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# MORE THAN A STOP ON THE WAY TO YELLOWSTONE: THE PARKS OF THE BLACK HILLS AND THEIR IMPACT ON WILDERNESS PRESERVATION

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# MORE THAN A STOP ON THE WAY TO YELLOWSTONE: THE PARKS OF THE BLACK HILLS AND THEIR IMPACT ON WILDERNESS PRESERVATION

By

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ideologies that contributed to the establishment of public parks in the Black Hills of South Dakota as a microcosm for nationwide conversations about preservation, tourism, nationalism, colonialism, and commerce. Wind Cave National Park, Custer State Park, and Mount Rushmore National Memorial each complicate and enhance understandings of how public preservation projects emerged out of debates that included ideas outside environmental protection efforts. The people who supported the establishment of these parks, such as the McDonald and Stabler families, South Dakota Senator Peter Norbeck, state historian Doane Robinson, and sculptor Gutzon Borglum, implemented their own ideas across a spectrum of motivations for preserving the environment. While establishing these parks, they contributed their personal perspectives about how nature preservation could support commerce, settler colonialism, and moral development and engaged with national and regional dialogues in the process. The Black Hills became a locus of these debates because of the quantity of parks established in a relatively small area in a relatively short period of time, yet the region is not analyzed in this context by previous scholarship. As a result, this thesis engages with the region's contributions to preservation ideology and park practice by investigating the establishment of three Black Hills park sites in relation to the national and regional conditions that favored or hampered preservation efforts.

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## Introduction: The Black Hills as a Microcosm

"The Park confines include the most beautiful scenery in the Black Hills; the most rugged and the most picturesque," US Senator Peter Norbeck wrote to Elizabeth B. Custer, General George Custer's widow.[1] Hoping to cultivate additional support for his Custer State Park project, Norbeck extolled the virtues of both the land protected in the park and of General Custer in 1920 to Custer's widow. Despite the fact that Custer had only briefly been in the Black Hills and became famous for military failure, Norbeck canonized Custer as a Black Hills hero by naming South Dakota's first state park after the general, which appealed to growing trends in tourism which emphasized the importance of nature, monuments, nationalism, and automobile travel in cultivating the national image of the United States.[2] The Black Hills emerged as a tourist destination that catered to American desires for experiences in nature that developed in the nineteenth and twentieth century by highlighting the region's unique scenic qualities, like rugged mountains and fabulously large caves, as well as providing a patriotic experience by canonizing people who could represent American achievements rooted deeply in colonization and settler colonialism. Although the developers intended the Black Hills to be a tourist stop on the way to another destination, especially other national parks like Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Glacier, the parks of the Black Hills contain cutting-edge and prescient ideas of their founders which are worthy of study in their own right.

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[1] Peter Norbeck to Elizabeth B. Custer, 23 September 1920, Peter Norbeck Papers, Mabel K. Richardson Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota.

[2] Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2001), 4.

America's national parks came into existence only after lengthy debates about the relationship between human inhabitants and the land itself. Because the history of the United States emphasized exploiting land and all of its resources, disregarding Indigenous national claims, conservation initiatives relied on compromises between people with Romantic attachments to the land for intangible reasons and those with economic interests.[3] Debates over the value of natural resources and the virtues of nature exploration created a movement to preserve the natural environment. People across a spectrum of beliefs determined that certain levels of alteration or resource extraction could exist alongside initiatives to protect the environment. Conservationists and preservationists both existed on the side of the spectrum which favored protections for the environment from overexploitation by capitalists, but differed in the goal of such preservation or conservation initiatives. Conservationists suggested that some alterations to the environment were acceptable, even on protected lands, and emphasized the importance of wise use of natural resources for future stable development. Preservationists were more radical, and suggested that the wilderness had an inherent, intangible value which should not be sacrificed in the name of commercial development.[4] The two groups worked together to preserve the environment in many cases, as conservationists' more moderate approach helped grow the appeal of these environmental preservation projects.[5]

[3] Sara Dant, *Losing Eden: An Environmental History of the American West* (John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 104.
[4] Dant, *Losing Eden,* 108.
[5] For this reason, there will be many cases where the two labels are used interchangeably in cases where the debate includes greater economic interests and does not center around the politics of how protected lands could or could not be used. Specifically, conservation and preservation initiatives will be used interchangeably.

The preservation movement emerged because many saw value in preserving natural landscapes for future generations. Beginning in the nineteenth and extending into the early twentieth century, both American and European philosophers reevaluated societal perceptions of nature, which had previously emphasized the wilderness was dangerous because it was a place outside the protections of society.[6] Writers used Romantic language that emphasized the allure and sublimity of the natural landscape, which derived its beauty out of its remoteness from society and thus closeness to God.[7] Writers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson pioneered Transcendentalism during the nineteenth century, which suggested that nature had healing and moralizing effects on those who ventured into it, as it removed people from the corrupting influences of industrialized society.[8] These thinkers expressed the opinions of many who thought negatively of the effects of industrialization in American society and feared that the resulting unnatural greed and materialism placed not only humanity but also the rest of the natural world in jeopardy.[9] As their ideas became more popular, nature writers like John Muir blended these Romantic and Transcendental ideas with advocacy to form the preservation movement responsible for creating the earliest national parks.[10] The "great men" of the preservation movement generally emphasized the importance of the landscape because of its connections to the divine and its lack of corruption by society. Preservationists were revolutionary in many ways because throughout European and Euro-American history many

[6] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 4th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001) 23.
[7] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 47.
[8] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 125.
[9] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 129.
[10] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 122.

people generally considered nature to be a dangerous and heathen place.[11] During the Gilded Age, both European and American society industrialized, and the United States began to "run out" of wilderness because of continuous westward expansion.[12] As a result, many elite thinkers developed a nostalgia for a time that seemed more "natural" when landscapes did not bear the physical markers of industrial economic development.[13] These thinkers conflicted greatly with industrialists, whose purported greed and opulence oppressed many people and hindered the moral character of the nation.[14] Although largely implicit, class expectations limited the propriety of nature enjoyment to men of the upper classes who were refined and educated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They also needed to be able to live in nature without accommodation, because it would be sacrilegious to alter God's creation in the few places that remained "untouched" by humans.[15] Although these "wild" lands had never been "untouched," Muir and his contemporaries conceived that in nature, one was actually closer to God because they were among His perfect creation without the presence of human society, which they likened to solitude at religious places like temples and cathedrals.[16] Because of these largely Romantic and theoretical markers of importance, the most prominent preservationists were White upper-class intellectuals who did not rely on the land for subsistence and had the

[11] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 9.
[12] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 12.
[13] "Natural" here refers to Euro-American ideas of an "untouched" nature that did not exist. See Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 12-13.
[14] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 150.
[15] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 12- 13. This assumption of nature as untouched is based inherently on colonial ideas about Indigenous relationships and use of land and does not reflect the reality of Indigenous control of and impact on the environment.
[16] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 76; Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 12.

time to devote to advocacy. The movement needed moderation to appeal to enough people to embark on some of the most impressive protection movements in the nineteenth century.

The conservation movement had similar goals to preservationists, but a moderate stance on the proper use of protected lands that included limited resource extraction.[17] The conservation movement primarily revolved around responsible use of resources so that they would continue to be accessible for future generations. People like President Theodore Roosevelt, who encouraged the development of national parks at the turn of the twentieth century to boost the character and masculinity of Americans also supported these movements for utilitarian and economic reasons.[18] Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the US Forest Service, which started in 1905, also highlighted conservation over preservation and grew support for the US Forest Service by allowing limited log cutting in national forests, both to preserve American forests and to provide stable resource management for industries that relied on log cutting.[19] One of the conservation movement's greatest achievements included the movement to restore wild bison populations, which had suffered greatly due to overhunting and intentional extermination efforts designed to destroy the Indigenous peoples whose traditional lifeways depended on them.[20] Conservation typically focused on the protection of resources from overexploitation, rather than ending the use of those resources. However, the conservation movement cannot be viewed entirely separately

[17] Proper use is an inherently colonial term used by conservationists and capitalists which implies that if lands exist, they must be used. This approach is based on Euro-American thought that justified Indigenous removal on the grounds that Indigenous peoples did not make proper use of the lands.
[18] Dant, *Losing Eden,* 106.
[19] Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience,* 5th ed. (Lanham, MD: Littlefield and Rowman Publishing Company 2022), 65.
[20] Dant, *Losing Eden,* 106; Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Verso, 2019), 93.

from preservation movements, as both perspectives exist on the same spectrum of ideas of land use. Conservationists were moderately positioned when compared to preservationists, but they often worked together to protect public lands and natural resources.[21] The work of these moderates proved to be deeply important for the national parks movement because it broadened the support for preservation initiatives through compromise. The stories of how the various parks of the Black Hills were established complicate and enhance the way that people with varying relationships with the land implemented both conservation and preservation ideas in unexpected ways. In the Black Hills, the same man who advocated for the preservation of the appearance of wilderness and scenery at Custer State Park became one of the greatest supporters of the Mount Rushmore idea, which permanently altered the scenery of the Black Hills by blasting apart the face of a mountain. These regional examples reveal the ways that designations such as conservationist or preservationist exist on a spectrum which appeared differently in every park project that these groups debated, which is difficult to see in the context of high-profile parks and thoroughly studied public figures.

While not monolithic, the majority of both conservationists and preservationists believed that "real" wilderness did not include humans, despite the fact that Indigenous people had always lived in areas that these thinkers had designated as "wilderness." While there were some naturalists, like Henry David Thoreau and the painter George Catlin, who suggested that local Indigenous people remain in these national parks to preserve their "primitive culture," the most impactful perspectives from John Muir and others required their removal from parks in order to

[21] Dant, *Losing Eden,* 108.

preserve the "untouched" wilderness.[22] John Muir promoted the Black Hills as an ideal place to visit *because* the US government had recently forced Lakotas onto reduced reservation lands outside the boundaries of the Hills and revealed his prejudice by suggesting that they were a violent and uncivilized people.[23] These perspectives had disastrous results for Indigenous peoples who lived in lands that would later become national parks and cemented preservation's role in settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is a structure by which exogenous settlers replace the Indigenous peoples of a given area, and the structure has many physical and historical manifestations, including in preservation efforts.[24] In the context of nature preservation, there had to exist lands that were "unoccupied," which necessitated the erasure of Indigenous presence to live up to such an ideal, so that settlers could protect it from degradation by human influence, even though settler society was truly responsible for the degradation of the natural environment.[25]

Historian Mark David Spence's work *Dispossessing the Wilderness* investigated how the creation of national parks contributed to Indigenous removal. Spence studied several different parks, all of which are in the American West, to highlight how White notions of the environment informed their use and designation of different spaces as worthy or unworthy for preservation.[26] He interacted with the intellectual reasoning behind the establishment of the national parks and investigated how ideals of an uninhabited wilderness informed the decision to remove

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[22] Mark David Spence*, Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11, 109.
[23] John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1904), 28.
[24] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 35.
[25] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism,* 42.
[26] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness,* 6.

Indigenous people from their homelands so that national parks could live up to Romantic ideals of "wilderness."[27] Even the most famous national parks, like Yellowstone and Yosemite, could not live up to the ideals set forth by these thinkers until the Indigenous nations that lived on these lands had been forcibly removed because the presence of humans supposedly degraded the experience of these parks. Ironically, Indigenous removal did not remove the presence of humans from these wilderness areas; instead, the people in the park were White tourists rather than the Indigenous people who lived in the area for generations.[28]

Historians see the development of preservation and conservation ideologies that contributed to the establishment of the National Park Service as the result of disillusionment with industrialization and the Gilded Age that ushered in the Progressive Era. Generally, scholars emphasize the impact of a variety of Romantic thinkers and writers who they argue popularized the idea that the wilderness was worth preserving for societal benefit.[29] Many of these scholars launched this argument to critique the modern environmental movement and the exclusion based on class, race, and gender resulting from the Romantic 19th century roots of this movement.[30] Additionally, scholars investigate the ways that the Progressive reforms that lead to the creation of these parks occurred largely at the expense of people of color and the working class while

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[27] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness,* 133.
[28] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness,* 6.
[29] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 167; Dant, *Losing Eden,* 107; Kathy S. Mason, *Natural Museums, U.S. National Parks, 1872-1916* (Michigan State University Press, 2004); Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, "Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness," *Environmental History* 6, no. 4 (2001): 541–60; and William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 7–28.
[30] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*; DeLuca and Demo, "Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race," 541–60; Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness,: 7–28; and Jennifer DeJonghe, "White Space: Racism, Nationalism and Wilderness in the United States," (M.A. thesis, Metropolitan State University, 2011).

they sought to uplift the White American middle class.[31] Widely-known figures in the preservation movement such as John Muir, George Catlin, and Henry David Thoreau all came from the privileged elite of America; none of these men worked the land as their main source of income and had education that society believed would protect them from the so-called corrupting influences of the wilderness.[32] John Muir is notorious for his classist dismissal of the practical reasons someone would extract resources from the environment, as he disdained a woodcutter who made his living off timber sales because Muir thought the trees were worth more standing than they were for feeding the woodcutter's family.[33] As a result, the preservation movement contained an element of class bias that many scholars argue is important to investigate and acknowledge when discussing their contributions to the growth of national parks.[34] In fact, many of these scholars suggested it is the classist background of this ideology that alienated many lower-income Americans from the parks in the first place.[35]

Despite the quantity of scholarship that investigates the ideology behind the park system, the field overall overemphasizes the importance of the "great men" of the parks as well as "crown jewel" national parks, which means that they often leave out what preservation meant to people who do not fit that description and the ways that less prominent parks have made

[31] DeLuca and Demo, "Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race," 541–60.
[32] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 65.
[33] DeLuca and Demo, "Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race," 552.
[34] DeJonghe, "White Space," 19.
[35] DeLuca and Demo, "Imagining Nature," 552. These scholars suggested also that for the environmental protection movement to succeed today, the environmental movement needs to reevaluate the ideas that contributed to it thus far to determine which ideas belong in the future and which ideas can be made more inclusive.

important contributions to the practice of preservation across the national park system.[36] The early years of public preservation initiatives lacked a coherent set of strategies and guidelines for how public parks should be established, as there was a period of over forty years where national parks existed without a central guiding agency. Further, there was no concrete, universally-accepted definition of "wilderness" or "nature," which meant that people brought their own ideas to the establishment of these parks, and the spectrum of belief was far wider than it may initially appear.[37] As a result, the development of national parks prior to the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916 was relatively ad-hoc, and thus contains the influences of far more people than have received credit in the historical record. When the frame of analysis is broadly national or focused on "crown jewel" parks and the "great men" who established them, it is difficult to survey the range of motivations that encouraged people to advocate for environmental preservation. To approach the people and parks that have gone underrepresented in early park history, this thesis will examine the intersections of conservation and preservation ideologies as they manifested in public parks in the Black Hills of South Dakota. A fascinating combination of peoples interacted with one another to create the national and state parks in the Black Hills.

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[36] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 6; Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 12; and Mason, *Natural Museums,* 5.

[37] Martin H. Krieger, "What's Wrong with Plastic Trees?," *Science* 179 (1973): 447. Because these ideas of nature and wilderness are constructed rather than inherent, modern policy should not have to rely on these ideas as debates about how to preserve the environment continue. In "The Trouble with Wilderness," Cronon discussed the ramifications of only preserving "natural" nature, in that it discourages environmentalists from approaching environmental injustice in urban areas. When people appear separate and outside nature, nature preservation ignores the impact of climate change on humans. It is for this reason that scholars like Cronon, DeJonghe, DeLuca, and Demo suggested that future policy ought to use a more expansive definition of nature than historically informed conservation and preservation.

The subject of the debates that South Dakotans had about establishing these parks were similar to the debates ongoing at the national level about environmental preservation and its relationship with the economy, tourism, national identity, and colonization. Because several parks were established in the early twentieth century during these debates, the Black Hills act as a microcosm for the debates that occurred at the national level, since South Dakotans engaged in these debates and interpreted them in their own ways. While the questions remained the same, the regional adaptation of these debates meant that South Dakotans' answers to these questions did not always look like the answers agreed upon at the national level, and thus emphasized different interests in these debates than those which won nationwide. Furthermore, the people who participated in these debates ranged drastically from politicians to local families who relied upon the environment to make a living. Not only did public officials like South Dakota Governor and US Senator Peter Norbeck and President Theodore Roosevelt participate in the establishment of these parks, but average people like the McDonald and Stabler families at Wind Cave, the first Black Hills park established in 1903, also contributed. This thesis will examine the diverse motivations for founding and underlying ideologies of preservation undergirding the emergence of national and state parks in the Black Hills of South Dakota to emphasize the true range of thoughts and inspirations that drove people to preserve.

There are a number of groups involved in preservation in the Black Hills, beginning with the members of the Lakota nation, who have lived in the region and used its natural resources for generations before and after the United States illegally expropriated the Black Hills. Lakota tradition emphasizes the importance of taking only what is necessary from the environment and does not see human life as separate from the other living creatures in the world. Although today,

environmentalists realize the value of privileging Indigenous perspectives and practices in efforts for sustainability, the preservationists in the early twentieth century Black Hills ignored Lakotas' relationship with the lands or included them in stereotypical ways to appeal to Wild West images for tourism.[38] Because of their traditional lifeways, had the United States not dispossessed Lakotas of the land, concerted preservation efforts would not have needed to occur, as Lakotas' traditional lifestyle is sustainable by design. Their ideas are inherently impressed upon the landscape that preservationists sought to recreate because they were active participants in the natural environmental processes that occurred in the Black Hills, even though these preservationists wrongfully did not see a place for Lakotas' continued presence.

A combination of prospectors, homesteaders, and intellectual wanderers made their way into the Black Hills starting in the 1870s. All of these groups played unique roles in contributing to the establishment of wilderness parks, and did so for their own reasons, frequently connected to the potential financial benefits associated with tourism. A combination of private individuals and public representatives, many of whom did not fit the description of well-educated individuals who believed in the inherent moral value of exploring the natural world for its own sake, established each of these wilderness parks. The McDonald and Stablers families were seemingly average residents of the Black Hills without large estates or fabulous wealth, but they were the first to promote Wind Cave as a tourist destination rather than a place that provided potential mining resources. Furthermore, although people like South Dakota Senator Peter Norbeck and state historian Doane Robinson appear closer to elite preservationists than did average citizens, they intended the public lands they protected to be appealing to a growing subsection of middle-

[38] Estes, *Our History is the Future,* 256.

class tourists, rather than wealthy elites and naturalists. Because of the people they appealed to, Norbeck and Robinson made decisions, like placing a zoo in a state park or carving figures into mountains, that looked different from other preservation efforts at the time. This thesis examines how the construction of multiple wilderness parks in close proximity to one another contributed to the growth of tourist culture in the Black Hills, which arguably focuses more on tourist accommodations than the beauty of the natural world that naturalists envisioned when they championed the idea of public wilderness parks, like state and national parks. The parks created in South Dakota are an early example of the tourism that has come to characterize national parks generally, especially their lurch toward nationalism, a modern form of settler colonialism.

The Black Hills and the wilderness parks established in the region within the first few decades of the 20th century exemplify both the changing demographics of the nation and the changing attitudes towards land use at the time. The wilderness parks of the Black Hills developed at a key period in American environmental history, as the land of this region has been the subject of a variety of lawsuits regarding use, title, and value of the natural features. The first of these parks was Wind Cave, which was officially established in 1903 after operating as a private park for a couple of decades before prolonged legal battles moved it under federal jurisdiction. Subsequent parks include Devil's Tower National Monument (1906)[39], Jewel Cave National Monument (1908), Custer State Park (1912), Fossil Cycad National Monument (1922), and Mount Rushmore National Memorial (1933). The titles given to each of these parks alone depicts the litany of people involved in their establishment: national monuments are designated

[39] Although not in South Dakota, Devil's Tower is promoted as part of the Black Hills.

by US Presidents under the Antiquities Act, whereas national memorials and parks are designated by Congress and approved by the President.[40]

Despite the large number of sites within a small area, the Black Hills have not emerged as a popular subject for historians focusing on environmental preservation at the beginning of its development. Writers often overemphasize the creation of "crown jewel" national parks, like Yellowstone National Park, Yosemite National Park, or Glacier National Park. Smaller parks do not receive as much scholarly attention, but these parks also shaped the future of preservation initiatives. One scholar who included smaller parks is Kathy Mason, who incorporated study of "forgotten" parks to construct her argument about the importance of practical concerns and single feature preservation efforts like Niagara Falls and the Arkansas Hot Springs. In this analysis, Mason highlighted Wind Cave as one example of how single feature preservation efforts for monumental natural features occurred nationwide.[41] In fact, Mason argued "wild land protection was initially a byproduct" of efforts "to preserve exotic or remarkable natural phenomena."[42] She also investigates what it meant to be "exotic or remarkable" enough to be worth preserving, and here she discusses Wind Cave. Mason explained that Wind Cave's status as a National Park was challenged when Carlsbad Cavern in New Mexico was discovered to be larger, as an important aspect of Wind Cave's attraction was the notion that it was the largest cave in the United States.[43] She noted that this controversy gained brief momentum during a key

[40] "What's in a Name? Discover National Park System Designations," National Park Service, Department of Interior. Accessed May 1, 2023.
[41] Kathy Mason, "Adapting to Endure: The Early History of Wind Cave National Park," *South Dakota History,* 32 no. 2 (Summer 2002): 150.
[42] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 12.
[43] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 58.

transition in the ethos of national park preservation in which wild lands had become a greater priority for preservation, so the unworked prairie above the cave ultimately saved its national park status.[44] While on their own, the geological feature and unworked prairie would not have been considered worthy of such a label, but the inclusion of both meant that Wind Cave could be a national park. Mason's work advanced the idea that environmental protection movements at the turn of the century were by no means monolithic, and a variety of rationale, including practical reasons, informed the public's support of preservation movements. Mason did not include a broader discussion of the national parks of the Black Hills. As a result, this thesis will expand Mason's work of highlighting how the parks in the Black Hills individually and regionally contribute to and emerge from broader trends in public lands movements.

Suzanne Julin investigated the development of tourism in the Black Hills and argued that its trajectory emerged from the advent of automobile tourism and the politicians like South Dakota governor and U.S. Senator Peter Norbeck whose ideas supported this new form of tourism.[45] She analyzed the local circumstances which contributed to the crossover from private to public lands near the turn of the century. Julin pointed out that many of the conversations about preservation manifested in the Black Hills, namely the conflict between preserving the natural features of the land and making these features accessible for everyone.[46] She highlighted the contributions of Norbeck throughout her work because of his work in establishing and growing Mount Rushmore, Wind Cave, and Custer State Park. She also suggested that despite

[44] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 60.
[45] Suzanne Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism, 1880-1941* (South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009): 5.
[46] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles*, 12.

Norbeck's deep involvement with the wilderness park movement, he had unconventional ideas about how these parks ought to be run. Julin brought the conversation about the construction of tourism to the Black Hills, and this thesis will expand and complicate her work by investigating the ways conflicting notions about preservation impacted the development of these wilderness parks through emphasizing the importance of tourism within public lands initiatives.

Elaine Nelson provided another analysis of tourism in the Black Hills and focused on the ways that Lakotas have continued to play an active role in the life of the region. She explained that the Black Hills "is a land that symbolizes Native American self-determination, the tensions that exit in the contested history of the American West, and conflicting notions that defined American exceptionalism at the turn of the century."[47] Nelson critiqued the lack of attention given to Lakotas across history except for where they can be used for dramatic portrayals of the "Mythic West."[48] She argued that Lakotas "used the region's successful tourism industry as another avenue for asserting their sovereignty in the Black Hills" through a variety of "pageants, powwows, and exhibitions" that allowed them to provide their own account of their identity, instead of reasserting the narratives in which colonial society had cast them.[49] Instead of focusing primarily on Lakota peoples, this work incorporates Nelson's argument about how tourism in the Black Hills occurred at the expense of Indigenous peoples and relied on their imagery to generate appeal.[50] Further, this thesis investigates how tourism and nature

[47] Elaine Nelson, "Dreams and Dust in the Black Hills: Race, Place, and National Identity in America's "Land of Promise"" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2011), 7.
[48] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 18.
[49] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 19.
[50] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 20.

preservation contributed to settler colonialism in the Black Hills by removing Indigenous people from the land and replacing their history with celebratory accounts of colonization.

The Black Hills offer a uniquely rich insight into the ways debates about nature and its protection manifested in parks projects. Few other places in the United States have as many park sites as the Black Hills in such a small radius. Furthermore, the relatively quick development and intentional planning that created the tourism industry of the Black Hills occurred alongside the broader development of automobile tourism culture across the United States, and the major proponents of Black Hills tourism ensured that the region lacked nothing hoped for by incoming tourists. Today, the Black Hills attracts millions of visitors to South Dakota every year, making it a significant force in today's national park system and contributing to the state's economy. Still, the literature available about the Black Hills does not place them in the context of preservation and conservation debates or does not analyze the Black Hills as a locus of preservation connecting it to ongoing developments in the region as a whole. As a result, this thesis focuses on the establishment of three important contributing sites from the Black Hills: Wind Cave National Park, Custer State Park, and Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Each chapter analyzes the debates that created each site as part of broader trends in both conservation and tourist development at the national and regional levels to highlight the manner in which their establishment contributes their founders' perspectives on the defining issues of national park preservation.

Analysis of each park reveals truths about the relationship between commerce, preservation, and tourism as they developed in the Black Hills. Wind Cave, the focus of chapter one, grew as a tourist destination in the 1890s before lawsuits transferred title to the federal

government, and it is through the business-minded perspectives of the McDonald and Stabler families that Wind Cave was both preserved and permanently altered to suit tourists who wished to see its unique size and mineral formations. The second chapter investigates how Custer State Park represents the ways that South Dakotans, like Senator Peter Norbeck, applied the thoughts and ideas of prominent preservationists to their state settings and the tourists who visited them. Norbeck intended Custer State Park to establish a thriving tourism industry based on "See America First" nationalist automobile touring during the 1910s and 1920s in hopes that diversifying the state's economy could reduce economic distress, while also giving Norbeck the opportunity to invest in conservation measures, one of his life-long passions. The third and final chapter explains that Mount Rushmore's development and construction in the late 1920s and 1930s indicated how state historian Doane Robinson, Norbeck, and sculptor Gutzon Borglum hoped to draw national attention to the Black Hills, which they planned to become an American patriot's Mecca. The memorial actualized their collective ideas about national identity, colonization, and nature-based tourism.

Using the Black Hills as a microcosm for the growth and development of conservationist ideologies at the turn of the century shows the different conceptions of the lands' importance to a variety of groups, and thus provides a clearer picture of what wilderness parks both in the state and across the country meant to the people involved in their preservation. Because the conclusions that South Dakotans reached in these debates occasionally differed from the conventions set forth by more prominent parks and people, the establishment of parks in the Black Hills shows the diversity of outcomes due to the strength of competing interests, like commercial industry, tourism, and nationalism, in preservation efforts. Without analysis of

regions like the Black Hills, one may see the visible outcomes of national debates as indicative of American understandings of conservation and preservation, rather than the result of complex negotiations about what the nation valued. Further, the perspectives of those who did not accomplish their goals at places like Yellowstone or Yosemite could still appear at other public preservation efforts in the nation. Many of the parks of the Black Hills were established before the National Park Service itself in 1916, and thus these debates reached local, regional, and national consensus at different times before there was a cohesive practice of preservation. Analysis of these debates on a regional level in South Dakota adds detail to understandings of conservation and preservation initiatives by showing what values influenced local answers to nationwide questions. This thesis shows how the people who created the parks of the Black Hills incorporated radical preservationist thought, economic ideas of the value of scenery, and otherwise unexpected understandings of what could be natural when they established these parks and contributed to nationwide debates on these ideas.

**A People's History of Wind Cave: Unexpected Actors and Their Beliefs About What Ought to be Preserved**

Cave explorer and tour guide Alvin McDonald wrote of his experiences in Wind Cave in a diary that echo Romantic thoughts about "the sublime," a simultaneous feeling of awe and powerlessness in the face of God and nature, which inspired many nature writers and naturalists to become activists for preserving the natural environment.[1] He wrote extensively of his exploration in his diary, and one such entry reads quite similar to sentiments John Muir or Henry David Thoreau might have expressed: **"**I found myself in a wonderful place & among the most beautiful scenery in the volcanic part of Wind Cave. From here I found the most dangerous climbing that I ever experienced. In the first place l got into the middle of (as far as I could tell) a place that I could see neither bottom nor top."[2] At the same time, however, Alvin McDonald's relationship with Wind Cave involved what these same nature writers may have objected to as exploitative, as his family's income relied heavily on removing mineral specimens from Wind Cave for sale as souvenirs and curiosities. Rather than conforming to the conventions created by wealthy elites, Alvin McDonald and his family established a business which capitalized on both the family's need for money and the Romantically-inspired ecotourism that began developing with the establishment of the first national parks.

Wind Cave is an example of the actualization of both Romantic ideas about natural beauty and practical concerns in preservation efforts. The cave's journey to becoming a national park began under average men who hoped to make money off the natural marvel and ended with

[1] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001),
[2] Alvin McDonald Diary, February 11, 1891, Wind Cave National Park Library Collection, Hot Springs, South Dakota. Hereafter, WICALC.

the park's establishment under the premise of preventing vandalism to secure the cave for future public enjoyment. While many studies about the debates between preservationists and conservationists emphasize the contributions of capitalists or romantics, these labels have never been mutually exclusive. People participating in debates about environmental protection have either consciously or unconsciously ascribed to and applied both ideologies in ways that may seem unconventional, as at Wind Cave.[3] The Wind Cave example indicates the involvement of unexpected actors who engaged in preservationist initiatives for their own reasons, in this case, motivated by both profit and affection for a natural resource. The McDonald family began the venture from a failed mining claim, and invited another local family, the Stablers, to assist with its development as they sought to create an attractive tourist destination in the natural environment of the Black Hills. Their early activities at the site indicate their beliefs about what preservation could look like as they blasted through many of Wind Cave's mineral formations in the name of tourist development.

Although Wind Cave is one of the oldest national parks and is one of the few that predates the National Park Service (NPS) itself, its fascinating history has not been connected to other debates about national parks, wilderness preservation, and American conceptions of the wild as much as one might expect. Wind Cave's story interacts with numerous questions about how preservation in public parks should occur during a key time in the development of the future form that American national parks would take, as elite preservationists debated what concessions could and should be made to make visitation possible for tourists. Since the NPS had not yet been established, national parks had not yet made a commitment to be hospitable to tourists,

[3] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 150; William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 10.

although many already recognized the importance of tourism in the future of these early parks. At Wind Cave, those who originally opened the site had a great impact on the shape of its preservation in the future, and they prioritized visitor experience for profitability. For its time, the cave's transition in 1900 from private to public hands was unusual, as it occurred due to prolonged legal battles over ownership, rather than as part of a concerted effort to create a national park in the region. After the park was established, it remained the subject of controversy due to the continuing conversation about what belonged in the national park system. As a result, study of Wind Cave national park's beginning and continued recognition in the national park system indicates that these nationwide debates not only occurred in the Black Hills, but also that even average people of the Black Hills impacted and contributed to these debates on the national scale. While their voices are somewhat implicit and did not have wide audiences during their time, their actions and work indicate their perspectives about what ought to be preserved at Wind Cave and how.

Other works have not adequately addressed the ways in which the original creators of the Wind Cave *attraction* contributed to preservation and the development of American national parks. A report written by John Bohi in 1962 for the South Dakota Historical Society is the foundation for most secondary literature about the cave, such as Kathy Mason, Suzanne Julin, and even the Wind Cave National Park website. Bohi offers a traditional history of Wind Cave but does not connect its story with those of other parks. Kathy Mason discusses how Wind Cave presents an interesting case in the history of public lands in two works. While Mason's work investigates several important issues regarding Wind Cave, the ideas of the original developers of the attraction were out of the scope of her work and thus have not yet received enough attention. The families who participated in the earliest development at Wind Cave carried a

variety of attitudes towards the attraction which illuminate the overlap and nuance involved in the origin of national park sites during the ongoing debate about the true value of natural features. This chapter analyzes the ways that the people of the Black Hills played an important role in forming National Park Service policy and shows how these debates about conservation appeared across society, whose members had more influence than often get recognized in the literature about these conversations.

Four main groups need to be considered when understanding the preservationist and conservationist ideologies which altered the status of Wind Cave. First, Indigenous peoples, such as Lakotas, trace their origins to this cave, and articulate that one should establish a relationship with the land which emphasizes respect and reciprocity. Next, there came the prospecting groups who sought to use this land for mining or homesteading, such as the South Dakota Mining Company (SDMC). To these people, Wind Cave was valuable for its capacity to provide resources, and as a result hoped to extract as many valuable minerals as possible. The SDMC hired Jesse McDonald, who then hoped to transform Wind Cave from a mining destination into a tourist attraction and invited John Stabler to help with this venture. McDonald represented an interesting contributor because he hoped to use Wind Cave as a resource for tourism and altered it because he thought that would make the cave more attractive. Similarly, John Stabler, who joined McDonald's Wind Cave Company, approached the conservation of the cave with business at the forefront of his mind. The final group to become involved at Wind Cave were officials of the federal government, who set it aside as a national park to prevent more destruction in the cave and to preserve it for future generations of Americans.

The history between Lakotas and Wind Cave is long, and in fact marks the beginning of time for several tribes. Lakotas have several different meanings associated with Wind Cave, but

it is generally agreed to be a sacred origin site. Some believe that the cave provides new animals to repopulate existing herds.[4] Additionally, other stories emphasize the cave as the site where Tokahe (the first man) "emerged from the underworld to bring wisdom and power to the Lakota people through his teachings."[5] Ultimately, while the story itself can come in many variations, the crux of the story is that Lakotas emerged from the earth with the buffalo at Wind Cave, and this marked the beginning of their deep relationship with the Black Hills.

One commonly told version of the story begins when there were no people or buffalo on earth; humans still lived within the earth in a place called Tunkan Tipi (the Spirit Lodge). Some humans were deceived by two spirits, Iktomi (the trickster spirit) and Anog Ite (the spirit of a two-faced woman), and lured to the surface through Wind Cave, or Maka Oniye, with a number of clothing and food items. The Creator had instructed the humans to stay underground, so Tokahe and others stayed behind. On the surface, the people were led to Anog Ite's home, where she taught them to work for the food and other items they had been shown. However, once Winter arrived, the people on the surface did not know how to survive and Anog Ite refused to help them. They attempted to return to Tunkan Tipi, but the entrance was covered. They cried for help, and once the Creator heard them, he decided he had to punish them for their misdeeds, so he transformed them into the first buffalo herd. Once enough time had passed that earth was ready for human life, the Creator told Tokahe and the remaining people to follow the hoof prints left by the buffalo because the buffalo would give them everything they needed to survive. After

[4] Sina Bear Eagle, "Wind Cave Emergence Story," *Dakota Life* (blog) *South Dakota Public Broadcasting,* January 28, 2022, https://www.sdpb.org/blogs/dakota-life/dakota-life-wind-cave-emergence-story/; James LaPointe, *The Legends of the Lakota,* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1976), 84.
[5] Linea Sundstrom, "The Sacred Black Hills: An Ethnohistorical Review," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17, no. 3 & 4 (Summer/Fall 1997): 132.

they left, the entrance to the cave from which they emerged was shrunk, so while they could see it to remember where they came from, they could not go back.[6]

This story provides not only Lakotas' creation story, but also some context for their relationship with the Black Hills. Indigenous peoples have inhabited the Black Hills for well over ten thousand years. White occupation of the Black Hills in the past two centuries has changed the landscape more than the Indigenous peoples who lived there before had in the previous thousands of years, and this has a great deal to do with differing conceptions of land use between Indigenous people and White settlers.[7] This is not to say that Indigenous peoples did not have an impact on the land, because they in fact have always been an active part of the continent's natural ecosystem.[8] The main difference between Indigenous and White use and control of the land is the extent to which they avoid overconsumption. Whereas White settlers saw the American landscape as providing resources that ought to be used until they disappeared, Lakotas believe that they are as much a part of the land as all other living creatures.[9]

Euro-American Romantic thinkers and naturalists often emphasize similar themes of respect, love of environment, and the restorative quality of being alone in nature which are also present in the ancient and sacred traditions of Lakotas. However, these same Euro-Americans advocated for Lakotas' removal from their homelands on the grounds that they were dangerous, unsophisticated, and incapable of properly appreciating what the land had to offer.[10] If they had stepped beyond their prejudices, they may have noticed these similarities and appreciated the

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[6] Bear Eagle, *Dakota Life: Wind Cave Emergence Story.*
[7] Elaine Marie Nelson, "Dreams and Dust in the Black Hills: Race, Place, and National Identity in America's Land of Promise*"* (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2011), 42.
[8] Nelson, "Dreams and Dust," 34.
[9] Nelson, "Dreams and Dust," 35.
[10] Mark David Spence*, Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

centuries that Indigenous peoples had spent appreciating and preserving the natural environment of these places. Lakotas traditionally have had a relationship with the land that emphasizes sustainability and appreciation for everything the land provides; many modern environmentalists have finally recognized this fact and begun to point to Indigenous peoples and traditions as the proper leaders of conservation movements going forward.[11]

Prior to its beginnings as protected lands, Wind Cave passed through several hands. Wind Cave National Park is originally the sacred origin site for Indigenous tribes of the region, namely Lakotas and Cheyennes, and the federal government officially acknowledged Lakotas' rights to these lands in the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868.[12] Because the government reserved the right to send out reconnaissance expeditions, the 1874 Custer Expedition set out to evaluate possible fort locations and the natural resources on Lakotas' lands. The first Custer Expedition in 1874 led to the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, which encouraged the US government under President Grant to break the treaties it signed and launch a genocidal campaign against Lakotas officially in 1876.[13] Although early in these incursions, the Lakota defeated General Custer at the Battle of Greasy Grass, also known as the Battle of Little Bighorn, Custer's death proved to be a rallying point for the US government to increase the scale of their attacks on the sovereignty of Lakotas. During this campaign, the US military starved and murdered Lakotas in the name of mining interests and colonization.[14] In 1877, the US government officially forced Lakotas onto further reduced reservations through the Manypenny Agreement, without following the requirements mandated by the previous Fort Laramie Treaties, and continued attacks on the life

[11] Nelson, "Dreams and Dust," 52.
[12] Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: The Struggle for Sacred Ground* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2010), 51.
[13] Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 105.
[14] Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 104.

and traditions of Lakotas. The government committed countless other abuses as part of settler colonial structures, such as promoting the slaughter of the buffalo to destroy Indigenous lifestyles, forcing children into boarding schools to destroy the transmission of culture across generations, and introducing the Dawes Act to erode at the already meager amount of land on reservations.[15] Resistance culminated in horrific human rights violations, most notably at the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1891, where the US Army murdered hundreds of innocent noncombatants for participating in the Ghost Dance religious movement.[16] Over a century later, the US government has not taken proper accountability for these travesties, manifesting another aspect of settler colonialism in denying proper adherence to even the legal mechanisms of the settler state itself which originally recognized Indigenous claims to the land through treaties.[17] While the Supreme Court did affirm Lakotas' rights to the land in the 1980 court case *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians,* the resulting settlement has not been claimed by the tribe because the lasting consensus has been that they would not take money for land they did not (and did not want to) sell.[18]

Wind Cave is a unique national park for its time because it is one of the first few parks to transition from settler ownership to public lands, as the other parks that had been established before 1900, like Yellowstone and Yosemite, were lands directly taken from Indigenous people.[23] Once the US government fraudulently forced Lakotas off their lands, many white settlers began to move in from the east after the Civil War.[19] By the end of 1876, approximately

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[15] Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 109, 113, 114. Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 38.
[16] Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 114.
[17] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism,* 44.
[18] Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills, White Justice: The Sioux Nation versus the United States 1775 to the Present* (New York, NY: HarperCollins 1991), 402.
[19] "Wind Cave National Park: Cultural Landscape Report," (Charlottesville, VA: John Milner Associates, May 2005).

25,000 people had moved into the Black Hills in search of the gold that the Custer Expedition found.[20] These settlers poured into the Black Hills in search of gold, but many of them ultimately did not stay long, as conditions proved difficult. The Northern Black Hills proved to contain more gold and more valuable land, so prospectors claimed the lands in that region first. As a result, prospecting in the Southern Black Hills near Custer occurred later, which explains why Wind Cave had not been claimed earlier in the settlement of the Black Hills.[21] Prospecting is what ultimately brought Jesse McDonald to the Black Hills under the direction of the South Dakota Mining Company (SDMC). The SDMC claimed Wind Cave because it hoped to capitalize on potential valuable minerals, although when the SDMC made the claim, the cave's mineral value had not been fully assessed.[22] Settler communities in the Black Hills grew in size and permanence during the 1880s and 1890s, brought by new industries and homesteading.

Tourism emerged as a potential source of income for the region beginning in the 1880s. The growth of tourism in the Black Hills was neither by accident nor a surprise but began its development somewhat slowly in the region.[23] The first initiatives for tourism in the region began in 1882 and revolved around the development of natural hot springs in Hot Springs, which is in the southern Black Hills.[24] Hot Springs attracted largely wealthy tourists seeking restorative time. Hot Springs represented the Black Hills's appeal to "the genteel elite," who sought "resort vacations, the picturesque tour, and the literary pilgrimages," as it acted as a resort for the

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[20] Herbert Schell, *The History of South Dakota,* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 141.
[21] Schell, *History of South Dakota,* 142.
[22] The first assessment of the value of Wind Cave's minerals came from South Dakota School of Mines professor Lucius Boyd in 1898. John Bohi, "75 Years at Wind Cave: A History of the National Park" *South Dakota Historical Collections* 31, (1963): 39.
[23] Suzanne Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism 1880-1941* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009), 7.
[24] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles*, 10.

wealthy elites of the Dakotas and the surrounding region.[25] Guided tours at Wind Cave drew many visitors from those who bathed in the hot springs but the cave's success did not come until later.[26] Prior to the establishment of other attractions in the Black Hills, most visitors to Wind Cave were state residents who lived somewhat nearby. While the cave was one of the larger attractions in the area in the 1880s and 1890s, South Dakota had not yet emerged as a popular stop on tourist excursions, so the park at Wind Cave struggled in its early years.[27]

After the turn of the century, people like South Dakota Senator Peter Norbeck and state historian Doane Robinson worked to create parks out of the public lands of the Black Hills and to build roads that connected them to other tourist destinations in the West.[28] Unfortunately for Hot Springs, the tourism industry underwent massive changes at the turn of the century because the growth of the "Great American Road Trip" encouraged more middle class families, which meant that long stays at hotels and resorts, the preserves of the wealthy who arrived on railroads, were no longer the most popular form of tourism.[29] The "modern tourist" was no longer someone inherently with significant wealth, and this changed the expectations of those who visited the state. The developers of South Dakota tourism appealed to the growing American sense of "tourism as a ritual of American citizenship," which promoted a sense of national identity from a marketed tourist spectacle, like cave tours at Wind Cave or scenic drives in other parts of the Black Hills, meant to provide a packaged experience for the "modern" tourist.[30] The growth of other attractions after the 1910s in Wind Cave's vicinity, like Custer State Park, Mount

[25] Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity 1880-1940* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 2001), 3.
[26] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles*, 41.
[27] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles*, 16
[28] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles*, 41
[29] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles*, 13.
[30] Shaffer, *See America First,* 5.

Rushmore National Memorial, and the Badlands, meant that there would be plenty of tourists who were already in the Black Hills who would make a stop at Wind Cave as part of a longer trip.[31] However, high visitation rates or profitability for those involved did not characterize its early years in the 1890s, the focus of this chapter, as the other attractions to the Black Hills had not been established yet, and the Black Hills did not attract tourists on a national scale.

Wind Cave's development as a tourist attraction began in earnest after 1890. While the cave was no secret among early settlers, not much exploration or improvement happened at the site until the South Dakota Mining Company (SDMC) procured mineral rights to the lands and sent J. D. McDonald to administer them. J. D. McDonald was a Quaker from the east and a self-proclaimed trusting person, which later it seems would bring him much trouble. Neither educated nor wealthy, McDonald cared deeply about his work.[32] In a letter to R.B. Moss, the owner of the SDMC, his work ethic and commitment to the venture is evident, as he warns his boss that he should not "hire eny body that uses licker for you Cannot Depend on them if you are a going to macke a success of this business out here."[33] Their original business arrangement brought J.D. McDonald from the East in April of 1890 with two of his sons, Alvin and Elmer, and his daughter, Mary, to evaluate the land and to establish a mining claim on it. He later moved the rest of his family, including his wife Lucy and other sons, Tommy, Roy, and Harry, to Hot Springs.[34] The SDMC, however, went bankrupt within the year and could no longer afford to pay

[31] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 61.
[32] Tom Farrell, "The McDonald-Stabler Feud: The Birth of a National Park," (paper presented at the Dakota History Conference, Dakota State University 11 April 1987), WICALC, 3.
[33] J.D. McDonald to R. B. Moss, 1890, WICALC.
[34] Lucy and J.D. would divorce within a few years of this move, as he would remarry in 1894. See *Wind Cave National Park Handbook 104* (Washington, DC: National Park Service Division of Publications, 1979), 36.

J.D. McDonald for supervising the land. Even when Moss's mining initiatives fell to the back burner, McDonald remained at the site in hopes there remained a fortune to be made there.

While the McDonald family originally moved to the Wind Cave site as representatives of the SDMC, they ultimately decided to remain at the cave even after the company could no longer afford to pay them because they hoped to capitalize on the tourist potential of the cave. Late in 1890, the McDonalds began promoting the cave as a tourist destination by offering tours and by bringing pieces of the unique boxwork mineral formations in the cave to town to attract local attention. The *Hot Springs Weekly Star* and *The Custer Chronicle* expanded these promotional activities by reporting often about the cave. For example, on June 20, 1890, *The Hot Springs Weekly Star* reported that J.D. McDonald "deposited on [the editor's] desk an elegant specimen from the cave" when he stopped by to update them on the happenings at the cave.[35] The McDonalds and the accompanying newspaper articles touted Wind Cave as the largest in the world, hoping to draw tourist attention from the growing tourism industry in the Black Hills. Unfortunately for the McDonalds, at this stage they did not make much money, and financial troubles associated with lawsuits and maintenance would continue to plague the family for years to come. Wind Cave never drew many tourists by itself, as Alvin McDonald's, one of J.D's sons, early diary records fewer than one trip per day for much of 1891.[36] In fact, Alvin's diary also mentions numerous times that the family struggled with the cost of food and basic living necessities.[37] In the interest of stable development, the McDonalds began to look for other ways to attract people to the cave.

[35] *Hot Springs Weekly Star,* 20 June 1890.
[36] Alvin McDonald Diary, January through December 1891, WICALC.
[37] Alvin McDonald Diary, 19 March 1891, WICALC.

As a result, the families conducted a variety of projects to "improve" the Wind Cave attraction. In this case, "improvement" meant making Wind Cave more accessible by building facilities to accommodate visitors, including a hotel, railroad, and clearer paths within the cave so that more people were able and interested in visiting the site. The newspaper also reported the McDonalds' development projects to make the cave a more attractive tourist attraction. This included a "hotel being erected at the Cave for the accommodation of visitors" and the availability of "competent guides [which could] be secured by those wishing to make a tour of the cave."[38] The family, generally J.D. himself or his older sons, Elmer and Alvin, offered tours in which they would take visitors through the cave, using candlelight to illuminate many of the cave's most unique features. Depending on the guests, the excursion may have involved crawling, climbing, and squeezing through tight spaces. The McDonalds did not demonstrate reservations about changing the original structure of the cave in the name of bringing visitors to different attractions that otherwise would have been inaccessible for most people.[39] They blasted out numerous paths throughout the cave so that they could offer a variety of different tour options.[40] In fact, the McDonalds blasted open the entrance to Wind Cave, which had previously been a small hole in the ground, so that it would be easier to access.[41] Although many visitors clearly had not minded the crawling and climbing that characterized early cave adventures, as the family sought to expand the appeal of cave tours, they hoped that by reducing the number of physical barriers in the cave, they could appeal to more potential visitors.

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[38] *Hot Springs Weekly Star,* 20 June 1890, WICALC. It is unclear what happened to this hotel, as another one was built two years later by the Stabler family, who would join the business in 1892.
[39] *Hot Springs Star,* 1 May 1891, WICALC.
[40] *Hot Springs Star,* 1 May 1891, WICALC.
[41] *Wind Cave Handbook 104,* 40. Such a move would undoubtedly offend Lakotas, as they did not believe that Wind Cave ought to be visited or that the environment should be destroyed in that manner. Similarly, preservationists would have also decried such destruction of the natural state of the cave.

To assist with the development of the attraction, the McDonalds invited another local family, the Stablers, to join them at the site in 1892 because of the McDonalds' dire financial situation. John Stabler, the patriarch of the family, visited Wind Cave after they moved to Hot Springs, and saw that the cave could become a better tourist attraction with better funding and management.[42] The families debate whether McDonald invited John Stabler to purchase part of the business interest or whether Stabler initiated the partnership, but their addition to the venture certainly benefited the business. The Stablers were a well-known and well-respected family in the local community once they moved in from Chamberlain, SD, as John Stabler bought and ran a hotel in Hot Springs.[43] The Stablers were already fairly well-off and more educated than the McDonalds. John Stabler was also popular with the press, and *The Hot Springs Star* regularly referred to him as "Friendly John" and "Honest John."[44] John Stabler also drew respect because of his status as a Civil War veteran who had fought with the 7th Wisconsin Cavalry at the Battle of Chattanooga where he was wounded.[45] Several contemporaries of Stabler reference his skilled way with words, which the McDonalds would later blame for their misfortunes.[46]

Once the Stabler family joined the initiative, John Stabler thought that the park needed more newsworthy events to draw attention and visitors to the cave, so he concocted several projects to land Wind Cave in the newspapers. Stabler sought to make Wind Cave a nationwide attraction and ensured that prominent visitors to the area arrived at Wind Cave, including

[42] Kate Stabler, "Katie Stabler's Memoirs," WICALC. Kate Stabler, John Stabler's daughter, argues that J.D. McDonald offered the partnership to John Stabler, whereas Emma McDonald, J.D. McDonald's daughter in law, argues that Stabler tricked McDonald into selling part of his interest.
[43] Kate Stabler, "Katie Stabler's Memoirs," WICALC.
[44] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 5.
[45] Kate Stabler "Katie Stabler's Memoirs," WICALC.
[46] Emma McDonald, "Wind Cave," WICALC.

Nebraska politician William Jennings Bryan who spoke highly of his visit.[47] Stabler also engaged in some gimmicky publicity stunts to draw the curiosity of people who otherwise would not have been nature explorers. For instance, he invited a psychic, who called himself Professor Johnstone, to the cave to search for a hidden hatpin as part of a publicity stunt for the area.[48] Stabler and McDonald both had a habit of keeping the local press informed about the happenings at Wind Cave. Stabler's decision to make events an important part of the tourist destination at Wind Cave reflected his goal to attract people using the press who otherwise may not have been interested in a standalone natural wonder. He also sought to add an element of intrigue in hopes that it would expand the profitability of the venture. He placed a skeleton in one room of the cave, but had it shrouded so he could extract additional dollars from the visitors to unveil it.[49] Not all of Stabler's contributions were so tacky though, as his family managed the hotel on the property, an important asset for the cave's success as a tourist destination.

John Stabler's interest in the cave, more than the others who worked there, appears to be primarily motivated by business. It does not appear that John Stabler led cave tours, and he focused his efforts on the bookkeeping of the business.[50]Although he is not described by his daughter or anyone as a naturalist, John Stabler contributed not only his implicit perspective on wilderness's capacity to draw in new people, but also participated in the construction of the tourist culture that continues to shape the Black Hills to this day. His emphasis on the unique and eye-catching corresponded with other trends in tourism that developed in this new era of the

[47] Bohi, "75 Years at Wind Cave," 44.
[48] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 5.
[49] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 6. In addition to bringing a skeleton into the cave, Stabler brought a number of prairie dogs into the cave to show visitors. These prairie dogs were popular among visitors, but turned out to be a very dangerous venture. In fact, John Stabler was bitten by one of these prairie dogs and was sick for months after, ultimately dying because of the complications from this prairie dog bite.
[50] *Wind Cave Handbook 104,* 51.

industry.[51] He clearly hoped to make Wind Cave into a nationwide attraction, a goal he shared with the McDonalds. Because of the flexibility offered by the partnership between the McDonalds and Stablers, representatives of both families went to the Chicago World's Fair in the summer of 1893 with cave specimens, highlighting the unique beauty of the cave as well as its improvements which made it a suitable location for both national and international travel.[52]

The Stabler-McDonald approach to nature contrasted with Romantic ideas about how the wilderness ought to be enjoyed, as many of the philosophers who contributed to the development of this Romantic approach to nature, like Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, believed that wilderness was primarily restorative when it removed someone from the corrupting influences of society, especially as it industrialized.[53] Encounters with the sublime enhanced the religious importance of connections with nature, and thus the most radical Romantics and preservationists would balk at initiatives that blew up parts of nature to make it more palatable for society. Furthermore, Theodore Roosevelt had popularized the idea of "tough living" and "rugged individualism" which typically emphasized the idea that people ought to carve their own way through the difficult life of the natural world without expectation that it would be made hospitable to them.[54] The McDonalds and Stablers knew that Wind Cave would not make an attractive tourist destination without infrastructure, and thus constructed amenities for potential visitors, such as a hotel and paths to make the visit easier. Stabler's efforts to appeal to a popular audience involved efforts that these elite thinkers would have found low brow and cheap compared to what they believed ought to be extracted from these experiences with the sublime,

[51] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 57.
[52] Bohi, "75 Years at Wind Cave," 19.
[53] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 13.
[54] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 14.

but also highlights how elites had lost exclusive control of the shape and experience of nature-based tourism.[55]

Elite nature philosophers and nature entrepreneurs inherently hold different rationale behind preservation. Whereas these philosophers thought that wilderness trips would bring moral and personal development, the McDonalds and Stablers believed that forays into the cave would bring money.[56] This sentiment was widely acknowledged, as journalists noted that "the cave [was] equivalent to a fortune to whoever [became] the owner of it."[57] The McDonalds had long earned a portion of their income from sales of specimens of unique mineral formations in the cave.[58] These primarily quartzite and calcite, which themselves are not expensive minerals, formed in unique honeycomb shapes called boxwork, which is not found in the quality and quantity available at Wind Cave anywhere else in the world.[59] The McDonalds also emphasized the unique size of the cave as possibly the largest in the world in the local press. Both families believed that highlighting the uniqueness of Wind Cave's sights, available nowhere else, were the primary contributor to its appeal to potential tourists.[60] While the McDonalds and Stablers likely did not see themselves as contributing to debates about how preservation and tourism could cooperate with one another, the way they structured their attraction presents their perspective on what was worthy of preservation and the purpose of this protection. To these people, the preservation of this natural resource revolved around its capacity to draw attention and tourist dollars, so the features worthy of protection were those that were unique and unlike

[55] Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness," 15.
[56] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 6.
[57] *Custer Chronicle,* 26 December 1896.
[58] Alvin McDonald Diary, 3 January 1891, WICALC.
[59] "Cave Geology," Wind Cave National Park, National Park Service, Accessed May 21, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/wica/learn/nature/wind-cave-geology.htm.
[60] Bohi, "75 Years at Wind Cave," 19.

other things that visitors would have seen. Features which the families deemed less unique and less beautiful were often then the victims of path-clearing and specimen harvesting, which thus altered the physical preservation possible in the future.

While generally the McDonalds and Stablers prioritized development for the sake of increased tourism, there is evidence that the families did hold the beauty of the cave in high regard and that they had some Romantic ideas about nature and the cave. Kate Stabler, John Stabler's daughter, reported having been interested in geology from a young age, a passion which only grew once her family became involved at Wind Cave.[61] She would go on to lead cave tours even after her family no longer owned the cave because of her deep attachment to it.[62] One of J. D. McDonald's sons, Alvin, loved exploring the cave and systematically documented his findings in his diary. His diary relates his feelings and excitement about the cave, which was so near and dear to his heart that he reported "getting homesick after staying out of the cave so long" after just two days without venturing inside.[63] His personal relationship with the cave certainly appears to have given him the experiences with the "sublime" similar to those of Romantic writers like William Wordsworth, which frightened and inspired both Wordsworth and McDonald, as each referenced their understanding of being in danger combined with their awe of the features of the wilderness.[64]

While Alvin's sentiment that the cave felt more like home to him than society outside of it does echo romantic thought, he did not view the cave as sacred, like Romantics such as Muir and Thoreau did. He expressed clear anger when an unknown person broke off a piece of a particular formation that he called the Petrified Swan, but the reason he stated was that "the

[61] Kate Stabler, "Katie Stabler's Memoirs," WICALC.
[62] Kate Stabler, "Katie Stabler's Memoirs," WICALC.
[63] Alvin McDonald diary, 21 February 1891, WICALC.
[64] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 10-11.

petrified Swan was the only attraction of the room that contained it."[65] Additionally, throughout his diary, he describes numerous occasions where he took mineral deposits out of the cave to sell and promote the cave. His preservationist instincts here appear to be motivated by providing the best possible tourist experience since he only took specimens from rooms that he did not take guests into, thus providing tourists with souvenirs without damaging the experience for those to come. Furthermore, the organized nature of cave tours hardly evoked the feeling of wandering in nature's untouched cathedral like the great thinkers Muir and Emerson conceived as the ideal sublime experience.[66] The McDonalds cleared pathways to make visitation comfortable to the cave's best features, rather than leaving the cave untouched and allowing visitors to pick for themselves the best features.[67] As a result, it seems that Alvin balanced both his personal interest in the cave with the priorities of the McDonald family. The families valued visitor experience and advertising, with preservation simply a necessary component of securing stable income for the family.

Early in Wind Cave's life as a tourist attraction, in 1893, ownership of the cave became the object of extreme controversy as the South Dakota Mining Company (SDMC) tried to regain control over the cave. The SDMC argued that their mining claims remained at the site, and that the McDonalds and Stablers illegally occupied the lands.[68] The SDMC sued McDonalds and Stablers because they sold mineral specimens from the cave, which the company argued interfered with their continuing mineral claims.[69] The McDonalds' claim to the land was the subject of several disagreements. The McDonalds suggest that they settled on the land in June of

[65] Alvin McDonald Diary, 6 March 1891, WICALC.
[66] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 59.
[67] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 13.
[68] Moss to J.D. McDonald, 1893, WICALC.
[69] *Custer Chronicle,* January 6, 1894. Moss to J.D. McDonald, 1893, WICALC.

1890 to establish a legitimate homestead claim. Indeed, they submitted their final proofs and gained title in June of 1895 according to the records of the General Land Office.[70] At the same time, however, local newspapers suggest that the McDonalds originally attempted to claim the land through squatter's rights, as they had lived on the land for a few years without intervention by the South Dakota Mining Company. In this scenario, the McDonalds eventually submitted claims to the timber in 1894 and a homestead claim later that year to bolster their case since squatter's rights did not exist.[71] Kate Stabler, John Stabler's daughter, later suggested that the McDonalds did not have the legal right to the lands they occupied from the start.[72] Regardless, the McDonalds and Stablers both submitted claims for the lands above Wind Cave under the 1862 Homestead Act, which required that the tenants of the homestead develop the land as a farm and living space, but their farming efforts paled in comparison to the work they did for their tourist business, which ultimately violated the spirit of the law.[73] The McDonalds' and Stablers' use of the land as both a homestead and a private enterprise represented local ideas about how lands could be used by those who owned them, and similarly indicated the relatively haphazard nature by which they believed that land ownership could be decided.

The McDonalds ultimately won the case against the mining company in 1896 because the reports "[failed] to show any mineral bearing rock that has commercial value," which nullified any existing mining claims of the South Dakota Mining Company.[74] Despite a clear local verdict, the Mining Company was not satisfied and appealed the decision through the General

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[70] Thomas Ryan to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, 30 November 1900, WICALC.
[71] *Hot Springs Weekly Star,* March 2, 1894. Letter to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, November 30, 1900 from Thomas Ryan, secretary, WICALC.
[72] Kate Stabler, "Katie Stabler's Memoirs," WICALC.
[73] *Hot Springs Weekly Star,* March 2, 1894, WICALC.
[74] *Custer Chronicle,* 29 July 1899.

Land Office (GLO).[75] While the McDonalds won against the SDMC in this lawsuit, a feud emerged with the Stablers that would result in additional disputes. Alvin McDonald's death in 1893 from tuberculosis meant the end of cave exploration, and tensions between the families began to explode over the financial situation at the cave.[76] It is unclear who to blame for the feud, as it appears to have originated in differences in the lifestyle and work of both families as part of the broader operation. To begin with, it is similarly unknown who even began the partnership; the Stablers say it was J.D. McDonald who begged for someone to help with the finances, whereas the McDonalds argue that John Stabler fraudulently pursued a partnership.[77] The partnership was unequal from the beginning; the park was not very profitable, but the Stablers got to keep the money from the hotel, the most profitable portion.[78] Elmer McDonald's wife Emma argued that "the Stablers bought ranches and stock while the McDonald's had to charge their groceries during the winters to live."[79] She said that "John Stabler's oily tongue and cheery smile still had J.D. McDonald hoodooed" to the point that even when the Stablers' records of the park finances showed "that they had over drawn their allowance enormously. . . [J.D. McDonald gave] the Stablers a chance to pay back what they showed that they had overdrawn in small payments."[80] As a result, Emma McDonald, J.D. McDonald's daughter-in-law, argued that John Stabler tricked J.D. McDonald into selling a portion of the business to Stabler, who swindled him more by living lavishly on money taken from the common account. Years later Kate Stabler would continue to deny any responsibility on her father's behalf,

[75] *Hot Springs Star,* 1 May 1896.
[76] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 7.
[77] Farrell, "The McDonald-Stabler Feud," 4-5.
[78] Farrell, "The McDonald-Stabler Feud," 6.
[79] Emma McDonald in Farrell, "The McDonald-Stabler Feud," 9.
[80] Emma McDonald in Farrell, "The McDonald-Stabler Feud," 9.

suggesting that McDonald was the true swindler, who had lied from the start about his rights to the cave. She recalled,

> [Wind Cave] was occupied by a Mr. McDonald (a squatter), who had been sent by Mr. Folsom, head of a mining company, to do the assessment work. He jumped the claim and took it as a homestead. This was unknown to my father at this time or he would not have bought into the cave.[81]

Kate's description of McDonald as a "squatter" who "jumped the claim" suggests that the Stablers later decided that the McDonalds' claim of the land was illegitimate, and thus the McDonald family had swindled them. In 1895, the Stablers eventually joined forces with a previous employee of the Mining Company, Peters Folsom, who hoped to claim debts from the South Dakota Mining Company from their assets.[82] Together, the Stablers and Folsom sued J. D. McDonald under the premise that they had mining rights in the cave, using expert testimony as evidence. This was not successful. Every time McDonald had a court victory, both the Stablers and Folsom would appeal the case again until the government ruled against both sides, in which case all involved parties appealed and ultimately took it to federal court.[83]

The dispute lasted for five years because of disagreements about the value of the minerals in the cave, which emerged from the reports of the independent surveyor Lucius Boyd, a professor at the South Dakota School of Mines, whom the Stablers hired to survey the formations in the cave. He found valuable minerals in the cave; Boyd's testimony "shows gold in quantities from a trace to $23."[84] The presence of gold at the cave could have changed the outcome of the court case, as the Stablers' and Folsom's case rested on the assumption that there could be profitable mining in the cave. Kate Stabler reports that at one point, the family found gold in the

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[81] Kate Stabler, "Katie Stabler's Memoirs," WICALC. Interestingly, Kate refers to Mr. Folsom as the man who hired J.D. McDonald, when it was truthfully R.B. Moss.
[82] Bohi, "75 Years at Wind Cave," 36.
[83] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 8.
[84] *Custer Chronicle,* 7 May 1898.

stomach of one of their chickens when they slaughtered it; this prompted John Stabler to consider slaughtering his family's entire flock of chickens to bring their stomachs to court as evidence of the presence of valuable minerals in the cave. Interestingly, although Boyd's testimony indicated the cave contained valuable minerals that could warrant a mining claim, Boyd suggested that the land would bring more benefit to the state if made public.[85] This was a foreshadowing statement, as the continuing litigation would attract people with similar opinions to weigh in on the case. Regardless of Boyd's intentions, however, this testimony prolonged the litigation and fueled additional appeals.

While the McDonalds fought the Stablers and Peter Folsom in court, numerous dramatic disputes out of court drew the attention of the surrounding town. J.D. McDonald reportedly believed that "possession of the land was nine-tenths of the matter" and as a result, the disputes largely took the form over fights about who had physical possession of the land, despite the fact that at no point did possession factor into court decisions.[86] In 1897 when the McDonalds won one of the appeals which dispossessed the Stablers of their land, John Stabler refused "to obey upon the grounds that the property was his own" despite the fact that he had been legally served papers ordering him to vacate.[87] In response, J.D. called the police on the Stablers, resulting in the arrest of John Stabler, his sons George and Charles, and Charles's friend Will Ranger.[88] In addition to large scale incidents, there are some reports that the men of the families "went about with revolvers and knives in their belts," although it is unclear whether there were actual shots

[85] Lucius J. Boyd, "Report of Wind Cave Property, Custer County, South Dakota," 1898. WICALC.
[86] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 9.
[87] *Custer Chronicle,* 10 April 1897.
[88] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 9.

fired between the families.[89] Furthermore, some believed that J.D. McDonald had hired a hitman from Texas to kill John Stabler.[90]

In December 1900, one of the most infamous altercations between the McDonalds and Stablers occurred. By this point, the litigation had progressed enough that all private claims to the land had been denied and it had been earmarked for a wildlife refuge. The Stablers maintained possession while the Department of Interior decided its further actions. J.D. McDonald and his son Roy attempted to regain possession of the cave after the courts had turned against them by breaking into the hotel and attempting to occupy it.[91] Folsom and several neighbors chased them out with firearms and an ax, but the McDonalds fled into the cave where they stayed for some time; the amount of time is either no more than 24 hours or up to three days.[92] The seriousness of this altercation drew the public's attention. *The Custer Chronicle* had some choice words for those who threatened the McDonalds with firearms as they hid in the cave; the writer complained "if there be any fair men in our city, then such an outrage will not be permitted. While in view of the last decision of the Interior Department, the McDonalds have no legal rights there, neither do the stablers possess any rights there. The time has surely come when such lawlessness needs a check."[93] Apparently, law enforcement had decided this was no longer their jurisdiction since it was federal lands, but the writer of the newspaper argued that "the fact that two lives are in danger should prompt any officer to do all in his power to save the imprisoned."[94] The McDonalds escaped the cave after Roy surrendered and asked that his father be let out of the cave as well. While away, the McDonalds' alternate home burned to the ground,

[89] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 10-11.
[90] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 10. Bohi, "75 Years," 41.
[91] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 14.
[92] Bohi, "75 Years," 42.
[93] *Hot Springs Star,* 14 December 1900.
[94] *Hot Springs Star,* 14 December 1900.

and the already poor McDonalds lost everything they had. The official story of the cause was that J.D. had left a candle burning, but there were some who believed the fire was set intentionally.[95]

Each of these more dramatic cases display the risks that both families were willing to take while negotiating land claims. Yet this was not because of some Romantic notion about proximity to nature; these disputes existed for practical claims to a resource that could benefit the financial situations of either family. Because these lawsuits were over business, they seemed worthy of repeatedly appealing the case until it reached the General Land Office and the Department of Interior. The beauty of the cave was neither the subject nor the impetus of these lawsuits, and probably would not have been deemed worthy of such prolonged litigation. As a result, the motivation to do business pushed Wind Cave from private to public hands.

It seems as though both sides waged a propaganda campaign to curry favor with the residents of the surrounding towns of Hot Springs and Custer, as both the *Hot Springs Star* and the *Custer Chronicle* published articles that suggested that both men would appear at the newsrooms to provide their own updates on the case. Additionally, it seems that towards the end of the dispute, the *Hot Springs Star* began to favor John Stabler, whereas the *Custer Chronicle* favored J.D. McDonald, as the newspapers made their own decisions about who had the ultimate right to the cave.[96] Their opinions shifted away from the McDonalds, however, when J.D. McDonald angrily canceled his subscription to *The Hot Springs Star* because he was upset that they had not published an article about a few prominent visitors, prompting *The Hot Springs Star* to criticize him publicly in an article republished by numerous papers for being hot headed and

[95] Farrell, "The McDonald Stabler Feud," 14.
[96] *Custer Chronicle* 12 December 1896; *Hot Springs Star,* 25 June 1897.

cheap.[97] Despite the personal interactions with both men, both newspapers slowly began to favor the concept of the cave becoming public lands. *The Custer Chronicle* reported in 1896 that "the many friends of Mr. McDonald hope that he will finally come out winner in the case, as he has spent a large amount of money and years of labor in developing and improving this wonderful cave," but then a few years later in 1899, the same newspaper suggested that "the proposal to make the property a government reserve is far more business like than to permit it to be destroyed by vandals," an unlucky fate that would later destroy the Fossil Cycad National Monument located nearby in a few decades.[98] Additionally, the newspaper even came out in support of the cave becoming a national park at McDonald's expense, so long as he "received partial compensation for the loss of his homestead" by being appointed warden of the park.[99] The change in opinion evidenced by the newspapers occurred alongside repeated appeals. Once Lucius Boyd suggested that the land be made public, the newspapers repeated their approval of such an idea on numerous occasions.[100] Overall, the interactions between McDonald, Stabler, and the newspapers suggest the importance of public opinion to those involved with the case.

In 1899, the General Land Office (GLO) sent C.W. Greene to investigate the lands and make a final determination about whether or not the minerals available in the cave were enough to warrant a mining claim and whether the land above the cave was suitable for agricultural development. Not much is known about Greene himself, but his 8-page letter to the

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[97] *Rapid City Journal,* 3 September 1895.
[98] *Custer Chronicle,* 19 September 1896; 5 August 1899. Fossil Cycad National Monument had been established in 1922 to protect a rare collection of fossilized plant materials so that these fossils could be studied by scientists. Unfortunately, Congress de-authorized the Monument because scientists, visitors, and looters had stolen all specimens in the boundaries of the Monument. The specimens from this area can still be found in museums today. See https://www.nps.gov/articles/fossil-cycad-national-monument.htm
[99] *Custer Chronicle,* 5 August 1899.
[100] *Custer Chronicle,* 19 September 1896.

Commissioner of the GLO details exactly what the lands looked like at the time and what the experts of the time would agree could be done with the land. Greene discovered that neither the South Dakota Mining Company, the McDonalds, nor the Stablers had used the land for its intended purpose according to the law; there was neither significant agricultural development to sustain the idea that the McDonalds and Stablers had made homesteads on the property nor were there valuable minerals in sufficient quantity to merit mining.[101] Ultimately, the land office suggested that "the McDonalds had not complied with the homestead law and recommended cancellation of their entries and held the ground to be non-mineral in character."[102] In this case, the government determined the "proper use" of land. Before the case went to the GLO, the newspapers had suggested that they respected McDonald's claim and use of the land as a homestead, despite the lack of agricultural development; the press's opinion also changed after these rulings.[103] As a result, the GLO rendered all claims to this land as null due to the lack of good faith efforts to properly exploit the land, and thus ironically removed any further opportunity for industrial exploitation or agriculture by earmarking it for public use.[104]

C.W. Greene originated the idea that Wind Cave ought to be a national park. While Boyd preceded him in suggesting that it ought to be public lands, it seems as though Greene was the first to suggest that the cave deserved the national park label. Throughout his letter, he investigated the value of the lands, valuing J.D McDonald's homestead lands with all improvements included at $400, Elmer McDonald's lands at $275, and George Stabler's at $350. Greene referenced the "beautiful box-work," and "the beautiful frostwork. . . so delicate that a

[101] C.W. Greene to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, Washington DC, 30 November 1900, WICALC.
[102] *Custer Chronicle,* 2 March 1901.
[103] *Custer Chronicle,* 19 September 1896.
[104] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 56.

breath will almost destroy it," while analyzing the value of the cave.[105] Despite making a career of surveying and describing lands, Greene ultimately concludes that "words cannot describe this place."[106] He also suggests that "the change if any is made should be done with care as a man could in 30 minutes ruin the Garden of Eden and the Pearly Gates."[107] Greene finished his letter to the Commissioner stating that "If I were to name it I would say 'Wind Cave National Park.' Very respectfully, C.W. Greene, Spl.Agt. G.L.O."[108] Greene seems to have been struck by what Romantic thinkers would have called the "sublimity" of Wind Cave, and thusly contributed to the campaign to preserve this feature for future generations; he represents a surprisingly Romantic perspective among the South Dakotans involved in the legal disputes about the cave. His suggestion ultimately is extremely impactful, as the decision reached from his testimony began the movement to establish Wind Cave National Park.

Overall, the decision to make Wind Cave a park appears to have been supported by the public, as the *Custer Chronicle* reported that while they supported McDonald in his claims, the administration by the government would do more to protect the land; the only reservation the writer had about the arrangement is that McDonald never received compensation for the loss of his land.[109] In this way, the litigation over Wind Cave's usage displays how the public agreed and disagreed with the ways that the government thought land ought to be used. By 1899, the public parks movement had successfully established a few of the "crown jewel" National Parks,

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[105] C.W. Greene to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, 30 November 1900, 2-3, WICALC.
[106] C.W. Greene to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, 30 November 1900, 6, WICALC.
[107] C.W. Greene to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, 30 November 1900, 8, WICALC. The Garden of Eden and Pearly Gates are rooms in Wind Cave well-known for their intense beauty.
[108] C.W. Greene to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, 30 November 1900, 8, WICALC.
[109] *Custer Chronicle,* 5 August1899

such as Yellowstone National Park and Yosemite National Park and shifted public and federal consciousness towards preservation, which created the grounds to take land that had not been "used properly" by private interests for public preservation.

Given the lack of future interests in mining or agriculture at the site, the Department of Interior began to evaluate Greene's suggestion that Wind Cave deserved a national park designation. The years after the GLO confiscated Wind Cave brought efforts by local officials to get the land designated officially as a national park. Among Congressmen, the legislation was uncontroversial, as it passed the Senate with little debate after Senator Robert Gamble, from South Dakota, explained that "There [were] only two valid existing claims on the reservation, and those claimants [were] given new lands in place of those which they [occupied]."[110] The House investigated the details of how previous claimants may be reimbursed for their loss and what potential claims, if any, could arise. Once Iowa Representative John Lacey, who wrote the bill, assured the chamber that neither past or future claimants would pose a significant threat, the bill passed the House, too.[111] As a result, President Teddy Roosevelt approved Wind Cave as a national park on January 9, 1903, establishing the terms of "proper use" of the space as for the preservation of natural resources, although infrastructure to support tourism was also permitted, provided that the profits of tourism go to the future preservation of the park's resources.[112]

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[110] *Wind Cave National Park,* S6138, on June 19, 1902, 57th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 35 pt. 7:7081. These claimants were not the Stablers or McDonalds, and instead resided on other lands near the cave.

[111] *Wind Cave National Park,* HR10586, on December 6, 1902, 57th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 31 pt.1:81. Lacey worked to support other preservation initiatives during his time, as he was interested in conservation initiatives. See Kathy Mason, *Natural Museums,* 56.

[112] "An Act to Set Apart Certain Lands in the State of South Dakota as a Public Park, to Be Known as Wind Cave National Park," Pub. L. No. 63 (1903).

Even Wind Cave's approval as a national park site represented part of the debate about what is worthy of conservation and how park sites ought to be run. Since its establishment as a park, scholars and park personnel have debated whether the cave by itself is "monumental" enough to warrant the national park label. Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger dismissed Wind Cave's suitability as a park as early as 1910, because he did not believe it beautiful enough to attract tourists to such a remote part of the nation.[113] Kathy Mason focused specifically on the conservation and preservation movements and the National Park Service to construct her argument about the importance of practical concerns and single feature preservation efforts at places like Wind Cave.[114] Indeed, Mason argued "wild land protection was initially a byproduct" of efforts "to preserve exotic or remarkable natural phenomena," as a shift occurred in how elected officials and park service personnel thought about what deserved a national park label.[115] Mason also investigated what it meant to be "exotic or remarkable" enough to be worth preserving, a serious point of contention in Wind Cave's journey to official national park status.[116]

Mason explained that Wind Cave's status as a national park was challenged when Carlsbad Cavern was discovered to be larger, as the belief that it was the largest cave in the world drove early preservation efforts.[117] John Ise, Harlean James, and Robert Sterling Yard are among the voices who have suggested that Wind Cave did not deserve its status.[118] For example, Robert Sterling Yard suggested that because Wind Cave had lost its status as the largest cave in

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[113] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 57.
[114] Kathy Mason, "Adapting to Endure: The Early History of Wind Cave National Park," *South Dakota History* vol 32 no. 2 (Summer 2002): 150.
[115] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 12.
[116] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 12.
[117] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 58.
[118] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 58.

the United States, he thought Wind Cave should lose its national park designation in favor of a state park designation.[119] Famed writer John Ise and conservationist Harlean James on the other hand did not believe that Wind Cave ever deserved such a label, and did not think that it was a site of enough beauty.[120] Mason notes that this controversy gained brief momentum during a key transition in the ethos of national park preservation in which wild lands had become a greater priority for preservation, so the unworked prairie above the cave ultimately saved its national park status.[121] This was because while on their own, the geological feature and unworked prairie would not have been considered worthy of such a label, but the inclusion of both meant that Wind Cave could be a national park. Mason's work advances the idea that the conservation and preservation movements at the turn of the century were by no means monolithic, and a variety of rationale, including practical reasons, informed the public's support of preservation movements. Her work extends the ways that Wind Cave manifested large-scale debates about the future form of other national park sites, as she indicated how Wind Cave was the subject of an important debate about what ought to be a national park. Ultimately, because the McDonalds and Stablers had failed to cultivate the land for agriculture, the land above Wind Cave became the final justification for its preservation, as it was unbroken prairie, which was becoming rarer by the day.[122] Additionally, bison and elk were reintroduced in 1912 which the superintendent at the time used to attract additional guests who would like to view the ever-rarer animals.[123] The combination of both a fascinating cave and unbroken prairie allowed the cave to avoid the unlucky fate of other parks, such as Sullys Hill National Park in North Dakota and Platt National

[119] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 58.
[120] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 58.
[121] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 60.
[122] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 58.
[123] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 59.

Park in Oklahoma, who lost their status because they were not impressive enough. Decades after, scholars have still argued that while Wind Cave ought to be preserved, it does not compare to the other national parks and therefore could be better off preserved as a state park.[124] These claims have not been enough to constitute a real legal threat to Wind Cave's national park status, but do suggest that Wind Cave developed in form because of a debate about what a national park ought to be which continues today.[125]

Wind Cave National Park's early years and establishment are indicative of existing conflicts within late 19th century American preservation and conservation debates, particularly regarding land use claims and what is worth preserving. In fact, Wind Cave's history incorporates a surprisingly diverse array of land use perspectives within a period of 50 years, beginning with the Lakota before figures like the McDonalds, Stablers, GLO, and Department of Interior became involved. Wind Cave National Park's early years were greatly shaped by people like the McDonalds and Stablers who were neither naturalists nor particularly committed to public welfare, which contrasts with narratives which emphasize the role of intellectuals who sought to benefit society through preservation initiatives. The members of each family and association did not always behave the way one might think, as Alvin McDonald and Kate Stabler developed more romantic reasons for protecting the cave than did their parents. At the same time, they contributed to and promoted the profit-motivated relationship with the cave as dictated

[124] Mason, "Adapting to Endure," 149.
[125] These debates about what features and lands should have government protections continue today, as new national park sites continue to receive designation. Additionally, high profile debates about whether lands and special features, such as at Bears Ears National Monument, which has been the subject of lengthy legal cases regarding the Antiquities Act, tribal welfare, and environmental protections. See Native American Rights Fund's discussion of these cases: https://narf.org/cases/bears-ears/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20President%20Biden%20reaffirmed,lawsuits%20to%20overturn%20the%20proclamation.

by their parents. Similarly, Agent Greene of the General Land Office failed to put a monetary value on Wind Cave, even though that was his original assignment, when he declared that it ought to be a national park. While a significant portion of scholarship critiques the ideological influences of the early American conservation and preservation movements, much of this scholarship does not necessarily interact with individual examples and thus runs the risk of overemphasizing the roles of figures like John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. As a result of this intense focus on the "great men" of early environmental history, it is easy to overlook the fraught history of national park designation, but Wind Cave's history acts as a testament to the ways that otherwise unknown people contributed to national park preservation for reasons, like profit, that did not align with those of elite preservationists.

## A Playground for the People of South Dakota: Peter Norbeck and the Politics of Preservation at Custer State Park

"No man except one of indomitable energy, high ideals, a great lover of nature and possessed of artistic sense of the highest degree could have conceived of such a project and carried it through," Horace Albright, director of the National Park Service, wrote to Senator Peter Norbeck of his work at Custer State Park. He continued: "I regard Custer State Park and the other work that you have done in the Black Hills as among the greatest park achievements in the entire history of our country."[1] Such words were high praise to Norbeck, who had worked nearly twenty years through multiple public offices on developing Custer State Park to be the attraction that Albright and countless others have appreciated since its establishment in 1912. Although Norbeck started the work as Governor of South Dakota, he continued his efforts as Senator with the help of important friends and colleagues, such as H.S. Hedrick, the state Game Warden, and C.C. Gideon, the park superintendent. Together, these men navigated a complex web of political interests, economic hardship, and competing ideas about nature preservation to establish "a real playground for the people of South Dakota."[2] Norbeck sought to appeal to the growing popularity of automobile tourism in the United States and the new audience of middle-class tourists that hoped to experience something of nature on their journeys. He hoped that he could synthesize tourist expectations with wildlife preservation by expanding the amenities available to a hotel, Game Lodge, Zoo, swimming pool and park museum. Custer State Park was a place where Norbeck could enact his unique idea that scenery and wildlife were natural

[1] Horace Albright to Peter Norbeck, 6 November 1930, Peter Norbeck Papers, Mabel K. Richardson Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota. (Hereafter, PNP).
[2] *Argus-Leader,* 25 August 1923.

resources in a growing tourism industry that could benefit both the people of South Dakota and the tourists who visited. Further, Norbeck hoped to make the state of South Dakota an appealing tourist destination that would attract people who already were making a journey west to see other national parks, and ensured that the preservation initiatives they saw in the state would rival the more famous parks they visited on their trip.

Despite the conception that "South Dakota carries something of a reputation as 'the end of the world'" even among scholars who studied the region, Norbeck ensured that the conservation initiatives he pioneered in the state existed on the cutting edge of the practices of other parks at the time. The Black Hills' proximity to famous national parks like Yellowstone and Glacier positioned the region well for tourist development.[3] Norbeck intentionally established Custer as a state park rather than a national park to bring the benefits of the anticipated tourism industry directly to South Dakota as part of his Progressive policy, which emphasized the benefits of state-owned industries. Norbeck also used his political skills to pursue conservation on a national scale throughout his career because of his deep personal passion for nature. He cared deeply about wildlife and scenery, and supported legislation in favor of conservation projects in states from Florida to Alaska. Norbeck regularly worked alongside some of the nation's leading conservationists, such as zoologist William T Hornaday and Horace Albright. Despite his involvement in many important conservation projects across the nation, Senator Norbeck is not emphasized as an important conservationist outside of South Dakota. This study of Custer State Park reveals how Norbeck transformed the tourist industry of South

[3] Matthew Glass, "Producing Patriotic Inspiration at Mount Rushmore," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (Summer 1994): 274. In this work, Glass focused on the rationale behind establishing Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills and regards it as a largely symbolic choice because he dismisses practical reasons for establishing a national memorial in a place as remote to other urban centers as South Dakota.

Dakota by blending popular practices of conservation with his ideas about how to make the park attractive and useful to the people of South Dakota. This chapter will investigate how Norbeck and his allies established Custer State Park by adapting nationwide trends in conservation to the tastes of South Dakotans and compromising with the financial and political realities of the state's attitude towards nature.

Despite Norbeck's many contributions to conservation throughout his career, scholars of conservation do not include him among the well-known preservationists of his time, and few scholars of South Dakota history have investigated him in great detail. Gilbert Fite wrote the only available biography of Norbeck, but only devoted a few pages to conservation as though it were only one of Norbeck's many hobbies. Although Norbeck certainly prioritized farm and banking relief for South Dakotans in his career, the effort he put into conservation indicated that it was more than a hobby to him. Jesse Sundstrom's description of Custer State Park's establishment focused predominantly on providing a record of events on the lands that became the state park, and thus Sundstrom did not interpret Norbeck's work in great detail.[4] Norbeck's conservation work did get more attention in Suzanne Julin's work on Black Hills tourism, as he played an integral role in the establishment and development of Custer State Park and Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Unfortunately, her scope did not include the ideological reasons he pursued conservation work, nor did she contextualize his work in South Dakota as part of nationwide trends.[5] As a result, Norbeck's work at Custer State Park warrants additional study to illuminate his role in establishing the Black Hills as a tourist destination that appealed to his contemporary ideas about the relationship between tourism in nature and American nationalism.

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[4] Jesse Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park* (Custer, SD: Jesse Sundstrom 1994).
[5] Suzanne Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism, 1880-1941* (South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009).

Because Norbeck compromised throughout his political career, the ideas he brought to his projects did not appear unadulterated in the parks he supported, and thus this study will illuminate how Norbeck's efforts produced Custer State Park despite political and financial adversity.

When Norbeck began considering how to launch a state park project early in his career as a state senator of South Dakota, he knew the project needed to happen at a low cost to the state's residents, both in the cost to acquire and maintain the land. Norbeck originally focused on reserving small sections of lands which remained under the state's control when the Black Hills became a National Forest in 1898, as Sections 16 and 36 of each township had been reserved for schools when South Dakota became a state in 1889. Although unused at the time of establishing the Game Preserve, these lands had been set aside to support the school system with their sale at a required minimum of ten dollars an acre, which was a high price at the time.[6] Many townships in the Black Hills and across the state had not yet made great use of these sections, which waited to be sold, until Norbeck proposed that they be used to create a reserve.[7] Each section was 640 acres, but they were not necessarily continuous, so it took additional effort to make a preserve out of these lands. The state and the US Forest Service, who controlled many federal lands since the Black Hills became a National Forest in 1897, traded parcels of land and gifted one another lands until by 1912, the state had amassed 48,000 continuous acres from at least 37 townships to form the original Custer State Forest. In 1913, Norbeck convinced South Dakota Senator John F. Parks of Custer County to present S.B. 338, which created the Custer State Game Reserve and

[6] These lands could be purchased or leased. Herbert Schell, *History of South Dakota,* 212.
[7] Gilbert Fite, *Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2005), 76.

began the work to stock the new reserve with elk, bison, and other big game.[8] By avoiding expensive land purchases in the early stages of the project, he was able to grow support for the project so that additional lands could be acquired later. By 1913, the only money spent on the Game Preserve was the original $15,000 appropriation from S.B. 338, which appealed to South Dakotans because it proved to be an affordable project, which also brought revenue from expansive lumber sales from the land.[9] As the Game Preserve proved to be a valuable addition to the state, in 1919 Norbeck advanced legislation to protect the land in perpetuity, as its status on lands reserved for schools meant that it could be sold.[10] Because of his support and effort, the Game Preserve became a permanent State Park with a newly established Park Board to take the place of the previous Game Commission in managing the lands. The legislation later allocated additional funds to acquire important new lands in 1920, including the Sylvan Lake area and the Needles, which were not included in the original boundaries but had captured Norbeck's attention from the start.[11] Custer State Park's expansion and development drew regional tourism from the surrounding states, and quickly became a profitable venture for South Dakota.

Although Custer State Park quickly became an important part of South Dakota's tourism industry, when Norbeck began work on Custer State Park, he felt that he "could count his supporters upon the fingers of one hand" for the project because South Dakotans were skeptical about the benefits of creating a reserve of any kind.[12] In the face of a local community which deeply valued hunting and resented the reintroduction of native wildlife like elk and bison,

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[8] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 9. Parks was a Custer County local, whereas Norbeck lived in Redfield, so Norbeck likely wanted to emphasize that the project had the approval of a local senator.
[9] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 10.
[10] Fite, *Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman,76.*
[11] Fite, *Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman,* 76.
[12] Peter Norbeck to H.S. Hedrick, 16 July 1914, PNP.

Norbeck had to achieve a balance between the conservation of treasured wildlife and the demands of locals. People questioned whether Custer State Park could truly be a venture that paid for itself as Norbeck suggested, and whether the establishment of such a park would simply be yet another encroachment by the state that prevented the development of private industry on the lands.[13] Some of the greatest opposition to the park in its earliest years came from farmers, a group that Norbeck sympathized with because of his childhood on a South Dakota farm and his career working with farmers as a well-driller.[14] These farmers feared the reintroduction of many native species would have negative impacts on their farms and ranches, and thus resisted the efforts of the Custer State Park Board to fill the park with wild game.

For example, when the Game Commission reintroduced elk, nearby homesteaders took to the press to express their outrage against "the greatest menace and imposition ever forced upon the people," which brought "additional taxation to the already over-taxed people."[15] Nearby settlers like William Sayars protested the reintroduction of "these pestiferous and vicious animals," namely bison and elk, which Sayars believed were dangerous both to the nearby farms and "the traveling public, especially women and school children."[16] Sayars was not alone in his concern about the impact of the Game Preserve's wildlife on nearby settlements and the viability of the tourist venture. The Game Commission also constructed fences around the boundaries of the reserve in key locations, such as the southern border of the park, as several families had homesteads on that border which had previously been damaged by traveling wildlife.[17] Although the fence was intended to address the concerns of family lands that had been destroyed by

[13] Fite, *Peter Norbeck,* 76. *Custer Chronicle,* 10 July 1914.
[14] Fite, *Peter Norbeck:* 28.
[15] *Custer Chronicle,* 10 July 1914.
[16] *Custer Chronicle,* 10 July 1914.
[17] *Custer Chronicle,* 19 January 1920.

wildlife, local ranchers resented that they no longer could graze their cattle for free on the lands and thus regularly cut the fences to let their cattle through illegally.[18] The Game Commission realized that it would be difficult to appeal to everyone, and thus focused on ensuring that the Custer State Game Preserve and Park would be profitable and appealing to tourists.

A few years later in 1920, when a different nearby resident, William Miner, went to the *Custer Chronicle* to protest about the park's wildlife, he argued that he "live[s] near the park and want[s] to push a good thing along. . . but it seem[ed to him] a folly to fill this park with a lot of elk to eat out these settlers who have some lovely mountain ranches. . . and drive these good people from their homes."[19] Miner's opinion of the park seems largely positive, as he reflects on how his family "never tire[s] of the scenery" and that he appreciates that "the scenery in the Park is attracting lots of tourists who come to the Hills each year," which reflects the way that local residents began to appreciate Custer State Park the longer it existed, even if they still had not begun to appreciate the elk.[20] Although Sayars expressed outrage at the very existence of the park because of its cost and the reintroduction of species he felt were dangerous to settlers, perspectives like Miner's became increasingly common in the southern Black Hills, even among the settlers and farmers who had originally opposed the park. To appease these settlers, the State killed elk outside the park's boundaries, which proved to be an important move in establishing trust between the ranchers and the State Park Board. After the killing started, Gideon reported that "the ranchers west of the Park are feeling much better since we started killing [elk] on the outside. . . they thought that the State was just bluffing. . . but they have changed their mind now

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[18] Fite, *Peter Norbeck,* 74. While ranchers could not graze their animals for *free,* they could pay a fee of "60 cents for cattle and 80 cents for horses" to graze in the lands of Custer State Park, but ranchers resented this and not many paid the fee. *Custer Chronicle,* 5 December 1914. Jesse Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 85.
[19] *Custer Chronicle,* 24 January 1920.
[20] *Custer Chronicle,* 24 January 1920.

and think it will put a stop to a lot of the kicking out there if we can just keep our fence up and gates closed."[21] While Norbeck and the Park Board likely had not wanted to kill the animals they introduced, the trust they established with locals by doing so was important in providing the support needed to continue developing the State Park.

Norbeck made compromises, like allowing hunting of reintroduced species outside of the park borders, with those who opposed Custer State Park in South Dakota to ensure that he could still establish the park, but he was not a moderate conservationist. Although some of the most radical conservationists believed he compromised too early, Norbeck refused to allow ideological purity to prevent his broader goals from becoming a reality. Although Norbeck himself did not hunt, he began the State Park to be a Game Preserve in its original form so that it would appeal to those who wished to see native big game return to the Black Hills.[22] In this way, although his primary goal was not raising animals to be hunted, he focused on a goal that would appeal to people who otherwise may not have supported Norbeck's conservation measures. Norbeck maintained this attitude throughout the conservation measures that he introduced, as he generally seemed to believe that making concessions to hunters and industry was worth getting protective legislation passed. When Norbeck worked on the 1929 Migratory Bird Act, some conservationists, like William T. Hornaday, protested the bill's first iteration because of hunting provisions in a bill designed to protect the birds. Norbeck wrote to Hornaday explaining that "I will be certainly glad to leave out the hunting grounds if I can get my bill through better that way. The hunting grounds provision never made any appeal, but it seemed a necessity to get the support of those who were to pay the one dollar license, and I look upon the bird refuge bill as all-important-- the most important bird conservation measure that has been before Congress

[21] C.C. Gideon to Peter Norbeck January 3, 1924, PNP.
[22] Fite, *Peter Norbeck,* 75.

since I came here, with or without the shooting grounds provision."[23] Norbeck's careful politicking and patient nature ultimately led to the removal of such provisions, but nonetheless he sought progress over perfection in his political endeavors.[24]

Norbeck took a similar attitude to his work at Custer State Park, prioritizing the establishment of some conservation measures in the short term over achieving his ideal scenario immediately. He slowly developed Black Hills residents' trust, and soon people explained that "they are not worrying about the park as they say they know 'Norbeck will take care of that'."[25] His pragmatism allowed for timber sales from the park and for ranchers to continue grazing on State Park lands for a fee, which brought in revenue for the State while improving the opinion of some who opposed the Park in its original form.[26]

Custer State Park is unique, however, in that Norbeck did not compromise on the lands that he wanted to be a part of the park in the long term, even though those lands could have been otherwise useful. Historian Alfred Runte explains that the earliest national parks developed support partially because early boosters suggested that the lands that became parks like Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Crater Lake were not valuable for industry, and that their designation as a national park provided value to otherwise "worthless" lands.[27] Since Runte's work was published in 1979, countless other historians have applied his "worthless lands" thesis to national parks across the United States. Kathy Mason is one such historian who applied Runte's idea to Wind Cave. Like most places in the Black Hills, Mason suggests that early settlers evaluated Wind Cave's value for mining or homesteading, but was found to be unsuitable

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[23] Peter Norbeck to William T. Hornaday, 4 April 1928, PNP.
[24] *New York Herald Tribune,* 3 September 1928.
[25] C.C. Gideon to Peter Norbeck, 5 January 1925, PNP.
[26] Fite, *Peter Norbeck,* 75.
[27] Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience 5th ed.* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group 2022), 43.

for any industry other than tourism.[28] Custer State Park differs from many of these parks, including the local Wind Cave, because its establishment curtailed industrial development on some of its lands, and eventually purchased privately owned homesteads to transform them into parklands.[29] The U.S. Land Office records 117 original entry records for the lands that are now a part of Custer State Park, especially concentrated near its southern boundary.[30] While many of these homesteads were acquired later in Custer State Park's history, early land acquisitions did include homesteads listed for sale at places that are well known today, such as at Stockade Lake, the Game Lodge, and Camp Galena.[31] The Park Board sought to avoid high profile purchasing disputes, and in fact kept the purpose of the special session of the South Dakota legislature called to facilitate the purchase of Sylvan Lake a secret until the deal had been completed.[32] Although the establishment of Custer State Park did not immediately eliminate the presence of other industry on the lands, the park's establishment on lands that had not been determined to be valueless for other industry indicates Norbeck's commitment and political savviness in convincing other South Dakotans that tourism, and thus the preservation of scenery, were viable economic decisions for the state.

South Dakota's economy in the 1910s and 1920s struggled with a variety of economic problems, many of which were caused by a state-wide overreliance on agriculture. Agricultural yield had not been as high as in other states like Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin because of

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[28] Mason, *Natural Museums*, 56.
[29] Jesse Sundstrom's work investigates the lives of the Pioneers who once lived on the lands that were once part of Custer State Park. Jesse Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 29-62.
[30] Expansion of Custer State Park lands occurred until 1943, and this number includes lands that were purchased after Norbeck's passing. Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 57.
[31] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park, 57.* To be clear, the homesteaders were *not* displaced by the park, but the park did purchase lands that had been homesteads, which removed otherwise valuable lands from available lands for future settlers to inhabit.
[32] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 46.

periodic droughts during the 1910s and 1920s, and thus many farmers found that they had not made enough money from crop sales to pay back loans or finance their daily lives.[33] Bank failures across the state and low crop prices created a perfect storm for South Dakotans, leaving the state searching for alternate industries without much money to invest in them.[34] Norbeck attempted to ameliorate this problem through his Rural Credits program, which provided farmers with loans, but even credit could not save the dire financial situation of the state.[35]

Norbeck and other politicians believed that tourism in the Black Hills could be one answer, as ecotourism had already begun to develop across the nation at places like Yellowstone, Yosemite, Glacier, and even South Dakota's own Wind Cave National Park.[36] As a result, Norbeck made a practical appeal to South Dakotans with the establishment of Custer State Park because he suggested that South Dakota had the resources to cultivate an industry that would make fast profits.[37] When he introduced the idea of shifting the Game Preserve to a State Park, Norbeck emphasized that Custer State Park was one "peculiar opportunit[y] which may be grasped to great and permanent advantage" because "the annual production of timber will make the property a source of profit forever."[38] He drew support from other South Dakota officials who supported conservation, but also those who searched for a new solution to ongoing economic distress in the state.[39]

In addition to a deep commitment to nature, Norbeck planned for Custer State Park to be a financial benefit to the state of South Dakota by establishing state control over part of the

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[33] Herbert Schell, *History of South Dakota* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press 1975) 277-278.
[34] Schell, *History of South Dakota,* 283.
[35] Schell, *History of South Dakota,* 277.
[36] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles*, 41.
[37] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 103.
[38] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 2.
[39] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 41.

growing tourism industry in the Black Hills. Norbeck consistently prioritized the people of South Dakota throughout his political career, which is best exemplified in his decision to establish Custer State Park as a state park, even when there were some who hoped he would promote it to a national park.[40] Norbeck's attitude towards national park designation appears to have changed over time, as in the early years of Custer's establishment, Norbeck repeatedly emphasized the profitability and benefits to the state as important reasons to establish the park.[41] Later, possibly because of political troubles on the park board and South Dakota Governor Carl Gunderson, Norbeck may have lost his faith that the park would survive as a *state* park without him.[42] While the national park status would have enhanced his political career and prestige, Norbeck wanted the benefits of the park to extend primarily to the people of South Dakota and prioritized the establishment of the Badlands as a national park over Custer State Park.[43]

Because Custer is a state park, the revenue from park admissions, cattle grazing, and timber sales goes to South Dakota as Norbeck intended, rather than the federal government. Custer State Park is in fact only one of a few initiatives on Norbeck's part to bring revenue to the state of South Dakota through state-owned industries, as he facilitated the construction of a state owned cement plant and coal mine, and demonstrated interest in others' suggestions to construct flour mills and stockyard.[44] Although Norbeck was not against the idea of Custer becoming a national park, he prioritized the development of the Black Hills as a tourist destination for the

[40] Peter Norbeck to Camille Yuill 23 February 1935, PNP. Camille Yuill was a local reporter who wrote to Norbeck to confirm plans that she heard about to transform Custer into a national park. Norbeck wrote back critically about the man who proposed the idea and indicated that such a designation was not a priority for him.
[41] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* Letter to Kurka from Peter Norbeck January 18, 1928, PNP.
[42] Peter Norbeck to C.C. Gideon December 15, 1925, PNP.
[43] Fite, *Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman,* 76. Letter to Camille Yuill from Peter Norbeck February 23, 1935, PNP.
[44] Fite, *Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman,* 71.

good of the people of South Dakota.[45] Norbeck's understanding of the financial benefits of conservation for a potential tourism industry allowed him to promote initiatives like the reintroduction and protection of wildlife both because he personally found intrinsic value in their presence and because such projects could attract tourist dollars to the state. Because conservation thus provided tourists with enriching experiences, the state with a source of income, and locals with a stronger economy, Norbeck believed that implementing conservation initiatives in this way amplified the public good that emerged from the wilderness, but he had to make compromises to ensure others could witness the public good of the park.

Norbeck likely drew some of his success for the venture from the fact that in the original form of the park as a game preserve, timber and mineral resources were not necessarily protected from continued extraction. Because limitations on resource extraction from the area occurred over time rather than all at once, there was less outrage at the erosion of industry on park lands. Additionally, once a State Park, the park board had more authority over what was allowed in the park. Early in the park's history, the park board limited tree cutting to one company that was chosen via auction, the Warren Lamb Company, as well as the National Forest Service, to prevent the overuse of timber resources in the park.[46] However, Norbeck was not in favor of this proposal and complained that the forest reserve's "logging operations have done much to spoil the beauty of the Park," although he also admitted that "there has also been too much timber cut on that part which the state owns, but at least it has not been cut along the highways and scenic places."[47] In promotional materials encouraging tourists to visit the Black Hills, Norbeck wrote of the "beautiful timber and profusion of flowers," as well as the excitement and variety of the

[45] Peter Norbeck to Camille Yuill, 23 February 1935, PNP.
[46] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 105.
[47] Peter Norbeck to W.J. Bulow, 25 November 1926, PNP.

mountain vistas, which he believed to be "free from the sameness and monotony so common to the larger mountain ranges."[48] He even criticized the Custer Expedition for being "too deeply concerned with the panning of gold from the creeks and the sinking of shafts to deeper strikes to care about the royal blue of the sky, the rugged mountains, the sharp-cut canyons or the great trees" in the Black Hills.[49] He believed that these trees and scenic views, which he deeply loved himself, could be resources for the tourism industry of South Dakota and thus resented their destruction, even if they were important for the establishment of the park. He likely agreed to allow limited tree cutting to reduce backlash against the park. Mineral resources also proved to be a nuisance to the State Park, as even after the State Park's designation, locals still filed for mining claims on the lands. One citizen filed across numerous important features in the park, including near Sylvan Lake and along the Needles Highway.[50] Fortunately, Norbeck and the other members of the Park Board found continued claims to be a nuisance and eventually found legal justification to end the practice in South Dakota's state parks.[51] It is thus evident that Custer State Park was unusual compared to many other national parks, as people still hoped to extract resources from the area, which indicated that settlers had not been convinced that the land was "worthless" like had been necessary for many other state and national parks.

By the time Custer State Park was established, a high profile controversy in Yosemite National Park had established that even in one of the "crown jewel" national parks with high levels of national prominence, industry took priority over scenery. Between 1908 and 1913, legislators and preservationists weighed the costs and benefits associated with building a dam that would improve the water supply to the city of San Francisco by flooding a protected valley

[48] Peter Norbeck, "The Black Hills are Not Hills But High Mountains," 2, 5, PNP.
[49] Norbeck, "The Black Hills are Not Hills," 3, PNP.
[50] John Stanley to Peter Norbeck, 22 August 1922, PNP.
[51] L.O. Kneipp to Peter Norbeck, 28 August 1922, PNP.

in Yosemite National Park called Hetch Hetchy.[52] Even though supporters of the park, namely John Muir, promoted Hetch Hetchy as one of the greatest scenic areas in the park, ultimately legislators, including President Theodore Roosevelt, determined that the dam's benefit to the water system of San Francisco outweighed the benefits brought by scenery. Although many of those who were in favor of the dam, like Roosevelt, admitted that scenery was valuable, they did not consider it as valuable as the money saved by flooding Hetch Hetchy instead of developing another plan for the water system.[53] The creation of the Hetch Hetchy dam startled and dismayed preservationists, and thus created a precedent that indicated that conservation and preservation came after the development of other industry and civic development.[54] Interestingly, Norbeck did not follow this precedent, even though Roosevelt was one of his personal role models, as the expansion of Custer State Park took over former homesteads, ended mining claims, and drastically curtailed logging in the area. Although Norbeck compromised on many aspects of the park, internally he held a somewhat radical Romantic position that prioritized scenery as a resource for the growing tourism industry in South Dakota even over potential agricultural and mining development on the lands that created Custer State Park. Norbeck acted as a cultural mediator between the people of South Dakota and the perspectives of elite conservationists, as he enacted otherwise radical conservation initiatives slowly over time at Custer State Park so that locals could grow to accept these measures. In Custer State Park, Norbeck hoped that industries that were allowed to continue in the park would coexist with tourism without detracting from the scenic values in the park.

[52] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 72.
[53] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 73.
[54] Mason, *Natural Museums,* 73.

Norbeck, unlike many congressmen of his time, believed firmly in the value of scenery as a natural resource in its own right. He suggested that wilderness "must be preserved, but it must also be made accessible to the public."[55] He hoped that visitors would "appreciate the grandeur, the heart-stirring beauty of these massive ranges and towering peaks, and the wild tumbling streams. . . the cool, silent woods, the high flowering meadows, and the placid mountain lakes" on their visit and worked to determine the best way to get tourists into the Black Hills.[56] In fact, Norbeck often spoke of trees and other scenic assets in the park in similar language to the way he might have discussed tangible resources. As he explained to the secretary of the Rapid City Izaak Walton League, a conservation minded club, he "believe[d] that a few trees along the highway are of much greater value for their beauty than their lumber."[57] As a result, Norbeck suggested that cutting too many trees down and disrupting the scenic beauty of the Black Hills damaged the tourism industry, just as forest fires damaged the timber industry. To Norbeck, the scenery of Custer State Park took precedence over the possible dollars extracted from the lumber and minerals in the park because the scenery was the resource that tourism required and the Black Hills had plenty of scenery provided it was not destroyed by other industries. Although this idea had been implicit in many conservation projects across the nation, Norbeck demonstrated a deep commitment to this idea that was unusual for his time.

Custer State Park grew out of Norbeck's desire to implement the ideas of preservation that he saw on a national scale. During the 1910s and 1920s, the automobile was an increasingly popular method of travel in the US, as more people were able to afford both the car itself and the

[55] Peter Norbeck, "The Black Hills are Not Hills But High Mountains," 4, PNP.
[56] Peter Norbeck,"The Black Hills are Not Hills, But High Mountains." 2, PNP.
[57] Peter Norbeck to F. J. Knochenmuss, 23 February 1929, PNP.

time away from work to tour the nation.[58] Norbeck first visited the Black Hills in 1905 on an automobile trip with a friend, and fell deeply in love with the rugged beauty of the granite mountains. He ultimately decided that future visitors to the Black Hills would likely also come in their vehicles, and planned to cater the park's design to automobile tourists.[59] At the same time, Norbeck loved hiking, and believed that the Black Hills were best seen on foot. Knowing that this would not necessarily be as attractive to the average tourist, Norbeck decided to create scenic highways, like the Needles Highway (1922) and later Iron Mountain Road (1933), so that future visitors to Custer State Park could see some of his favorite scenery from the comfort of their car. For this project, Norbeck enlisted Scovel Johnson, an engineer associated with the South Dakota Highway Commission, to manage the construction of the park's scenic highways. Together with Johnson and C.C. Gideon, the Park superintendent, Norbeck personally hiked on foot throughout the park, planning not only where the roads ought to be, but also which trees ought to be cut to provide scenic views of the surrounding Hills without damaging the scenic views of the forest.[60]

Although Norbeck was a great compromiser in politics, he would not compromise on the scenery of the highways, which frustrated some of the engineers involved in the projects. Not all engineers were as accommodating as Scovel Johnson, who explained to Norbeck that his dreams were possible, provided that he furnished enough dynamite.[61] Fortunately in 1922, Norbeck's vision of a scenic highway that went through some of the best scenery in Custer State Park was realized, as the Needles Highway officially opened for visitors.[62] The success of the Needles

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[58] Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity 1880-1970* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution 2001) 136.
[59] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park* 118.
[60] Fite, *Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman,* 76.
[61] Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,*118.
[62] Fite, *Peter Norbeck,* 77.

Highway encouraged him to create another scenic highway, called Iron Mountain Road, which encountered similar obstacles. He considered forgoing federal funding if that meant that he would not be able to have the highway look as he hoped it would, as the requirement for tall guardrails proved to irritate him greatly.[63] In the face of such regulations, Norbeck complained "I do not think it is necessary to make the guard rail so high that people can't jump off the bridge if they really want to. They might jump off the rim of the canyon, or they might climb up those tall trees (that we forgot to cut down), and commit suicide in that way."[64] In this way, Norbeck protected the uniqueness of his mission to create the optimal visitor experience on these scenic highways by refusing the compromise on the scenic quality, even if it was for safety concerns.

Norbeck's vision of a scenic highway as a way to connect people to the Black Hills occurred alongside the development of automobile-based tourism across the nation. Proponents of highway associations such as the Lincoln Highway Association and the National Highways Association "represented automobile tourism as a quintessentially American experience-- a democratic journey of self-fulfillment in which tourists could come face to face with the nation's past and present."[65] Furthermore, by 1911, travel across the United States on long-distance tours was more than possible; it was even *comfortable.* The press across the nation followed a caravan of twelve cars who made a high profile transcontinental road trip in a month and a half, reporting no difficulties and thus proving the possibility of such trips for other tourists.[66] Norbeck had clearly observed these developments, and made preparations like the Needles Highway because

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[63] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles*, 49.
[64] Peter Norbeck to J. Harper Hamilton, 22 January 1932, PNP. Hamilton was one of the engineers who worked on Iron Mountain Road and had written to Norbeck explaining that federal guidelines required taller guard rails to discourage people from climbing over them to commit suicide.
[65] Shaffer, *See America First,* 132.
[66] Shaffer, *See America First,* 136.

"Custer State Park is in the line of travel, east and west, to and from the Yellowstone National Park, Glacier National Park and Northwest Pacific Coast points."[67] Similarly, in his promotions of Black Hills tourism across the nation, he explained that "the tourist travel in the Black Hills is nearly doubling each year. The State Park and the wonderful highway system in same, carrying the traveler into the rugged scenery of the higher altitude, is the real attraction."[68] By creating the Needles Highway and later Iron Mountain Road, he appealed to the growing popularity of scenic highways and automobile-based adventures, which thus placed South Dakota in a cutting-edge position to capitalize on tourism when compared to other nearby states who had not yet invested in automobile tourism. Norbeck was not concerned with whether South Dakota was the final destination of those who visited, and intentionally sought to capitalize on the success of other tourist stops to scaffold the growth of South Dakota's industry.

Norbeck hoped to include other attractions in Custer State Park that would energize and attract people to the area, including a swimming pool, cabins, and a park museum. In the park museum, Norbeck and the Park Board hoped to include "a fine exhibit of Indian handicraft, articles of historic interest in the settlement and development of the west, fossil exhibits of that general territory, rock exhibits from which various minerals are extracted, and exhibits of gold mining processes and machinery" to provide "an interesting and instructive feature along the way to Wind Cave, the Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks."[69] His attention to the trends in tourism emphasized the growing demand for "authentic" experiences with the culture of the nation, as tourists hoped to connect to their national identity on their journeys.[70] In their search

[67] Draft Application of the Custer State Park Board for a Public Works Administration Grant, 1933, PNP.
[68] Peter Norbeck to James Givan, 1 October 1926, PNP.
[69] Draft Application of the Custer State Park Board for a Public Works Administration Grant, 1933, PNP.
[70] Shaffer, *See America First,* 231.

for the "real" people of the US, a museum like that of Custer State Park ideally would provide them with the opportunity to learn about the culture of the area as it was impacted by the Indigenous peoples who once lived there and the settlers who farmed, ranched, and mined in the area.[71] Norbeck also ensured that there were suitable accommodations in a variety of manners so that tourists could have the experience they hoped for, as whether they stayed in a private cabin, at a campsite, or in the Game Lodge, the accommodations were stylized to represent the rustic outdoors while providing the comfort level that visitors expected.

Tourists who came to the Black Hills often carried their own perspectives on the culture that they would encounter in the area, which often revolved around the overemphasis on the "Wild West" period of South Dakota history, utilizing imagery of a bygone era of "cowboys and Indians" who once lived independent, Romantic lives.[72] Although it seemed appropriate for cowboys to remain as members of the present because of the dominance of ranching in the nearby region, Indigenous people were intentionally historicized, instead of recognized as living people with active roles in the trajectory of the Black Hills. The historicization of Indigenous peoples is part of settler colonial structures which seek to replace Indigenous people with settler society and write off their loss as a necessary part of progress.[73] While Custer State Park is within one hundred miles of the Pine Ridge Reservation, the Custer State Park Museum relegated local Indigenous people to history or highlighted their "exoticism" when they appeared in traditional regalia on special occasions.[74] Lakotas primarily occupied space inside the museum, or as oddities which evoked nostalgia for the Frontier Era rather than as people with

[71] Shaffer, *See America First,* 231.
[72] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 146.
[73] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 42.
[74] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 81, 146

interests at the park in their own right.[75] Furthermore, tourist culture accepted the narrative that the Black Hills were not stolen and were in the rightful hands of settler society, rather than as part of the Great Sioux Reservation as had been promised by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty.[76]

Scholars like Philip Deloria and Elaine Nelson have illuminated the dualism of Native participation in tourist projects during this time. Deloria argues that some Lakota individuals found a certain sense of empowerment in the opportunity to perform traditional dance in traditional regalia. Because many of their traditional dances and rituals had been outlawed, some Lakotas saw the chance to show their culture to outsiders as an important way to reconnect with traditions that settler society was trying to destroy.[77] Nelson points out that it was a Lakota woman, Good Elk Woman, whose desire to protect the bison that her culture treasured led Scotty Philip to save a small herd of bison at his ranch. Scotty Philip later sold to the Custer State Game Preserve in 1914, forming the bison herd that has been a major attraction for Custer State Park ever since.[78] Deloria also highlights the many ways that Lakotas found ways to make the growth of tourism benefit them, as they developed businesses to cater to tourists that also carried some markers of their traditional culture. Deloria explains that there were some ways that Indigenous people could exercise limited autonomy in their performance of culture, and expresses that they often preferred to do so instead of leaving their portrayals to Whites alone.[79] However, their participation in tourist events or their ability to find limited benefits from this new industry does

[75] Details about the portrayal of Indigenous people in the early museum do not remain, but it is likely that the museum followed other trends around the Black Hills in its portrayal of Indigenous peoples.
[76] Elaine Marie Nelson, "Dreams and Dust in the Black Hills: Race, Place, and National Identity in America's Land of Promise," PhD diss., (University of New Mexico, 2011) 94.
[77] Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places,* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas 2004), 13.
[78] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 113-114.
[79] Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places,* 56-58, 229-231.

not change the fact that tourism, as many other industries in settler society, perpetuated the idea that they had no continuing claim to the lands and that they were a disappearing people. Nelson highlights how despite the construction of narratives that denied their rights to the land, their presence boosted the development of the tourism industry because people hoped to see them as relics. The relegation of Lakotas to history allowed politicians, like Norbeck, and tourists alike to ignore or deprioritize myriad present issues that Lakota people faced, such as encroachments on dwindling reservation lands from White settlers, disease, poverty, and racial violence.[80] By presenting Lakotas as a disappearing people without a future, settler society suggested that Lakotas were unfortunate past victims of progress, rather than living victims of violence perpetrated by settler lifestyles.[81] The "disappearing Indian" narrative allowed settlers to overlook the injustice caused by settler colonialism by portraying Lakotas in an idealized past without regard to the realities on nearby reservations, in which Lakotas neither were able to live as they traditionally had nor were they actually disappearing.[82] As a result, the incorporation of Indigenous history at Custer State Park allowed tourists to engage with a past they felt was authentic, but was divorced from reality.

Custer State Park's lands had long been Indigenous homelands that were important for the continuation of many of their cultural practices. Both the seizure of the Black Hills in 1877 and Norbeck's efforts at Custer State Park, although almost fifty years apart, sought to reassign ownership of the Hills to scaffold the industrial development of settler society. Industry destroyed much of the environment as Lakotas and other Indigenous tribes of the region knew it, and Norbeck's later efforts sought to preserve a false past in which the Black Hills were a

[80] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 112.
[81] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 118.
[82] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 111.

wilderness without humans. Environmental conservation initiatives like Custer State Park further alienated Indigenous peoples from the land, as many of the great thinkers of the conservation movement believed that nature needed protection from humans, rather than recognizing Indigenous worldviews which argue that humans are part of nature as well.[83] From the perspective of settler society, to be truly "natural," the wilderness had to be free of Indigenous people; John Muir praised the Black Hills for their beauty and for their suitability for wilderness exploration in the first edition of *Our National Parks,* published in 1901 because Lakotas' removal had taken place a few decades prior.[84] In the years following John Muir's visit, the settler project continued through the replacement of Indigenous place names in favor of Euro-American names. The name Custer State Park appealed to General George Custer, whose expedition into the Black Hills in 1874 provided the justification for stealing the Black Hills from Lakotas, and with the establishment of the state park came along the application of Euro-American names to countless Indigenous landmarks.[85] In many cases, Euro-American place names like Harney Peak or Sheridan Lake glorified people who actively encouraged the slaughter of innocents during conflicts with Lakotas.[86] Replacing Indigenous place names with Euro-American names serves multiple purposes in the settler colonial structure, as it both denies Indigenous history and claims to the land, but also glorifies the process by canonizing contributors.[87]

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[83] Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.
[84] John Muir, *Our National Parks,* 28.
[85] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 110.
[86] Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: The Struggle for Sacred Land,* 54, 61.
[87] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," (*Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (December 2006), 338.

Norbeck explicitly hoped to glorify these people in the establishment of the park, emblemized best in his decision to name the park after General Custer, whose failure during the 1876 expedition into the Hills provided the justification for its illegal seizure the following year. In a letter to Norbeck, Elizabeth Custer, General George Custer's widow, congratulated the Senator for his role in creating "an inspirational monument to my husband" and expresses "the joy that fills my soul at the thought that the name will be carried back and forth for all time," at Custer State Park.[88] Norbeck responded to her by highlighting that "the perpetuation of General Custer's name is a matter of personal satisfaction to the entire country," and invited her back to South Dakota, to revel in "satisfaction in the advancement of this section of the country toward the settlement of which your husband did so much."[89] The false past did not stop there, as Elizabeth Custer sought to make her husband a pioneer of conservation, as she argued George Custer "had in mind at that time the protection of the bison. . . General Custer's orders were only to kill enough that the companies needed in order that the army ration of pork might be varied."[90] She highlighted her own nostalgia for the bison, developed during a time where she was "surrounded day by day with a solid black frame of those docile beasts," when "we could see the entire horizon covered with them."[91] Norbeck informed her of his efforts to restore the bison population in the region with great satisfaction. Considering that Custer's Expedition of 1874 wrote of the plentiful resources for settler society's absorption and promoted the presence of gold for prospectors on lands that the United States did not own, his legacy did far more to destroy the ecology of the Black Hills than to preserve it.

[88] Elizabeth Custer to Peter Norbeck, 23 September 1920, PNP.
[89] Peter Norbeck to Elizabeth Custer, 23 September 1920, PNP.
[90] Elizabeth Custer to Peter Norbeck, 23 September 1920, PNP.
[91] Elizabeth Custer to Peter Norbeck, 23 September 1920, PNP.

Custer State Park was a place where settler society felt confident enough in its control of the land to use Indigenous imagery to create a romanticized past that tourists could encounter on their quest to see an "authentic" version of the nation and its history.[92] Norbeck and the Custer State Park Board established an environment where tourists could have the encounters they wished without being forced to question the actual authenticity of their experience. Norbeck sought to build the "authenticity" of the experience of the Black Hills by reintroducing and introducing wildlife into the park as part of his effort to make Custer State Park fulfill ideas of what the "wilderness" would look like.[93] Norbeck stocked the State Park with animals that visitors expected to see on a trip into the Black Hills and the Wild West, while he also provided a unique guarantee that a visitor could see iconic wildlife in the state park's zoo. Although Norbeck's precise motivation for establishing the zoo are unclear, he wrote numerous times to C.C. Gideon about the Washington Zoo that he visited during Senate sessions as an inspiration for his Custer State Park Zoo.[94] Most ideas of what was "native" to the Black Hills came from the 1874 Custer Expedition and Colonel Dodge's journals from his 1875 Expedition, which provided some accounts of the wildlife that both groups encountered and generally spoke of abundant wildlife of many varieties.[95] Some of the most iconic species mentioned include bears, bison, elk, mountain lions, and bighorn sheep, which Norbeck worked to ensure were represented sufficiently in both the park and the zoo.[96] To further bring the oasis of animal life into reality for the tourist, Norbeck introduced Rocky Mountain goats, moose, beavers, and

[92] Nelson, *Dreams and Dust,* 112.
[93] For Norbeck to create an authentic historical Black Hills, he would have needed to return the Black Hills to Lakotas.
[94] Peter Norbeck to C.C. Gideon, 14 December 1921, PNP.
[95] Jesse Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 110.
[96] Peter Norbeck to H.S. Hedrick, 19 April 1923, PNP. Peter Norbeck to H.S. Hedrick and C.C. Gideon, 19 April 1923, PNP. Peter Norbeck to H.S. Hedrick, 23 March 1923, PNP.

Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep to the Black Hills, which were native to North America, but not the Black Hills.[97] Norbeck seems to have believed that some of the animals he introduced were native, as he explained that he "hardly dare[d] think about getting other animals into the park until we have secured a good assortment of our native animals," in the early years of the park's history.[98] In many cases, "native" became "native enough," as some species, such as the Audubon sheep, had already been hunted to extinction, so Norbeck and Hedrick introduced the Rocky Mountain sheep, a close relative also found in North America, to take the place of what the original sheep would have been.[99] Norbeck hoped that stocking the Black Hills with a variety of animals would boost the appeal of the region, as he wanted to present people with the opportunity to see a creature they had not seen elsewhere. Although he focused on native wildlife, Norbeck had hoped to later introduce a variety of interesting animals to Custer State Park, like yaks, tar, and Barbary sheep, although it is unclear whether he intended these animals for the zoo or for the wild.[100] Norbeck ultimately focused his efforts on North American wildlife that were unique and iconic, like pronghorns, bighorn sheep, elk, bear, bison, and mountain goats, as these were all animals present at Yellowstone, which had a great deal to do with why people expected to see them in the Black Hills.[101] By bringing animals that were native to North America to the Black Hills, Norbeck created a "wilderness" that appealed to tourists'

[97] Of these animals, only the moose failed to survive. Norbeck attempted to introduce moose at least three times, but the moose either died or went to Wyoming, where they are native. Sundstrom, *Pioneers and Custer State Park,* 69. Letter to C.C. Gideon December 2, 1921, PNP.
[98] Peter Norbeck to C.C. Gideon, 14 December 1921, PNP.
[99] Peter Norbeck to C.C. Gideon, 2 December 1921, PNP.
[100] Peter Norbeck to C.C. Gideon, 14 December 1921, PNP. Perhaps originally Norbeck hoped to see all these animals traveling the Black Hills, but was traumatized by three failed efforts to introduce moose into the Black Hills.
[101] Runte, *National Parks,* 58.

expectations of authenticity and about what nature looked like before humans "ruined it" with industry.

Norbeck added animals and attractions to Custer State Park because he understood the needs and wants of the new traveling public, who hoped to have an "encounter" with something they had never seen before.[102] While in Washington DC for Senate sessions, he also frequented the Washington Zoo, which provided him with inspiration for his Custer Zoo, and he wrote to Hedrick and Gideon often about how to emulate the Washington Zoo's model by choosing animals that were both hardy and interesting.[103] The growth and popularity of travel writing by the 1920s had brought the American public to the assumption that by traveling the country, people could reconnect with nature and the nation on their own journey of self discovery, and for many travelers of the national parks, wildlife encounters were an important part of the experience.[104] Perhaps because of his experiences traveling with his own children at times, Norbeck understood that jaunts into the wilderness did not fit many family's expectations for an enjoyable trip, so he provided visitors with a guarantee that they could see the wild animals of the region in the zoo, but without removing the chance for them to see them truly wild as well. In this way, Norbeck adapted nature to be more appealing to the touring public in ways that appealed to people's ideas of what nature looked like in the early twentieth century, which often were not characterized by sophisticated understandings of what was indigenous to the United States.

Although today's conservation practices suggest that adding animals that are not native to certain regions can disrupt ecosystems, Norbeck's work to reintroduce elk and bison and to add

[102] Shaffer, *See America First,* 224.
[103] Peter Norbeck to C.C. Gideon from Peter Norbeck, 14 December 1921, PNP.
[104] Shaffer, *See America First,* 259.

other North American wildlife to the state park would have been on the cutting edge of environmental science of the early twentieth century, as even Yellowstone had only reintroduced bison in 1902, a decade before Custer State Park.[105] Bison reintroduction at Custer State Park occurred so early that Yellowstone's herds were not yet established well enough for animals to be sent from their herds to other parks, which informed the Game Board's decision to purchase bison from Scotty Philips.[106] Norbeck's efforts were made possible by coordination with the National Park Service and the US Biological Survey, the government's agencies responsible for researching, developing, and implementing environmental science principles and conservation practice. Both Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service and Stephen Albright, Mather's successor, spoke highly of Norbeck's work in introducing new animals into the Black Hills because it seemed to be appealing for potential visitors as well as good for the restoration of these species.[107] When approached by a member of the Biological Survey about potentially eradicating porcupines, Norbeck unexpectedly saw value in their continued presence; while he admitted porcupines "destroy a good deal of trees," he thought that they still "have a value to the visitors who have never seen porcupines."[108] Norbeck thus showed a radical understanding of the value of wild animals, as he saw them as important to visitor experience much like he did scenery, even when they proved to be somewhat of a pest for the scenic values he sought to preserve. Norbeck truly believed that his work was re-establishing animals that rightfully belonged in the Black Hills and did so at the cutting edge of scientific understanding at

[105] Peter Norbeck to HS Hedrick, 16 July 1914, PNP. Hedrick was the state game warden and a friend of Norbeck's.
[106] Peter Norbeck to Harry Gandy, 3 October 1934, PNP. Gandy was a representative in the US House of Representatives from South Dakota and assisted with developments in Custer State Park on occasion.
[107] Peter Norbeck to H.S. Hedrick, 5 March 1923, PNP; HS Hedrick to Peter Norbeck, 21 May 1914, PNP; Peter Norbeck to Horace Albright, 10 January 1931, PNP.
[108] Peter Norbeck to Louie Knowles, 21 November 1933, PNP.

the time. Norbeck balanced these cutting edge scientific principles with visitor experience, hoping to create an experience that could draw tourists into the Black Hills so that they and the people of South Dakota could benefit from the wilderness preserved at Custer State Park.

Although many of Peter Norbeck's decisions in the establishment and development of Custer State Park appear contrary to modern conservation practices, his ideas were radical for his time. Norbeck's pragmatic decision to use otherwise underused parcels of land to establish a game preserve to begin the Custer State Park project helped the people of the Black Hills and of South Dakota to evaluate and accept the benefits associated with large scale conservation projects. His love for nature and commitment to the people of South Dakota developed Custer State Park from a project based in compromise to one of the largest and most visited state parks in the nation. A visionary for his time, Norbeck catered to a growing segment of America who wished to have experiences in the wilderness as part of a longer journey in the nation, and ensured the growth of the automobile tourism industry directly benefited the people of South Dakota. At the same time, Norbeck engaged with questions of "authentic" experiences in tourism and blended these desires with modern environmental preservation practices, which slowly pushed Custer State Park from a project of compromise to a standout wilderness preservation initiative that balanced the practical desires of the public with his Romantic ideas about the value of wildlife and scenery. Norbeck also embedded settler colonial narratives into the park, as he canonized Custer as a martyr who fought for progress, rather than a failed military leader who invaded Lakota territory, intending to emphasize settler claims at the expense of Indigenous people. As a result, Norbeck positioned Custer State Park alongside other preservation efforts which blended preservation practice with settler colonialism to create a tourist attraction that supported Euro-American self-perception.

## "The Most Important Thing Came Later:" Preservation and Americanism at Mount Rushmore

"My great hobby has been development of the State Park, into which picture the most important thing came later-- Rushmore," Norbeck explained, consoling sculptor Gutzon Borglum about the dire financial situation at Mount Rushmore during the Great Depression.[1] Truly, the creators of Mount Rushmore National Memorial had many intentions, all of which they felt were of the utmost importance. During the dedication of Mount Rushmore National Memorial's cornerstone in 1927, President Calvin Coolidge celebrated the newest of the Black Hills park projects for its patriotic contribution, explaining that "The union of these four presidents carved on the face of the everlasting hills of South Dakota will constitute a distinctly national monument. It will be decidedly American in conception, in its magnitude, in its meaning, and altogether worthy of our country."[2] Touted as "the Shrine of Democracy" since its inception, the creators of Mount Rushmore emphasized their desire that the memorial would bring Americans together to consider the triumph of American democracy and the contributions of four presidents which made the country a better place.[3] The debates that created Mount Rushmore transformed the memorial from an artistic and patriotic undertaking to a physical answer to early twentieth century questions about the relationship between nature, money, and American national identity.

Mount Rushmore developed amid a backdrop of nationalist-motivated ecotourism but has carried concurrent and occasionally competing meanings that manifested because of the time the

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[1] Letter to Gutzon Borglum from Peter Norbeck, December 14, 1932. Peter Norbeck Papers, Mabel K. Richardson Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota.
[2] Rex Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore* (Abbeville Press Publishers, 1985), 153.
[3] Gilbert Fite, *Mount Rushmore* (Keystone, SD: Mount Rushmore History Association, 2005), 58.

memorial was constructed and the debates that its creators engaged in before and during its carving. The Mount Rushmore story on its surface explains how a group of state officials, artists, and naturalists came together to complete a seemingly impossible feat, but the story has far more value in indicating how these men and others like them hoped to permanently alter the nation's self-perception and international image by creating a memorial in the wilderness that celebrated a select identity of White male achievement.

Mount Rushmore has been the object of numerous celebratory investigations into the "grit" and "obsession" of Borglum and the Rushmore boosters since carving began. Because the memorial was successful in its objective to capture the imagination of the American people, many accounts have investigated Mount Rushmore as a narrative of triumph over the natural environment, the Great Depression, and the opposition to the construction of such a memorial.[4] In many ways these narratives have offered a simplified version of the ways that Mount Rushmore's construction manifested popular hopes for the future of the state of South Dakota, the future of national character of the United States, and the future of gender roles.[5] In recent years, these celebratory accounts have been qualified by a number of studies which provide a critical lens for understanding the way that the memorial represents hypermasculinity, white supremacy, and colonization in the state of South Dakota and the nation.[6] However, there have

[4] Fite, *Mount Rushmore;* John Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers: The Story of the Obsessive Quest to Create Mount Rushmore* (PublicAffairs Publishers, 2002).
[5] Smith, *The Carving of Mount Rushmore National Memorial;* Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers,* and Fite, *Mount Rushmore.*
[6] Stephen Germic, "Memorials and Mourning: Recovering Native Resistance in and to the Monuments of the Nation," in *Observation Points,* Thomas Patin, editor. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 2012) 231. Jon Mathieu, "Six Grandfathers and Other American Mountains." In *Mount Sacred* (White Horse Press, 2023). Harriet Senie, *Monumental Controversies: Mount Rushmore, Four Presidents, and the Quest for National Unity,* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, an Imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2023).

not been investigations into the way that the construction of Mount Rushmore fits into the time's debates about how nature could be used for the development of patriotism and commerce, despite the fact that it emerged directly out of these ideas. Because of the extensive attention that the carving process received in scholarly work and in interpretive programming at the site, this chapter will not investigate how the memorial was built. Instead, this chapter will focus on the ideas of its founders and the justifications they provided for creating Mount Rushmore. Study of Mount Rushmore in the context of debates about national park sites reveals how those involved with its establishment synthesized ideas about national and state identity, preservation, art, and tourism to create one of the most visited National Park sites in the United States, drawing around two million tourists per year.[7]

As in many other park sites, the park had purposes beyond its contributions to the national identity of the United States; many of the South Dakotans behind the project, like state historian Doane Robinson, South Dakota Senator Peter Norbeck, and South Dakota Representative William Williamson, believed the project had the potential to secure the future of the state of South Dakota and to provide a safety net for the thousands of farmers who struggled against repeated droughts and minimal profits on their crops.[8] Low postwar crop and meat prices meant that average South Dakotans struggled to profit from their farms. The value of land in South Dakota was also historically low, which meant that in many cases South Dakotans were in debt and unable to fulfill their debts even if they sold their land.[9] Additionally, the state struggled with bank failure, which meant that there was little opportunity for economic growth in the state without government assistance, as there were few banks who could offer loans and few people

[7] Mount Rushmore National Memorial Website, nps.gov/moru/planyourvisit/index.htm.
[8] Paula Nelson, *The Prairie Winnows Out Its Own: The West River Country of South Dakota in the Years of Depression and Dust* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1996) 7.
[9] Nelson, *The Prairie Winnows Out Its Own,* 6.

who wished to put their money in banks.[10] Although Peter Norbeck as Governor of South Dakota had introduced a Rural Credits Program designed to offer credit to farmers in the absence of a strong banking system, the program failed because allowances made to accommodate poor farmers meant the system fell apart, as one third of the loans provided by this program were in default by 1925, when the system was ended.[11] All of these desperate economic conditions eventually pushed so many people out of the state that its population declined in the 1920s. People began to realize that the state's economy could not be powered by agriculture alone, and this economic distress motivated South Dakota politicians in the early to mid-1920s to try to find another way to keep their state's economy afloat.[12] South Dakota politicians looked for new resources outside of agriculture that they could incorporate into their state's economy, and their eyes fell on tourism as a possible panacea because of the distinct beauty of the Black Hills region.

The state had already received national recognition for the Black Hills' beauty from John Muir in 1901, as in his bestselling work, *Our National Parks,* Muir suggested that the Black Hills were a fabulous place to visit and explore.[13] There was also already some tourism in the Black Hills, as Hot Springs had hosted tourists seeking warm waters since the 1880s and Wind Cave National Park had drawn tourists since the 1890s.[14] Norbeck had also established and expanded Custer State Park in the Black Hills in the 1910s and 1920s, but these attractions altogether did not equal enough attention to support the state's economy. Together, Williamson, Norbeck, and Robinson tried to negotiate how to make good money off tourism and natural

[10] Schell, *History of South Dakota,* 278.
[11] Nelson, *The Prairie Winnows Out Its Own,* 7.
[12] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 75.
[13] John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1904), 13.
[14] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 41.

beauty by establishing Mount Rushmore National Memorial, which capitalized on the existing scenery in the Black Hills while presenting something unlike any other sculpture tourists could have seen before. They appealed to a growing body of tourists who embarked on cross-country journeys to learn more about their nation and the people who inhabited it.[15] Many of these people traveled in automobiles hoping that seeing the natural sights of "nature's nation" would imbue them with a sense of patriotism, and the Rushmore creators hoped that they could provide an explicit patriotic experience to appeal to this desire.[16]

Both Robinson and Norbeck paid close attention to the growth of automobile tourism, and Robinson noted that the lack of accessible roads was a factor which stifled efforts to draw tourists through Nebraska. Automobile tourism had become one of the most popular forms of touring by the 1920s, as boosters suggested that it was the most "democratic" and "American" way to tour the country because the driver had the authority to go where he wished on the timeline he wished, which was in contrast to the previously popular railroad tour packages which dominated the industry.[17] In a letter promoting the construction of Mount Rushmore in 1924, Robinson wrote to Lee Horford of Deadwood South Dakota to clarify some of the motives he had when he originally came up with the Rushmore idea. He suggested that because "[Nebraska has] no gravel and can surface their roads only at great cost. Consequently, western bound traffic goes north from Chicago to avail itself of graveled roads in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and South Dakota."[18] Not only did Robinson see Nebraska as a cautionary tale, but he also saw an

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[15] Shaffer, *See America First,* 132.
[16] Shaffer, *See America First,* 101.
[17] Shaffer, *See America First,* 132. Railroad tour packages maintained a strict itinerary with designated stops; they were most popular with the wealthy elites and often based their stops on contracts they held with resorts and vendors.
[18] Doane Robinson to Honorable Lee Horford, 1924, Doane Robinson Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society Archives, Pierre, South Dakota. Hereafter, DRp.

opportunity for South Dakota to capitalize on its southern neighbor's deficit, as he suggested that "there is now gravel all of the way from Chicago to Pierre, and the next two years will probably see it extended to the Black Hills." Robinson thought that by creating adequate roads and highways in South Dakota, "every automobile ought to be induced to tour the entire Hills district. . . if the points of interest are properly played up to them."[19] In addition to highways, Norbeck also worked tirelessly to create scenic roads and ensure to connect Mount Rushmore to the scenic highway trend by facilitating the construction of Iron Mountain Road, which promoted optimal viewing of Mount Rushmore alongside the rest of the beautiful landscapes in Custer State Park. Not only was Norbeck himself interested in motor tourism, he also saw that automobile traffic had the potential to transform the way people enjoyed the Black Hills. Scholars today believe this to be especially prescient, as Suzanne Julin attributed the development of tourism in the Black Hills to the rise of family road trips and the construction of Mount Rushmore.[20] She explained that as the Rushmore idea developed, the Black Hills not only made national news for its construction, but it also gained increasing attention from the director of the National Park Service (NPS). By the 1920s, transcontinental automobile trips were both possible and comfortable, which made them popular among a rising touring middle class. Locations with numerous places to enjoy thus were most desirable, as families appreciated the ability to camp somewhere and drive about the area.[21] They worked to bring the Black Hills into national tour plans, and in 1928, the Director of the NPS, Stephen Mather, paid a visit to the Black Hills, especially Wind Cave, as part of a national tour.[22] He had long been in contact with Norbeck over Custer State Park and Mount Rushmore, but his attention also went to Wind Cave

[19] Doane Robinson to Lee Horford, 1924 DRP.
[20] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 8.
[21] Shaffer, *See America First,* 161.
[22] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 104.

National Park, which had been neglected. Because his visit generated some much-needed publicity, Wind Cave and the Black Hills began to appear increasingly on tourist road trip agendas and the NPS invested in improved infrastructure at Wind Cave as part of Norbeck's plans to boost the appeal of the general region through roads and quality tourist accommodations.[23] Robinson and Norbeck hoped to draw tourists into the Black Hills as they traveled elsewhere, thus bringing great financial benefit to not only the proposed Mount Rushmore attraction, but to all attractions in the Black Hills, such as Hot Springs, Wind Cave, Custer State Park and the Homestake Mines. Robinson thought that the spectacle of creating such a statue would be sufficient, as he believed that even "if [Borglum] failed to finish the work; the wreck of it would bring the world running to see where he had left his mark," which emphasized that Robinson's priority truly was bringing people to the Black Hills.[24] Robinson explicitly intended Mount Rushmore to be a stop along a tour whose main destination was not necessarily in South Dakota, but he foresaw that if tourists found one good reason to stop in the Black Hills at Mount Rushmore, the other attractions in the Black Hills, like Wind Cave, Devil's Tower, and Custer State Park, would encourage them to stay longer. Robinson conceived that automobile tourism would be transformative for South Dakota's economy and believed that it would grow to be a stable industry which they could grow because of its success in other Western states.

However, they had to work to encourage other South Dakotans to support the idea of incorporating tourism into their state economy and thus also into their state identity. Local South Dakotans did not necessarily hope to see tourists flooding their state, as they feared that it would

[23] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 105
[24] Doane Robinson to Peter Norbeck, 18 December 1924, DRP.

interfere with local farming and mining interests.[25] Tourism is not an unquestionable good in many places, as it has the effect of bringing in outsiders that inevitably change the shape and culture of the places they visit. Scholar Hal Rothman investigated how tourism can drastically alter the places where it manifests and compares the acceptance of a tourist-based economy as a "Devil's Bargain" because of the myriad of unintended changes and consequences such a decision can have.[26] Many South Dakotans were thus wary of a tourism-based economy in the early years of this proposal because of the changes they feared they could not control. A few decades prior, Black Hills residents had ferociously opposed the designation of the Black Hills as a National Forest in 1893 because they had hoped to capitalize on the timber resources and feared that such a designation was the first of many encroachments on their freedom to do so.[27] A similar sentiment emerged when the Mount Rushmore project first came to the attention of many South Dakotans. Norbeck worried because South Dakotans were "financially distressed and skeptical and say -where will the money come from?"[28] He noted that "a great work of art makes its appeal, but it is not strong enough to satisfy a hungry man," and feared that the economic situation in South Dakota would be problematic.[29] These South Dakotans reflect the many settlers who opposed other preservation efforts because of their concerns about the loss of income from the natural resources that would be protected under such legislation. For these South Dakotans, the Memorial Commission simply had to convince them that the income

[25] Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 64.
[26] Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press 1998), 17.
[27] *Black Hills Weekly Journal,* 7 April 1897.
[28] Peter Norbeck to Gutzon Borglum, 27 September 1926, PNP.
[29] Peter Norbeck to Gutzon Borglum, 17 September 1926, PNP. Although the Great Depression had not started, economic conditions in South Dakota were already not strong. Once the Great Depression began in 1929, the carving project struggled even more because of the tight budget and difficulties fundraising elsewhere.

generated by tourism would exceed the potential income from the protected resources, and that they would not have to foot the bill for the project. For this, the Rushmore Commission appealed to the rhetoric of patriots and of popular naturalists who advocated for a balance between nature and economy, such as Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot.[30] By creating infrastructure and a spectacle at Mount Rushmore, Robinson and Norbeck conceived that they could boost the appeal of the Black Hills as a destination for future ecotourism.

Peter Norbeck had long been involved in projects to "improve" nature's appeal in the name of commerce and development. Norbeck embodied Roosevelt's commitment to nature and Progressive ideals throughout his political career.[31] Norbeck was in his own right a trailblazer in South Dakota, as his work establishing Custer State Park created the foundation for future state park preservation projects. Norbeck also supported Roosevelt's commitment to conservation of natural resources not only because nature provided resources that needed to be used wisely to support future development but also because both of them found nature to be a vehicle to personal improvement.[32] Norbeck may have had a more Romantic commitment to nature than Roosevelt, as evidenced by his sentiments towards the scenery of the Black Hills in his bids to establish Custer State Park. Although he was an admirer of President Theodore Roosevelt, his ideas on how nature could be used differed slightly. While Roosevelt's ideas seemed to indicate that natural resources could be used based on a utilitarian framework which balanced public enjoyment with economic profit, Norbeck's ideas emphasized the maximization of public enjoyment for greater economic profit and highlighted natural beauty as an economic resource

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[30] Anne Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture* (New York, NY: New York University Press 1990), 32; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 163.
[31] Gilbert Fite, *Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2005), 75-76.
[32] Peter Boag, "Thinking Like Mount Rushmore: Sexuality and Gender in the Republican Landscape," in *Seeing Nature Through Gender,* University of Kansas Press, 2003: 43.

similar to timber or water. Thus, Norbeck became involved in a number of projects to "improve," according to his specific ideas of "natural beauty," the natural environment for public enjoyment. Prior to Mount Rushmore, one of the projects that Norbeck worked the longest on was the Custer State Park and Game Preserve project. As was discussed in the second chapter, Norbeck hoped that Custer State Park would be a "playground" for the people, and thus Norbeck designed the park to be conducive to public enjoyment, with natural features drawing the visitors to the park.[33] To ensure that Custer State Park could become reality, Norbeck and the Custer State Park Board allowed limited industrial activity, like log cutting, and moved moderately to develop public support. As a result, Roosevelt certainly inspired Norbeck's work at Mount Rushmore, but Norbeck applied Roosevelt's ideas about masculinity and nature appreciation to his work at Mount Rushmore in a way that included people who otherwise would not have been ideal ecotourists. Thus, Doane Robinson likely sought to gain Norbeck's support from the inception of the carving project, as Norbeck was both passionate and experienced in public preservation initiatives.

Norbeck and Robinson also appealed to the growing sense that nature appreciation could be linked to patriotism and the cultivation of a cohesive national identity. Romantic thinkers like Washington Irving, an early nineteenth century diplomat and nature writer of works like "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," supported the idea that the natural features of the United States were the American version of historic and ancient structures like castles or Stonehenge, and as a result these thinkers hoped that national parks would inspire a sense of patriotism and pride in one's American identity among this new class of tourists.[34] National parks thus became a way that

[33] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 42. E.C. Woodburn to Peter Norbeck, 9 November 1920, PNP.
[34] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 71. Shaffer, *See America First,* 94.

people could see the "real" nation, as it was in the wilderness, where settlers had been "abandoning European traditions, and developing new behaviors and institutions" that defined America as a nation.[35] Mount Rushmore ultimately appealed to both ideas, as it was intended to be a defining patriotic artwork in the American wilderness that surpassed much of Europe's, but also one that capitalized on the growing number of middle class automobile travelers for the enjoyment of nature and its views.

While Mount Rushmore may seem like an odd addition to the National Park Service, which primarily focused on the protection and promotion of public nature parks, the motivation behind its establishment contains remarkable similarities with other national park sites. The supporters of the Mount Rushmore initiative hoped to establish the mountain as "the National Shrine; the Mecca to which all feet will turn," invoking religious language similar to that of Romantic philosophers who saw experiences in nature as religious and transformative.[36] These Romantic notions influenced the establishment of many national parks, such as Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Glacier National Parks. However, at Mount Rushmore, the focus was always meant to be the sculpture, as opposed to nature, and the quasi-religious experience celebrated American achievement and character instead of worship of God in his creation. The debates and ideas of the creators of Mount Rushmore show how the development of tourist culture in the early twentieth century combined with the thoughts and writings of people such as writer Ralph Waldo Emerson and former President Theodore Roosevelt to inspire a sculpture in nature that celebrated American achievement for the touring public.[37] Mount Rushmore made this

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[35] Shaffer, *See America First,* 17.
[36] Runte, *National Parks*, 14. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 76. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 12.
[37] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 76. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 12. Hyde, *An American Vision,* 8.

connection between nature and nation explicit. Mount Rushmore represented a combination of appreciation of "nature" and American achievement in one memorial. Because promoters of nature-based tourism suggested that America was "nature's nation," seeing the natural features of the United States was considered a patriotic experience.[38] The creators of Mount Rushmore situated the memorial in a larger framework of nature-based tourism in the Black Hills and engaged in debates about preservation and conservation themselves in other contexts, but hoped that Mount Rushmore would more clearly answer concerns about nature's continued role in the nation.

At the turn of the century, many Euro-American writers published their concern that American national culture could never rival European national culture because they believed that ancient physical markers of a shared national past were important for the cultivation of a cohesive national identity, but that these markers were entirely absent in the United States. Although Indigenous peoples had lived in North America for millennia, Euro-Americans did not view Indigenous history as comparable to European history, and thus these thinkers brainstormed ways to invent a comparison.[39]American philosophers had long been debating what the American alternative to the ancient ruins and historical markers in Europe would be; writers like Washington Irving suggested that the American equivalent of such physical markers of American progress were monumental natural features.[40] These ideas blended with American anxiety about the future of the nation, as Frederick Jackson Turner published his frontier thesis which suggested that American national identity up to that point relied on the existence of an untamed boundary between civilization and wilderness. Turner's ideas combined with those of

[38] Shaffer, *See America First,* 101.
[39] Hyde, *An American Vision,* 17
[40] Hyde, *An American Vision,*6. Runte, *National Parks,* 14.

writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and boosters of American tourism, who suggested that it was through monumental natural features that Americans could derive their national identity, as these protected areas of nature were the remnants of a time before American progress had spread across the continent. The American West seemed to be a place ripe with potential for this process because Romantic thinkers believed more "nature" existed in the West than in the East or Europe because Euro-American settlement had not yet permanently altered the entire landscape, although it was increasingly settled.[41]

Just as Irving lamented the lack of ancient ruins in the United States to provide what he considered a satisfactory national character, so too did the proponents of the Rushmore idea agonize about the need to develop the character of American masculinity and the identity of the state of South Dakota. At the same time, the young states in the American West and the Great Plains hoped to create their own identities within the United States and relative to the states and territories that they bordered. South Dakota, like the other Great Plains states, relied heavily on agriculture, and was a relatively young state in 1924 when Doane Robinson proposed the original Mount Rushmore idea. As a result, tourism could be a way that the state could carve out a niche for itself among other states with agriculturally-reliant economies.

Curiously, the original idea for Mount Rushmore appealed more to the contemporary desires for Western tourism, but the idea that ultimately took shape anticipated the growth of patriotic fervor after World War II. Doane Robinson, South Dakota's state historian, sought to help define South Dakota's identity in relation to other states nearby. Robinson had the original idea for granite carvings in the Black Hills. He reached out to Senator Peter Norbeck, who had also demonstrated some commitment to such a project after Robinson presented the idea of

[41] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 67

massive carvings at a regional meeting of the Black and Yellow Trail Association. Together, they originally intended to appeal to the heroes of the Wild West, which spoke to a turbulent, yet bygone period in South Dakota history that produced tales which captured the minds of the American public.[42] Robinson's original idea sought to eulogize the Old West by carving Western heroes like frontierswoman Calamity Jane, the Oglala Lakota Red Cloud, and showman Buffalo Bill Cody into the Needles, a geologic formation in Custer State Park. Many people at the meeting where Robinson presented this idea supported this notion, including Peter Norbeck, because of its capacity to draw tourists to South Dakota, which thus would diversify the state's agriculturally reliant economy. Although both Norbeck and Robinson eventually distanced themselves from the idea of carving Western heroes into the Needles, they continued their work to secure a massive sculpture in the Black Hills to draw attention to the region for tourism.[43]

The 1920s American West appealed regularly to a time before settlers had seemingly fully wrested control from Indigenous peoples and "civilized" the wild. Control over the wilderness defined society for frontiersmen and settlers, as did opposition to Indigenous people.[44] Doane Robinson hoped to entrench this fantasy image as emblematic of Western identity by carving it into the physical landscape, which he believed to be appealing to potential tourists. Additionally, the project sought to use tourism to carve an appropriate state identity for South Dakota, placing Wild West heroes as emblematic of the state's self-image alongside other states in the Great Plains, who were also developing tourism industries. While South Dakota would use Wild West imagery present also in other states, the carving of these Wild West heroes into the mountains would be the unique appeal needed to draw tourists to South Dakota. As part

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[42] David Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth,* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press 2001), 2.
[43] Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 85. *Lead Daily Call* December 10, 1924.
[44] Murdoch, *The American West,* 4.

of these "See America First" tourism campaigns, Fisher Harris, the originator of the saying and executive member of the "See America First League," suggested that the West "embodied the 'true' America," because of "its sublime scenery, abundant resources, and virtuous citizens."[45] Robinson blended both the romanticization of the Wild West, which seemed to be a time with greater freedoms, with the growing association of nature with nation to create an identity for South Dakota which suggested that a stop in South Dakota could be more American and more rejuvenating than other locations because it made ideas about nature's healing and patriotic capacities explicit.[46]

Indigenous people also appeared occasionally in the projection of this new identity. Where they could be displayed as exotic or as remnants of a bygone time, the Rushmore creators sought to ensure they would be present, as they were when President Calvin Coolidge dedicated the memorial in 1927.[47] Despite the fact that the Oglala Lakota celebrated Coolidge and adopted him into the tribe in 1924, the "history" he presented at the dedication of Mount Rushmore did not include a word about Lakotas.[48] Instead, the Rushmore creators and other tourism boosters across the nation used Indigenous images whenever it suited them to enhance their "civility" and the "authenticity" of their "Wild West" identity without admitting that the mountain and the land they occupied had recently been stolen.[49] As a result, representation of Indigenous peoples at Mount Rushmore boosted its claims of providing an "authentic" Wild West identity and by relegating Lakotas to supporting roles of the past as unlucky casualities of Euro-American

[45] Shaffer, *See America First,* 27, 37.
[46] Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 7. Shaffer, *See America First,* 37.
[47] Senie, *A Monumental Controversy,* 25.
[48] Senie, *A Monumental Controversy,* 25. Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles,* 81.
[49] Shaffer, *See America First,* 282.

progress.[50] By forming an appealing state identity, South Dakota could capitalize on the growth of tourism in the region and contribute to the legitimization of both settlers' chosen state and national identity, which suggested the perpetuity of American conquest over Indigenous peoples and the rugged individualism, masculinity, and independence of the Euro-Americans in South Dakota and the United States at large.

For this project, Robinson originally reached out to renowned sculptor Lorado Taft. In his original letter to Taft, Robinson cites one of Taft's sculptures, "The Eternal Indian," modeled after Black Hawk, a Sauk leader and warrior, as evidence for Taft's suitability for the project. Because of his artistic fame and experience carving Indigenous people, Robinson thought he would be an excellent candidate for carving Indigenous people and Wild West heroes into the Needles.[51] Taft, however, had reached an advanced age and poor health prohibited him from making the journey to South Dakota. When prompted, he suggested that Robinson pursue Gutzon Borglum as sculptor because he was still young and already working on a different mountain carving initiative.[52] As a result, Robinson reached out to other sculptors, including Gutzon Borglum, who ultimately agreed to the project, provided that he could modify the idea and enjoy little interference during the carving process.[53]

Borglum's motivations for participating in the Rushmore project appear to have been selfish and glory-seeking in addition to his stated hope that Mount Rushmore would invigorate the American public's civic religion. When originally invited, Borglum had been working hard

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[50] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 35, 40; Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (December 2006), 393.
[51] Doane Robinson to Lorado Taft, 1923, DRP.
[52] Lorado Taft to Doane Robinson, 1924, DRP.
[53] In addition to Lorado Taft and Gutzon Borglum, Robinson publicly considered Daniel French. It is unclear whether any other artists made the short list in private. See a letter from Doane Robinson to the editor of the *Argus-Leader,* 8 February 1924, DRP.

on the Stone Mountain project. While he declared himself a lover of nature and often cited his love of the outdoors when promoting the project, it was not because of his love of the wilderness that he made his name carving mountains. It was not his idea to carve the Stone Mountain Monument in Georgia, but he was drawn to the project because of his love of the idea of a massive granite canvas and the fame that he hoped would come with it. Borglum was also deeply interested in matters of national identity, and thus the Stone Mountain Monument offered him the chance to contribute to the way that the nation and the South would remember those who had fought for the Confederacy over half a century earlier.

Although Borglum never finished the Stone Mountain Memorial, it was not for ideological objections to the content, but instead because his pride as a sculptor prevented him from adhering to the budget and requests of the Stone Mountain Memorial Association who hired him. Borglum's budgetary troubles and lack of desire to cooperate with the Association brought him trouble in Georgia, and ultimately to work at Mount Rushmore in 1925. Throughout his work in Georgia, he struggled with interference from commissioners.[54] Questions about Borglum's frequent out of state trips and continual requests for an increased budget caused the carving association to question whether Borglum's "loudly professional admiration for the valor of the soldiers of the South begins and ends at the door of the association's treasury."[55] Because of this disagreement and continual money issues, the carving association fired Borglum, a fact he had trouble admitting at times.[56] Before leaving, he smashed his models and fled town before he could be arrested for unlawful destruction of property; he did not want the next artist to be able to use his work.[57] His bid for national renown at Stone Mountain brought national notoriety,

[54] Gutzon Borglum to Peter Norbeck, 25 April 1925, PNP.
[55] Hollins Randolph, "Resolution on Gutzon Borglum," 25 February 1925, PNP.
[56] Gutzon Borglum to Peter Norbeck, 25 April 1925, PNP.
[57] Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 51.

leading some to caution Robinson and Norbeck against hiring Borglum for the Rushmore project out of fear that he was "more of a selfish money grabber than an artist" in light of "serious indiscretion in the accounting of money" at Stone Mountain.[58] Borglum intended to return to Stone Mountain someday and "make it the wonder of the world at a cost of the cosmetics used in a single month in America," but was never welcomed, or allowed, back.[59]

Borglum, believing he was robbed of his opportunity at Stone Mountain, brought many of the ideas that he had intended to enact there to the Rushmore project. Disappointed in what happened at Stone Mountain, he saw an opportunity to have more artistic freedom in applying his beliefs about American national identity to a memorial that appealed to him more than the Stone Mountain memorial.[60] He hoped the Rushmore project would be his magnum opus, and that he would finally achieve the national attention he had craved his whole career.[61] To suit his own tastes, he wanted to change the idea from Wild West heroes, which he feared would only attract regional attention. Instead, he hoped to create a shrine exalting American achievement through four accomplished Presidents, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt, to ensure that the project could gain national, or even international attention.[62] Proposals to include Indigenous people, namely the Oglala Lakota Red Cloud, in the carvings shifted under Gutzon Borglum, who demanded that Mount Rushmore be a

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[58] Chas Weller to Peter Norbeck, 4 July 1926, PNP.
[59] "Why the Mountain Memorial." Interview with Gutzon Borglum on Collier's Radio Hour. 18 January 1931, PNP. The interview was delivered six years after Borglum had been fired from the Stone Mountain project.
[60] Stone Mountain certainly appealed to Borglum; however, prior to working on either sculpture, his primary subjects were American presidents, as concerns about national identity remained at the front of his mind. As a result, when given the opportunity to adjust the subjects of the sculpture, Borglum felt that the Rushmore memorial was the best actualization of his own ideas. Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 23.
[61] Fite, *Mount Rushmore, 21.*
[62] Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 33.

memorial to *White* American achievement. Borglum resisted recognizing Indigenous people even in his plans for the Hall of Records at the Memorial.[63] He suggested that "few races have contributed immortal service to civilization," but that "America has."[64] He thought three key moments in American history represented the best of America's contributions. The Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and "America's return to save Europe and civilization."[65] Borglum believed that the United States "saved" Europe and civilization by completing the Panama Canal, which he believed realized Columbus's dream of connecting Europe to Asia by sea, and by acting as "a guiding star" for the development of democracy worldwide.[66] Borglum, with the support of Robinson and Norbeck, intended Mount Rushmore to be a memorial which demanded religious reverence for American society. Borglum, a White supremacist, did not think Indigenous history was worthy of memorializing alongside four presidents whom he admired so deeply-- and Robinson and Norbeck let him have his way.[67]

Borglum hoped to contribute an astounding and uniquely American artwork to the world, as he believed that the United States had not yet developed art that reflected what Borglum believed to be its proper national character. Borglum hoped that a memorial like Mount Rushmore would pay homage to American democracy for thousands of years, even after American society itself no longer existed. He hoped to contribute art that rivaled European

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[63] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 29.
[64] "Why the Mountain Memorial," transcript, Interview with Gutzon Borglum on Collier's Radio Hour. 18 January 1931, PNP. When Borglum discussed America, he invariably meant White Americans,
[65] "Why the Mountain Memorial," transcript, Interview with Gutzon Borglum on Collier's Radio Hour. 18 January 1931, PNP.
[66] "Why the Mountain Memorial," transcript, Interview with Gutzon Borglum on Collier's Radio Hour. 18 January 1931, PNP.
[67] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 29. Although Borglum expressed limited admiration for Indigenous people, he generally appropriated their imagery for showmanship and historicized them as victims of American progress. Borglum was known to be a white supremacist, and his bigotry extended to both Indigenous people and Black Americans.

ancients to the American canon, thus closing the perceived cultural gap between America and Europe.[68] Borglum expressed his hope that Mount Rushmore would "place there, carved high, as close to the heavens as we can, the words of our leaders, their faces, to show posterity what manner of men they were" in hopes that "these records will endure until the wind and the rain alone shall wear them away."[69] To preserve their words with their likeness, he included a 500 word inscription of American history and the Hall of Records in his original plans. He would enshrine stone copies of important documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in his Hall of Records. Therefore, Borglum hoped that Mount Rushmore would not only define the United States during his lifetime, but also for the next few thousand years. Borglum's idea caught on, and many onlookers praised his efforts to create "in this memorial an immortal work of fine art, that ranks with the best of Greece, Egypt, or Rome."[70] For visitors with similar anxieties about the lack of comparison between American and European art, Rushmore became an outlet for American pride and a landmark which cultivated patriotism. Mount Rushmore provided an explicitly nationalist experience for American tourists which celebrated American achievements and promoted itself as a shrine to these feats.[71] Promotional materials for Mount Rushmore suggested that the carving was both unprecedented and seemingly impossible, which appealed to Borglum's sense of masculinity and American exceptionalism. Mount Rushmore encouraged Americans to reevaluate the possible, but also suggested that

[68] Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 59. Mount Rushmore National Memorial Commission Promotional Pamphlet, PNP.
[69] Mount Rushmore National Memorial Commission Promotional Pamphlet: Jefferson Number, 3, PNP.
[70] Mount Rushmore National Memorial Commission Promotional Pamphlet: The Shrine of Democracy," 19, PNP.
[71] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 24.

Mount Rushmore's positioning in nature was the ideal way to celebrate the United States, as it was nature's nation.

A profound fan of President Theodore Roosevelt, Borglum hoped that American life would soon reflect Roosevelt's ideals of strenuous living.[72] Borglum thought that "the trouble with American life is that it is not vigorous enough. We talk vigor, we patronize sports, but we are not ourselves sportsmen."[73] Borglum's idea to carve great American presidents into a mountain fulfilled a number of elements of Roosevelt's style of manliness, namely because of the scale, the spectacle, and the subjects.[74] Borglum also had considerable anxiety about the state of American masculinity amid the growth of office jobs which did not require physical fitness to succeed. He thought that men should be "men, large in their sympathies, large in their understanding, courageous in their work."[75] He criticized other artists, who, in his mind, were "the delicate member[s] of the family. . . [who were] good for nothing else."[76] Borglum, a profound fan of Roosevelt, copied his idol by ensuring his deeds received adequate photographic and media attention.[77] Promotional materials from the Mount Harney Memorial Association (later the Mount Rushmore Memorial Commission), which Borglum often wrote and contributed to, often emphasized the power of uniting landscape and art to bolster American pride and masculinity. Borglum thought that by creating undeniably American artwork reflective of his

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[72] Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 24.
[73] Gutzon Borglum in Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 23.
[74] John Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity* (Hill and Wang, 2001), 4.
[75] Gutzon Borglum, "Aesthetic Activities in America: an Answer to His Critics." *The Craftsman* Vol XV no. 3 (December 1908): 304.
[76] Borglum, "Aesthetic Activities in America," 305.
[77] Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man,* 6. Norbeck often enabled this by informing the local media whenever Borglum was going to do something extravagant, noting how pleased Borglum was when he got media attention when he did not expect it in a letter to Doane Robinson about their initial meeting.

ideals of masculinity, he could bring the United States closer to his own ideals, and Borglum wanted to ensure that his ideas did not get diluted by the input of others, especially regarding the subjects of the carving.

Although Borglum did not want others' input on who should be carved, this did not stop people from offering their opinions. Norbeck received letters from several constituents, who argued in favor of other additions. One man from Madison wrote wondering whether some "Indian chiefs, who for centuries back, roamed the prairies and hills in the Dakotas" could be added to the memorial, rather than "Washington, Jefferson, or others who never saw the Black Hills and never knew they existed."[78] Others questioned if Susan B. Anthony should be added, to represent her contributions to American society through women's suffrage.[79] Probably most startling to Norbeck's humble attitude was the suggestion that *he* be added to Mount Rushmore.[80]

Some people thought certain presidents should be removed from the memorial, namely Roosevelt. Roosevelt was a controversial choice, but Norbeck chalked it up to being "due to the fact that his enemies are not yet all dead" and firmly believed that "time will change the situation."[81] Roosevelt's inclusion likely had as much to do with the fact that Norbeck himself was a living admirer of Roosevelt's policies and political career; it was Norbeck's idea to add Roosevelt to the Memorial, but appealed to Borglum since he too had known, admired, and worked for Roosevelt on his 1912 presidential bid.[82] Furthermore, Roosevelt appeared to be a

[78] Hans Urdahl to Peter Norbeck, 22 May 1930, PNP.
[79] Mrs. B. F. Langworthy to Peter Norbeck, 20 August 1934, PNP. Mrs. Langworthy was a representative of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and wrote on behalf of educators who supported Anthony's inclusion on the memorial.
[80] Peter Norbeck to Charles Buell, 15 March 1929, PNP.
[81] Peter Norbeck to JM Williams, 14 March 1929, PNP.
[82] Boag, "Thinking Like Mount Rushmore," 43.

natural choice for the memorial after Norbeck suggested it. He had both regional appeal from the years he had lived as a "cowboy" in the Dakotas and invoked American fantasies about the Wild West to cultivate the appearance of manliness.[83] Roosevelt had also emphasized his own masculinity, emulated by many Roosevelt admirers, and his belief in the superiority of the White race in opposition to Indigenous peoples, which White Americans praised across the nation.[84] Roosevelt's image could thus draw nostalgia for the Wild West, which seemed a time of greater democratic values and masculinity, as well as incorporate White supremacy and imperialism into the memorial.[85] As a result, Borglum embraced the opportunity to enshrine Roosevelt's ideas alongside the values of his other heroes as beyond reproach and completely emblematic of American achievement going forward.

Borglum's choice of American presidents reflected his own values and beliefs about what made American society special. His original idea included sculptures of Washington and Lincoln, but he soon added Jefferson and Roosevelt. The addition of these last two presidents reveals that indeed, Borglum was celebrating "empire builders rather than champions of democracy," and the expansion of White society through colonization.[86] Borglum hoped to convey a single message of greatness in this memorial, which celebrated each of these men whose Presidential careers emphasized the importance of White-owned lands.[87] He articulated that he hoped the Rushmore memorial should "have a serenity, a nobility, a power that reflects the gods who inspired them and suggests the gods they have become," indicating his desire to place these four presidents on a pedestal without recognition of their humanity or any

[83] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States 1880-1917* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1995) 180.
[84] Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man,* 4.
[85] Murdoch, *The American West,* 63.
[86] Boag, "Thinking Like Mount Rushmore," 44. Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 118.
[87] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 3.

shortcomings.[88] Borglum had long admired presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln for their contributions to the beginning and preservation of the United States.[89] At the same time, both Washington and Lincoln explicitly promoted their ideals of land ownership at the expense of Native nations. Washington viewed land ownership as essential for democracy and for freedom, and often sought to provide the opportunity to own land to White American settlers regardless of the cost to Indigenous people, who he believed were savage and unable to properly use the land.[90] Washington's methods of forcing Indigenous peoples from their lands, particularly the tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy, are considered war crimes today.[91] Abraham Lincoln not only allowed the largest mass execution in American history of Dakota men, but also supported settlement and Westward Expansion through the Transcontinental Railroad and the Homestead Act, both of which had disastrous outcomes for Indigenous peoples.[92] Lincoln at best ignored Indigenous people, and at worst dramatically worsened tensions and treatment of Indigenous peoples in the West by assigning political choices to high ranking positions and ignoring federally-signed treaties.[93]

Borglum later decided to expand the presidents on the memorial to include Thomas Jefferson and Theodore Roosevelt for their contributions to American success through procurement; in Jefferson's case, Borglum celebrated the Louisiana Purchase, whereas for Roosevelt, Borglum celebrated the Panama Canal.[94] Jefferson shared and expanded

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[88] *Omaha Bee-News,* 22 February 1934.
[89] Washington held many ideas remarkably similar to Jefferson's which prioritized the importance of land acquisitions for farming. Borglum's greatest hero on the Mountain was likely Lincoln, as had carved several sculptures of Lincoln, and even named his son after Lincoln.
[90] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 46.
[91] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 47.
[92] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 95.
[93] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 95.
[94] Boag, "Thinking Like Mount Rushmore," 44.

Washington's emphasis on land ownership as important for democracy, as Jefferson believed that the ideal social structure of the nation would rely on yeoman farmers and their families working land to create his Republican ideal. As a result, Jefferson took an active role in land acquisition for the United States in the Louisiana Purchase, and expected that the lands he acquired would be inhabited by yeoman farmers that would assimilate Indigenous people into Euro-American society.[95] Theodore Roosevelt's push to complete the Panama Canal improved trade, but did so with great cost to Panamanians, who suffered disease and the loss of territory due to American Imperialism.[96] He was not only a notorious imperialist overseas, but also supported and encouraged assimilation policy to divorce Indigenous people from their ancestral language, culture, and lands.[97] Roosevelt argued that the costs suffered by South Americans and Indigenous people were justified in the name of White American progress, and thought that White men established their civility in opposition to peoples he thought inferior.[98] In fact, Roosevelt's ideas about masculinity and conservation relied heavily on his ideas of White supremacy, as it was through racial domination and practiced wildness that White men could prevent personal and racial degradation.[99] Settler colonialism has always prioritized the taking of land and the elimination of Indigenous peoples to make room for the new settler society, and Mount Rushmore clearly celebrates this process.[100] As a result, it is clear that Borglum's

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[95] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 76-77.
[96] In the 1920s when Congress considered paying the Colombians $25 million for the turmoil caused by the Panama Canal, Norbeck was furious because he supported Roosevelt's treatment of South Americans. He dismissed the measure as boosts for "big American business, and especially the oil men." Peter Norbeck quoted in Fite, *Peter Norbeck,* 118. Norbeck generally ignored foreign affairs, but like Borglum, held White supremacist ideas which favored White success at the expense of people of color.
[97] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 113-114.
[98] Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization,* 180-182.
[99] Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization,* 185.
[100] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 387.

decision to highlight these four presidents was intimately tied to the ways that they pushed colonization forward, which formed the celebration of American accomplishment that Borglum desired to emphasize as an unparalleled good.

Borglum had attempted to carve a single story of the Confederacy into stone at Stone Mountain as well, as matters of national memory interested him deeply. The Stone Mountain Monumental Association hired Borglum to commemorate their ancestors who fought in the Civil War and wanted artwork that would eulogize their vision of the Old South, full of Southern gentlemen who fought for states' rights rather than to preserve the institution of slavery.[101] Although the idea had originally been to create a memorial to Robert E. Lee, Borglum hoped to expand it by including carvings of other generals and the troops to commemorate the "lost cause" they fought for. While Borglum did not come up with the idea to carve a Confederate memorial, he certainly had his own ideas on how to expand it to make it a more profound celebration of the Confederacy and its values.[102] In fact, a promotional pamphlet about the carving of Stone Mountain reveals plans to create a Memorial Hall, carved into the mountain itself, which would contain a roster of all the men who fought for the Confederacy and serve as a place for "the display of Confederate relics, documents, souvenirs. . . for perpetual safe-keeping."[103] He argued that "no greater or more sincere struggle was ever fought than this," and thus Borglum hoped that the sculptures would be "as big as the mountains," although he suggested that they were "small compared to the great contributions to civilization they commemorate."[104] The plans for such a space ring eerily similar to Borglum's plans for a Hall of

[101] *Stone Mountain Magazine,* PNP.
[102] Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 45.
[103] *Stone Mountain Magazine,* PNP.
[104] Why the Mountain Memorial," transcript interview with Gutzon Borglum on Collier's Radio Hour. January 18, 1931, PNP.

Records at Mount Rushmore, and his language indicates the near-religious reverence with which Borglum designed the Stone Mountain Memorial.[105] As a result, his work explicitly denied the grievances suffered by generations of enslaved people and reinforced a sanitized perspective of the South that suited the self-image of the descendants of their captors. Furthermore, Stone Mountain is considered the symbolic birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, which has held numerous revivals and events at the site since its carving. While Borglum never registered himself for the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), he never spoke out against their activities and was also a White supremacist himself. It is undeniable that his work on Stone Mountain supported the KKK's agenda and provided them with a platform and place of prominence.

Both Mount Rushmore's story and selection of presidents represents the concerted effort of settler society to reshape the physical environment of the Black Hills to affirm their continued, permanent presence in the region.[106] Mount Rushmore's construction in the Black Hills reflected the ongoing colonial process across the nation that sought to displace and destroy Indigenous presence in the region which has existed for thousands of years.[107] By this point, Lakotas had already been forced onto reservations to create room for settlers in the region. Mount Rushmore bolstered settler structures by embedding settlers into the landscape, giving it the appearance that it is truly their own.[108] Once the Rushmore carving concept shifted from crafting a regional identity to designing both a regional and a national identity, the creators determined that Indigenous history no longer had a place at a monument to American achievement and cast Lakotas as unfortunate obstacles instead of victims of settler colonialism.

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[105] Later Borglum would be accused of being more interested in the money behind Confederate memory than he was the values of the Confederacy.
[106] Germic, "Memorials and Mourning," 233.
[107] Germic, "Memorials and Mourning," 233.
[108] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism,* 42.

Central to understanding Mount Rushmore's role in developing the industry and culture of the Black Hills is the fact that settlers carved Mount Rushmore as part of their broader project of denying the land claims of Indigenous tribes in the region and asserting their triumph over the people and the land.[109] Although the settlers who lived in the Black Hills no longer feared an uprising that would remove them from the land, the carving of a memorial celebrating settler society was another step in the replacement of Indigenous heritage with Euro-American heritage.[110] Historian Mark David Spence investigates how national parks fueled by preservationist and conservationist ideas contributed to settler colonialism by removing Indigenous people from the wilderness physically, philosophically, and in history.[111] Since Indigenous peoples were at different points written out of the history of the Black Hills or simply accused of not having used the Black Hills' resources efficiently enough, settler society took the land for its own use, whether it be mining, agriculture, or in the case of other public wilderness parks, preservation.[112] However, removing Lakotas is only the first part of many processes to eliminate their history and claims from memory.[113]

Mount Rushmore's construction began in 1927, which was approximately fifty years after Lakotas had been forced out of the Black Hills by the fraudulent 1877 Manypenny Agreement and occurred at a time when settlers sought to reshape the landscape and its history to suit their continued presence.[114] In the absence of historical markers that settler society found

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[109] Susan Miller, "Native America Writes Back: The Origin of the Indigenous Paradigm in Historiography," in *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press 2011), 13-14.
[110] Miller, "Native America Writes Back," 12-13. Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness,* 7. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism,* 42.
[111] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness,*7.
[112] Linnea Sundstrom, "The Sacred Black Hills: An Ethnohistorical Review," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17, no. ¾, (Summer/Fall 1997): 185. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism,* 37.
[113] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 387.
[114] Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills,* 101.

suitable for celebration, Mount Rushmore was meant to be a step towards the celebration of the truly "American."[115] The placement of such a memorial in the sacred Black Hills, known as "the heart of everything that is" by local Indigenous people, namely Lakotas, ignored over ten thousand years of human history in the region and denied the sacredness of the land to the people who lived there to assert that the transfer of land from Indigenous control to settler society was an inevitable and appropriate part of progress.[116] Furthermore, the mountain that White Americans named Mount Rushmore is known to Lakotas as the Six Grandfathers, representative of the six traditional directions honored in Lakota cosmology.[117] Lakotas and other Indigenous people who hold the land sacred perceive the carving of four men into these mountains as offensive, especially because each of them contributed in a variety of ways to dispossession of Native lands.[118] Additionally, Lakotas never stopped demanding the return of their lands.[119] In 1920, the Court of Claims had been opened for Lakotas to file suit, so Ralph Case filed twenty four compensation claims on their behalf in 1924 and had begun a lengthy legal claim to demand compensation for the injustices Lakota suffered due to the loss of their lands.[120] Ultimately, the case would be decided in their favor in 1980, but in the meantime, settler society hoped to continue entrenching their permanent claims to the land and ruthlessly decried the idea that

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[115] Hyde, *An American Vision,* 6.
[116] Germic, "Memorials and Mourning," 232. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism,* 42.
[117] Mathieu, "Six Grandfathers and Other American Mountains," 84.
[118] Senie, *Monumental Controversies,* 118.
[119] Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills, White Justice: The Sioux Nation versus the United States, 1775 to the Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 119.
[120] Lazarus, *Black Hills, White Justice,* 128, 430. Interestingly, Lazarus highlights Doane Robinson as an early defender of Lakota claims to the Black Hills. Robinson expressed in an article in the *Deadwood Pioneer Times* that he did not believe Lakotas sought the return of their land, but truly wanted compensation for the land they wanted, which inspired significant discussion about what compensation could look like. Further, Ralph Case, the lawyer that Lakotas originally hired to take on the case, used Doane Robinson's *History of the Dakotah or Sioux Indians* to construct historical analysis in the court cases he filed. See page 167.

Lakotas could have any continuing interest or claim to the land.[121] Mount Rushmore made explicit the idea that the land completely belonged to settlers and erased the narratives of dispossession that made it possible by refusing to acknowledge Indigenous history and continued presence.[122] Borglum sought to carve a memorial which uncritically celebrated settler colonialism in lands whose ownership had been and continues to be down to this day contested.[123] In this way, Borglum's influence on the carving of such a memorial is just one of many ways that settler society has sought to write over and displace Indigenous relationships with the land.[124] Although the use of nature in creating a settler identity was widely supported during this time, not everyone agreed that carving mountains was an appropriate way to use the landscape to link nature and national identity.

Although Mount Rushmore would become part of the National Park Service, in the early years of the project's development, radical preservationists opposed the project most vocally. Fierce opposition came from those who believed that carving into the Black Hills was offensive because they believed that to do so was an affront to God, as the Black Hills were His creation and thus needed no alterations to be attractive and beautiful.[125] Preservationist opponents echoed John Muir, who saw the alteration of nature to be unnecessary for religious reasons, as it seemed to be an affront to God's creation. As a result, these people highlighted the plans to carve Mount Rushmore as a threat to the natural beauty of the Black Hills. Women formed some of the most outspoken opposition to Mount Rushmore, and these women engaged with the ongoing dialogue about nature preservation by invoking both traditional gender norms and contemporary ideas

[121] Lazarus, *Black Hills, White Justice,* 129.
[122] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism,* 40.
[123] Senie, *Monumental Controversies.* Lazarus, *Black Hills, White Justice,* 428.
[124] Miller, "Native Historians Write Back," 25. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 387.
[125] Johnson in Fite, *Mount Rushmore,* 34.

about the New Woman in politics. Historian Glenda Riley has emphasized that women have always been involved in societal discourse about the relationship between humans and their environment, as they have long worked, explored, and appreciated the lands that sustained them and their families.[126] Women developed their own relationships with nature both in contrast and in conjunction to men's, and in fact women inspired some of the most famous preservationists who get the most credit for preservation work in the early twentieth century. Jeanne Carr, a botanist married to one of John Muir's professors, mentored and inspired John Muir.[127] Although women had long written and engaged with nature, their roles were long overlooked. During the beginning of the twentieth century, female naturalists, like writer Beatrix Potter, had carved a public place for feminine thought in nature writing by highlighting how the destruction of nature was connected to the callous expansion of industrialized society.[128] By the time the original idea for the Mount Rushmore project reached the ears of the Black Hills Federation of Women's Clubs, these women had already realized a role for themselves in public discourse. They published a resolution against carving in the Needles in 1924, stating that: "As residents of the Black Hills, we feel strongly that such carvings would be an incongruous note in the cosmic grandeur of that scene and a sacrilege against the handiwork of nature."[129] Thus, the fight for the Mount Rushmore idea began.

Notable among these female activists was Cora B. Johnson, the editor of *The Hot Springs Star,* who was also a freelance writer, social worker, and progressive reformer. A force to be reckoned with, Johnson became an outspoken opponent to the Mount Rushmore project, gaining

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[126] Glenda Riley, *Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West* (University of Nebraska Press, 1999).
[127] Riley, *Women and Nature,* 15.
[128] Susan Mann, "Pioneers of U.S. Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice," *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 6.
[129] *The Weekly Pioneer Times,* 30 April 1925.

the attention and ire of the memorial's proponents.[130] Johnson's protest against the construction of Mount Rushmore invoked a dual sense of responsibility, where she and other Black Hills women adopted an understanding that it was their job as American citizens to protect the natural environment. At the same time, they acted as New Women who brought their mothers' roles as which emphasized "religion belonged to woman by divine right" into public protest.[131] Johnson thus utilized both traditional gender roles, which held women as the ideal arbiters of religiosity, and modern understandings of women's role in politics to take a stand against the carving of Mount Rushmore.

The conflict between the men behind Mount Rushmore and the women who opposed its construction extended beyond whether or not carving in the Black Hills was appealing. In fact, there was a conflict between the ways in which gender roles manifested in conservation and preservation initiatives. Some suggest that women experienced nature distinctly from men and that their relationships with nature were more often connected to its appreciation, which was in contrast to the resource-focused ideas men brought to nature.[132] The Rushmore boosters, especially Borglum and occasionally Norbeck, upheld and promoted Rooseveltian strenuous masculinity, which existed in deep contrast with the gentle religiosity of Cora Johnson and other women's nature activism.[133] Cora B. Johnson and other Black Hills women engaged with dialogue about preservation and conservation that was ongoing nationwide when they wrote to

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[130] Although there were other Black Hills women who participated in these protests, none were as prominent as Johnson because she had the unique position as editor of *The Hot Springs Star.* As a result, many of their protests were unpublished, although they did write to Doane Robinson, who responded to their criticisms in a way that reflected his conservative attitude towards women's involvement in politics.
[131] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly*18 no. 2 (Summer 1966): 152. Shaffer, *See America First,* 255.
[132] Riley, *Women and Nature,* 14.
[133] Boag, "Thinking Like Mount Rushmore," 50.

Doane Robinson to protest the carving idea. Johnson's writing appeared numerous times in her own newspaper as well as in reprints in other papers, even when the other papers did not agree with her position. Other journalists declared her a fabulous writer, and many papers reprinted her simple assertion that "God carved the Needles. Let them alone."[134] Her articulation that carving in the Black Hills would be religiously offensive echo existing gender roles which place women as less corrupt and the proper disseminator of religiosity in the family.

Johnson situated herself within the broader conversation about nature appreciation and preservation when she invoked the tradition of many nature writers about the beauty of Custer State Park. In an article in *The Hot Springs Star,* she described the scene near Sylvan Lake as a "fairy land" with "such ferns as you would pay a good round price for at the florist's."[135] Johnson used imagery that appealed to women, as women's writing about nature generally praised the aesthetic value of scenery, especially plant life, as extensions of women's domain.[136] Although not explicitly referenced, Cora Johnson joined female nature writers who came before her, like Susan Cooper, who wrote *Rural Hours*, published in 1850, which gave women a voice in nature that had otherwise been reserved for men. Cooper modeled nature advocacy that did not defy conservative family values, but Cooper's work had the effect of blending the boundaries between home and nature.[137] At the same time, male writers like John Muir emphasized the religiosity of nature excursions; the natural blend of women's domain and the religiosity of nature emerged as a way for women to engage in nature activism decades before Cora Johnson

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[134] *Hot Springs Star,* 27 November 1924. *Queen City Mail,* 17 December 1924.
[135] *Hot Springs Star,* 16 April 1925. Johnson does not miss the opportunity to critique the carving project in this article, and includes a section titled "Improving on Nature" in which she lambasts the idea that the beauty of Custer State Park could be enhanced by carving.
[136] Vera Norwood, *Made From This Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press 1993)*,* 26. Riley, *Women and Nature,* 11.
[137] Vera Norwood, *Made From This Earth,* 26.

protested the Rushmore idea.[138] Because women like Susan Cooper had carved a place for women in this work, Cora Johnson and these Black Hills women had space to blend activism and nature writing fifty years later without violating popular understandings of "women's domain."[139]

Johnson argued that the Black Hills were best left alone, and that any such carving in the Black Hills would be sacrilegious. Because of her position at *The Hot Springs Star,* she ultimately represented formidable opposition. Many residents were already not enthusiastic about the idea. Her organizational skills also created a united front of women who temporarily fought against the idea. Johnson not only published her objections about the Mount Rushmore idea, but she regularly reported on its successes or failures as the Rushmore boosters brought legislation to Congress for funding. Johnson also published the writings of other women who opposed the idea, such as Susie Wood, a reader of *The Hot Springs Star,* who argued that "the hand of man should never touch them in any attempt to add to their impressiveness. Man's art is but an attempt to reproduce the beauties created by God; when we have the original in all its grandeur, why should we add to it the feeble touch of man?"[140] She and others of the Black Hills Federation of Women's Clubs published a resolution across numerous papers in the Black Hills which called "every woman to do her utmost to discourage this movement."[141] In this way, the women who fought against the construction of Mount Rushmore show that they saw carving in these mountains as a religious issue, but also one that *women* had a responsibility to fight against. Furthermore, Johnson's use of *The Hot Springs Star* gave women the opportunity to be heard in a way they otherwise may have been ignored if the editor of the paper had been a man.

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[138] Sara Dant, *Losing Eden,* 108.
[139] Vera Norwood, *Made From This Earth,* 34.
[140] *Hot Springs Star,* 11 December 1924
[141] *The Weekly Pioneer Times,* 30 April 1925.

At the same time, Johnson did not only write to appeal to domestic women, as she also highlighted her self-image as a naturalist and explorer in her own right by describing excursions into the wilderness at Custer State Park that would be difficult for unseasoned hikers. Johnson suggested that the best hike in Custer State Park was a "picturesque route but one which had best be attempted only if you have a full afternoon before you and a compass in your pocket."[142] The other trails that Johnson recommended in this article were far less rigorous, but would provide an experience comparatively less sublime. During the 1920s, women took expanded roles in the public and began to shed many of the traditional ideas about women's capacity for hard work and their relationship to nature. Famous female travel writers like Emily Post, Winifred Hawkridge Dixon, and Letitia Stockett published their experiences traveling the American West as testaments to the self-sufficiency, grit, and individuality that women developed on their own journeys.[143] Although not as well-known, Johnson wrote within a tradition which sought "to express the gendered possibilities of the tourist landscape," in which women could learn of their own capabilities and find their own self-fulfillment.[144] These gendered possibilities in some ways echoed the emphasis on strenuous living for men's self-actualization, and revealed to women that these opportunities existed for them too.[145] Because of the value of struggle and the profound benefits associated with nature appreciation, Johnson and other nature writers argued that these strenuous hikes were well worth the physical demands, if not even enhanced by them. The combination of feminine strenuous living with religious experiences within nature situated Cora Johnson with some of the most radical preservationist and tourist voices, which advocated for nature remaining untouched and suggested that nature excursions had religious meaning.

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[142] *Hot Springs Star,* 16 April 1925
[143] Shaffer, *See America First,* 256.
[144] Shaffer, *See America First,* 258.
[145] Shaffer, *See America First,* 259.

As can be expected for the time, Johnson encountered opposition and derision for her preservationist activism as a woman. Despite her appeal to masculine nature writing traditions in addition to feminine nature writing traditions, Johnson could not escape gendered feedback about her activism. Although by this point, women had claimed the right to vote, suffrage in the state of South Dakota and the nation had been a prolonged fight, involving several territorial legislative attempts and six referenda for voting rights, which meant that there were still many who opposed women in politics.[146] Doane Robinson responded to her original protest in the *Hot Springs Star,* criticizing her statement that the Needles should remain unaltered:

> If it was discovered that the granite about Harney Peak assayed five dollars to the ton in gold, the editor of the Hot Springs Star would simply break his neck to be the first one to file his mining claim in the heart of the Needles, and he would convert Harney Peak into a hole in the ground just as fast as men and machinery could do it.[147]

The *Queen City Mail* in Spearfish noted with humor that "Perhaps Mr. Robinson failed to take into consideration the fact that the talented editor of the Star is a lady. Otherwise, he might have modified his statement somewhat."[148] Here, Robinson makes a gendered assumption that men would be likely to destroy anything in the name of commerce, an assertion he does not repeat once he learns that Johnson was a woman. In addition to writing to local papers, Robinson directly wrote to the Johnson household, addressing a letter meant for the editor of the *Hot Springs Star* to her husband. She responded, asserting her position as editor and reasserting her position, receiving a reply from Robinson that was less than fifty words which stated that he would not "argue with a lady" and accused her of refusing "the most majestic monument in the

[146] Molly P. Rozum and Lori Ann Lahlum, "We Will Never Halt Till The Prize is Won," in *Equality at the Ballot Box: Votes for Women on the Northern Great Plains,* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2019), 16.
[147] *Queen City Mail,* 17 December 1924.
[148] *Queen City Mail,* 17 December 1924.

world."[149] As a result, although Johnson's activism did not necessarily transgress respectability, she and other women who wrote to Robinson in protest of the idea were, characteristically of the time, not taken seriously as thinkers in their own right by the men who they opposed.

It is, however, clear that the opposition had a great effect on Robinson and the project's shape overall. Women held significant power in the realm of public opinion on the local level despite lacking public office, and thus such united and outspoken criticism of the Rushmore idea in its early stages constituted a real threat to its popularity.[150] The plans to carve Western heroes into the Needles changed into plans to carve presidents into a less popular mountain, Rushmore, occurred because of public backlash, although officially because of differences between the grain of the granite in the Needles and Rushmore.[151] Likely frustrated and anxious about the possibility that the unpopularity of carving the Needles could stop the project, Robinson attempted to argue in the newspaper that "No one had any thought of touching the Needles at all."[152] However, he had not only proposed carving in the Needles to Norbeck, the Black and Yellow Trade Association, the Rapid City Commercial Club, and multiple potential sculptors, but also had Borglum test the granite for carving.[153] As a result, it is clear that Robinson had definitely had thoughts about touching the Needles.

The new location, at a less unique mountain in the Black Hills, satisfied many because residents decided that they had plenty of mountains, and "only one peak out of dozens is

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[149] Doane Robinson to Cora Johnson, 7 December 1924, DRP.
[150] Riley, *Women and Nature,* 7.
[151] Norbeck took a moderate stance regarding Johnson, attributing her protest to "misunderstanding, growing- I think- out of a little indefiniteness in the early news. . . to carve the Needles along the great highway" which he agreed was a poor choice. Peter Norbeck to Doane Robinson, 13 December 1924, PNP.
[152] *Lead Daily Call,* 10 December 1924.
[153] Doane Robinson to Peter Norbeck, 7 February 1924, PNP. Doane Robinson to Peter Norbeck, 28 September 1924, PNP.

included in the sculpture plans."[154] The shift in opinion provides an interesting glance into how Black Hills residents related to the mountains; Rushmore was far from existing tourist roads and sights and thus had the capacity to be transformed into "the most sublime piece of art ever conceived by a man" without altering a part of the landscape that people had come to think was integral to the experience of the Black Hills.[155] Although perhaps the change in venue satisfied other residents of the region, Johnson maintained that "It would strike a false note, wherever it be put and however well it might be executed."[156] Johnson represented a more extreme perspective in the debate about whether or not to carve, as her opinion against carving remained regardless of the changes made to Mount Rushmore's plan. Her focus switched from the religious affront of carving in the Needles to the myriad of failings of Borglum himself.[157] Deeply critical of "the Borglum complex," Johnson questioned Borglum's temperament, allegiance, and age, wondering if he "might go so far as to ruin our Needles by capping the most prominent with a famous head, then leaving it without bodily support in case he should not have his own way in all things."[158] In fact, Cora Johnson's activism on the subject did not stop until she and her husband moved away from the Black Hills by 1927.

Mount Rushmore ultimately was a canvas for its creators to enact their ideas about the future of the South Dakota economy, tourism, nature, gender, and nationalism in one single

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[154] *Argus-Leader,* 9 June 1928.
[155] *Queen City Mail,* 17 December 1924.
[156] *Hot Springs Star,* 11 December 1924. Interestingly, in the December 25th edition, Johnson does not criticize Borglum's carving at Stone Mountain in Georgia because "the bas-relief commemorating the Confederacy is upon a face of stone which is the only outstanding mass of uplift in the scene about it, the surroundings being the rather monotonous land that characterizes that part of the South. In consequence, It provides interest where none would exist without it." She concludes that "it is artistically ethical."
[157] Johnson would reiterate her belief that carving was religiously offensive often, but this qualm was not always the focus of each of her writings.
[158] *Hot Springs Star,* 25 March 1925. *The Daily Deadwood Pioneer-Times*, 14 March 1925.

memorial. Mount Rushmore contributed to Romantic perspectives about American identity as a work of art intended to rival the work of ancients to cultivate American pride in their artistic achievement. Borglum, Norbeck, and Robinson tied this pride to nature, which appealed to conceptions from thinkers like Washington Irving who promoted the natural beauty of the United States as the rival to the ruins of past civilizations in Europe. Borglum also used the opportunity to privilege the perspectives of Euro-Americans to assert triumphant narratives about Manifest Destiny and intended that there be no room left for dissent or recognition of Indigenous resistance. The Rushmore boosters made their ideas about the patriotic potential of transcontinental automobile travel explicit at Mount Rushmore and synthesized it with the widespread belief in nature's importance to American national identity. They provided the ultimate democratic experience by paving scenic roads and highways so that tourists could appreciate a memorial to American achievement on their own terms in nature. The Mount Rushmore project appealed to people on both sides of the conservation and preservation debates because it synthesized many needs and ideas about how these ideas could appear in South Dakota. Thanks to Norbeck and Robinson's thoughts about the usefulness of nature, Mount Rushmore balanced conservation ideas with commerce, as it commercialized the landscape as a resource whose value ultimately exceeded the value of raw materials that could have been extracted from the region. Mount Rushmore simultaneously answered questions about the commodification of the landscape and about how alterations to the landscape could invoke and advance preservationist traditions associated with national pride and nature appreciation.

## Conclusion: Destinations in Their Own Right

Although the national and state park sites of the Black Hills are not as famous as other parks and are not considered the "crown jewels" of the national park system, the history of their establishment provides new insight into the ways that conservation and preservation ideology manifested in less famous parks across the country.[1] Scholars have not analyzed the Black Hills as a locus for national park ideology, instead focusing on individual Black Hills parks on occasion. However, the Black Hills as a region demonstrated commitment to enacting ideas of conservation and preservation over several decades at the beginning of the twentieth century, and this commitment has been the focus of this study. Local leaders and entrepreneurs implemented the ideas which they saw on the national level in a regional setting at the parks of the Black Hills that emphasized the growth of commerce and settler society's lands. The parks of the Black Hills reveal how questions about conservation and preservation were answered in regional settings at individual parks, often before the National Park Service or other national groups reached a consensus. Many of the major supporters of park ideas, like Peter Norbeck and Doane Robinson, adapted the comparatively more radical ideas of elites so that these local initiatives included people less enthusiastic about the idea of nature preservation. At the same time, the parks of the Black Hills synthesized ideas about the intangible value of natural features, potential profit from natural resources, automobile tourism, and the relationship between national identity and monumental features of the land.

The National Park Service's dual mission of protecting the wilderness in its most "natural" state and providing Americans with the opportunity to experience nature emerged from

[1] Kathy Mason, *Natural Museums: US National Parks 1872-1916* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press 2004), 69.

debates that occurred nationwide, especially in the Black Hills.[2] Politicians and philosophers alike debated what of the American environment was worth preserving for future generations and what ought to be used for additional settlements and commercial development. Debates about the future of national identity, colonization, tourism, and wilderness converged at the national parks to create what is now known as "America's best idea" as Americans sought to define the future of their relationship with nature near the turn of the nineteenth century.[3] Although beloved today by settler society for the associated meanings of democracy, equality, and morality, these meanings were the result of decades of debate about the purpose of national parks. The parks of the Black Hills actualized these ideas by relying heavily on automobile travel, said to be the most democratic form of travel, and by providing both explicit and implicit encounters with the natural and the artistic to inspire patriotic feelings in tourists as they journeyed across the country.

Although largely among people who shared a goal of preserving the wilderness in some fashion, the debates between conservationists and preservationists created a spectrum of ideas about how nature could be used to benefit society through industry, tourism, and the cultivation of national identity.[4] The people of the Black Hills who contributed to the establishment of these wilderness parks designed the features they protected in response to their ideas about the value of nature and the way society overall related to the wild. While perhaps John Stabler at Wind Cave emphasized the financial benefits of cave preservation, Alvin McDonald saw recreational opportunities and natural beauty as important reasons to protect the feature. Together, the McDonald and Stabler families had a wide range of perspectives about nature, but carved their

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[2] Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience 5th Ed.* (Lanham, MD: The Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group 2022) 57; Mason, *Natural Museums,* 69.
[3] Runte, *National Parks,* xiii.
[4] Sara Dant, *Losing Eden: An Environmental History of the American West,* 108.

perspectives into the physical possibilities for the future by altering the cave to emphasize what they thought were the most beautiful features.[5] Further, people valued different features, and could thus move across the spectrum based on the features they protected and the other perspectives they considered. Although Norbeck resented log cutting at Custer State Park because of its effects on the scenery, Norbeck propelled the Mount Rushmore project forward, which involved the destruction of a mountain.[6] Study of the Black Hills as a locus of preservation debates reveals how these ideologies appeared unevenly in the region and broader nation, as individuals changed their approaches over time or compromised with competing interests. At the same time, the Black Hills' parks emphasize the complex and constantly changing relationship between commerce, national identity, and nature preservation, as the Wind Cave example affirms the primacy of commerce while the Custer State Park example acts as an exception, as Norbeck removed otherwise productive lands from private hands for the park.

America's sense of the West indicated that it was more wild, and simultaneously more American than much of the rest of the country because of the acceptance of Turnerian ideas suggesting that the wilderness defined America for much of its history.[7] As a result, ecotourism became a way for Americans to rediscover what it meant to be American and to become in tune with their countrymen. The founders of Black Hills parks capitalized on these ideas as they structured the attractions they established and provided their perspective implicitly and explicitly through the decisions they made. Although the McDonalds and Stablers did not have the same understanding of statewide and nationwide trends in tourism that South Dakota politicians like

[5] Runte, *National Parks,* 125.
[6] Gilbert Fite, *Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2005), 144.
[7] Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity 1880-1940* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution 2001), 17.

Peter Norbeck certainly did, they still evaluated the trends perceptible at the local level that emerged out of these larger scale movements. Furthermore, the boosters of tourism in the Black Hills sought to provide potential tourists with the experiences they expected because of these trends, leading them to create a zoo to guarantee wildlife encounters and a large national memorial to guarantee patriotic reflection. Tourism in the Black Hills grew out of careful planning, even though the founders' plans did not rely on long stays in the region, or that the region would be the primary destination on the way to other parks.

National parks and tourism grew together because of the growing popularity of ecotourism, both for romantic ideas about the benefits associated with being in the wilderness and for the relative affordability of automobile travel and camping.[8] The Black Hills emerged as a tourist destination at the same time that automobile travel and the Great American Road Trip became the standard for tourism going forward, but also had roots in the early years of railroad-based resort travel.[9] Automobile travel shaped these Black Hills parks, which developed under the impression that automobile travel would be the way of the future. Because of the emphasis on travel in cars, the state of South Dakota invested heavily in highways that spanned the state and facilitated fast, easy travel to incentivize motorists to choose the South Dakota route over neighboring states, like Nebraska. Those who sponsored the development of this state tourism industry, namely Peter Norbeck and Doane Robinson, thus permanently altered the way the state would connect with itself and other nearby states during these preservation projects.

At the same time that these parks ascribed to the idea that national parks and wilderness travel could stimulate patriotism and national pride in visitors, these parks also contributed to the erasure of Indigenous history and relationships with nature. Although Mount Rushmore is the

[8] Shaffer, *See America First,* 137.
[9] Shaffer, *See America First,* 101.

most obvious and explicit example of the parks that propelled and supported settler colonial narratives, so too did Custer State Park, which sought to recreate the environment that Lakotas called home without their presence, and Wind Cave, which denied the sacredness of Lakotas' origin site in order to make a tourist site for White Americans. Other historians, namely Mark David Spence, have investigated how national parks contributed to settler colonialism, and this thesis expands the ways that national parks and wilderness preservation became part of this process. Spence highlights the importance of crown jewel parks in which the US Government and Army forced Indigenous people off their homelands to make national parks out of the sites, but the grand majority of parks became part of the national park system years after the Indigenous peoples who lived there had been forced onto reservations.[10] The Black Hills show that understandings of the relationship between preservation efforts and colonization ought to be taken further, as the Lakota continued to fight to reclaim their ancestral lands but had already lived on reservations for some years before any of these parks were established. The passage of time in between Indigenous removal and park establishment does not remove parks' contributions to settler colonialism, and thus study of the Black Hills in this context reveals that many other parks also contributed to the erasure of Native history, regardless of the time passed.[11] Because of the conceptions of wilderness that informed the establishment of state and national parks, these preservation initiatives contribute to the erasure of Indigenous claims to the land by suggesting that there was uninhabited wilderness lands that could be used to benefit

[10] Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11, 109.
[11] Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness,* 109. Although this thesis does investigate how each park contributed to settler colonialism, there is more work to be done on the topic regarding both national parks and the Black Hills. This thesis notably does not investigate how Lakotas perceived the establishment of these national parks in sufficient detail, which needs additional study.

settler society's progress through preservation.[12] Establishing parks as preservation areas asserts another layer of control over the land, and settlers renamed the land to celebrate the transfer of control from Indigenous peoples to settlers.[13] Every park in the United States is the homelands of Indigenous peoples, and thus each of them has a history of dispossession that ought to be investigated as an integral part of each park's identity and the story it shares.

The Black Hills parks developed alongside the National Park Service itself, and the original contributors to these parks implemented both ideas that failed to become part of the larger system and ideas that modeled preservation for future park endeavors. Much of the historiography of NPS ideology emphasizes the ideas that became standard in the parks that are most popular today, but this approach alone cannot fully describe the meanings and ideas that created the system that remains today. Studying the ways that these ideas blended with local attitudes towards nature in many of the less popular parks reveals the true impact of the ideas of elites, but also highlights where unexpected contributors participated in these otherwise elite conversations in ways that altered national park preservation. Perhaps from a national perspective, after nationwide controversies like at Hetch Hetchy, debates answered questions about the primacy of scenery or natural resources. On a local level, however, the final decision could still look different, as Norbeck maintained his commitment to scenery, suggesting instead that the scenic quality of land could be a natural resource that takes priority over potential mining or farming. The expansion of study from crown jewel parks and elite thinkers to regional landmarks and local innovators reveals the depth of relationships like the cultivation of national identity and tourism, ideas of wilderness and colonization, and the value of tangible natural

[12] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 35, 40 ; Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (December 2006), 338.
[13] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism,* 41.

resources and intangible societal benefits in establishing public parks. Although the founders of many parks in the Black Hills did not even envision these places as the final destination for the tourists who visited them, the Black Hills became a destination where competing ideas about commerce, tourism, national identity, and colonization manifested in public wilderness preservation initiatives.

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