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Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1864–1930

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The author is a doctoral candidate in history in the University of California, Los Angeles. The PHR's Board of Editors selected this essay as winner of the W. Turrentine Jackson Prize for 1995.

The true ownership of the wilderness belongs in the highest to those who love it most.

John Muir (1912)

Whit men drive my people out—my Yosemite.

Totuya (1929)

Although every area that later became a national park was once utilized or inhabited by American Indians, only Yosemite National Park has ever included a native community within its boundaries. Indeed, Americans are able to cherish their national parks today only because Indians abandoned them involuntarily or were forcibly removed to reservations. Because Indian removal from Yosemite National Park occurred in the first half of this century, and not in the dusty old days of Indian wars and land grabs, the park's early history presents a unique opportunity for examining the basic ideals underpinning American conceptions of wilderness and their close links to ideas about Native Americans. The long presence of Indians in Yosemite is all the more remarkable when compared to the removal and exclusion of Indians from other early national parks like Yellowstone

and Glacier, and provides an exceptional case by which to evaluate the policies developed at these and other parks. Such a comparison not only sheds light on Yosemite's unique history, but also demonstrates that the presence of a native community within a national park eventually proved too exceptional for the park service. Consequently, in an effort to hasten the "vanishing" of Yosemite's Indians and bring the park in line with the rest of the national park system, Yosemite officials implemented a program of gradual Indian removal in the 1930s.¹

The Yosemite Indians' ability to remain in a national park resulted in large part from a long history of efforts to both resist and adapt to the American conquest of their homeland. The first sustained contact between the Yosemite and whites took place in the aftermath of the Gold Rush as thousands of "forty-niners" invaded the central Sierra Nevada. While miners brought epidemic diseases to native communities and destroyed carefully tended ecosystems in their feverish quest for some trace of the Mother Lode, the growth of mining camps and settlements also spawned a series of violent conflicts between whites and displaced Indians. Not surprisingly, the "discovery" of Yosemite Valley in 1851 occurred during a military campaign to subdue the Indians of the central Sierra Nevada and relocate them to the

1. While historians have not examined Indian removal from Yosemite National Park, two recent works have associated California's efforts to remove the Yosemite Indians from the area in the 1850s with the desire to establish Yosemite Park in the 1860s. Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers, and Defenders of the Amazon* (New York, 1990), 269–276; Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West* (San Francisco, 1994). Much of the documentation for this article comes from the Yosemite National Park Research Library. Unlike most national park archives or libraries, Yosemite has held onto the bulk of its original holdings. For the most part, those materials that have been sent to the National Archives, either at Washington, D.C., or the Regional Branch in San Bruno, California, have been copied and filed in Yosemite. Those records pertaining to the Yosemite Indians are generally found in the internal reports and correspondence of park employees and did not become a part of the Federal Records system except in those instances when copies of these documents were forwarded to the director of the National Park Service. Documents relating to Indians in Yosemite after 1916 are especially well organized and have remained largely untapped by historians of the park. Although the sources at the Yosemite National Park Library are especially rich, this article would not have been possible except for the patience and advice of Yosemite's librarians and archivists. Likewise, the comments of several people have greatly improved this article, and I would especially like to thank Tanis Thorne, Kerwin Klein, Amanda Kate Allaback, and the referees for the *Pacific Historical Review*.

San Joaquin Valley. Efforts to remove the Indians from the region ultimately failed, however, and the Yosemite reestablished themselves in the valley after two years of sporadic encounters with miners and state militia battalions.²

By necessity, the Yosemite developed an accommodating relationship with nearby mining camps in the mid 1850s, and a number of Indians started to work for individual argonauts or panned gold for themselves.³ Yosemite Valley lay outside the purview of most mining interests, however, and the Indians preserved a degree of distance and autonomy from neighboring white society that few native groups in the gold country could ever hope for. Consequently, Yosemite became something of a cultural island and, as it had been for centuries, remained an important place for hunting, harvesting various food and medicinal plants, and served as the locale for important religious celebrations. While only a few Indians remained in the valley year-round during these years, most spent the winter months in the lower country to the west with a few hundred returning to Yosemite each year. In the spring of 1857, for instance, an early hotelier observed that an especially "large band of Indians" had come to the valley "on account of a bounteous acorn crop the preceding fall."⁴ A few weeks later, a Belgian gold miner familiar with the Yosemite region probably encountered the same group of Indians, which numbered about a hundred, when he noted that a large encampment he encountered three years earlier had moved further up the Merced River into the valley.⁵ Yosemite Indians still lit purposeful fires in the valley in the early 1860s,

2. Lafayette H. Bunnell, *Discovery of the Yosemite, and The Indian War of 1851, Which Led to that Event* (Chicago, 1880); Carl P. Russell, *One Hundred Years in Yosemite: The Story of a Great Park and Its Friends* (Yosemite, 1957), 36–48; Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln, 1990), 10–12; Craig D. Bates and Martha Lee, *Tradition and Innovation: A Basket History of the Indians of the Yosemite-Mono Lake Area* (Yosemite, 1991), 26–27. This last book includes the best available history of the Yosemite Indians.

3. See Jean-Nicholas Perlot, *Gold Seeker: Adventures of a Belgian Argonaut during the Gold Rush Years*, translated by Helen Harding Bretnor, edited by Howard R. Lamar (New Haven, 1985), 228. For a general account of California Indians working in the gold country, see James J. Rawls, "Gold Diggers: Indian Miners in the California Gold Rush," *California Historical Quarterly*, LV (1976), 28–48; and Albert Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven, 1988), 100–117.

4. James M. Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras* (Oakland, 1886), 100.

5. Perlot, *Gold Seeker*, 294.

and one traveler observed that they had started so many small fires for the purpose of "clearing the ground, the more readily to obtain their winter supply of acorns and wild sweet potato root," that the fire-glow could be seen from miles away.⁶

While the gold rush took a severe toll on the Indians of the central Sierra Nevada, native inhabitants still greatly outnumbered European and American visitors to Yosemite Valley until the early 1860s. Between 1855, when the first pleasure-seeking tourists visited Yosemite, and 1863, only 406 visitors entered the valley. As Yosemite's fame grew and travel became less arduous, however, visitation increased exponentially thereafter. In 1864, the year that President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Park Act, Yosemite received 147 visitors, but this figure more than doubled the following year and soon rose above 1,100 with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.⁷ Along with increasing numbers of visitors, tourist facilities rapidly expanded as early concessionaires built new hotels, planted orchards and vegetable gardens, plowed and fenced hay fields, blazed trails, and constructed roads.⁸ Between 1874, when Yosemite received 2,711 tourists, and 1875, the Big Oak Flat Road, the Coulterville Road, and the Wawona Road opened to wagon traffic for the first time, bringing wagon loads of supplies and coaches full of tourists to the valley on a regular basis.⁹

Despite the dramatic increases in visitation, Indians in Yosemite Valley remained on fairly good terms with their new neighbors and found in the growing tourist industry a means by which they could both earn a livelihood within their rapidly changing world and remain in their ancestral home. A number of small Indian communities in the Sierra foothills made similar adjustments to the changes wrought by growing white settlements, but these so-called *rancherías* generally persisted only as very small communities of a few families. The Indian population of Yosemite actually grew as tourism increased, however, and a number

6. I. W. Baxley, *What I Saw on the West Coast of South and North America and the Hawaiian Islands* (New York, 1865), 467.

7. Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras*, 130.

8. Runte, *Yosemite*, 51–54.

9. Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras*, 130; Bates and Lee, *Tradition and Innovation*, 31.

of dislocated groups returned to the area to seek employment during the spring and summer tourist season.¹⁰

How one defines a Yosemite Indian has long proven difficult for anthropologists and park officials, but the group most closely associated with Yosemite Valley at the time of the park's establishment was the Ahwahneechee. Part of a larger cultural and linguistic group called the Southern Sierra Miwok, the Ahwahneechee frequently traded and intermarried with other Miwok tribes as well as Mono-Paiutes from the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada. Yokuts from the Central Valley, and even some former mission Indians from the coast, also mixed in with the Ahwahneechee before the 1850s to create a complex Yosemite Indian culture.¹¹ Such cultural blending, or ethnogenesis, was common among pre-contact tribes, but became especially pronounced when various native groups struggled to survive the impact of American settlements. L. H. Bunnell, one of the first whites to see Yosemite Valley during the militia campaigns of 1851 and 1852, clearly recognized these processes at work when he referred to the "Yo-Semite Indians [as] a composite race, consisting of the disaffected of the various tribes from the Tuolumne to King's River."¹² The processes of cultural blending did not cease with the end of the gold rush, however, and Yosemite Indian culture continued to evolve in the decades following the establishment of Yosemite Park. Borrowing items and practices from surrounding American and Mexican communities, and combining the traditions of various Indian groups, the Yosemite con-

10. Karen P. Wells and Craig D. Bates, "Ethnohistory and Material Culture of Southern Sierra Miwok: 1852-1880," unpublished essay in the Yosemite National Park Research Library (hereafter YNPRL); C. E. Kelsey, *Census of Non-Reservation California Indians, 1905-1906*, edited by Robert Heizer (Berkeley, 1971); Samuel A. Barrett and Edward W. Gifford, "Miwok Material Culture," *Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee*, II (1933), 117-376; James Gary Maniery, *Six Mile and Murphy's Rancherias: An Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Study of Two Central Sierra Miwok Village Sites* (San Diego, 1987); Eugene L. Conrotto, *Miwok Means People: The Life and Fate of the Native Inhabitants of the Gold Rush Country* (Fresno, 1973). The Washo Indians of the Lake Tahoe area made similar adaptations to agricultural and mining developments in their homeland. James F. Downs, *Two Worlds of the Washo: An Indian Tribe of California and Nevada* (New York, 1966).

11. Bates and Lee, *Tradition and Innovation*, 23, 25-26.

12. Lafayette H. Bunnell, from a letter quoted in "The Yo-Ham-i-te Valley," *Hutchings' California Magazine*, I (1856), 7.

stantly adapted to new conditions and managed to remain a distinct and viable community within a rapidly changing world.¹³

Although they retained a fair amount of their traditional lifeways, the Yosemite became further integrated into the tourist economy as more and more visitors arrived in the valley. Increasingly, the Indians' presence in Yosemite depended upon their ability to gain employment from hoteliers and concessionaires. Indian men found work chopping wood and putting up hay, labored about the hotels, served as guides, drove sight-seeing wagons, and often provided large private parties with fish and game.¹⁴ The Yosemite succeeded especially well at supplying fish to tourist parties who, as many sportsmen reported, almost never had any luck fishing. As one early visitor noted, "trout are abundant in some of the streams, but they are very shy of the hook. The Indians catch them in traps, and frequently supply travelers at twenty-five cents per pound."¹⁵ Yosemite women often worked in the private homes of concessionaires as domestics, and in the hotels they often found work as maids or washerwomen.¹⁶

13. Cultural Systems Research, Inc. (hereafter CSRI), *Petition to the Government of the United States from the American Indian Council of Mariposa County for Acknowledgment as the Yosemite Indian Tribe* (Menlo Park, Calif., 1984); Wells and Bates, "Ethnohistory and Material Culture"; Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*. Efforts by park officials and scholars to define "true" Yosemite Indians as directly descended from the Ahwahneechee have always been flawed since such a definition implies that a static Ahwahneechee culture once existed and then perished when change arrived in the mid-nineteenth century. In much the same way that the Puritans of the seventeenth century are gone, one could claim that the Ahwahneechee of the early 1800s no longer exist. But just as there have been New Englanders for nearly five centuries, so too have there been Yosemite Indians since the last Ice Age. Though much different than even two generations ago, the Yosemite Indians remain a distinct and dynamic cultural group today, with close ties to Yosemite Valley and the surrounding area.

14. See, J. F. Campbell, *My Circular Notes: Extracts from Journals, Letters Sent Home, Geological and Other Notes Written While Traveling Westwards Round the World from July 6, 1874–July 6, 1875* (London, 1876), 79; Charles Carleton Coffin, *Our New Way Round the World* (Boston, 1869), 478; Samuel Kneeland, *The Wonders of the Yosemite Valley, and of California* (Boston, 1872), 52–53; W. W. Ross, *10,000 Miles by Land and Sea* (Toronto, 1876), 180; A. E. Wood, *Annual Report of the Acting Superintendent of the Yosemite National Park to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D. C., 1892); Charles Francis Saunders, *Under the Sky in California* (New York, 1913), 69.

15. John S. Hittell, *Yosemite: Its Wonders and Its Beauties* (San Francisco, 1868), 30.

16. Bates and Lee, *Tradition and Innovation*, 34.

Women and children also picked the wild strawberries that grew in the valley meadows in late summer and sold them to the hotels, and even as late as 1913 private parties could still occasionally purchase chickens, fresh fish, and wild strawberries from them.¹⁷

Indian employment in Yosemite reflected patterns established throughout the central Sierra Nevada in the years following the gold rush. The massive invasion of miners who poured over the mountains brutally devastated whole Indian societies while the environmental destruction wrought by mining practices undermined seasonal hunting and gathering cycles. Severely weakened and suddenly homeless in their homelands, most of California's shrinking Indian population found the means for survival only in close accommodation with whites.¹⁸ Many Miwok families and individuals moved to where they could eke out a living on the margins of white settlements. Though generally despised and frequently humiliated by whites, their presence was tolerated whenever Indian labor could not easily be replaced by Mexican or Chinese workers. A similar situation developed in Yosemite, but there the Indians got along much better with their white neighbors since the valley did not attract the same rough crowd that congregated in the mining camps. The remoteness of Yosemite also made Indian labor more prized, and because they posed no visible threat to tourists or concessionaires, the Yosemite were left to live in relative peace and allowed to participate in non-Indian society to a degree rarely seen elsewhere in California. The Yosemite's ability to adapt to their new world also

17. Saunders, *Under the Sky in California*, 64.

18. James J. Rawls, *Indians of California: The Changing Image* (Norman, 1984), *passim*; Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*, 100–117, 149–168. It is generally agreed that California's Indian population fell from 150,000 in 1848 to 35,000 in 1860, declining to a nadir of some 20,000 by the 1890s. Sierra Miwok numbers plummeted even more drastically, from an estimated 9,000 in aboriginal times to 760 individuals in 1910. This profound demographic collapse resulted primarily from starvation, disease, and murder. Sherburne F. Cook, *The Population of the California Indians, 1769–1970* (Berkeley, 1976), 43–73; Alfred Kroeber, "Indians of Yosemite," in A.E. Hall, ed., *Handbook of Yosemite National Park* (New York, 1921), 54; Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492* (Norman, 1987), 107–113. For a chilling account of the destruction of California Indian communities during the gold rush and the measures that refugees took to survive, see W. P. Crenshaw's report to F. J. Henley, superintendent of Indian Affairs, in *Indians of Nevada City in 1854* (Nevada City, Calif., 1993).

made them inconspicuous to state officials, who had taken over Indian policy in California after federal efforts to develop a reservation system in the Central Valley failed in the early 1860s.¹⁹

Despite the disinterestedness of the state, the presence of Indians in Yosemite proved a matter of considerable interest for many early visitors. The often patronizing affection that early tourists had for the Indians who lived in Yosemite Valley, and the Indians' ability to reciprocate and even exploit these affections, went far toward insuring they would remain in the area long after Yosemite became a national park. As Europeans and Americans had for the previous century-and-a-half, early tourists continued to associate Indians with wilderness and many were delighted to find them still living in Yosemite. Tourists happily recalled being entertained by their native and non-native guides with accounts of Yosemite legends, while other visitors commented excitedly about encounters with local Indians. The Indian settlement just outside the valley at Wawona became something of a tourist attraction, and in the words of one traveler, the sweat house there was an especially popular "object of curiosity."²⁰ Tourists would often visit the camp in the evenings to see how the Indians lived, and at times dined with them in their dwellings.²¹ In both Yosemite Valley and Wawona, the Indians' expertise as fishermen and hunters frequently received praise from sportsmen, and their methods of gathering, storing, and preparing acorns fascinated countless visitors.²²

The association of Native Americans with wilderness was

19. Wells and Bates, "Ethnohistory and Material Culture," *passim*. For studies of federal and state Indian policies in California, see Joseph Ellison, *California and the Nation, 1850-1869: A Study of the Relations of a Frontier Community with the Federal Government* (Berkeley, 1927), 97-102; Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*, 126-148; Rawls, *Indians of California*, 137-160; and Robert A. Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-1851* (Philadelphia, 1975), *passim*.

20. Kneeland, *Wonders of the Yosemite Valley*, 52.

21. Although a number of tourist accounts mention the Indian settlement at Wawona, see especially John Erastus Lester, *The Atlantic to the Pacific: What to See and How to See It* (Boston, 1873), 140; anonymous, *Souvenir of Yosemite* (N.p., 1886?), 7.

22. Charles B. Turrill, *California Notes* (San Francisco, 1876), 223-224; Campbell, *My Circular Notes*, 79; Lester, *Atlantic to the Pacific*, 140, 156; Ross, *1,000 Miles by Land and Sea*, 181-182; "Digger Indian Fare," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 12, 1889; Saunders, *Under the Sky in California*, 67.

especially strong in the minds of early tourists, with one visitor in the 1850s even suggesting that Yosemite be left entirely to the Indians. Unlike rapacious Americans, he observed, they showed their "love for the spot the 'Great Spirit' has made so lovely, and hallowed as the hunting ground of [their] forefathers."²³ After Yosemite's preservation in the 1860s, another tourist expressed similar sentiments in even more patronizing and romantic language. Thrilled that Yosemite was still home to "Indians, the simple children as of old," he wrote excitedly of "their bows, and arrows with flint heads; their food mostly acorns pounded in a rock hollowed out perhaps centuries ago for the same purpose; their furniture willow baskets; cooking by heating stones, and throwing them when heated into water; their faces tattooed and painted, and their enjoyments nothing above those of the animal." The government act to preserve a place still inhabited by these "simple children" gave him hope that "the time will never come when Art is sent here to improve Nature."²⁴

The idea that Indians somehow complemented or completed a wilderness scene was also evident in the works of Yosemite's early landscape painters. While images of modern tourists in Yosemite could detract from the sublimity of the landscape, "picturesque" Indians, or Indian-built structures, gave a touch of "native" color to the wilderness and provided a human scale by which to emphasize the grandeur of Yosemite's cliffs and waterfalls.²⁵ The artist and writer Constance Fletcher Gordon Cumming, for instance, found Yosemite Indian encampments to be "filthy" and uninviting, but she could not resist placing them in the foreground of some of her paintings since they brought a "naturalness" and "blessed" touch of color to her art.²⁶

James Hutchings, one of Yosemite's earliest and most avid promoters, understood the tourist's fascination with Indians and his promotional writings about Yosemite in the 1870s and '80s

23. *Mariposa Gazette*, Oct. 11, 1855, quoted in Peter Browning, *Yosemite Place Names* (Lafayette, Calif., 1988), 216.

24. George W. Pine, *Beyond the West* (Utica, N.Y., 1871), 417.

25. Kate Nearpass Ogden, "Sublime Vistas and Scenic Backdrops: Nineteenth-Century Painters and Photographers at Yosemite," *California History*, LXIX (Summer 1990), 146

26. Constance Fletcher Gordon Cumming, *Granite Crags of California* (Edinburgh and London, 1886), 137.

frequently called attention to the "Indian Camp, and its interesting people [as]...one of the many attractive features of Yosemite." For Hutchings, the Indians in Yosemite possessed "the principal customs, occupations, manner of living, habits of thought, traditions, legends, and systems of belief," not only of their own people and the surrounding tribes, but also of "the California Indians generally." Consequently, Yosemite was an excellent place to see "real" Indians in their "natural" environment.²⁷ Though his comments reflected the romantic hyperbole of the time, in some respects Hutchings was right. The Yosemite Indians probably constituted the largest native community in the central Sierra Nevada at this time, and their efforts to coexist with non-native society actually preserved a high degree of cultural continuity and independence. Of course, as noted earlier, the Indians had adopted a number of their white neighbors' tools and customs, and Yosemite's roads, pastures, hotels, and camp sites were anything but "natural," yet most early tourists simply applied a little imaginative effort and visually edited out such distractions.

Probably the most popular "Indian activity" for early Yosemite tourists was basketry, and many proclaimed Yosemite's basket weavers the finest in the world. The first recorded sale of a basket to a tourist in Yosemite occurred in 1869, but sales did not become commonplace until the 1890s. By that time, Miwok and Paiute women in and around Yosemite began manufacturing baskets expressly for sale to tourists, and their work soon became so famous that collectors and dealers traveled thousands of miles to purchase baskets.²⁸ As Craig Bates and Martha Lee have observed, the Yosemite baskets were popular with visitors since they "brought to mind western, romantic, and primitive connotations." More than collectible items of merchandise, they allowed the purchaser "to sustain memories of their wilderness experiences."²⁹ Baskets also represented an important means by which Yosemite Indian women could directly tap into the tourist trade and gain esteem in their own community. Basket making was a

27. Hutchings, *In the Heart of the Sierras*, 421–422.

28. Bates and Lee, *Tradition and Innovation*, 73–89.

29. *Ibid.*, 8. For a contemporary comment on this phenomenon, see Galen Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley and Vicinity: Their History, Customs, and Traditions, with an Appendix of Useful Information for Yosemite Visitors* (Yosemite, 1904), 1.

highly valued skill among the Yosemite, and though a woman could make more money as a laundress, the number and quality of baskets that a family possessed were traditional signs of wealth and status within the Yosemite community.³⁰ Consequently, a successful basket maker not only profited from the tourist trade, but she also utilized a skill that brought her respect from tourists, park officials, and other Indians, and enhanced her family's and her own status within the Yosemite Indian community.³¹

Aside from basketry, Indians found other means for profiting from the interest of early tourists in "things Indian." By the early 1870s, individual Indians frequently entertained visitors outside their hotels and charged a penny for a brief dance or song while larger "fandangos," as early Californians called them, may have been held on occasion for the paid entertainment of tourists.³² The growing popularity of "kodaks" in the late 1880s made photographing Indians another important feature of the Yosemite tourist experience. The Yosemite Indians quickly recognized the marketability of their own "exotic naturalness," and several early tourists made special note of "a very cunning little papoose [who] smiled for a dime a smile."³³ Within a few decades the price for a picture had risen considerably, and one popular basket weaver charged tourists a half dollar to photograph her with her baskets!³⁴ Galen Clark, in a 1904 book addressed to a growing interest in Yosemite Indians, admonished tourists not to expect the Indians "to pose for you for nothing [since] they are asked to do it hundreds of times every summer, and are entitled to payment for their trouble." He further advised his readers to "treat the Indians with courtesy and consideration, if you expect

30. Bates and Lee, *Tradition and Innovation*, 22–23.

31. Because of their marked importance to tourists and the members of their own community, these women or their families often served as intermediaries between park officials and the Yosemite Indians. Indeed, important early basket makers were often identified as Indian leaders, and their status within the Yosemite Indian community often passed to their children and grandchildren. *Ibid.*, 143.

32. While early tourists commented on such "fandangos," it is difficult to determine whether they were part of a traditional ceremony that outsiders were invited to witness—perhaps for a fee—or if they were strictly a commercial event. For an example of comments on individual dancers and singers, see Helen Hunt Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home and Abroad* (Boston, 1894), 107.

33. Anonymous, *A Souvenir of Yosemite*, 7.

34. Frank T. Lea, "Indian Bread Makers in Yosemite," *Overland Monthly*, LXIV (July 1914), 25.

similar treatment from them.”³⁵ By the end of the century, Indians had become an important part of the Yosemite experience for tourists, whether as laborers in the tourist industry or as an authenticating aspect of a tourist’s encounter with the “wilderness.” Likewise, tourists had become an integral part of the Yosemite Indians’ lives, and as one frequent visitor to Yosemite commented, a number of Indians were “in the habit of repairing yearly to the Yosemite for the purpose of sharing in the double harvest,—first of the tourists, later of the acorns.”³⁶

The presence of Indians in Yosemite during the last decades of the nineteenth century contrasts markedly with the policies of Indian removal implemented at Yellowstone in the 1880s. Established in 1872, only eight years after President Lincoln signed the Yosemite Park Act, Yellowstone is a near contemporary of Yosemite in the annals of wilderness preservation. The removal of Indians from Yellowstone points up some significant differences in the evolution of these parks, however, and highlights the unique conditions that fostered the continuing development of Yosemite’s Indian community. Created within Wyoming Territory, a federally administered region, most of Yellowstone’s lands bordered, and even overlapped with, some newly established Indian reservations. Consequently, the issue of Indian removal from the national park was wholly a federal prerogative, and park administrators could coordinate their efforts to exclude Indians from the park with officials in the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the War Department. Following a series of Indian “troubles” in the late 1870s that threatened to undermine a growing tourist trade, Superintendent Philetus W. Norris lobbied hard in Washington for a treaty to exclude all Indians from the park. His efforts proved successful, and in the summer of 1880 he personally negotiated treaties with two Indian groups in which they recognized Yellowstone as a national park and promised to avoid the area in the future.³⁷ Yosemite, on the other

35. Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley and Vicinity*, 104.

36. J. Smeaton Chase, *Yosemite Trails: Camp and Pack Train in the Yosemite Region of the Sierra Nevada* (Boston and New York, 1911), 32–33.

37. The “Indian troubles” began when the Nez Perce passed through Yellowstone in 1877 during their ill-fated attempt to escape to Canada, assaulting a few tourists and taking another hostage. Bannocks raided the park for horses in 1878 during an uprising against their confinement to a reservation in southern Idaho. The following year, the so-called Sheepstealer War in southeastern Idaho once again

hand, was established within a state, and California officials retained sole responsibility for the park's management until the 1890s. Like the state's management of its Indian affairs, however, Sacramento took almost no interest in the administration of Yosemite. Even if state officials decided to exclude Indians from Yosemite, their removal from the park would have been complicated by the fact that, after the demise of California's reservation system in the 1850s, there were no parcels of land to which they could be restricted. As a result, no policy ever developed regarding the removal or restriction of the Yosemite Indians so long as the park remained under state control.

The different conditions surrounding the administration of each park certainly influenced the development or absence of a policy toward Indians, but the issue of Indian removal from park lands ultimately depended on the attitudes of park officials and tourists toward Native Americans. Coming only a few years after Lt. Colonel George A. Custer's debacle at Little Big Horn, the early exclusion of Indians from Yellowstone reflected a concern that Indians might frighten potential visitors away from the park. To alleviate tourists' fears about Yellowstone, and despite his firsthand knowledge that several plains and intermountain tribes frequently used park lands, Superintendent Norris disseminated a myth that Indians avoided Yellowstone because of superstitions about geysers.³⁸ Unlike the Indians of the Rocky Mountain re-

troubled Yellowstone's administrators. For a brief treatment of these conflicts, see Joel C. Janetski, *Indians of Yellowstone Park* (Salt Lake City, 1987), 61–77. Norris's treaties were ratified by Congress in 1882. In accordance with these agreements, the last Indians to live year-round in the Yellowstone area, a small Shoshonean group called Sheepeaters, left the park to live on reservations in Wyoming and Idaho. *Ibid.*, 54–55; Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 18–19.

38. Joseph Weixelman, "The Power to Evoke Wonder: Native Americans & the Geysers of Yellowstone National Park" (M.A. thesis, Montana State University, 1992), *passim*. Norris's writings about Indians in Yellowstone have long been criticized, but they still influence a popular belief that Indians never lived in, or extensively utilized, the Yellowstone "wilderness." Alfred Runte's "worthless lands" thesis—that only scenic lands with no residential or economic value have become national parks—may serve well for Anglo-American valuations of these areas, but his assertion that such lands were also worthless to Native Americans is unfounded. Even tribes greatly dependent on buffalo hunting spent a large part of every year in the foothills and high mountain areas of the Rockies. Far from "worthless," these places were often the most frequently inhabited areas since they provided shelter from winter storms and summer heat, sustained large seasonal herds of important game animals such as elk, and served as the locale for large tribal gatherings and

gion, however, California Indians rarely marshaled a threatening resistance to the invasion of their homelands. Consequently, the presence of Indians in Yosemite never became a matter of fearful concern among administrators or visitors, even during the highly publicized Modoc War of the early 1870s. Indeed, as one visitor noted in 1872, the Yosemite were altogether “mild” and “harmless,” and wholly unlike the more dangerous tribes further east.³⁹

By the 1890s, however, park officials at both Yosemite and Yellowstone began to share similar concerns about the presence of Indians within a nature preserve. In Yellowstone, Bannock hunting parties still frequented the park and their presence was a matter of great consternation for park officials. Because the conflicts of the 1870s were now a dim memory, and since the Bannock only moved through the most remote portions of the park, officials no longer worried that the presence of Indians might frighten visitors. Instead, their concerns reflected new ideas about Indians as both harmful to wilderness and potentially assimilable into American society. Yellowstone superintendent Captain Moses Harris underscored this point when he argued that the presence of Indians in Yellowstone not only threatened the wild flora and fauna in the park, but Indians could never become “civilized” so long as they continued to frequent their

important religious celebrations. Due to the recent enactment of the Native American Grave Repatriation Act, Yellowstone National Park is currently undergoing an archaeological survey in order to document the extent of Native American use of the park area during the nineteenth century. Much information about Indian use of the park can be gleaned from the comments of early visitors to Yellowstone. See especially Gustavus C. Doane, “Official Report of the Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition into the Upper Yellowstone in 1870,” 10–15, copy in Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University, Bozeman; Windham T. W. Q. Dunraven, *The Great Divide* (London, 1876), *passim*; Philetus W. Norris, *Report upon the Yellowstone National Park, to the Secretary of the Interior, for the Year 1877* (Washington, D.C., 1877); *ibid.*, 1878 (Washington D.C., 1879); Norris, *Fifth Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Yellowstone National Park* (Washington, D.C., 1881); Norris, *Report...for 1880* (Washington, D.C., 1881); Norris, *Report for...1881* (Washington, D.C., 1882). The best scholarly analysis of Indians in Yellowstone in the 1870s and '80s is Joseph Weixelman's “Power to Evoke Wonder.” Alston Chase also comments briefly on the exclusion of Indians from Yellowstone in his *Playing God in Yellowstone: The Destruction of America's First National Park* (New York, 1987), 105–115. For Runte's thesis, see *National Parks: The American Experience* (Rev. ed., Lincoln, 1987).

39. Kneeland, *Wonders of the Yosemite Valley*, 52.

“former wilderness haunts.”⁴⁰ Similar ideas informed policies at Yosemite, and the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890, which then consisted of a large area in the Sierra high-country surrounding the state-managed valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove, brought new restrictions to the valley’s Indian community. The enforcement of trespassing and hunting regulations, for instance, adversely affected those Indians who still hunted large and small game or gathered plant stuffs in the Yosemite area. Unlike Yellowstone, however, Indians still made up a significant portion of the valley’s labor force and the idea that they somehow harmed wilderness did not lead to their outright exclusion from Yosemite. Furthermore, as Superintendent A. E. Wood noted in 1892, their long, unthreatening presence in the valley gave the Indians a “moral right” to remain in the state park. Wood also implied that removal would not be necessary since the Yosemite were a “vanishing” tribe that would soon die out or assimilate into white society.⁴¹

While Yosemite tourists and park officials generally had a more favorable attitude toward Indians than did their counterparts in Yellowstone, a number of important early visitors complained about the presence of Indians in the park. In part because California Indians did not match the “handsome and noble” warriors of popular fiction and art, the famous Unitarian minister Thomas Starr King found the “lazy, good for nothing, Digger Indians” in Yosemite to be wholly incongruous with his notions of a “pristine” wilderness. The fact that they gathered eggs from woodpecker nests only proved to King that Indians degraded the wilderness. Indeed, he felt that “many a Californian, if the question were up between the Diggers and the woodpeckers, would not hesitate in deciding the point of the ‘moral value’ in favor of the plundered birds” and seek to remove the Indians from Yosemite.⁴² Self-appointed “Friends of the Indian” such as Helen Hunt Jackson shared King’s disdain for the Yose-

40. “Army Records,” Document Numbers 105, 375, and 385, Yellowstone National Park Archives.

41. A. E. Wood, *Annual Report of the Acting Superintendent of the Yosemite National Park to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D. C., 1892).

42. Thomas Starr King, *A Vacation among the Sierras: Yosemite in 1860*, edited by John A. Hussey (San Francisco, 1962), 40–41. See also Stanford E. Demars, *The Tourist in Yosemite, 1855–1985* (Salt Lake City, 1991), 38–39.

mite Indians. But for Jackson, wilderness also represented the depraved condition from which savages needed uplifting. Such “uplifting,” incidentally, benefited the wilderness and, as Jackson noted during a trip to Yosemite in the 1870s, the presence of “filthy” Indians only detracted from the sublimity of the scenery. Furthermore, the inability of their “uncouth” minds to appreciate the beauty that surrounded them was an affront to the creator and his works.⁴³ Like Jackson, John Muir found the Yosemite Indians to be especially “dirty” and “lazy.” He did feel that knowing them better would make him like them better, but their “uncleanliness” precluded his acquiring any such intimacy.⁴⁴ King, Jackson, and Muir did not speak for most early tourists, but the longer the Yosemite persisted in the park and refused to “vanish,” the more such attitudes became commonplace and began driving park policy and eclipsing concerns about the Indians’ “moral rights.”

The Yosemite, for their part, were not always happy with their non-Indian neighbors and the changes they had wrought in the valley. In the late 1880s the headmen of the Yosemite sent a “Petition to the Senators and Representatives of the Congress” in which they complained of being “poorly-clad paupers and unwelcome guests, silently the objects of curiosity or contemptuous pity to the throngs of strangers who yearly gather in this our own land and heritage.” They further noted that cattle and horses in the valley destroyed “all of the tender roots, berries and the few nuts that formed the[ir] sustenance.” They feared that “the destruction of every means of support for ourselves and our families by the rapacious acts of whites...will shortly result in the total exclusion of the remaining remnants of our tribes from this our beloved valley.” In compensation for the damages to their homes and their way of life, they requested a million dollars from the federal government “for the future support of ourselves and our descendants.” In exchange, they promised to relinquish their “natural right and title to Yosemite Valley and our surrounding claims.”⁴⁵

43. Jackson, *Bits of Travel*, 107.

44. John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston, 1916), 226.

45. Edward Castillo, “Petition to Congress on Behalf of the Yosemite Indians,” *Journal of California Anthropology*, V (Winter 1978), 273.

None of the fifty-two Indians who placed their mark on the document could have written it. Most likely, the author was the artist Charles D. Robinson since much of the wording is similar to complaints he brought before the California state Assembly during its investigation of the Yosemite Park Commission.⁴⁶ In the late 1880s, the commission had come under increasing criticism for its management of the park, and in response to the complaints, the Assembly launched an investigation in February 1889. During public hearings, Robinson and others had criticized the commission's promotion of commercial development in the valley and its neglect of what they perceived to be its primary responsibility, the protection and preservation of Yosemite's natural environment.⁴⁷ While many of the issues raised in the petition would probably not have interested the Indians, those who placed their marks on it doubtless assented to its contents and the author's intentions.

No one advanced the Indians' concerns at the hearings, however. Nor did the headmen receive an answer from Washington in response to their petition. The hearings nonetheless damaged the commission's reputation, and preservationists successfully petitioned the federal government not only to take over the management of Yosemite from California, but to considerably extend the park's boundaries as well. The creation of Yosemite National Park in 1890 incorporated the high country surrounding the valley, thus preserving the area's flora and fauna as well as the streams that supplied Yosemite's magnificent waterfalls, but Yosemite Valley itself and the Mariposa Grove remained under the jurisdiction of the state. Preservationists did not achieve their ultimate goal until 1906 when the valley and the Mariposa Grove reverted to the federal government and became part of the national park.⁴⁸

Federal administration of the new national park quickly became a major force in the Yosemite Indians' lives. Management

46. Craig Bates and Martha Lee draw a similar conclusion about Robinson's efforts on behalf of the Yosemite Indians. Bates and Lee, *Tradition and Innovation*, 36.

47. California Legislature, Assembly Committee on Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Trees, *In the Matter of the Investigation of the Yosemite Valley Commissioners*, 28 sess. (Feb. 1889); Runte, *Yosemite*, 57.

48. Runte, *Yosemite*, 61-63.

of the park by the United States Cavalry, which had taken over the care of Yellowstone as well, subjected Indians to all federal laws and park regulations. Before 1890, for instance, Indians hunted deer throughout the Merced and Tuolumne river watersheds, but the cavalry severely restricted such activities within the boundaries of the new national park.⁴⁹ Hunting in Yosemite, whether by Indians or whites, was prohibited, and early superintendents aggressively sought to enforce the ban. In 1897, distressed that Indians had killed a large number of deer the preceding fall, Acting Superintendent A. Rodgers insisted that “the interior department...take steps to prevent a recurrence of this conduct on the part of the Indians.” Rodgers’s efforts were apparently very effective since later reports noted that hunting within park boundaries no longer posed a problem.⁵⁰

While these new regulations reflect the zealotry of military administration in the national parks, they also demonstrate that late nineteenth-century ideas about wilderness as uninhabited and pristine, and Indians as both vanishing and assimilable, had begun to take hold in Yosemite.⁵¹ In many respects, the new restrictions placed on Yosemite Indian life reflect the same mindset that inspired the creation of Glacier National Park at about the same time. In 1895 the United States purchased the mountainous portion of the Blackfeet reservation in order to open the land to mineral exploration, but the tribe retained unrestricted access to the plants, animals, and sacred places they had long depended upon.⁵² The mining boom soon busted and preserva-

49. For evidence of the Yosemite hunting in these areas, see Charles Carleton Coffin, *Our New Way Round the World* (Boston, 1869), 478; John Muir, *The Mountains of California* (New York, 1894), 80–81; Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston and New York, 1911), 94.

50. A. Rodgers, *Annual Report of the Acting Superintendent of the Yosemite National Park to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington D. C., 1898).

51. For a study of the United States Cavalry’s administration of the national parks, see Harold Hampton, *How the U.S. Cavalry Saved Our National Parks* (Bloomington, 1971).

52. Foley, “An Historical Analysis,” 170–190. The Blackfeet have never relinquished their rights to the Glacier area, and the United States has never acknowledged the legitimacy of Blackfeet claims on the national park. Many tribal elders contend that the Blackfeet never “sold” this area, but only leased their mineral rights for a period of fifty years. My understanding of Blackfeet views on the Land Cession Agreement of 1895 has been clarified in conversations with Chief Earl Old Person, Curly Bear Wagner, Mike Swims Under, Ted Hall, and Marvin Weatherwax.

tionists like George Bird Grinnell spearheaded efforts to preserve the area as a national park.⁵³ Grinnell, who served as the lead negotiator for the government in its agreement with the Blackfeet, had already formulated in 1891 a plan to convert the Blackfeet lands into a national park.⁵⁴ With the miners gone, he led a ten-year campaign that culminated with the Glacier Park Act of 1910. Early park officials then worked in conjunction with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to extinguish Blackfeet rights in the area and to exclude all Indians from the Glacier back country.⁵⁵

Despite such efforts to prevent Indians from using the Glacier wilderness, park administrators and developers nonetheless used the Blackfeet in a variety of highly visible park promotions and tourist entertainments. The importance of the Blackfeet to the Glacier tourist "experience" seems odd when juxtaposed with the exclusion of Indians from the park's back country, but this apparent irony holds an internal consistency when viewed in terms of American wilderness ideals. As "past-tense" Indians, those Blackfeet men and women who entertained tourists were presented as living museum specimens who no longer used the Glacier wilderness. Those Indians who continued to use the park illegally, on the other hand, demonstrated a deplorable lack of appreciation for the national park and an anachronistic attachment to older traditions.⁵⁶

53. C. W. Buchholtz, *Man in Glacier* (West Glacier, 1976), 27–51; Gerald A. Diettert, *Grinnell's Glacier: George Bird Grinnell and Glacier National Park* (Missoula, 1992), 61–85; James W. Sheire, *Glacier National Park: Historic Resource Study* (Washington, D. C., 1970), 137–146; Madison Grant, *Early History of Glacier National Park, Montana* (Washington, D.C., 1919); Ann Regan, "The Blackfeet, the Bureaucrats, and Glacier National Park, 1910–1940," unpublished essay in the Glacier National Park Library; Michael F. Foley, "An Historical Analysis of the Administration of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation by the United States, 1855–1950s" (Indian Claims Commission–Docket 279-D, 1974), 170–194; Christopher S. Ashby, "The Blackfeet Agreement of 1895 and Glacier National Park: A Case History" (M.A. thesis, University of Montana, 1986).

54. Diettert, *Grinnell's Glacier*, 57–59.

55. Numerous documents in the National Archives, the federal records center in Denver, and in the Archives and Library of Glacier National Park reveal that exclusion of the Blackfeet from Glacier was carried out at all levels of park management, from the Secretary of the Interior to park rangers on patrol. The most accessible documentation of these policies can be found in Historical Resource Associates, *Montana Indian Reservations Historical Jurisdiction Study, Appendix* (Missoula, 1981), documents B17–B61.

56. For a brief study of the use of Blackfeet Indians in the promotion of Glacier National Park, see Ann T. Walton *et al.*, *After The Buffalo Were Gone: The Louis Warren Hill, Sr., Collection of Indian Art* (St. Paul, 1986).

Such ideals also informed the administration of Yosemite National Park in the 1910s and '20s. As at Glacier, turn-of-the-century romanticism for the frontier inspired a sentimental interest in the Yosemite Indians that only seemed to grow stronger as native lifestyles "vanished" further into the past, and as older, more "authentic" Indians died.⁵⁷ On the other hand, once the valley became a part of the larger national park in 1906, federal officials took a more active interest in Yosemite's Indian community and redoubled efforts to restrict native use of the back country. The concerns of tourists and the acknowledged "moral rights" of the Yosemite still precluded any efforts toward Indian removal, but they did inspire a series of administrative plans to incorporate the Yosemite into official park promotions. In the summer of 1913, for instance, Acting Superintendent William Littebrandt wrote to the Secretary of the Interior and urged that the Bureau of Indian Affairs be brought in to assist the park service in making the village "one of the features of the Valley."⁵⁸ The notion of building an Indian village for tourism was entertained the following year, but due to a lack of interest on the part of the BIA, park officials decided against such a plan.⁵⁹ Neither the BIA nor any other government agency expressed more than a passing interest in the Yosemite Indians since, unlike the Blackfeet and many other tribes, they had signed no treaties and thus had no official relationship with the federal government.⁶⁰ Consequently, as Littebrandt's successors soon learned, the Yosemite Indians became a "problem" for the newly established National Park Service to resolve.

The creation of the National Park Service in 1916 fulfilled preservationists' long-held hopes for a single government agency dedicated to the protection and enhancement of national parks. Nevertheless, the Park Service soon found itself caught up in the

57. "She Was Simply a Yosemite Squaw," *Yosemite Tourist*, June 25, 1907; Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley and Vicinity*, *passim*.

58. Adolph Miller to Acting Superintendent Littebrandt, June 18, 1913, in the Appendix to CSRI, *Petition to the Government of the United States*; David Sherfey to Littebrandt, Dec. 15, 1913, *ibid.*; Littebrandt to Secretary of the Interior, July 11, 1914, *ibid.*

59. E. B. Merritt to the Secretary of the Interior, Oct. 3, 1914, *ibid.*

60. The Yosemite Indians still do not have federally recognized tribal status, a situation that the American Indian Council of Mariposa County has sought to rectify for nearly two decades. CSRI, *Petition to the Government*, *passim*.

same struggle between preservationists and development interests that plagued the management of Yosemite in the 1880s, and this struggle carried over into the new agency's relationship with the Yosemite Indians. In the same year that the service was established, Yosemite officials and concessionaires inaugurated the Indian Field Days, a festivity designed to "revive and maintain [the] interest of Indians in their own games and industries, particularly basketry and bead work." The Field Days also encouraged visitation to Yosemite during the late summer, when waterfalls had either diminished to unspectacular trickles or dried up altogether.⁶¹

Within a short time, however, park officials, instead of promoting an interest among Yosemite Indians in "their own games and industries," sharply circumscribed expressions of Yosemite culture. Event organizers encouraged Indians to conform to a generic representation of Plains Indian culture with the Field Days often degenerating into little more than an excuse for tourists and park officials to dress in buckskin and feathered headdress. Indians remained the central attraction of these events throughout the 1910s and '20s, but only insofar as they confirmed popular white conceptions of how Indians were supposed to look and behave.⁶² Basket judging and the sales of Indian artworks took place in front of crudely constructed canvas teepees. One year, in an attempt to lend some authenticity to the events, Don Tressider, president of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, even looked into purchasing a wigwam from Indians

61. W. B. Lewis to Stephen Mather, Sept. 25, 1923, file: "Indian Affairs" W 34 970.3 I-3, YNPRL.

62. In its 1930 report, the Committee of Expert Advisers to Yosemite National Park criticized Indian Field Days. "As far as we can learn the performance held here, so far as excused as something associated with the Indians of the Valley, is quite absurd. It appears to be essentially a white man's [entertainment], in which some part is taken by Indians to whose Yosemite forebears such things are wholly unknown." Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Draft of Report: Meeting of the Committee of Expert Advisers, Yosemite National Park, Yosemite Valley, April 24-25, 1930," 17-18, YNPRL. For a broader treatment of American stereotypes of Native Americans, see Robert J. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1978); Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing Indian: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, Conn., 1982); Raymond Stedman, *Shadows of the Indians: Stereotypes in American Culture* (Norman, 1982); Duane Allen Matz, "Images of Indians in American Popular Culture since 1865" (Ph.D. dissertation, Illinois State University, 1988).

in Oregon since he regarded the Yosemite Indian village an eyesore and apparently found the traditional Miwok *u-mu-cha* inappropriate.⁶³

Besides basketry and beadwork competitions, the 1925 Indian Field Days included a parade, rodeo events, an "Indian Baby Show," and horse races featuring bareback riders "striped as Warriors." To encourage Indians to participate in these events, park officials paid each Indian registered one dollar, while every "squaw" appearing in "full Indian costume of buckskin dress, moccasin, and head decoration," garments wholly foreign to Miwok culture, received two dollars and fifty cents. The winners of "Best Indian Warrior costume" and "Best Indian Squaw costume" received twenty-five dollars each.⁶⁴ Similar contests, with similar incentives, were a standard feature of all Field Days, and insofar as Indians were encouraged to practice Indian "games and industries" at all, the National Park Service and Yosemite concessionaires expected them to fulfill popular conceptions of what Indians supposedly did.⁶⁵

Along with promoting such stereotypical presentations of Indian culture, park officials sharply rebuked certain behavior as unacceptable. At the Indian Field Days of 1924, for instance, those attending the rededication of the Yosemite chapel heard a commotion from a group of Indians in the midst of a tug-of-war game a short distance away. A ranger rushed over from the chapel, ordered them to stop, and because some had been excitedly betting on the game, chastised them for gambling in the park. A number of Indians described the event in a letter addressed to the chief ranger: "The Indians were playing Tugowar[;] the first game no one interfered[;] the second game Mr. Mather rushed in and said no gambling in Yosemite National Park and ordered the Indians to leave this minute."⁶⁶ From sub-

63. Don Tressider to W. B. Lewis, June 18, 1925, file 883-07.3, "Indians-General, 1924 to 1931," YNPRL.

64. Advertisement and prize list for Indian Field Days, 1925, file 970.33 I-1, YNPRL.

65. Bates and Lee, *Tradition and Innovation*, 104-107. Because the 1929 Field Days lost money and the stock market crashed that autumn, and because the "commercial" nature of the event drew considerable criticism in the late 1920s, the Field Days were eliminated.

66. Handwritten letter addressed to "Chief Townsley," Aug. 5, 1924, file 883-07.3 "Indians General 1924-1931," YNPRL. Subsequent correspondence about this event is in the same file.

sequent correspondence among park officials it is not clear whether Stephen Mather, the director of the National Park Service at the time and present at the chapel dedication, was the person who ordered the Indians to leave. Nevertheless, the Indians perceived the orders as representing the full authority of the National Park Service and resented the considerable attention park officials placed on this minor incident. Indeed, the tug-of-war game generated a surprisingly large body of correspondence among administrators and rangers, who eventually decided that the Indians would not be fined for gambling, but must be further informed of park regulations and the consequences of ignoring them.

Park officials did not tolerate drinking or theft, whether it involved Indians or park visitors, and the penalties for Indians were especially severe. In December 1925, Alvis Brown and Lawrence Beal were arrested for theft and sent to an Indian school in Salem, Oregon, as punishment. A month later, fifteen-year-old Lawrence Dick received the same punishment for the same crime. And in April 1926, park rangers arrested Virgil Brown for drunken driving, held him in jail for thirty days, and then banned him from the park. Always a favorite pastime with the Miwok and many other American Indian groups, gambling was often an integral part of social gatherings. Nevertheless, the park service prohibited gambling, and after the tug-of-war incident, rangers vigorously enforced this ban among the Yosemite.⁶⁷

Restrictions on Indians were accompanied by well-intentioned patronizing. Yosemite officials often acted as unofficial Indian agents and arranged for the health care of the valley's Indian residents. Partly to encourage Indian participation in the Field Days, park administrators also worked in conjunction with the California Bureau of Child Hygiene to provide a "well baby" check for participants in the Indian baby contest.⁶⁸ In 1930, when a seventy-two-year-old Yosemite Indian named Charlie Dick became too ill from tuberculosis for successful treatment at the valley clinic, Superintendent C. G. Thomson arranged for

67. Yosemite National Park Indian Arrests, Offenses and Notes, file W-34 "Indian Affairs," YNPRL.

68. Ellen Stadtmuller to W. B. Lewis, June 18, 1925, file 883-07.3, YNPRL. See also later correspondence in same file.

his care in the town of Coulterville.⁶⁹ Although Dick paid for his own medical expenses, he apparently did not realize that he was doing so, since Yosemite officials had long withheld part of his wages, without informing him, for just such a medical emergency.⁷⁰ In another instance involving money, however, Assistant Superintendent Leavitt helped Maggie Howard with a number of problems she had with the Bank of Italy in Merced.⁷¹ Though these examples illustrate a sometimes benevolent interest in the welfare of the Yosemite, they are part of the omnipresent and intrusive role that park officials increasingly played in the Indian community.

Despite such encroachment into their lives, the Yosemite Indians successfully adapted to changing conditions in the park and, whenever possible, exploited them to their own advantage. At the turn of the century, for instance, the Yosemite lived in six small encampments from spring through fall, but they gradually merged into one larger village that strengthened the community as a whole and better accommodated the Indians to Yosemite's ever-increasing tourist development. Such an important social change took place along traditional lines, however, and community leaders continued to rely on older religious and political structures as they worked to bring native life into accord with new developments.⁷² On the other hand, the Yosemite apparently had no qualms about participating in the very untraditional Indian Field Days. Local basket weavers looked forward to matching their skills with those of neighboring Indian women, and the festivities drew a large number of customers for their wares. Likewise, the Indian rodeo provided a public arena for Yosemite men to test their riding skills, and their luck at betting, against other Indians from California and Nevada. While the Yosemite may have benefited from the Field Days, the event did not become an especially important part of native life and never supplanted the traditional "Big Times" held in early July.⁷³ Indeed, these annual celebrations brought dozens of Indian visitors into the Yosemite community for days and nights of feasting and

69. C. G. Thomson to Louis Milburn, July 26, 1930, *ibid.*

70. T. W. Emmert to Clinton Mentzer, Jan. 7, 1931, *ibid.*

71. E. P. Leavitt to Bank of Italy, Merced, Oct. 13, 1930, *ibid.*

72. CSRI, *Petition to the Government*, 115.

73. *Ibid.*, 123.

dancing. Perhaps more than anything else, the continuation of the Big Times through the first decades of the twentieth century illustrates the strength of native traditions and the paramount importance of Yosemite Valley as a place where such ceremonies had continued unabated since time out of memory.

The strength of the Yosemite Indian community and its ability to remain in the park met its greatest challenge in the late 1920s when a new master plan called for moving the Indian village. Because the National Park Service planned to build a new hospital and store on the site of the village, Superintendent W. B. Lewis proposed relocating the Yosemite to another site within the valley, though he did so without consulting the Indians themselves. Having always found the village to be “more or less a nuisance,” Lewis nevertheless recognized its popularity among park visitors, and like his predecessor he proposed the development of a new village in “an Indian character design,... thereby making...[it] a very presentable thing.”⁷⁴ What such a design entailed was not altogether clear, but it certainly did not include improvements that an Indian might propose. While remodeling his old house in the Indian village, Harry Johnson learned from park officials that he would have to cease construction since his additions were “too conspicuous from the road... and lacked the proper architectural lines.” Johnson’s house apparently did not look “Indian” enough to the administrators, or it simply clashed with the master plan’s requirement that all new construction reflect “harmony with the landscape.”⁷⁵ In either case, it never occurred to these park officials that their road did not harmonize with the landscape or that Johnson’s improvements grew out of his own feelings about what constituted an appropriate Indian dwelling.

Superintendent Lewis hoped the Bureau of Indian Affairs would help finance the proposed new village, and encouraged the BIA to contribute significantly to its planning and imple-

74. W. B. Lewis, “Memorandum Regarding Indian Village,” Aug. 30, 1927, file 883-07.3, YNPRL.

75. E. P. Leavitt to Harry Johnson, Oct. 11, 1927, *ibid.* Yosemite officials had earlier expressed a suitable design for Indian homes in the valley. For a discussion of the rustic style in Yosemite National Park, see Robert C. Pavlik, “In Harmony with the Landscape: Yosemite’s Built Environment, 1913–1940,” *California History*, LXIX (Summer 1990), 182–195.

mentation. Unfortunately for Lewis, the response of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Sacramento was even colder than that given Superintendent Littebrandt thirteen years earlier. Noting that the Indians who lived within Yosemite National Park neither belonged to a tribe recognized by treaty with the United States nor resided on a reservation, the commissioner informed Lewis that the Indian Service would not assist in the development of the new village or contribute to the support of the Indians.⁷⁶ Despite the rebuff, Lewis moved ahead with his master plan for the village and for determining how Indians would or would not be incorporated into a national park.

In the fall of 1927, the park service conducted the first in a series of Indian village censuses to determine how many of those living in the valley had “a right to do so, either through being natives of Yosemite Valley or because of their long residence [there].”⁷⁷ By the summer of 1929 the issue had been thoroughly studied, and Lewis’s successor, Superintendent C. G. Thomson, met with the Indians to “impress upon them in a proper way,” as he related it to the director of the National Park Service, “that their residence [in the valley was] a privilege, and not a vested right; [and] that this privilege [was] dependent upon proper deportment.”⁷⁸ Thompson informed those present that certain Indians, namely “the Yosemite Indians...and the Mono and other Indians who [had been in the valley] for years and years[,]...had a ‘moral right’ to remain in the valley,” but he warned that “should it prove to be in the best interests of the Government to build houses and assign them, it will give [park officials] absolute control of the Indian Village.” “If anyone was constantly breaking a regulation,” he continued, “did not want to work reasonably steady, cannot get along with his neighbors, or in any way prove to be a poor member of the Village,...he would have to go away and give up his house.” Furthermore, anyone who could not find work in the park during the fall and winter months would have to leave the valley as well. As Thomson well knew, almost no one, white or Indian, worked in the valley during these months.

76. Lewis, “Memorandum Regarding Indian Village”; L. A. Dorrington to W. B. Lewis, Sept. 1927, quoted in CSRI, *Petition to the Government*, Appendix, 124.

77. E. P. Leavitt to Director, National Park Service, March 7, 1928, file 883-07.3, YNPRL.

78. C. G. Thomson to Director, National Park Service, June 25, 1929, *ibid.*

Hence, Thomson's "absolute control of the Indian Village" did not simply mean a severe regulation of Indian life and a dismissal of the Yosemite's "moral right" to remain in the valley; it implied the possibility of the outright eviction of the entire Indian community.⁷⁹

Not surprisingly, such talk frightened the Indians who complained to the Indian Board of Cooperation, a nonprofit legal organization in San Francisco. The interest of board executive Frederick G. Collet in the Indians' grievance created quite a stir among park officials, who asked the U.S. Attorney General to investigate him.⁸⁰ Although the Yosemite Indians never sought legal redress against the park service, and government officials quickly undermined Collet's efforts, Superintendent Thomson realized that a program of outright eviction could never be implemented. Indeed, as he noted in a "Special Report on the Indian Situation" to the new director of the National Park Service, Horace M. Albright, a program of Indian removal had the great benefit of breaking up the Yosemite Indians "as a racial unit and, in time, diffus[ing]...their blood with the great American mass," but such a policy would also raise a "storm of criticism [from the Indians and their allies]...that could hardly be withstood."⁸¹ Thomson now proposed a middle course that would give park officials unprecedented control of the Yosemite Indian community and, in the long run, achieve the full removal of Indians from the park through a process so gradual that it would not draw any adverse publicity.

Thomson's proposal became the definitive statement on park policy toward the Yosemite Indians, and received enthusiastic support from both Albright and the Yosemite Board of Expert Advisors, a nongovernmental group established to advise Yosemite administrators on matters of policy and development. Although Thomson felt the Indians were not "thoroughly desir-

79. Thomson, "Meeting at Indian Village," July 23, 1929, *ibid.*

80. Frederick G. Collet to C. G. Thomson, Aug. 19, 1929, *ibid.* In response to one of numerous inquiries into the fate of the Yosemite Indians that Collet's advocacy in the Bay Area generated, Thomson noted that he was "fed up" with Collet and resolved that he "must go gunning for him" very soon. Thomson to Duncan McDuffie, Dec. 16, 1929, *ibid.*

81. Thomson, "Special Report on the Indian Situation" to Horace M. Albright, Jan. 9, 1930, *ibid.*

able citizens," he believed their presence in the valley imposed an "obligation upon those charged with the handling of backward peoples." Moreover, the Indians' "historical association with Yosemite makes them very significant to the Park; to drive them out would result in an ethnological loss comparable to the loss... [that] our deer would mean to our fauna exhibit." Because the Indians remained popular with visitors, "especially Easterners," Thomson agreed with an Advisory Board recommendation for a native exhibit "done in the aboriginal style, with one or two Indian families resident, during the summer garbed in native dress, carrying on the pursuits of their forebears."⁸²

In Thomson's view, the benefit of a new Indian Village was the control it would give park officials over the Indian population within the valley. As he told Albright, "the Superintendent could prevent the influx of outside Indians and, by the device of cancellation of lease of those abusing the privilege of residence, he could maintain a discipline now impossible." Furthermore, Indians would pay rent to the National Park Service for the first time ever, and those who fell delinquent in their payments or absented their homes for too long would forfeit their residences in the valley. While those Indians gainfully employed by either the park service or one of the concessionaires could remain in the new village, all were to be retireable employees. And once retired, they had no right to remain in the valley—moral or otherwise. Ultimately, the Indian presence in the valley would cease to be a "problem" since it would eventually take care of itself through a process of attrition. In the short run, the new village also had the benefit of segregating the Indians from other areas of the park, thus making their presence less noticeable to visitors and, Thomson hoped, preventing them from resuming their "tendencies toward professionalizing—fortune telling, fake Indian dances, etc. for fees."⁸³ The fact that the "fauna exhibit" to which Thomson referred consisted of caged animals near the visitor's center was revealing: Like the animals, the Indians' presence in the valley would be limited to an "aboriginal exhibit."⁸⁴ Furthermore,

82. *Ibid.*; Board of Expert Advisors, "Recommendations on Indian Camp," Dec. 1929, *ibid.*

83. Thomson, "Special Report on the Indian Situation."

84. For a discussion of Yosemite's fauna exhibits in the early 1930s, see Runte, *Yosemite*, 160–168.

like those bears that “misbehaved” in the park, the Indians living in the new village who behaved in a sociably unacceptable manner would be banished.

Residents began moving into the new village in 1931, and within four years the last of the Indians in the old village had also made the move. When completed, the new site contained twelve cabins for a permanent population of sixty-six individuals. The cabins were tiny, only 429 square feet in size, and housed as many as six to eight family members.⁸⁵ The addition of three more cabins slightly alleviated cramped conditions, and by 1938 these fifteen cabins housed a total of fifty-seven people.⁸⁶ Ostensibly reserved for those with the strongest “moral right” to reside in the valley, other criteria tended to be more important when designating who could live in the village. Not surprisingly, park officials did not allow Henry Hogan to reside in the new village, though all regarded him as a “true” Yosemite Indian, on account of his previous trips outside the valley to buy liquor. Local authorities also denied Jim Rust a place in the new village since he “had no connection with the valley...beyond that of an ordinary laborer.” Apparently, the relative unimportance of Rust’s work in Yosemite was more significant than his being the great-grandson of Chief Tenaya, the Ahwahneechee leader at the time of Yosemite’s “discovery” in 1851.⁸⁷ Indeed, as Thomson told the Indians during a meeting at the new village in the fall of 1931, their continued residence in the valley depended less on ancestry and more on “usefulness to the community; length of service working in Yosemite; ability to support themselves; [and] number of children.”⁸⁸

Although ultimately successful, Thomson’s efforts to create an “Indian free” Yosemite did not take effect as rapidly as he might have liked. As he noted himself, the Yosemite Indians provided “a reservoir of almost efficient labor upon which [the

85. Pavlik, “In Harmony with the Landscape,” 190–191; William H. Nelson to Thomson, Aug. 2, 1935, file W 34, “Indian Affairs,” YNPRL.

86. Chief Ranger F. S. Townsley to Acting Superintendent, July 14, 1938, *ibid.*

87. F. S. Townsley to Thomson, Feb. 4, 1931, file 883-07.3, YNPRL; CSRI, *Petition to the Government*, 137.

88. C. G. Thomson, “Memorandum to the Indians,” Nov. 24, 1931, file 883-07.3, YNPRL.

park service and concessionaires could] draw," and rapid attrition of workers would have been counter-productive.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, park officials neglected to assist with the maintenance of the new village and ignored earlier promises to give Indians first consideration for park employment. As conditions in the village deteriorated in the following years, and as employment in the park became more difficult to obtain, Indians moved out of the valley to adjacent areas in Mariposa County. Despite new births within the Yosemite Indian community, the population of the village had been halved by the 1940s, and most of the remaining residents were slated for retirement in the coming years.⁹⁰

Between two and three dozen Indians still lived in Yosemite more than a decade after the construction of the new village, and their presence served as strong testimony to the continuing strength of the Yosemite Indian community. Despite strict regulations, the payment of rent, and a growing scarcity of jobs, the Yosemite had no desire to leave since the valley remained a focus of Indian life in the region. As Virgil Brown stated in a letter to Superintendent Thomson in October 1934, he wished "to be reinstated" in the park because he had "been born in the Old Indian Village and [had] a strong desire to visit my people in Yosemite."⁹¹ The fact that Brown, the son and grandson of important leaders of the Yosemite Indian community, had to petition for reinstatement into the Indian village also underscored the degree of control that park officials exerted over Indian life in the park. The restrictions on the size of the new village prevented the seasonal influx of Indians that had long been a part of life in the area. The segregation of the new village from the rest of the valley's tourist services prevented Indians from profiting directly from tourism and kept them from engaging the public on their own terms. The new ethnological exhibit proved a boon for a few Indians—like Chris Brown (Chief Lemee) who entertained visitors along with basket weavers Maggie Howard (Tabuce) and Lucy Telles until the early 1950s—but the ethnological exhibit also reified Yosemite Indian life as a past-tense

89. Thomson, "Special Report on the Indian Situation."

90. Harold E. Perry, "The Yosemite Indian Story: A Drama of Chief Tenaya's People," unpublished paper, 1949, file 970.33 I-4 "Yosemite Indians," YNPRL.

91. Virgil Brown to C. G. Thomson, Oct. 11, 1934, file W 34 "Indian Affairs," YNPRL.

experience and prevented visitors from engaging the Yosemite as a vital, distinct, and “nonvanishing” community.

Disappearing employment opportunities along with the restrictions on Indian behavior gradually pushed the Yosemite into the towns just west of the national park where they could more readily cultivate relationships with old neighbors and other Indian groups. Abandoned and dilapidated, the last structures in the Indian village disappeared in the flames of a fire-fighting practice session and have long since been covered over by a gas station and campground. No longer residents in the national park, the Yosemite Indians still have a close connection with their ancestral home, and many frequent the valley to gather acorns, celebrate Big Times, and maintain traditional religious practices. The tremendous tourist development in the park has compromised much of Yosemite’s environment, however, and efforts to repair the damage have resulted in tighter restrictions on the utilization of park resources, including the traditional practices of Indians. Though Indian uses did not produce the current problems in the park, the crackdown on their practices has created tension between the National Park Service and the Yosemite Indians that has occasionally flared in recent years.

More than sixty years ago, Superintendent Thomson felt that the government had “solved a perplexing problem and would have no other task with [the Yosemite] except to prevent the influx of other Indians into these favorable living conditions.” By establishing a plan through which the Yosemite would eventually be forced to leave the valley, and by segregating those who remained from more commonly visited areas of the park, Thomson achieved a solution to a “problem” that had bothered officials since the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890. The construction of a sanitized ethnological exhibit depicting pre-gold rush Indian culture further restricted the Yosemite Indians’ presence in the valley and effectively contributed to an historical fiction still maintained by the National Park Service in its literature on Yosemite and most other national parks: Indians were the first “visitors” to park areas who, for a variety of reasons, decided not to visit these lands sometime in the distant past and, at least in the case of Yosemite, “real” Indians ceased to be a viable presence in the area long before the establishment of the national park.

With the Indian “problem” solved and Yosemite no longer an anomaly in the national park system, such fictions have only become further imbedded in popular conceptions of national parks and wilderness. Americans look at an Ansel Adams photograph of Yosemite and they see more than a national symbol. They see an image of *a priori* wilderness, an empty, uninhabited, primordial landscape that has been preserved as God first intended it to be. Ironically, when Adams took his most famous photographs, Indians still lived in Yosemite, the descendants of the same peoples whose presence in the mid-nineteenth century qualified Yosemite as a true wilderness in the minds of many Americans. What Adams’s photographs obscure, and what tourists, government officials and environmentalists fail to remember, is that the uninhabited wilderness had to be created. Likewise, the assumption that preserved wilderness areas represent primordial America conveniently forgets that Native Americans had a profound effect on this “wilderness” before its preservation and reaffirms the myth that North America was once a “virgin” continent waiting to be peopled.⁹² At base, the wilderness preserved in national parks, monuments, and forests is a wilderness dispossessed—dispossessed of the people who shaped and were shaped by their interaction with it over the course of centuries.

The uninhabited wilderness ideal has had a far-reaching yet unexpected legacy. As Americans proudly proclaim, national parks such as Yosemite have served as models for wilderness preservation throughout the world, but indigenous people on every continent have launched successful campaigns against their eviction from homelands designated as wilderness preserves. Those struggles are providing a model for new ways of thinking about wilderness in the United States and elsewhere.⁹³ Native

92. For an excellent study of how Native Californians altered and “domesticated” the physical landscape, see Thomas Blackburn and Kat Anderson, eds., *Before the Wilderness: Environmental Management by Native Californians* (Menlo Park, Calif., 1993); see also Gary Paul Nabham, “Cultural Parallax in Viewing North American Habitats,” in Michael E. Soulé and Gary Lease, eds., *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (Washington, D.C., 1995), 87–101.

93. In recent years, the effective resistance of people threatened with removal from designated wilderness areas has led international preservationists to reassess the American national park model. See especially Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers, and Defenders of the Amazon* (New York, 1990); Jeffrey A. McNeely and David Pitt, eds., *Culture and Conservation: The*

Americans also resisted their exclusion from national park areas, but park officials have only just begun to see that native use of back-country areas need not compromise the integrity of park environments.⁹⁴ The park service has been slow to recognize that “wilderness” is more a cultural construct than an absolute condition of nature, and that its construction came at the expense of Indians. The growing strength of Native American claims on park lands, at Yosemite and elsewhere, might change such thinking and revolutionize the way Americans experience their national parks. The notion of a usable or inhabitable wilderness would imply that humans might have a place in nature that is something more than as a “visitor not to remain.”⁹⁵ More particularly, native use of park lands would further ongoing tribal efforts to reclaim their traditions and, in the process, strengthen their ability to remain politically and culturally distinct nations.

Human Dimension in Environmental Planning (London, 1985); Barry E. Machlis and David L. Tichnell, *The State of the World's Parks: An International Assessment for Resource Management, Policy, and Research* (Boulder, Colo., 1985); Hisayoshi Mitsuda and Charles Geisler, “Imperiled Parks and Imperiled People: Lessons from Japan's Shiretoko National Park,” *Environmental History Review*, XVI (1992), 19–37.

94. Most Native American resistance to exclusion from park lands has occurred extralegally, particularly at Yellowstone and other parks within or bordering the northern plains. At Glacier and Yosemite National parks, this resistance has also been expressed in court challenges or the threat of legal action.

95. The phrase comes from the 1964 Wilderness Act in which wilderness is defined as a place where “people are visitors not to remain.”