoting cultural relevance and safety. This can involve developing educational initiatives and interpretive programs that honestly and transparently explore the complex histories of outdoor spaces, including the displacement and exclusion of Black communities. By confronting these difficult truths and working towards reconciliation and restorative justice, outdoor recreation providers can demonstrate their commitment to creating spaces that are not only physically safe but also emotionally and psychologically affirming for Black Americans.

Promoting Diverse Representation in Leadership and Decision-Making:

To truly transform the outdoor recreation industry into a more inclusive and equitable space, it is essential to prioritize diverse representation in leadership and decision-making roles. This requires a comprehensive and proactive approach that goes beyond simple recruitment efforts and addresses the systemic barriers that have historically excluded Black Americans from these positions.

Outdoor recreation organizations should implement targeted recruitment strategies that actively seek out and engage Black talent, such as partnering with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), professional associations, and community-based organizations. These partnerships can help build relationships and trust with the Black community, while also expanding the pool of qualified candidates for leadership roles.

In addition to recruitment, outdoor recreation organizations must also prioritize the retention and advancement of Black professionals within the industry. This can involve creating mentorship and sponsorship programs that pair Black employees with experienced leaders who can provide guidance, support, and advocacy for their career growth. By investing in the professional development and leadership potential of Black staff, organizations can cultivate a pipeline of diverse talent that is well-positioned to take on decision-making roles in the future.

Moreover, outdoor recreation organizations should conduct regular audits and assessments of their leadership and decision-making structures to identify and address any inequities or barriers to diverse representation. This can include examining hiring and promotion practices, board and committee composition, and organizational culture to ensure that they are inclusive and supportive of Black professionals. By systematically identifying and dismantling the obstacles that prevent Black Americans from accessing leadership roles, the outdoor recreation industry can create a more level playing field and harness the full potential of diverse perspectives and experiences.

Investing in Community-Driven Initiatives:

To effectively promote outdoor engagement among Black Americans, it is crucial for outdoor recreation companies, organizations, and government agencies to invest in community-driven initiatives that are rooted in the needs, aspirations, and strengths of Black communities. This requires a shift away from top-down, one-size-fits-all approaches and towards a more collaborative and empowering model of community partnership.

Outdoor recreation providers should prioritize funding and resources for Black-led organizations and community groups that have a proven track record of increasing access and participation in outdoor activities. Organizations like these tend to be more nimble than larger institutions like the National Park Service or REI and can iterate based on community feedback more efficiently. These grassroots efforts are often best positioned to understand and address the unique barriers and opportunities facing Black communities, and their expertise and community trust should be valued and leveraged in the development and implementation of outdoor engagement strategies.

In addition to providing financial support, outdoor recreation organizations should also offer capacity-building assistance to help Black-led initiatives scale and sustain their impact over time. This can include technical assistance, training, and networking opportunities that enable these organizations to strengthen their programming, expand their reach, and advocate for systemic change.

Furthermore, outdoor recreation providers should actively seek out and support the development of Black-owned outdoor recreation businesses and entrepreneurs. By investing in the growth and success of these ventures, the industry can help create a more diverse and inclusive ecosystem that benefits both Black communities and the outdoor recreation economy as a whole. This can involve providing access to capital, mentorship, and market opportunities, as well as collaborating with Black entrepreneurs to develop new products, services, and experiences that resonate with diverse audiences.

Ultimately, by investing in community-driven initiatives and Black-owned businesses, the outdoor recreation industry can demonstrate its commitment to equity and inclusion not only in its words but also in its actions. By shifting power and resources towards Black communities and enabling them to lead the way in promoting outdoor engagement, the industry can help create a more just, vibrant, and sustainable future for all.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the barriers and opportunities for Black Americans' participation in outdoor recreation, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study primarily focused on the experiences and perceptions of Black Americans in Massachusetts, which may not be representative of the diverse experiences of Black communities across the United States. Future research should explore the participation patterns and barriers faced by Black Americans in other geographic regions, as well as the intersectional experiences of Black individuals with other marginalized identities, such as those related to gender, sexuality, and disability.

Additionally, while the study included interviews with key stakeholders in the outdoor recreation industry, the sample size was relatively small and may not capture the full range of perspectives and initiatives within the sector. Furthermore, this study did not incorporate interviews with administrators and officers from state and national parks, whose insights would be crucial for a more nuanced understanding of the role these institutions play in shaping access and inclusivity in outdoor spaces. State and national parks have historically been sites where exclusion, both explicit and implicit, has occurred, and their administrators are key actors in both maintaining and reforming these spaces to be more inclusive.

Future Research

Future research should seek to engage a broader range of outdoor recreation companies, organizations, and government agencies, including those at the helm of park management. Engaging with park administrators and officials could provide critical insights into the institutional and policy-oriented aspects of accessibility and inclusion. Understanding these perspectives is essential for developing comprehensive strategies aimed at dismantling the systemic barriers that limit Black Americans' participation in outdoor activities and ensuring that these public spaces become truly inclusive and welcoming to all.

Furthermore, while the study highlighted the importance of community-driven initiatives in promoting outdoor engagement among Black Americans, more research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of these interventions. Future studies should employ rigorous evaluation methods to assess the outcomes and sustainability of community-based outdoor recreation programs, as well as identify best practices and lessons learned that can inform the development and scaling of similar initiatives.

Finally, the study primarily focused on the barriers and opportunities related to participation in traditional outdoor recreation activities, such as hiking, camping, and skiing. Future research should explore the diverse ways in which Black Americans engage with the outdoors, including urban outdoor recreation, cultural and heritage-based activities, and environmental stewardship practices. By broadening the scope of inquiry, future studies can contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Black Americans' relationship with the outdoors.

Conclusion

This study has sought to shed light on the complex factors that shape Black Americans' participation in outdoor recreation, drawing from a rich body of literature and the lived experiences shared through intercept and semi-structured interviews. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and systemic changes to address the stereotypes, economic barriers, cultural and safety concerns, and lack of diverse representation that hinder Black Americans' engagement in outdoor activities.

The recommendations proposed in this study, including challenging stereotypes through representation, addressing economic barriers through targeted initiatives, fostering cultural relevance and safety, promoting diverse representation in leadership and decision-making, and investing in community-driven initiatives, provide a roadmap for creating a more inclusive and accessible outdoor recreation environment for Black Americans.

However, it is important to recognize that this study is just one step in the ongoing journey toward equity and inclusion in outdoor recreation. Future research must continue to explore the diverse experiences and perspectives of Black Americans, as well as evaluate the effectiveness and impact of interventions aimed at increasing participation. By centering the voices and needs of Black communities, and engaging in collaborative and community-driven efforts, we can work towards a future where the outdoors is truly a space for all.

As we strive to create a more just and equitable society, it is crucial that we recognize the transformative power of outdoor recreation in fostering individual and community well-being, environmental stewardship, and social cohesion. By dismantling the barriers that have historically excluded Black Americans from these spaces and experiences, we can unlock the potential for outdoor recreation to serve as a catalyst for healing, empowerment, and social change. It is through this lens of

hope and possibility that we must approach the work ahead, united in our commitment to ensuring that the beauty and benefits of the outdoors are accessible to all.

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Appendix

List of Interview Questions – Intercept:

- I. Think of someone outdoorsy. What do they look like, where are they from and what's their lifestyle?
- II. Do you consider yourself an outdoorsy person? What outdoor activities do you engage in, and why might some people hesitate to join you?
- III. Where does your appreciation for the outdoors come from?
- IV. What are your favorite outdoor landscapes, and why? Are they the same as the places you spend time in?
- V. Name a place you'd like to visit but are afraid to. What's holding you back, and how do you think your friends and family would react?
- VI. Have you been on outdoor trips? Share a memorable experience and whether you felt safe.
- VII. What factors do you believe discourage people from participating in outdoor activities? What are the major obstacles in your view?
- VIII. When you think of your "happy place", what comes to mind?

List of Interview Questions – Semi-Structured – Outdoor Retailer:

- I. Give me a brief overview of your company and your position...How did you get to where you are today and why?. Can you provide an overview of your company's commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in outdoor recreation? What initiatives or programs have you put in place?
- II. How does your brand engage with underrepresented communities, such as Black individuals, to encourage their participation in outdoor activities?
- III. Outdoor gear can be expensive. What strategies or programs have you implemented to make outdoor apparel and equipment more affordable and accessible to a wider range of people?
- IV. Representation in marketing and advertising is crucial. How does your company ensure that your marketing materials reflect the diversity of outdoor enthusiasts?
- V. Community partnerships can play a significant role in breaking down barriers. Could you share any collaborations your company has with local organizations or community groups to promote outdoor recreation?
- VI. Addressing safety concerns is important for making outdoor spaces welcoming. What safety initiatives or resources do you provide to help people feel more secure in outdoor environments?
- VII. Environmental stewardship is a key aspect of outdoor recreation. Can you discuss your company's sustainability efforts, especially in terms of minimizing the environmental impact of outdoor apparel production?
- VIII. Inclusivity often goes hand in hand with education. How does your company support outdoor education and skill-building opportunities for diverse communities?
- IX. What feedback have you received from customers or community partners regarding your efforts to address barriers to outdoor recreation? How has this feedback influenced your strategies?

- X. Looking ahead, what future initiatives or goals does your company have in place to further promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoor recreation industry?

List of Interview Questions – Semi-Structured – Non-profit/For-profit Impact Venture:

- I. Can you briefly describe your non-profit organization and its mission?
- II. What inspired your organization to focus on the mental and physical development of young people through outdoor experiences?
- III. Could you outline some key programs and initiatives your organization offers to engage youth in outdoor activities?
- IV. How do these programs contribute to the mental and physical development of the participants?
- V. How does your organization ensure that outdoor activities are accessible to a diverse range of young people, including those from underserved communities?
- VI. What strategies or resources do you provide to make outdoor experiences inclusive and equitable for all participants?
- VII. In what ways do your programs incorporate educational elements or skill-building to enhance the participants' outdoor experiences?
- VIII. Can you share examples of how these educational components have positively influenced the youth you work with?
- IX. Are there any collaborations or partnerships with other organizations, schools, or local entities that support your mission?
- X. How have these partnerships contributed to the success of your outdoor programs for youth?
- XI. How does your organization measure the impact of your programs on the mental and physical development of youth participants?
- XII. What are some of the challenges your organization faces in promoting outdoor engagement and youth development?
- XIII. How have you addressed or overcome these challenges?
- XIV. What are the long-term goals and visions your organization has for continuing to support youth in outdoor activities and development?
- XV. Based on your experience, what advice would you give to other non-profit organizations or individuals interested in promoting youth outdoor engagement and development?

List of Outdoor Organizations:

- I. **52 Hike Challenge:** <https://www.52hikechallenge.com> - 52 Hike Challenge aims to inspire personal growth and outdoor connections through a year-long commitment to weekly hiking, touting the physical and mental benefits.
- II. **Backyard Basecamp:** <https://backyardbasecamp.org/> - Backyard Basecamp motivates BIPOC communities in Baltimore to engage with local nature and explore further, managing an urban farm and green space for education and access.
- III. **Bay Area Wilderness Training (BAWT):** <https://www.bawt.org/> - Bay Area Wilderness Training is dedicated to providing equitable outdoor access for low-income and BIPOC youth, fostering a new generation of diverse social and environmental leaders through meaningful nature experiences.

- IV. **Bearings Bike Works:** <https://bearingsbikeworks.org/> - Bearings Bike Works in Atlanta provides urban youth with opportunities to discover and develop skills through bicycle-centric programming.
- V. **Big City Mountaineers:** <https://bigcitymountaineers.org/> - Big City Mountaineers provides under-resourced youth with fully-outfitted and professionally led outdoor experiences to build life skills and community.
- VI. **Black Girls Do Bike:** <https://www.blackgirlsdobike.org/> - Black Girls Do Bike creates a community that supports Black women cyclists, promoting skill-sharing and mentorship to build a diverse biking community.
- VII. **Black Girls Hike RVA:** <https://www.blackgirlshikerva.com/> - Black Girls Hike RVA offers a supportive hiking environment for Black women, fostering a connection with nature and encouraging outdoor fitness in Richmond, Virginia.
- VIII. **Black Girls Run:** <https://blackgirlsrun.com/> - Black Girls Run tackles the growing obesity epidemic in the African-American community by encouraging Black women to make fitness and healthy living a priority.
- IX. **Black Girls Trekkin' (BGT):** <https://blackgirlstrekkin.com/> - Black Girls Trekkin' is a group dedicated to representation and diversity in outdoor spaces, empowering Black women to embrace the outdoors through hiking and adventure.
- X. **Black Outside:** <https://www.blackoutside.org/> - Black Outside aims to reconnect Black youth to the outdoors through culturally relevant outdoor experiences that foster leadership and a love of nature.
- XI. **Brown Girls Climb:** <https://www.browngirlsclimb.com/> - Brown Girls Climb is a national non-profit focused on mentorship, access, leadership, and representation in climbing for People of the Global Majority, with an emphasis on equitable relationships.
- XII. **Brown People Camping:** <https://www.brownpeoplecamping.com/> - Brown People Camping's mission is to promote diversity in outdoor recreation through storytelling that encourages BIPOC individuals to go camping and enjoy nature.
- XIII. **Destination Hike:** <https://www.destinationhike.com/> - Destination Hike offers hiking adventures that invite people to explore natural beauty, rejuvenate, and connect with a community of fellow hikers.
- XIV. **Diversify Outdoors:** <https://www.diversifyoutdoors.com/> - Diversify Outdoors is a coalition for outdoor leaders who are committed to promoting diversity in outdoor spaces.
- XV. **Fresh Tracks:** <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/fresh-tracks/> - Fresh Tracks brings together diverse youth leaders to participate in cross-cultural exchanges and leadership training that combine the outdoors, cultural sharing, and community engagement.
- XVI. **Get Out Stay Out:** <https://vamosafuera.org/> - Get Out Stay Out engages indigenous migrant youth in outdoor education to empower them and promote stewardship of the land.
- XVII. **GirlTrek:** <https://www.girltrek.org/> - GirlTrek is a health movement dedicated to unleashing a mass movement for health justice among Black women, using daily walking as a means of radical self-care and community mobilization for systemic change.
- XVIII. **Green 2.0:** <https://diversegreen.org/> - Green 2.0 strives to increase racial diversity in the environmental movement.
- XIX. **Greening Youth Foundation (GYF):** <https://gyfoundation.org/> - Greening Youth Foundation connects underrepresented youth to the outdoors and environmental careers.
- XX. **Golden Bricks Events:** <https://goldenbricksevents.com/main/> - Golden Bricks Events focuses on creating memorable experiences through event planning and management.

- XXI. **In Solidarity Project:** <https://www.insolidarityproject.com/> - The In Solidarity Project supports organizations and activists working for social justice through collaboration and partnership.
- XXII. **Latino Outdoors:** <https://latinooutdoors.org/> - Latino Outdoors celebrates Latino culture in the outdoors and works to create a community of leaders for conservation.
- XXIII. **Melanin Base Camp:** <https://www.melaninbasecamp.com/> - Melanin Base Camp aims to increase the visibility of outdoors enthusiasts of color and provide a platform for storytelling and advocacy.
- XXIV. **Momentum Bike Clubs:** <https://momentumbikeclubs.org/> - Momentum Bike Clubs aids youth development through a comprehensive program that integrates cycling and mentorship, focusing on supporting young lives.
- XXV. **National Brotherhood of Skiers:** <https://www.nbs.org/> - National Brotherhood of Skiers promotes the development of skiing among Black youth and adults and supports athletes in international and Olympic winter sports competitions.
- XXVI. **Native Women's Wilderness:** <https://www.nativewomenswilderness.org/> - Native Women's Wilderness seeks to inspire and raise the voices of Native Women in the outdoor realm and to encourage a love of the outdoors in the Native community.
- XXVII. **Outdoor Afro:** <https://outdoorafro.org/> - Outdoor Afro is a national network that encourages and celebrates Black connections and leadership in nature.
- XXVIII. **Outdoor Empowered Network (OEN):** <https://www.outdoorsempowered.org/> - Outdoor Empowered Network empowers individuals through training and providing gear to organizations that enable youth outdoor experiences.
- XXIX. **Outdoor Industry Association (OIA):** <https://outdoorindustry.org/> - The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) advocates for the interests and needs of the outdoor industry, promoting growth and success within the sector.
- XXX. **Outdoor Foundation:** <https://outdoorindustry.org/participation/> - The Outdoor Foundation works to increase outdoor participation and ensures that future generations have opportunities to play and grow outdoors.
- XXXI. **Outdoor Outreach:** <https://www.outdooroutreach.org/> - Outdoor Outreach connects youth to the transformative power of the outdoors to inspire positive change in individuals and communities.
- XXXII. **Outdoorsy Black Women:** <https://outdoorsyblackwomen.com/> - Outdoorsy Black Women is a social network designed to connect Black women who share an interest or curiosity in outdoor activities and to foster a supportive community around an outdoorsy lifestyle.
- XXXIII. **Outward Bound Adventures:** <https://www.obainc.org/> - Outward Bound Adventures is dedicated to introducing urban youth to nature and wilderness experiences to foster environmental awareness and personal growth.
- XXXIV. **REI Co-op:** <https://www.rei.com/about-rei> - REI Co-op is an outdoor retail cooperative focused on inspiring, educating, and outfitting its members and the community for a lifetime of outdoor adventure and stewardship.
- XXXV. **Rocking The Boat:** <https://rockingtheboat.org/> - Rocking The Boat uses boatbuilding and on-water education to help young people develop into empowered and responsible adults.
- XXXVI. **Soul River Inc.:** <https://soulriverinc.org/> - Soul River Inc. connects veterans and inner-city youth to the outdoors through fly fishing, providing transformative experiences in nature.
- XXXVII. **Soul Trak Outdoors:** <https://soultrak.com/> - Soul Trak Outdoors is focused on connecting communities of color to outdoor spaces while also fostering leadership and community engagement.

- XXXVIII. **The Brown Ascenders:** <https://www.thebrownascenders.org/> - The Brown Ascenders aim to promote diversity in the climbing community, focusing on people of color, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Latinx climbers.
- XXXIX. **The Outside Initiative:** <https://theoutsideinitiative.org/> - The Outside Initiative provides BIPOC and White Hikers with BIPOC guides to provide connection and ensure safety to all.
- XL. **Vibe Tribe Adventures:** <https://vibetribeadventures.org/> - Vibe Tribe Adventures encourages Black women, men, and children to explore the outdoors through adventure travel, while also providing education on African American history.
- XLI. **Youth Outside:** <https://www.mightycause.com/organization/Youth-Outside> - Youth Outside advocates for the engagement of youth in the outdoors through grantmaking, capacity-building, and advocacy to create a more inclusive outdoor experience for all.