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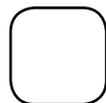
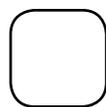
A Note from the Editor

This issue of the *Journal* is a special issue focused on diversity. There are many ways of defining diversity, of considering it in our programming and planning, and of attempting to address it in our overall approach to interpretation. We typically think of diversity in terms of ethnicity, but we also need to think about interpretation and “diversity” in terms of age, gender, political persuasion, culture, accessibility, and programming preferences, to name just a few. Being narrow in definition results in being narrow in perspective. This special issue of the *Journal* introduces three articles that can help us begin the conversation and expand our collective understanding.

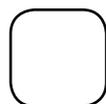
Two of the articles present research conducted in other countries (Sweden and China). Being exposed to research from other countries dealing with the same issues we are facing in the United States can be one way of expanding the conversation and our collective understanding of “diversity.” A minority in one place represents the majority in another, and learning from what other places are doing, how they are doing it, and the impacts that result from it can only inform our collective conversation on diversity.

The final piece in this issue serves as a summative look at the work in diversity over the years in the United States. It will be a great tool and reference sure to have shelf life for years to come. It is such a special piece and the driving influence of this special issue that I have asked a guest to write an introduction for it.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and I look forward to the future developments of our field through your quality submissions to *JIR*.



SPECIAL ISSUE:
DIVERSITY



Introduction

Effectively Connecting with Communities Across Cultures: There's No App for That!

Nina S. Roberts, Ph.D., Professor

San Francisco State University

A dynamic educator and well-known, vibrant speaker, Nina is a professor in the department of Recreation, Parks, & Tourism at San Francisco State University. She is a Fulbright Scholar and experiential educator whose social science research in cultural diversity and parks has been vital to public land managers and community partners. Nina is also director of the Pacific Leadership Institute, an outdoor adventure program in partnership with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Her perspectives on diversity, national parks, and use/non-use of public lands have been widely shared through interviews with CNN.com, Boston Globe, L.A. Times, NBC News Bay Area, New America Media, The New York Times, and Public Radio International. She is featured in the landmark book Black and Brown Faces in America's Wild Places, and is well published including numerous journal articles and book chapters about constraints to park use, social and environmental justice, women and girls outdoors, and youth development. Her work provides leaders, park managers and partners with ideas and resources needed to respond more effectively to changing demographics and social trends across the U.S.

“Why do so few minorities visit some parks, public lands, or even wilderness?” is a question that has been asked for decades. Similarly, “Why aren’t there more interpretive rangers from ethnically diverse backgrounds?” Empirical research ranging from interpretation and environmental studies, to outdoor education and adventure recreation, describe experiences of ethnic minorities since the early 1960s and, still today, there is much more to explore. From civil rights to civil disobedience, where have we been? And, from New Urbanism to the New Jim Crow (see Alexander, 2015), where are we going? Ultimately, how do we effectively disseminate information reflecting greater progress, who are we listening to, and what do we do with the information once we get it? People who cannot interpret the reality of racism may be deemed unreliable, while those who want to be part of a larger conversation continue to be invisible. This needs a remedy because our work is also about whose voices matter. This is a time for asking the right questions (or new ones), leading to the right answers, and implementing solid change. Therefore, we need a new map to go on, based on both social and biological dynamics.

Our nation’s natural and cultural resources receive millions of visitors annually yet cultural diversity is lacking among them. Hence, as shown in this excellent annotated

bibliography by James Pease, some people receive a label of underserved, underrepresented, or nontraditional. This doesn't mean they're not "out there" or don't care. The fact demographics are "changing" across the U.S. and around the globe is a reality (e.g., see prb.org; census.gov). Many embrace this truth; others resist and deny it to avoid difficult yet vital decisions. To skeptics, I appreciate your cynicism or uncertainty; we can still be allies if there's a willingness to meet halfway. Challenges abound when distance is maintained or structural barriers create a lack of transparency. Efforts toward a common goal need to show the measures, outcomes, and impacts; with a mutual vision and core value of seeking positive change, anything is possible. From the practical standpoint, we must build awareness as a moral imperative and seek the compelling evidence needed to change policy. No one can go it alone and cooperation proves vital.

Indisputably there is also great work being done; however, I still often hear agencies and organizations occasionally discussing how the "system" is broken. What comprises a system and who sets the policies? People do. Hence, engaging future stakeholders in the promotion of a diverse world is going to be central in the next decade in ways that have duality and are not unilateral. What's missing from the literature is what dedicated interpreters and other park employees are supporting or not supporting within the organization or the field (e.g., programs, activities, initiatives). It's not about "outreach"; it's about building and restoring relationships; only this—and renewed hope—can bring about the balance of nature. From rangers and education specialists to supervisors and managers, there are many positive directions that have received well-deserved kudos. Conversely, there are many "naysayers" who will do all they can to impede progress. Both scenarios are real; I invite everyone to ask themselves if they're willing to meet the status quo head on, or would prefer a complacency and avoidance mode.

Engaging underrepresented communities is as difficult and necessary as protecting our watersheds, restoring habitat, and managing wildlife. The application of the social sciences has a crucial role here. When we recognize we must engage by developing relationships and garnering trust, for instance, or "bring the parks to the people," as many agencies strive to do, then a healthier ecosystem will truly serve us all. Nature knows no boundaries of interpretation; so, why are some public lands sporadically perceived as belonging to a privileged few? How can this be changed? Engagement and dialogue has always been the cornerstone of progress. Social sciences must prevail, but the current methods beg for a change.

Various seminal studies, as shown in the work by Dr. Pease featured in this special issue, have provided tried and true examples leading to such change. Subsequently, rightful attention and visibility is presented here to both convey the historical and persistent constraints and help dispel myths that still exist. On the other hand, it's been tough to get some of these important study results and recommendations into the hands of practitioners to help bridge the gap between research and practice. This work produced by Dr. Pease should encourage interpreters and park managers, for example, to review the findings and suggestions and engage in valuable discourse towards greater action. Similarly, while pioneering initiatives have achieved some notable success, many ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in varied forms of outdoor recreation or participation in various interpretive events across the country. Studies consistently show people of color still at the lowest end of the visitation spectrum; this has generated new inquiries into barriers and perceptions as well as use patterns/preferences for visiting and supporting natural, cultural, and historic sites. This doesn't mean there is no relationship to these places; it simply denotes lack of agency understanding or institutional culture of inclusion.

How these perceptions or use patterns, for instance, may be changing also relates to ethnic minority growth, many of whom will eventually be a more visible part of the public lands system from urban open space to wilderness areas. It is clear minorities are stepping out into the light and growing in numbers and voice until they become the most heard. According to the U.S. Census, this nation will be “majority minority” by 2042, so a cultural transformation is inevitable. How this change will impact our programs, policies, personnel, and management practices relating to interpretation and resource education remains to be seen. Underserved audiences must be embraced yet institutional challenges and personal biases persist coast-to-coast.

Subsequently, connecting people with parks and public lands through interpretation, education, and outdoor recreation provides an open door that is all too often closed. Yet, that assumes people are not already connected in their own way. That is, nature inspires people for very different reasons that are often unknown or misunderstood. Nature, with all its intricacies, does not know the difference between cultures; people are stewards of their own experience. How can agency managers continue to learn from the very communities they are trying to serve? And, noted by the Pew Research Center for Social Trends, are new patterns of migration being accepted? If so how, if not why not? One-in-five (46 million) migrants now live in the U.S., doubling since 1990 (Connor, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). Are you ready?

Research has explored concepts from perceived discrimination and socioeconomic indicators to lack of transportation, limited knowledge, and more. As reflected in this annotated literature review by Dr. Pease, the collection of studies has grown, the research is becoming more rigorous, and this topic is receiving much-deserved and growing attention among interpreters, managers, outdoor educators, and related. This does not mean people of color do not value parks and protected areas; hence, there may be a need for greater comprehension of minority experiences. Engaging communities can be challenging, yet efforts are absolutely essential and interrelated, for history has stories we must not forget or ignore. Visitors are one end of the equation, the workforce is the other; the current state of diversity in leadership in this field is not where it needs to be.

Based on data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 47 percent of people with bachelor's degrees in the workforce are women. Furthermore, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders had the highest labor force participation rates (71.4 percent) among the race and ethnicity groups, while American Indians and Alaska Natives and Blacks had the lowest participation rates (59.3 percent and 61.5 percent, respectively). The participation rates for Hispanics, Whites, and Asians, were 66.4 percent, 64.0 percent, and 63.9 percent, respectively (BLS, 2013). An often invisible part of the population, still, is that participation rates for people of two or more races was 65.3 percent. Furthermore, from an education standpoint, the freshman class for four-year schools is 38 percent non-white, and for two-year schools, 47 percent non-white. Is the leadership of your agency substantially less racially diverse than the workforce of the United States? If yes, and especially in the near future, what does “working together” mean with numbers like this? Depends who you are.

“Unconscious bias, discrimination, and insular recruiting practices were found to be the three major challenges to hiring, retaining, and promoting diverse talent in the mainstream organizations. Organizations either do not recognize or have been unwilling to act on initiatives that will make them more welcoming to people of color. They have also shown relatively little interest in partnering with and funding organizations that represent people of color...” (Taylor, 2015)

Consequently, future research on connecting with underserved communities should include how the workforce contributes to systemic culture shifts within the organization. Therefore, it is plausible that underrepresentation also erodes engagement, efficiency, and innovation of everyone not in the majority. Not doing the extra work to be more representative leads to a downward spiral in a country where white people will soon be less than 50 percent of the population. Hence, all the special things about park visitors—their race, gender, age, experience or even immigrant status—contribute to the way people look at approaching situations, evaluating solutions, and solving problems. The more differences agencies cultivate the more support they will receive. The more culturally diverse agency staff becomes, the greater the success achieved. Innovation comes with new perspectives; this demands bringing together people with different backgrounds, fresh thinking, and unique abilities. In the world of parks, public lands, and protected areas, generally, it's not just about different use patterns or visitor needs, or even completely about respecting difference; it's about making a difference.

Relevance, diversity, and inclusion may be some of the toughest aspects of interpretation today. Those who do this work comprehend the importance to furthering their agency mission and, frankly, survival. Still, some others believe relevance and diversity are merely code words for time-wasting political hotspots and blowing taxpayer money. Research shows that if we fail to make parks and public lands relevant to a changing America, what's at stake is the continued political and financial support of these extraordinary places. More scholarly articles surface and a surge of media reports on this topic appear regularly. Nonetheless, research is needed to explore the intersection of agency goals, structural constraints, and the visitor experience using a variety of methodological approaches deemed most appropriate for communities of interest. Ultimately, research should continue seeking new tools and processes needed to invest in and make real progress. Recognizing the consequences of inaction, our hard work must endure.

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