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Creating Safe and Welcoming Spaces on Public Lands: An Anti- Oppression Toolkit for Public Lands Interpreters

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**Creating Safe and Welcoming Spaces on Public Lands: An Anti-Oppression Toolkit
for Public Lands Interpreters**

by

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Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of
Arts in Education: Environmental Studies and Natural Sciences.

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

May 2023

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DEDICATION

To my mother for a lifetime of love, support, and encouragement. Your dedication and hard work raising me is the reason I am in a position to submit a capstone and earn a Master's degree.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank you so much to Jannette Chien who lent her expertise and time to this capstone and to Rowzat Shiphandler who first inspired me to pursue my Master's Degree and an education in anti-oppression action.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

Public lands in the United States have long provided visitors an opportunity to recreate and experience nature – provided you are a middle-class or wealthier, white American (Gosalvez, 2020). Public lands were created with the exclusion of people of color, disabled people, and members of other oppressed groups in mind (American Trails, 2020; Gosalvez, 2020; Jackson & Mills, 2020; Mills, 2022; Murphy, 2023). The legacy of forced removal of indigenous people from their ancestral homelands (Murphy, 2023; Treuer, 2021), whites-only recreation areas (American Trails, 2020; Mills, 2020; Murphy, 2023; Repanshek, 2019; United States Forest Service (USFS), n.d.), explicit threats of violence to Black Americans (Booker, 2021; Ebbs & Dwyer, 2022; Murphy, 2023; Pires, 2018; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 2022; Schwartz, 2020), resistance to creating accessible outdoor recreation spaces (Charitan, 2019; O'Brien, 2021), and other intentional or unintentional barriers to access still impact modern visitation and employment on public lands (Ali, 2016; Ebbs & Dwyer, 2020; U.S. Department of the Interior (U.S. DOI), 2021c; Wagner 2022). This exclusion led to a systemic disparity in visitation and access to public lands that continues to this day.

Interpreters, professionals that specialize in culture, history, and natural resources, are specially trained communicators who facilitate connections between visitors and

resources (National Association of Interpreters (NAI), n.d.; NAI, 2023). Employed on many public lands, interpreters' unique skills in research, synthesizing complex information into plain language, facilitating connections, and overcoming barriers to create opportunities for recreation and education make them a logical professional class to address the legacy and modern impacts of historical exclusion. Working alongside members of historically excluded communities, interpreters have the skills to promote and establish safe and welcoming spaces for community members on public lands.

Before interpreters can begin reaching out to historically excluded communities, they need to understand the complex historical and modern systemic oppression faced by these communities. This capstone project seeks to answer the question: *How can public lands interpreters educate themselves on the historical and modern challenges unique to members of historically excluded communities in order to better establish safe and welcoming spaces on public lands?*

Personal Background: Demons in the Woods

Growing up I was inundated with racist (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Sonnett, et. al, 2015), misogynist (Thornham, 2007), and ableist (Ocran, 2019) messages from my peers, the education system, and the media. As a white, cis-gender girl growing up in the American culture of the 1990's and 2000's, I was oblivious to my whiteness – and to the systemic racism that favored it. Undiagnosed and an expert in masking symptoms of my own invisible disabilities at a young age, I benefited from the assumption of being non-disabled. Without realizing it, the deeply imbedded racism, ableism, and misogyny of the

American cultural, governmental, and other systems implanted racist, ableist, and sexist constructs into my understanding of the world – constructs that led me to believe and act in ways that were racist, ableist, and sexist (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Ocran, 2019; Sonnett, et. al, 2015; Thornham, 2007).

In the 2010's a school from a majority Black neighborhood in Minneapolis came and visited a camp I was working at as an interpreter. A student (personal communication, 2015) about 6 years old was walking beside me and a coworker to the main meeting hall when he asked me, nervously, if there were any demons in the surrounding woods. I wasn't sure how to answer his question but I assured the child there were no demons in the woods, but that didn't mean that the woods couldn't have scary things in them (Student, personal communication, 2015). The student (personal communication, 2015) and I had a short talk about what scary things could be in the woods and how he should stay with a grown up, but that the woods were just a place like any other.

That interaction may not have had a lasting impact on that young-man, but as an interpreter it awakened me to something I had thought little about – the demons that a young, Black child may fear in the woods. As shorthand for something or someone that may bring harm to a Black child, demons could be wild animals, strange adults, or the threat of racial violence (Booker, 2021; Ebbs & Dwyer, 2022; Murphy, 2023; Pires, 2018; NAACP, 2022; Schwartz, 2020). It was years of interactions with members of historically excluded communities, my experiences as a disabled person, and national

social unrest that pushed me to seek out anti-oppression education. Learning about systemic oppression inspired me to learn how to incorporate anti-oppression action in my career as a public lands interpreter and in my personal life. I am indebted to the members of historically excluded communities who shared their experiences under systemic oppression.

Summary

Inclusion of historically excluded communities on public lands is a complex issue. To engage with historically excluded communities on public lands, professionals need education on historical and modern systemic oppression. Without this, outreach efforts are hindered. Interpreters are highly skilled in communication and facilitating connections between resources and visitors. With education on historical exclusion, systemic oppression, and principles of anti-oppression education and action, interpreters can have a significant impact on shifting the culture around outdoor recreation on public lands. With connections to local communities, community leaders, and organizations serving those communities, interpreters can learn about barriers and needs and participate in creation of safe, welcoming places for members of historically excluded communities.

This project aims to answer the question, *how can public lands interpreters educate themselves on the historical and modern challenges unique to members of historically excluded communities in order to better establish safe and welcoming spaces on public lands?*

In Chapter Two, I will provide a basis for why anti-oppression work is necessary on public lands through a review of literature on the creation of public lands and the exclusion inherent in their creation specifically through the lens of racism and ableism, modern visitation trends, and why access to public lands is important. Next, I will provide background on identity and systemic oppression to demonstrate the rationale for the anti-oppression toolkit and why interpreters on public lands need specialized education and understanding of the unique challenges faced by historically excluded communities. Lastly, I will provide background on past and current efforts to reach out to historically excluded communities and how interpreters can be an important part of this work. In Chapter Three I will provide an overview of the anti-oppression toolkit that accompanies this capstone including the intended audience and an overview of the toolkit. In Chapter Four I will reflect on what I learned through this process, recommendations for future research, implications and limitations of this capstone project, and my continued dedication to the subject.

This capstone will also include a toolkit for public lands interpreters. The toolkit connects users to anti-oppression education and action, opportunities for growth and training, and contains activities, worksheets, and resources to pursue educational opportunities. The toolkit is designed as a starting point to connect interpreters to the history, theory, and basics of anti-oppression education and work. This introduction is a step toward awareness and creating truly safe and welcoming spaces for all on American public lands.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter Two provides rationale for the creation of an anti-oppression toolkit for public lands interpreters to successfully create safe and welcoming places for historically excluded communities through examining public lands history, systemic oppression, and current efforts at increasing diversity. First, an examination of the creation of public lands, historical exclusion due to racism and ableism, modern visitation trends, background on why access to public lands is important, and financial motives to create safe and welcoming spaces for historically excluded communities will establish a background for why these anti-oppression inclusion efforts are necessary. Next, a review of literature related to identity and systemic oppression will explore racism, ableism, dominate culture, and how systemic oppression impacts all facets of people's lives – an impact that bleeds over on to public lands. Lastly, a look at past and current efforts to reach out to historically excluded communities and how interpreters can help bridge the gap between public lands and historically excluded communities will provide further rationale for the creation of the anti-oppression toolkit.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two seeks to provide necessary background to answer the question: *how can public lands interpreters educate themselves on the historical and modern challenges unique to members of historically excluded communities in order to better establish safe and welcoming spaces on public lands?*

Creation of Public Lands: A History of Exclusion

The National Parks Service (NPS) was created to “care for special places saved by the American People so that all may experience our heritage” (U.S. Department of the Interior (U.S. DOI) (2022)). While *our heritage* isn’t defined, there is some reason to speculate that this heritage did not include historically excluded communities (Gosalvez, 2020; Jackson & Mills, 2020; Klein, 2020b). Public lands were designed to protect the image of American Nationalism and to promote an *American Identity* – an identity centered on young, white, cis-gendered men (Gosalvez, 2020). As Gosalvez (2020) and Jackson and Mills (2020) report, the exclusion of people of color was inherent in their creation (Asmelash, 2021; Mtshali, 2021; Murphy, 2023; Repanshek, 2019; U.S. Forest Service (USFS), n.d.). Lack of requirements and resistances to creating accommodations for disabled persons (Charitan, 2019; Meldon, 2017; O’Brien, 2021; NPS, 2022) coupled with societal and cultural attitudes toward the disabled (Marini et al., 2011; Reynolds, 2020; The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2023) also excluded them from visiting public lands.

In order to create public lands, indigenous people were forcibly removed from their ancestral homelands by a colonial government that believed they were incapable of conservation (Klein, 2020b; Murphy, 2023; Treuer, 2021). Often celebrated in the conservation movement, John Muir (Sierra Club, n.d.), advocated for the removal of the indigenous people of Yosemite Valley calling the tribal members “lazy,” “deadly,” and “dirty” while the creation of Yellowstone National Park was predicated on the forced

removal of the indigenous Shoshone people, 300 of which died in during these evictions in a single day (Bullinger, 2018; Yonk, 2016). Muir is an often-cited figure in conservation and pivotal in creation of the Sierra Club, an environmental organization that today is reckoning with a racist past (Taylor, 2022). Muir has his own designated day, April 21st, in the state of California (Sierra Club, n.d) and his image has been used on multiple United States Postal Service official stamps including one in 1964 (Smithsonian National Postal Museum (SNPM), n.d.b) and one in 1998 (SNPM, n.d.a).

Often considered to be one of the nation's foremost conservationists, Theodore Roosevelt, wrote of Black Americans in 1906 that "As a race and in the mass they are altogether inferior to the whites," and that indigenous people were unprincipled, immoral people saying that "The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian" (Klein, 2020a; Knight & Stegemann, E., n.d.). Roosevelt supported the removal of indigenous peoples from 86 million acres of tribal land to be managed by the USFS and policies requiring indigenous people to assimilate into the colonial culture according to Klein (2020a). Roosevelt, like the first head of the USFS Gifford Pinchot, was a supporter of Eugenics (Klein, 2020a; The Wilderness Society, 2021), a now discredited theory that perpetuated white supremacy and the exclusion of people of color, disabled, and people with otherwise "undesirable" characteristics (Reynolds, 2020). Examining the often violent removal of indigenous people from their ancestral homelands in order to create the public lands system and the racist and ableist beliefs of often celebrated early

American conservation figures demonstrates the attitude of oppression and exclusion inherent in the creation of public lands.

Exclusion on public lands is a complex topic. This capstone does not address all the factors that led to and still impact exclusion on public lands such as the link between public lands and manifest destiny, colonialism (Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM), 2015), redlining, and other exclusionary policies aimed at oppressing people of color (Gosalvez, 2020) or other oppressed identities. As a complex topic, exclusion on public lands is intrinsically tied to the beliefs, philosophies, and history of colonialism in America, religion (SAAM, 2015), eugenics (Marini et al., 2011; Stanford, n.d.), and whiteness (DiAngelo, 2020; Klausman, 2020; National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), 2021; Roediger, 2021), topics that would require a much more in-depth examination than this capstone can provide.

Exclusion of People of Color on Public Lands

The deliberate act of excluding people of color from public lands led to the white centered outdoor recreation culture of the modern United States (Asmelash, 2021; Martin and Turesky, 2020). Awareness of visitorship to national parks being disproportionately white extends back to the 1960's (Floyd 1999), but has its roots in the Jim Crow era post the 13th amendment of the 1860's (American Trails, 2020; Murphy, 2023). As Martin and Turesky (2020) showed, Black Americans in particular may not face institutional laws against accessing public lands today, but public lands rural and urban are functionally

segregated and centered around the enjoyment of white Americans (American Trails, 2020; Gosalvez, 2020; Murphy, 2023).

Though slavery was abolished nation-wide in 1865 with the passing of the 13th amendment (National Archives and Records Administration, 2022), the majority of freed Black Americans and their descendants were living in the south (American Trails, 2020) under Jim Crow – laws that enforced segregation of people of color (Murphy, 2023). This included public lands which were often segregated into special areas for white visitors and visitors of color often referred to as “negro” areas (American Trails, 2020; Mills, 2020; Murphy, 2023; Repanshek, 2019). These recreation areas were said to be duplicated facilities (often not meeting the same standards) of the whites only recreation areas for people of color so that their presence in natural areas would not take away from the enjoyment of white Americans (American Trails, 2020; Miles, 2019). Often these recreation areas were built in areas far more dangerous for recreation than those built for whites (American Trails, 2020).

Not only is this historical exclusion linked to modern discrepancies in visitation to public lands between whites and people of color, but this segregation also impacted how Black Americans participate in outdoor recreation activities like those commonly taking place on public lands. Exclusion from public lands prevented Black youth living in the Jim Crow Era south from learning to swim, preventing those youth from teaching their own children to swim and creating a generational loss of education around swimming and culture of recreating on the water (American Trails, 2020; Rohrer, 2010). This domino

effect costs thousands of Black children their lives annually in the United States and in 2010, Black youth were three times more likely to drown than their white counterparts with 70% of Black youth reporting little to no ability to swim (Rohrer, 2010).

There are other concerns for Black Americans visiting public lands, many of which were conserved for their wilderness value. Trees are homes for squirrels and provide shade, but are also a representation of generational racial violence and a memorial to those lost to the barbaric practice of lynching (Murphy, 2023; Pires, 2018; NAACP, 2022). In an interview with Pires (2018) Aaron Jones, a Black man from Chicago, said “It’s a very real fear for Black people, especially those from urban communities, that bad things happen to Black people in the woods, like lynching. It’s something that you see again and again when you look at the history of the civil rights movement and slavery: Black people going into the woods and not coming back.”

Disabled U.S. Army veteran Danielle Williams, leader of the Diversify Outdoors Coalition, told Ebbs & Dwyer (2022) that she is hyper vigilant while recreating outdoors. Williams is careful to smile and allow white visitors to pass her on the trail out of concern that white visitors may call the police on her for being Black in a predominantly white space (Ebbs & Dwyer, 2022) – something that can be deadly for Black Americans who are three times more likely to be shot by police than white Americans (Schwartz, 2020).

The viral video of a New York City birder, Christian Cooper being threatened by a white woman with police violence after asking the woman to contain her unleashed dog

reflects how systemic racism can impact Black Americans enjoyment of the outdoors and on public lands (Booker, 2021). The entitlement of white Americans both in the outdoors and on public lands where outdoor recreation takes place is rooted not only in the exclusionary history of public lands but also in the wider systemic oppression experienced by people of color and those with other oppressed identities which will be examined later in Chapter Two.

Exclusion of Disabled People on Public Lands

While no current or historical laws restricted access specifically to public lands for disabled Americans, a lack of accessibility and legal and social norms pertaining to disabled people led to exclusion on public lands. As mentioned in the previous section, the NPS was created to “care for special places saved by the American People so that all may experience our heritage (U.S. DOI, 2022).” While some believe that a key part of this mission is creating accessible opportunities for disabled persons to recreate on public lands, some conservationists are concerned that accessibility is antithetical to conservation (Bradshaw & Doak, 2022). The creation of accessible trails requires different standards than that of trails open to mobile persons such as wider trails, incline limitations, and more durable, permanent surfacing (American Trails, 2013). Some conservation professionals worry that these standards would lead to more resource damage (Bradshaw & Doak, 2022).

In 1968 the Architectural Barriers Act mandated that all buildings built or renovated using federal funding must be accessible to disabled people and in 1973 the

Rehabilitation Act required that all programs and services that received federal funding must also be accessible (U.S. NPS, 2022). In 1979 NPS announced its intention to create accessible options for disabled Americans in parks (Meldon, 2017). Prior to this announcement, accessibility options were considered on a site-by-site basis (Meldon, 2017). In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law creating federal requirements for disability access including access to public lands (ADA National Network, n.d.).

Despite these legal requirements for disability accessibility in national parks, many parks still offer limited options for disabled visitors. As reported by Charitan (2019), some parks feature accessible ramps to locations that are inaccessible, sidewalks are too narrow and lack proper curb cuts, restrooms are too small and inaccessible, and accessible parking may be too far away from amenities that its functionally inaccessible. While many parks offer accessible campsites and restrooms, doorways are often too narrow to accommodate wheelchairs and the wheelchair accessible shuttle buses at Grand Canyon National Park don't accommodate modern motorized scooters (Charitan, 2019). In places where accessible hiking is available, paths are often short and do not follow pathways that show off the park's unique features (Charitan, 2019; O'Brien, 2021).

While modern legislation seeks to protect and accommodate those with disabilities access to public lands, during the period in which public lands were created in the late 1800's to early 1900's, the treatment of those with physical, cognitive, and mental disabilities was not as accommodating. Ugly Laws and other exclusionary

legislation of the late 1800's made it illegal for those with disabilities to be out in public (Schweik, 2009). As Schweik quoted in *the Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, these laws prevented "any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in anyway deformed so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, or an improper person" from being seen in public. These laws emphasized the *unsightliness* of disabled people and sought to protect the public from *exposure* to their disability (Schweik, 2009). Institutionalization of those with mental and cognitive disabilities throughout the 1800's and first half of the 1900's excluded them from not only public lands but public life (The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2023). With little to no psychological treatment and brutal treatment of patients in these institutions, disabled people suffered greatly (Marini et al., 2011).

Popularization of the eugenics movement during 1840 to 1950 led to the sterilization of those with "undesirable" traits (Marini et al., 2011; Reynolds, 2020). Not restricted only to the oppression of the disabled, eugenics targeted people of color, women, and anyone deemed inferior by the standards of white supremacy (Marini et al., 2011). These attempts at preventing disabled people from participating in everyday life, being seen in public, or from existing all together served to exclude from all of public life. While ugly laws and institutionalization may not seem directly related to public lands, the systematic removal of those with disabilities from public life by default excluded them from visiting and engaging with public lands, silencing any contribution to them or outdoor recreation culture they would have had.

Modern Visitation

The United States is diversifying faster than previously expected with an unprecedented decline in the number of white Americans between 2016 and 2019 (Frey, 2020). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, much of the white population is aging and birth rates are low, (Frey (2020) reported. As Goslavez (2020) reported, the majority of public lands visitors fall into this ageing and shrinking demographic. Coupled with a decline in general outdoor recreation (YaleEnvironment 360, 2017), an opportunity to redefine what the outdoors is and who it is for has presented itself. Public lands are typically maintained by city, county, state, or federal agencies and governments and are legally open for use by citizens provided any necessary fees (which vary by location) are paid (Parris, 2018). Recreation statistics and demographics on public lands can vary from state to state, so this section will focus on visitation at national parks under the management of the National Parks Service.

Initiatives throughout agencies and governments who manage public lands have sought to increase staff and visitor diversity through outreach to historically excluded communities. Current data shows that, despite a number of outreach programs already in place to reach out to historically excluded communities, they do not appear to be having a large impact on visitation or employment diversity according to Ebbs & Dwyer (2020). In its most recent 10-year survey, NPS found that 77% of all visitors to national parks were white (Ebbs & Dwyer, 2020) despite white Americans making up 60% of the general population (U.S. DOI, 2021c). Ebbs and Dwyer (2020) note that only 23% of visitors to

national parks were members of historically excluded communities despite making up 42% of the greater U.S. population (U.S. DOI, 2021c). Of that 23% of visitors, only 6% were Black Americans, a decline from 2019, despite making up 13% of the wider population (Ebbs & Dwyer, 2020; U.S. DOI, 2021c).

Starting in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic saw more Americans enjoying nature, including those who identify as a person of color. While it remains to be seen if this will be a permanent shift to higher participation in outdoor recreation or if things will return to pre-COVID levels as more Americans return to other recreation activities, this rise in attendance has potentially increased awareness of public lands and outdoor recreation (Outdoor Foundation, 2021). Despite initial, small increases in outdoor recreation participation amongst communities of color (Outdoor Foundation, 2021), national parks visitation is still predominantly composed of white, middle-aged Americans (Wagner, 2022). As a diversifying nation (Frey, 2020) with a decrease in pre-pandemic outdoor recreation (YaleEnvironment, 2017), national parks and other public lands have a vested interest in engaging historically excluded communities (Ali, 2016; Anderson, 2021).

Why Public Lands Access Matters

Since 1903 the Roosevelt Arch has greeted visitors to Yellowstone National Park's (YNP) north entrance with the message "For the Benefit and Enjoyment of The People" (Janiskee, 2009). "The people" didn't always include all Americans, as NPS ranger Shelton Jackson, a Black man who began working at YNP in 1987, said while reflecting on his race and the words on the Roosevelt arch (Mills, 2020). Jackson says

that women, Black Americans, and Indigenous peoples were among those who “the people” didn’t apply to (Mills. 2020). Access to public lands only for some Americans, rather than for all, is antithetical to the idea of *the people* (USFS, n.d.).

Legally defined, public lands refer to any piece of land or interest that is held by the United States Government and administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management regardless to how that land was acquired (Cornell Law School, n.d.a). In practice, the U.S. DOI (2023b) says that public lands refer to the nation’s parks, trails, monuments, battlefields, wildernesses, refuges, historic sites, conservation areas, and forests. The premise behind the conservation of public lands is to ensure their existence so that future generations may experience the natural and cultural sites contained within (U.S. DOI, 2023b).

Beyond an understanding that exclusion of any American from public lands is antithetical to their stated purpose, being in nature promotes better mental well-being for all humans (Bratman et al., 2019; Borunda, 2021). Multiple theories about how this works have been developed, but despite why we feel better in nature, we do (Capaldi, 2015). Stress rates can decrease and mental health have been shown to improve with access to nature (Bratman et al. 2019; Borunda, 2021).

Outdoor play improves the cognitive abilities of children (Louv, 2005; Schertz, 2019) and helps them develop self-control and improve working memory (Schertz, 2019). This is exceptionally important for neurodivergent children and adults who struggle with working memory and cognition like those with ADHD (Kofler, et al, 2011).

Adults also see an increase in cognitive ability when exposed to nature and can be used to reduce anxiety, rumination, and improve working memory (Bratman et al., 2019). According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2020), nature helps treat anxiety disorders which impact millions of Americans. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAAA) (2022), 6.8 million Americans are living with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), a condition only 43.2% of those suffering are currently being treated for. Women are twice as likely to suffer with GAD than men (other gender expressions were not reported) and GAD is often comorbid with major depression (ADAA, 2022). Other anxiety disorders include social anxiety disorder (15 million Americans), specific phobias (19.3 million Americans), obsessive-compulsive disorder (2.5 million Americans), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (7.7 million Americans) (ADAA, 2022).

Beyond Inclusion: Financial Motives

There is a financial incentive for public lands to prioritize inclusion of historically excluded communities. It varies by state, but many state park systems are partially to primarily funded by user fees including camping, entrance, and park specific fees like facility rentals. Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission funding majorly comes from user and entrance fees, as well as state government allocations and donations (Mayer, 2021; D. Dupuis, Personal Communication, 2022). According to the U.S. DOI (2023a), the National Park Service receives funding through congressional appropriations, non-profit and individual donations, and park entrance and user fees – an

increasingly important source of revenue used to improve parks and visitor services. Approximately 80% of all entrance fees paid at a National Park are used to fund that particular park (U.S. DOI, 2023a). Other conservation lands such as those maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state fish and wildlife services or departments of national resources, also receive funding from hunting licenses, sport fishing, and commercial fishing permits to protect wildlife and their habitats (Rott, 2018).

Local economies of cities and areas surrounding National Parks are also largely dependent on park visitation with over \$14.5 billion spent in 2020 in local communities by National Parks visitors (U.S. DOI, 2021c). The U.S. DOI (2021c) reports that national parks contributed \$28.6 billion to the nation's economy in 2020. Recreation on public lands at all levels also increases the needs for outdoor recreation goods and other related commodities, valued in 2021 as \$454 billion, or 1.9% of the American economy (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023).

With decreasing park visitation before the COVID-19 pandemic (YaleEnvironment 360, 2017), and uncertainty about whether or not pandemic levels of visitation will continue or if visitation will fall again (Outdoor Foundation, 2021), coupled with the fact that white Americans are a shrinking demographic, funding for public lands may decrease as user and entrance fees decrease. One way to solve this potential budgetary shortfall is to increase access to public lands to historically excluded communities. An increase in access increases the potential for visitor fees, contributions to local community's economies, and the nation's economy. Programs designed to make

hunting and fishing more accessible to new generations currently not participating in these activities aim to offset some of this loss by increasing interest. Increasing public lands visitation numbers and sales of hunting and fishing permits naturally increases revenues, allowing public lands conservation to continue and improve.

Identity & Systemic Oppression

Systemic Oppression

Challenging systemic oppression on public lands is as complex as the ecosystems public lands seek to conserve. Before examining identity, it is necessary to establish the definitions of *oppression* and *systemic oppression* as used in this capstone. Oppression is prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion from places of power held by members of the majority social or cultural group dominating a system (Kres-Nash, 2016; NMAAHC, 2021). Systemic oppression refers to the mistreatment of individuals belonging to certain social identity groups embedded in institutions, schools, courts, other governmental entities, and the greater social and cultural forces (Cheney et al., 2006).

Identity

An important step on the path to anti-oppression, an investigation of an individual's identity can help create context for engaging with people of different identities. Identity refers to the individual characteristics (race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability status, etc.) which make up a person and to the combinations of those characteristics (University of Southern California, 2020). The characteristics of our identity help us understand the lens through which we experience and understand

everything from media to interpersonal communications to systemic oppression and the discrimination (Tatum, 2017). Our complex identity is formed by the complex matrix of our individual identities, also known as intersectionality, which we will touch on later in this chapter (Gaither, 2019).

Our perception of identity is heavily influenced by the culture in which we live (University of Minnesota Libraries, 2016). Culture can be complex to define but generally refers to the set of values, goals, behaviors, and beliefs shared by a group of people (Merriam-Webster, 2022a). Due to the complexity of the topic of systemic oppression, this capstone focuses on two characteristics of identity: racism and ableism.

Race. Race is a social construct used to categorize humans based on physical characteristics (Roediger, 2021). Evolving alongside the early history of the United States, Roediger writes that the concept of race was tied heavily to that of slavery (2021). Racial groups in the U.S. are defined solely by physical characteristics such as skin color as no genetic connection between racial groups has been found (Whitley & Barnas, 2022). Ethnicity, sometimes errantly used interchangeably with race, is a broader term linked to one's cultural expression and identity according to Whitley and Barnas (2022).

Whiteness. Whiteness is a social construct based on modern definitions of race, a term that prior to the 1500's was used to identify groups of people with common kinship and connection rather than skin color (Roediger, 2021). From the 1550's to 1600's "white" was a term used to describe high society English women who stayed within the confines of the home while high society English men were not as the idea that a man

wouldn't leave his home was considered insulting reports Roediger (2021). It wasn't until 1613 that the English referred to themselves collectively as "white people" in opposition to the East Indians whom they intended to colonize (Roediger, 2021). The connection between whiteness and colonization is clear, Roediger (2021) demonstrates, as the use of the term was used spurred by colonial efforts. It was in the creation of "white" that other races were categorized as others – "savages" referring to Indigenous Americans who early colonists wrote did not subject themselves to enslavement in opposition to "subhuman" people like Africans who were "easier" to enslave (Roediger, 2021).

Who is and isn't part of the "white race" has changed throughout the history of the United States, but consistently whiteness is at the center of what it means to be "American" (National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC, 2021) and is the standard by which all groups whose racial identity isn't in line whiteness are compared (DiAngelo, 2020; Klausman, 2020; NMAAHC, 2021). Whiteness awards those who are perceived as members with privileges, safety, and belonging, called white privilege, not afforded to people of color (DiAngelo, 2020).

This inherent set of advantages is often unrecognized by those who experience it (DiAngelo, 2020) and when confronted with it, can lead to negative emotions such as guilt and shame or be seen as threatening (Flynn, 2015; Garrett-Walker & Martin Poole, 2022). As Flynn (2015), points out, every white American has benefited from racially exclusionary and oppressive policies and a misunderstanding of how that privilege manifests itself can lead to conflicts. Due to the inherent inequality of white privilege and

systemic racism, this topic cannot be addressed without a discussion of white privilege (McIntosh, 1989). It is important to note that privilege doesn't only extend to skin color and racial identity but to all characteristics that make up a person's identity including disability status, gender, sexual orientation, and many other factors the sum of which is referred to as intersectionality.

Examining the creation of public lands, we can see how whiteness and exclusionary policies around race were integral to establishing public lands as white-centered spaces (Klein, 2020a; Klein, 2020b; Knight & Stegemann, E., n.d.; Martin and Turesky, 2020; Mtshali, 2021; Murphy, 2023; Repanshek, 2019; USFS, n.d.).

People of Color. Research, literature, and style guides use many terms to describe racial identities that do not benefit from the cultural understanding of whiteness. When speaking in about multiple racial identities that do not benefit from whiteness, terms like people of color, non-white (Southwestern University, n.d.; University of South Carolina Aiken, n.d.), and Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) (Daniel, 2020; Grady, 2020, Harmon, 2021) are often used as a descriptor. When referring to specific groups it is more appropriate to refer to the specific racial identity of the person or group, but as systemic oppression is rooted in whiteness, it is necessary to talk about those who do not benefit from whiteness with a group signifier. The term BIPOC, commonly used in media, has received pushback for implying members of individual communities have the same or similar experiences, taking away from the unique experiences of each group experiences (Daniel, 2020; Grady, 2020; Harmon, 2021). While the term people of color

may also imply same or similar experiences, it is used in this capstone to describe those who do not benefit from whiteness.

While racial categories are often used to describe individuals in the United States, it is important to note that these categories have no connection to anthropological or genetic differences in individuals of different races, rather, they are socio-political constructs (Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, 1997). When working with groups of a specific racial identity, it is important to remember that though the U.S. Census Bureau (2022) identifies five racial categories including white, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, these categories may not reflect how individuals or communities identify. The definitions of each of these categories from the U.S. Census Bureau (2022) can be found in the Anti-Oppression Toolkit accompanying this capstone.

Racism. A pervasive and inherent part of American culture, racism actively oppresses people of color by favoring their white counterparts according to Young (2011). Racism is so ingrained in the fabric of our society that to address it, our actions must be deliberately anti-racist (Kendi, 2022; Young, 2011). The structures of institutions, culture, individual persons, and our government and justice system are all impacted by systemic racism (Banaji et al., 2021). Racism is prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed at a person or group of people due to their racial identity and includes interactions between people and groups that results from one oppressed group's status conflicting with a majority group's status (Merriam-Webster, 2022b). Racism can

also exist between oppressed groups with a higher cultural or social standing when interacting with other oppressed groups that may be perceived as having a lower social status as racism itself is based on historical interactions between groups brought to or immigrated to America (Ji-Sun Kim, 2014).

Racism can be individual/interpersonal or systemic with individual racism (or interpersonal racism) being easiest to identify through the beliefs and attitudes someone holds against a person from an oppressed racial group (Gee & Ford, 2011). Racism can be both unconscious and conscious, making it difficult for some people to identify that their thoughts and beliefs are in fact racist, according to Gee and Ford (2011). It can also be both passive or active with the person holding racist ideas actively participating in racist activities or speech or passively agreeing with or just holding racist views. It can also be intentional or unintentional (Gee & Ford, 2011).

The term reverse-racism implies racism by oppressed groups against the majority group and has no basis in academic theory (Krishnan, 2016). The definition of racism from the previous paragraph explicitly refers to discrimination by the majority against an oppressed group due to an imbalance of power in the relationship (Merriam-Webster, 2022b). A member of the majority community defined by whiteness cannot claim racism against a person of color (Lewis, 2016). As Woo 2017 shows, the mental health impacts of racism on non-Hispanic white persons (the majority) are significantly lower than the mental health impacts of racism on persons of color. People of color can discriminate against a member of the majority as discrimination refers to the externalization of

prejudice by a member of one group against another but this is not equal to the impacts of racism (Ontario Tech University, 2018).

Systemic Racism. Also referred to as institutional racism, systemic racism refers to the system-wide racism inherent in the culture, laws, and education of the majority community (King, 2020). Less commonly talked about and depicted in the media, writes King (2020), systemic racism is the largest hurdle facing members of oppressed communities. Living within a dominant culture that conflicts with your identity as an oppressed person creates potential for conflict in every facet of life (King, 2020). Interests, experiences, cultural understanding, language, religion, tradition, and every other part of a person's cultural identity may be existing in opposition in some way to the dominant culture (King, 2020).

Raikes (2019) reports that the impacts of systemic racism are most notably applied to the experience of Black Americans. As discussed in the previous section on Exclusion of People of Color on Public Lands, the system and structures built into the very foundation of the United States are those built on the idea of whiteness (NMAAHC, 2021). The historical nature of slavery and Jim Crow are often ignored, Raikes (2019) point outs, with the lasting impacts often overlooked (American Trails, 2020; Murphy, 2023). White Americans have directly benefited from slavery, Jim Crow, and the continued oppression of Black Americans who were enslaved or underpaid (Reece, 2019). As Reece (2019) points out, Black Americans were prevented from investing in

property, underemployed, and over-incarcerated (Carrega, 2021) preventing many from passing down generational wealth and opportunities (Reece, 2019).

Disability Status

Disabled is a term that can refer to physical, mental, cognitive, or emotional disabilities. There is both a legal and a medical definition of disabled, the legal definition being the only one that is protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (United States Department of Justice (U.S. DOJ), 2023). According to the U.S. DOJ (2023), a person is disabled under the ADA if they meet one of the following categories: they have a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,” have a history or record of the impairment, or they are perceived by others as having an impairment. Medically speaking, a disability is any condition physical or mental that makes life and activities more difficult for the person with the disability (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2020). Proper terminology when referring to a disabled person should always begin with asking the individual their preference but in general refer to disabled people as disabled (Wong, 2021). Using terms such as differently abled, handicapable, or differently able imply that being disabled is bad or undesirable, according to Wong (2021). In this capstone disabled will be used preferentially.

Ableism. Ableism is the idea that value is held by those who are considered “normal” in terms of intelligence, function, and productivity with roots in anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and the theory of eugenics among others

(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). Much like racism, ableism can be intentional or unintentional and leads to the oppression and exclusion of disabled persons (National Conference for Community and Justice, n.d.). According to professor of psychology at Moravian University in Pennsylvania, Dunn (2021), ableism is common in the U.S. and often manifests not just as prejudice against disabled people, but the patronizing effort to “cure” disabled people in an attempt to make them “normal.” Within ableism there is a hierarchy of disability acceptance with some disabilities (often physical) being more desirable than other disabilities (often mental or intellectual) (Dunn, 2021). Dunn (2021) reports that there also exists offensive moral beliefs about disability that, while some may assume old fashioned, still impact the lives of disabled Americans. Like people of color, disabled Americans are seen as a second-class citizen and social and cultural norms place disabled Americans as less than their abled counterparts (Dunn, 2021).

Systemic Ableism. Much like the concept of systemic racism, systemic ableism refers to the emphasis placed on nondisabled superiority. An inherent part of the system in which Americans live, systemic ableism impacts the ability of disabled Americans to participate in many parts of American culture and society.

Intersectionality

Stemming from work in the field of feminism and women’s studies, the idea of intersectionality refers to the combination of racial and non-racial facets of a person or group and how those identities interact with one another and with the larger system and

culture (Crenshaw, 2022; Romero, 2017). No one is simply one thing, rather we are the summation of our memberships in multiple groups – some of which may be majority or oppressed status. Intersectionality addresses the “-isms” of racism, ableism, sexism, and other oppressed group status belonging (Romero, 2017). Socioeconomic background, disability status, sexual orientation, and gender are the most commonly addressed pieces of intersectionality and how they are impacted by the combination of race (Crenshaw, 2022; Romero, 2017).

This means that intersectionality is an important piece of working with any community. Some individuals may be members of one or more oppressed groups, impacting whether or not a situation may be more or less safe for them than other members of only one oppressed group. For example, a Black transgender woman may not feel safe at events serving the Black community due to well documented violence against transgender persons of all racial backgrounds, but particularly of Black trans women (Rummler & Sosin 2021).

Another example of the importance of considering intersectionality, is that Black women in America are more likely to be victimized and experience racism and economic disadvantages (Phillips & Votey, 1984). Black women experience higher maternal mortality rates (Suliman, 2021), wage inequality leading to Black women making only 63 cents on the dollar in comparison to white men (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021), and an unemployment rate double that of white women (Dmitrieva, 2022). When working with historically excluded communities, intersectionality must be taken into account.

While originally rooted in the idea of feminism, this expanded understanding of intersectionality gives us a framework with which to understand the multiple factors impacting potential outreach efforts to historically excluded communities. Crenshaw said in an interview with Columbia Law School (2017) that the expanded use of intersectionality, particularly into the area of LGBTQIA+ barriers, serves as a tool for understanding systems of oppression and power.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias refers to the automatic and unintentional hidden prejudices we carry that we are not consciously aware of (Project Implicit, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, 2022). Implicit bias can be informed by your upbringing, culture, social status, characteristics of your identity, and other factors (Implicit Bias, 2011; Payne et al., 2018). Bias reduction strategies have been shown to successfully reduce the impact of implicit bias (HHS, 2022).

Empathy. Defined by Sussex Publisher's Psychology Today (2023), "Empathy is the ability to recognize, understand, and share the thoughts and feelings of another person, animal, or fictional character." Typically developed throughout one's lifetime, infants develop a sense of empathy before 18 months of age and children around five or six years old often have a deeper understanding of empathy that comes from their parents modeling and encouraging them to practice empathy (Sussex Publishers, 2023). According to Sussex Publisher's Psychology Today (2023), research shows that adults are able to increase their ability to empathize with others through prioritizing spending

time with people who are different from themselves, consuming art by people from different backgrounds and identities, and even through the practice of meditation or attending therapy.

Research into how empathy impacts interactions between those who belong to a majority identity group and those who do not shows a statistically significant relationship between empathy and intentional or unintentional discrimination (Cameron et al., 2019; Forgiarini et al., 2011; Gloor & Puhl, 2016; Myers & Hodges, 2013; Zembylas, 2012). This connection indicates that empathy is a useful tool in addressing systemic oppression (Campt, 2018).

Empathy vs. Sympathy. While empathy is the ability to identify with another's thoughts and feelings, sympathy is feeling sorry or pity for another's situation or misfortune. Sympathy can be appropriate in situations where someone feels genuine sorrow for the circumstances experienced by another. Sympathy is not the same as empathy as it does not come from a place of sharing a thought or feeling. (Schrader, 2020)

Types of Empathy. As defined by Myers and Hodges (2013), emotional or affective empathy is when a person feels emotions for another who is in distress and expressed compassion for that person through empathetic concern or sympathy (University of California Berkely, n.d.). The feelings expressed by the person who witnesses or hears of the misfortune befallen another do not need to be the same for a person to be practicing empathy (Myers & Hodges, 2013). Empathetic concern and

sympathy are both appropriate responses depending on the circumstances of the second person, but empathetic concern is most notably associated with pro-social and helping behaviors according to Myers & Hodges (2013). Generally, cognitive empathy, or empathetic accuracy, is not associated with caring about the thoughts or emotions of another person, but rather, is the accuracy with which a person identifies and understands the emotions of another and is a skill that is developed to identify the emotional state of others (Myers & Hodges, 2013).

Often literature on empathy connects a lack of cognitive empathy as a primary feature of autism spectrum disorder (Myers & Hodges, 2013). Recognizing that cognitive empathy is a challenge for those on the spectrum does not mean that these individuals lack the ability to empathize with others as underdeveloped cognitive empathy only relates to the ability to identify the emotions of others accurately (DeThorne, 2020). Due to neurological differences in the brains of autistics and allistics (those who are not on the spectrum), it can be difficult for those on the spectrum to identify the emotions of those who are not according to DeThorne (2020). The fundamental differences between autistics and allistics leads to the phenomenon of double empathy (Dethorne, 2020).

Empathy and Systemic Oppression. Empathy being an important trigger for prosocial and helping behavior makes it an important tool for prompting inclusive behavior, even when doing so may have a perceived or actual sacrificial requirement (Cameron, et. al, 2019; Myers & Hodges, 2013). According to Cameron et al. (2019), three impact how a person shows empathy in different situations. Empathy is not

automatic in all situations regardless of whether or not empathy is situationally appropriate, humans may avoid empathy if having empathy requires additional effort, and racial prejudice impacts a person's ability to respond with empathy when faced with someone we perceive to be a cultural other (Cameron et al., 2019). Simply put, Cameron et al. (2019) states that people avoid empathy in situations that will elicit negative emotions and if the other person is different than us.

As an example of how empathy is impacted by race, Forgiarini (2011) reported that when white participants in one study were shown a Black person experiencing pain, they had significantly lower physiological responses than when shown a white person in pain. Indicative of the level of empathy experienced by the participant for the sufferer, there was clear correlation between an individual's racial bias and their ability to empathize with someone of a different skin color. Studies such as this show the extent to which systemic and cultural racism is imbedded in the automatic responses of white individuals. (Forgiarini, 2011)

As touched on earlier in Chapter Two, discussions of racism can elicit cause strong, negative emotions of anger, resentment, guilt, and fear in white Americans (Klausman, 2020; Todd et al., 2010; Zembylas, 2012). Conversations on whiteness, white privilege, and systemic racism can be jarring to white Americans who do not experience racism (Klausman, 2020). The American Psychological Association (2023) defines anger as a human emotion triggered by the sense that someone or something has purposely caused you emotional or physical pain. Anger can motivate someone to find a solution to

that which they perceived harmed them (APA, 2023) and defensiveness, a mental response that commonly takes the form of denial, rationalization, blame shifting, and withdrawing from the conversation or situation, can make anti-racist education difficult for some benefactors of white supremacy to engage in it (Klausmann, 2020).

Discussions of ableism can also elicit negative reactions from the non-disabled as cultural attitudes toward disability are commonly negative, with disabled persons facing similar responses to those from other oppressed identity groups according to Dunn (2021). A cultural hierarchy also exists within disability with those with physical disabilities typically perceived as more acceptable than those with mental or intellectual disabilities or those whose disability is seen as the fault of the person rather than a misfortune (Dunn, 2021). As Dunn points out, stigmatization of diseases such as Diabetes Type 2, obesity, and HIV/AIDS stem from a cultural assumption that development of these disorders is related to a moral failing of the disabled. This cultural hierarchy can impact how non-disabled persons perceive disabled persons and their ability to respond with empathy (Dunn, 2021).

An increased capacity for empathy gained through engaging with the narratives, art, and individuals from different backgrounds can help in overcoming this initial defensiveness and anger related to anti-oppression education reducing discrimination (Todd et al, 2012). Increasing empathy requires active listening, seeking out those with different identities, engaging in discomfort, and focusing attention outward on the behaviors and challenges of others (University of California Berkely, nd.) Todd et al.

(2012) found that shifting perspective to that of another race and understanding how that person is reacting cognitively and emotionally to a situation was an effective strategy for combating denial of discrimination. Those participants who were exposed to Latino and Black perspectives were less likely to deny discrimination as opposed to those who took on a white perspective (Todd et al., 2012). When educators were encouraged to practice empathetic discipline which focuses on what led to inappropriate behavior rather than punishing the behavior, the suspension rate of at risk students were halved and respect for educators on behalf of students increased (Okonofua et al., 2016). Gloor and Puhl (2016) found that while discrimination against those struggling with obesity is common, participants who were exposed to stigma-reduction interventions based on empathy and perspective taking increased their empathy for obesity sufferers.

Anti-Oppression: A Framework of Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion

The framework of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) focuses on challenging systemic oppression (Neami National, 2017). While the term DEAI is the one used in this capstone, there are many other terms for this same concept. Generally, the ideals behind these different expressions of this framework are the same. Diversity refers to the differences and similarities of individuals within a group or organization (Indiana Arts Commission, 2022; American Alliance of Museums, 2018). In terms of public lands, both visitor demographics and staff demographics are good places to start when looking at diversity.

Equity refers to all persons having the option to fully participate and receive fair and just treatment (Indiana Arts Commission, 2022; American Alliance of Museums, 2018). Equity differs from equality in that equality all are given the exact same opportunity regardless of systemic or intersectional barriers while equity recognizes that individuals have unique needs and circumstances and allocates resources and opportunities to create equality (Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2022).

Accessibility is giving equitable access to everyone regardless of their physical, mental, emotional, or any other type of ability (Indiana Arts Commission, 2022; American Alliance of Museums, 2018). Inclusion is the intentional, ongoing effort to create safe, welcoming environments where all individuals regardless of membership in any protected class, are able to participate fully (Indiana Arts Commission, 2022; American Alliance of Museums, 2018).

Underserved and underrepresented audiences are terms that are often used interchangeably, but do not refer to the same groups. Underserved populations are often defined as persons or populations for whom the barriers preventing access to a service are due to geographic location, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, social or economic standing, racial or ethnic identity, non-English speaking, or disabled (Cornell University, n.d.). Underrepresented often refers to the result of underserved populations. This is when a group does not include members of communities facing one or more of the previously listed barriers to participation (Emory University, n.d.).

Research shows that in order to advocate for members of oppressed communities successfully, it is important to support, empower, and stand up for others known as allyship (University of Kansas, n.d.). Allies are committed to equity and recognize their own privilege according to DiAngelo (2020). Allies work alongside oppressed groups, even if it is not in their own personal interest, to address the needs of the group (DiAngelo, 2020). Allies must have an understanding of their own privilege as well as listen to the communities for which they want to advocate (Campt, 2018). Knowing the history of an oppressed community and understanding how systemic oppression is impacting these communities allows allies to advocate alongside oppressed groups (University of Kansas, n.d.). Allyship means standing in solidarity with members of oppressed communities, not giving a voice to the voiceless (Chang, 2013). This reductive and harmful phrase and invalidates the voices of those who have been silenced in the past and need help in amplifying their voices, not for those in power to speak for them, Change explains (2020).

Self-education or self-directed education is important for potential allies (Campt, 2018; Office of Equity and Inclusion, 2022). Members of oppressed groups cannot be expected to teach others about their experiences and their needs as often these community members are working harder than their non-oppressed counterparts (Hicks, 2020). Asking a member of an oppressed community to do the additional work of teaching non-oppressed persons about their experience places an undue burden on them, further oppressing these individuals according to Hicks (2020). Anti-oppression education and

allyship requires that those engaging with it embrace discomfort as learning takes place when someone reaches beyond their comfort zone (Scott, 2022).

Inclusion on Public Lands: Efforts to Create Safe and Welcoming Places

As mentioned previously, Ebbs and Dwyer (2020) report that 77% of all visitors to national parks identify as white while only 23% of visitors identify as a person of color despite people of color making up 42% of the United States population. Of that 23% of visitors, only 6% were Black Americans, a decline from 2019 (Ebbs & Dwyer, 2020). In a report, NPS showed that its staff is majority white with 78.5% identifying as white despite the greater United States population being 60.1% white in 2020 (U.S. DOI, 2021b). In this same report, the percentage of Black staff was 6.7% despite the greater population being 13.4% Black (U.S. DOI, 2021b). This disparity illustrates that, while efforts have been made to reach out to historically excluded communities, there is still a divide in both visitorship and staff racial demographics. While it would be impossible to cover every current effort nationwide to increase diversity in the outdoors, here are some of the examples from federal public lands.

National Parks Service Office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion

The Office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion at the National Park Service was developed to integrate the principles of relevancy, diversity, and inclusion and has developed a webinar series on the topic and is working with creating inclusive narratives in public spaces (U.S. DOI, 2021a). The parks service also increased marketing to

communities of color, had staff attend racial sensitivity training, and launched initiatives designed to increase the diversity of its workforce (U.S. DOI, 2021a).

Diversity in the National Park Service Director's Order

In 2012, the National Park Service Director's Order #16B: Diversity in the National Park Service which sought to increase the diversity of National Parks Service staff through the goals of education, recruitment of a diverse workforce, retaining current members of the workforce who represent diversity, and strengthening language surrounding prevention of harassment (Jarvis, 2012). Despite this effort, in 2020 78.5% of the NPS staff were white compared to the 2019 U.S. Population showing that 60% of Americans identify as white (U.S. DOI, 2021b). This disparity continues despite the agency's intention to create a more representative staff.

Every Kid Outdoors

Every Kid Outdoors is a federal program which issues every American fourth-grader a public-lands pass guaranteeing them free access (DOI, 2021d). The program only offers free passes for families with fourth graders according to the Obama administration because the age of 11 was identified as "the last chance" to make important impacts and encourage a relationship with nature (Marshall, 2015). While the pass gives free access to public lands, it does not provide transportation to and from public lands, provide lost income reimbursement to families who are unable to take paid time off to visit public lands, or recreation or safety equipment recreation on public lands requires. Nor does the program guarantee families that they will be safe on public lands.

While not a specific listed consideration of Every Kid Outdoors, it is important to note that schools are also rich in demographic data, allowing for specific targeting of historically excluded communities such as title 1 schools where 40 percent or more of students come from a family that is classified as low-income (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Children of color in the U.S. disproportionately come from low-income families. Nationwide approximately 16% of children are living in poverty. Of that percentage, 28% are Black youth, 25% are American-Indian/Indigenous, and 23% are Latino (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). When we combine these two statistics, we can see that it is more likely for youth at a title 1 school to be children of color. This makes school districts with title one schools an attractive place to focus DEAI outreach programs as it often has a cross-section of underserved and underrepresented youth present (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

National Park Service Accessibility Task Force

To challenge the exclusion of disabled Americans in national parks, NPS assembled an Accessibility Task Force to address accessibility in national parks (Charitan, 2019). One in four American adults (roughly 26%) is disabled with 13.7% of American adults being mobility-disabled (CDC, 2022). While visitors centers and other buildings have complied with existing disability architectural laws, this task force works to understand how disabled visitors can interact with public lands – not just buildings. Yellowstone National Park, arguably one of the most famous of America’s National

Parks, has already improved its accessible offerings with the construction of accessible boardwalks to popular attractions. (Charitan, 2019).

National Forest Service

Another federal agency looking at diversity and equity in access to public lands is the USFS (n.d) who has been using their visitor use monitoring program to identify utilization and visitation trends and to identify opportunities for improvement. Recently, USFS has developed an inequality index, a tool for policy-makers and land managers to emphasize inclusive decision making.

Diversity Training

In recent years, the solution to educating employees on DEAI issues typically begins (and sometimes ends with) diversity training, an \$8 billion a year industry (Tran, 2021). Many of these trainings are developed by companies or agencies without the input of members of excluded communities (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Research shows that mandatory attendance for diversity training fails at educating participants and engaging them in the broader world of systemic discrimination. Diversity training benefits rarely last and some studies show that it may in fact have the opposite impact (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016).

Creating awareness is the first step in creating pathways to anti-oppression education. The process of engaging with historical exclusion and anti-oppression can be difficult, particularly for members of majority communities, as it can create negative emotions such as guilt and shame (Garrett-Walker & Martin Poole, 2022). For that

reason, it is important to first engage with the concept of identity through the self and to engage in exercises that facilitate increased capacity for empathy (Stanford, 2020; Psychology Today, 2023)

Interpretation: Professional Public Lands Communicators

While management of public lands includes the work of hundreds of employees at different levels within an agency or government, one group has a more direct role with how visitors engage and form bonds with public lands – Interpreters. The name can be misleading. Interpreters are not professional translators of one language. As the National Association of Interpretation (NAI) defines it, “interpretation is a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us” (NAI, 2021). A second definition for Interpretation can be found in NAI’s Certified Interpretive Guide training workbook that expands on this definition as “a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us” (NAI, 2023).

At the federal level there are two types of rangers: interpretive and law-enforcement (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d). In states, such as Washington, interpreters are not considered rangers, instead referred to as interpretive specialists and part of a separate job class (Washington State Office of Financial Management, n.d.). Members of the public are not always aware of the distinction between law enforcement

rangers and interpreters/interpretive rangers (Arkansas State Parks (ASP), 2017). This capstone project focuses on interpretive professionals.

As the above definitions suggests, interpreters are specially trained in communication techniques that allow them to synthesize complex information for visitors for the purpose of facilitating connections intellectually and emotionally (NAI, 2021). Interpreters are skilled in research, as well as communication, as program development requires extensive knowledge of the program topic (NAI, 2023). As the “face” of public lands, it is often interpreters who are tasked with making parks welcoming places, providing opportunities to connect to the resource, and providing opportunities for visitors (ASP, 2017; NAI 2023). As described previously in this literature review, allyship is necessary to advocate for oppressed groups (Campt, 2018; DiAngelo, 2020; University of Kansas, n.d.). Logic would follow that an important step that interpreters can take toward creating safe and welcoming spaces on public lands includes and understanding and commitment to being allies to oppressed communities.

Summary

Chapter Two provided the background necessary to understand historical exclusion, systemic oppression, modern visitation, why access to public lands matters, identity and systemic oppression. Examining past and current efforts at creating safe and welcoming places on public lands demonstrated how engaging with an anti-oppression framework can assist in addressing historical exclusion and its legacy. Empathy and anti-oppression education and action can help interpreters become allies for oppressed

communities and provide an answer for the research question posed by this capstone: *how can public lands interpreters educate themselves on the historical and modern challenges unique to members of historically excluded communities in order to better establish safe and welcoming spaces on public lands?*

Chapter Three will describe the anti-oppression toolkits connection to interpreters, contents, and how the toolkit will be implemented. The literature of Chapter Two will inform the rationale for the creation of the toolkit and its contents as well as how the toolkit will be used. Finally, this chapter will provide opportunities for assessing the toolkits success.

CHAPTER THREE

Anti-Oppression Toolkit for Public Lands Interpreters

Introduction

Using the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, this chapter will present an answer to this capstone's research questions: *How can public lands interpreters educate themselves on the historical and modern challenges unique to members of historically excluded communities in order to better establish safe and welcoming spaces on public lands?*

Using the framework of anti-oppression and diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) covered in Chapter Two, Chapter Three will detail how these frameworks were used in the creation of the anti-oppression toolkit for public lands interpreters. In order to create safe and welcoming spaces on public lands, as Chapter

Two demonstrated, interpreters must become allies of the communities they seek to serve.

There are many answers as to *how* public lands interpreters can educate themselves on the historical and modern challenges unique to members of historically excluded communities through self-directed education, seeking out opportunities to expand their knowledge and understanding, and engaging with the stories of others but without some type of guide it can be difficult to learn what you don't know. A toolkit designed with public lands interpreters in mind provides them a place a starting point.

Intended Audience

This toolkit is designed for interpreters working on public lands with cultural, natural, and/or historical resources. The toolkit is designed for those interpreters new to anti-racism and DEAI frameworks or those who are early in their journey. Every interpreter approaching this toolkit will have a different background, identity, and understanding of themselves and oppression. For this reason, I recommend that all interpreters engage with the toolkit. Those who have knowledge that surpasses this toolkit's contents can then skip the sections that do not apply to their anti-oppression education journey and use only those resources they find useful. Those with little to no education in anti-racism should engage with each section as it applies to them personally and in their career.

Members of one or more historically excluded and/or oppressed communities may find some of the contents of this kit to be less useful on their journey due to lived

experience. These resources are designed to challenge interpreters on public lands and, for some, may elicit feelings of discomfort, anger, or other negative emotions. This toolkit is not designed to shame, blame, or admonish anyone unaware of the included concepts. Growth often comes from a place of discomfort as understanding is gained when we leave our comfort zone (Scott, 2022). As interpreters we ask our visitors to receive our programs and messages with open hearts and open minds. This is our opportunity to lead by example.

Implementation

Due to the nature of interpreter's jobs often being at remote sites or scattered across a geographic area, this toolkit is designed to be used independently, but can be used by partners or a group. Currently, this toolkit will be available on an internal server shared with those employed as interpreters with Washington State Parks alongside myself, the author. This toolkit is a resource for those expressing interest in working with oppressed communities who are seeking assistance in self-directed education. In the future, the toolkit may be used as part of interpretive training on inclusion and anti-oppression.

As culture is not a constant but rather changes over time, this toolkit is designed as a living resource that will be regularly updated with new information and exercises. Engaged with anti-oppression education regularly in my work, I intend to add additional resources and content from content experts, community members, and anti-oppression educators and to solicit suggestions for items to include from others.

Self-Directed and Self-Paced

This toolkit is designed to be self-paced and self-directed. Estimated time to complete the included exercises and engage with the content provided will vary by the individual interpreter, but in general the estimated time to complete part one and part two of the toolkit is around 6 hours. Figure 1 shows the estimated completion times of each reading or exercise in part one of the toolkit. Figure 2 shows the estimated completion times for each inventory exercise in part two.

Table 1

Anti-Oppression Toolkit for Public Lands Interpreters Estimated Completion Time Part One

Document	Estimated Time to Read/Complete
Reading 1.1: What You Don't Know	5 Minutes
Exercise 1.1: Discovering Your Identity: Self-Identity Inventory	20 minutes
Exercise 1.2: Discovering Your Identity: Self-Identity Inventory and the System	45 minutes
Exercise 1.3: McIntosh's Invisible Knapsack	45 minutes
Reading 1.4: Uncovering Bias: Hidden Prejudice	2 minutes
Exercise 1.4: Bias Inventory	3 Hours

Completion of all bias assessments	
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Note. Estimated times to complete each reading or exercise included in part one of the Anti-Oppression Toolkit for Public Lands Interpreters.

Table 2

Anti-Oppression Toolkit for Public Lands Interpreters Estimated Completion Time Part Two

Document	Estimated Time to Complete
Outreach Inventory 2.1: In Park/Area Participation	10 minutes
Outreach Inventory 2.2: K-12 Education	10 minutes
Outreach Inventory 2.3: Barriers	20 minutes
Outreach Partners 2.1: Example Organizations	3 minutes

Note. Estimated times to complete each reading or exercise included in part two of the Anti-Oppression Toolkit for Public Lands Interpreters.

Part three of the toolkit contains resources to learn more about the language surrounding anti-oppression work as well as resources for continued education. Figure 3 shows the estimated time to complete part three excluding the time to engage with the listed continued learning resources. The last section of part three containing continued learning resources is designed with the assumption that the user will not engage with all of the listed content but with what they find most interesting.

Table 3

Anti-Oppression Toolkit for Public Lands Interpreters Estimated Completion Time Part
Three

Document	Estimated Time to Complete
Reading 3.1: Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Acronyms	1 minutes
Reading 3.2: Common Terminology Used in Anti-Oppression Research	10 minutes
Reading 3.3: Gender Terminology	10 minutes
Reading 3.4: U.S. Census Bureau Definitions of Racial Categories	2 minutes

Note. Estimated times to complete each reading or exercise included in part three of the Anti-Oppression Toolkit for Public Lands Interpreters.

Toolkit Contents

Overview

There are three parts to the toolkit. Part one focuses on self-assessment and understanding your own unique identity, part two focuses on the public land where you work and part three focuses on resources for continued education and recommendations for additional research. The toolkit also provides a pre- and post- self-assessment

opportunity for users to reflect on their growth and to set goals for themselves rooted in their personal anti-oppression journey.

Part One

Part one of this toolkit centers on understanding the user's identity and place within the broader culture. This section is deeply personal and includes two readings and four exercises for the user to complete. *Reading 1.1: What You Don't Know* explains different segments of knowledge and is adapted from Chien's 2022, presentation on the topic. Each individual holds four segments of knowledge: what we know we know, what we know we don't know, what we don't know that we know, and what we don't know we don't know (Chien, 2022).

What we know we know refers to information that is easy to recall and use. This is the knowledge that we can easily share with others (Chien, 2023; upwords, 2020). What we know that we don't know refers to the knowledge that we acknowledge we don't know and are able to seek information and educational opportunities about (Chien, 2023; upwords, 2020). What we don't know that we know is knowledge or experiences that we have forgotten (Chien, 2023; upwords, 2020). What we don't know we don't know is knowledge that we have not been exposed to yet or have no awareness of (Chien, 2023; upwords, 2020).

Exercise 1.1: Discovering Your Identity: Self-Identity Inventory is a self-identity inventory activity designed to create a baseline of the user's personal identity. This inventory worksheet was adapted from an activity led by Shipchandler (2021). In this

exercise users are asked to identify their gender, race, sexual orientation, age, ability or disability status, religion, socioeconomic status, and education level.

Exercise 1.2: Discovering Your Identity: Self-Identity Inventory and the System allows the user to explore their identity further by identifying the history of each characteristic of their identity as well as engage with the question “is the world designed for you?” To determine if the world is designed for you, users are encouraged to think about whether or not finding produces that are congruent with their identity, ability, or other characteristic are simple or more complicated.

Exercise 1.3: McIntosh’s Invisible Knapsack includes a description of McIntosh’s Invisible Knapsack exercise as well as indicates where the knapsack can be accessed online. The purpose of this activity is for the user to assess their racial privilege.

Reading 1.4: Uncovering Bias: Hidden Prejudice provides a description of implicit bias and resources to learn more about implicit bias. Accompanying this reading, *Exercise 1.4: Bias Inventory*, gives the user the opportunity to assess their implicit bias based on the Implicit Association Tests provided by Project Implicit.

Part Two

Each organization has a different culture. While some similarities may exist between them, each organization is individual when it comes to assessing what discrimination, racism, power, and privilege look like. This section will assist the user in identifying opportunities, limitations, and barriers. As the intended audience for this

toolkit is interpreters, the resources in part two will center on parks and public lands and address the internal and external culture of the user's organization.

Outreach Inventory 2.1: In Park/Area Participation allows the user to assess the current participation in programming at their site and *Outreach Inventory 2.2: K-12 Education* focuses on K-12 education outreach. *Outreach Inventory 2.3: Barriers* provokes users to consider the barriers to access to their public land(s) with guided questions. These questions were guided by my experience in the field as an interpreter, questions asked by grants focused on inclusion, and on issues and barriers known to those working in the field of interpretation. Finally, *Outreach Partners 2.1: Example Organizations* provides opportunities to reflection on current and potential partners already working with members of oppressed communities.

Part Three

Lastly section three will contain resources for learning more about anti-oppression language and continued learning about anti-oppression topics. Alternative terms for diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion can be found in *Reading 3.1: Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Acronyms*. Glossaries for common terminology used in anti-oppression research can be found in *Reading 3.2: Common Terminology Used in Anti-Oppression Research* and *Reading 3.3: Gender Terminology*. *Reading 3.4: U.S. Census Bureau Definitions of Racial Categories* contains the United States (U.S.) census bureau definitions of racial categories. Also included in this section are learning resources including research, articles, and other online sources for further learning under

Continued Learning Resources 3.1. This section also contains media recommendations including books and other reading resources, documentaries and films, podcasts, and additional media.

Measuring Success

A Self-Assessment of Anti-Bias Attitudes and Behaviors based on other self-assessment tools by the Anti-Defamation League (2021), Wells (2022), and Longfellow (n.d.) is included in the toolkit prior to chapter one. This assessment, if completed honestly, can be used to compare initial responses against those of the user after engaging with the toolkit and additional learning resources. The assessment asks the user to indicate if the following statements describe them never, rarely, sometimes, often, or always. The questions are randomly arranged and pertain to racism, ableism, and general oppression. At the end of the worksheet the user will be asked to reflect on the self-assessment and to create goals for themselves based.

The assessment does not produce a numerical score or have “correct” answers as its purpose is to inspire critical thinking about oppression and bias and to facilitate curiosity in the user. While the assessment isn’t graded, it does establish a baseline for the user of their attitudes and behaviors pertaining to oppression and serves as a tool to measure these throughout the learning process. Due to the highly personal and potentially embarrassing nature of the assessment, users will not be asked to share their pre- and post-toolkit use results. Instead, they will be asked to share their reflections and goals from the assessment worksheet.

Notably, the self-assessment is limited by the user's honesty and willingness to engage with anti-oppression education. If the user does not answer the questions honestly, comparing the pre- and post- toolkit use assessment may not highlight areas of growth. However, if the user recognizes the areas in which the original assessment was not truthful, they may still be able to recognize areas of growth. The assessment is also limited by the user's understanding and interpretation of the questions though, much like a lack of honesty, this can inform the user on their growth upon completing the post-assessment.

Built into the toolkit are some additional resources for measuring success.

Exercise 1.4 Bias Inventory and *Outreach Inventory 2.1-4* are designed to be repeatable.

These inventories can be used to compare past and current data to measure how successful use of the toolkit has been in increasing both personal awareness and bias as well as measure visitorship and engagement.

Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed the anti-oppression toolkit in depth including the intended audience, details of what is included in the kit, how the kit will be used, and how success will be measured. Chapter Four will reflect upon what I learned throughout this process, review the pertinent literature covered in chapter two, discuss the implication and limitations of this project and include future recommendations for research, as well as how this project and the topics included will impact my future research and work.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Overview

The literature review of Chapter 2 made a clear case for why exclusion of minorities on public lands did not begin by accident but by design. The legacy of this exclusion is still with us today and is reflected in modern visitorship which trends white and middle-class for wealthier (United States Forest Service (U.S.FS), n.d.; Charitan, 2019; Gosalvez, 2020; Martin & Turesky, 2020; Murphy, 2023). Despite initiatives to increase diversity and create inroads for oppressed identities to work within public lands such as those at the National Park level, staff at the National Park Service continues to not reflect the racial demographics of the nation (U.S. DOI, 2021b).

Through the development of the toolkit and literature review process it became increasingly clear that the only way to create safe and welcoming spaces on public lands through inclusion is to shift the culture around these places through anti-oppression education and action and allyship. The issues that plague public lands lack of diversity are not unique to the outdoors but are a reflection of the greater societal divisions that exist systemically in the United States and a history of exclusionary policies.

Equity is Everyone's Responsibility

“Equity is everyone's responsibility” is a phrase I have heard repeated in many diversity trainings and statements, but its simplicity betrays its complexity. Equity *is* everyone's responsibility, but in order to create equitable systems, there must be an

investment in the individuals of that system. As individuals, anti-oppression education resources exist, but many do not know where to start. Without a baseline understanding of the terminology of anti-oppression and DEAI education and theory, an understanding of the self, and familiarity with the systemic issues that plague our systems it is can be difficult to know where to start.

Chien (2022) discussed in a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training that individuals can't know what they don't know – meaning someone can't engage in anti-oppression education and work until they know that oppression exists. As McIntosh (1989) showed with her invisible knapsack exercise, privilege can be largely invisible to those who have it, making it nearly impossible for the recipient to identify it. Investing in staff to assist them in learning about anti-oppression and DEAI is key to creating a cultural shift within public lands that will allow for the creation of safe and welcoming places.

Interpreters working on public lands can help. As a profession that relies on interpreters' ability to comprehend, synthesize, and convey complex topics and information to the public in plain language to facilitate connections and inspire stewardship mindsets, interpreters are equipped with the skills necessary to thoughtfully engage in anti-oppression education and actions. With interpreters' access to visitors, professional focus on facilitation of connection between visitors and resources, and their advanced communication skills, they are a natural fit for working with historically

excluded communities and addressing the barriers that perpetuate the diversity divide on public lands.

Recommendations for Future Research

To increase our understanding of how anti-oppression education among interpretive staff on public lands impacts the creation of safe and welcoming places for historically excluded minorities, future research would need to conduct baseline data on a specific population of interpreters with access to populations with high intersectional diversity. These baseline data would need to assess the interpreter's initial knowledge and understanding of oppression and exclusion, their knowledge of self-identity, their understanding of system oppression, and awareness of barriers impacting local populations.

Baseline data for local populations with high intersectional diversity would also need to be obtained to understand the attitudes, barriers, and opinions of community members. The toolkit would need to account for the data collected from the local community and adjust exercises and focus around the needs of the community. This would mostly impact the resources and interpretive inventory sections. There may also be a need to include additional information or exercises depending on local needs.

Implementation of the toolkit, modified or retooled as appropriate, would need to be in a structured environment to produce measurable results. Check-in surveys, feedback forms, or knowledge assessments would all be potential ways to assess the impact of the toolkit on interpretive participants. Using the data collected from these assessments

would be comparable against baseline data. In a long-term study, reassessing the local population would yield insight into how connections are being facilitated between the local population and local public land after the implementation of the toolkit. Due to the nature of relationship building, community impact may not produce results immediately, making it difficult to measure in short-term studies.

Implications and Limitations

While this capstone demonstrates the need for engaging individuals in anti-oppression education and action and the need for anti-oppression education and resources, it cannot provide imperial evidence that the accompanying toolkit will increase awareness among interpreters as no in person trials were completed. Engaging in direct research to determine the toolkit's ability to inspire engagement with anti-oppression education and action would require a Doctorate level program to complete.

As a Master's project, there is not enough time or support to complete field testing. This project relies on the conclusions of other research majorly outside of the public lands environment to inform the development of the toolkit project. This means that further research and in-field testing would be required to determine if the toolkit needs more, less, or different resources specifically for public lands interpreters.

A Step on a Lifelong Journey

This capstone project is one step in a lifelong journey toward anti-oppression research for myself as an interpreter and ally. While this capstone contains dense literature review and research, it is far from complete. Not only does the field of DEAI

and anti-oppression research continue to grow and evolve, but this capstone does not cover many topics that continue to impact exclusion of oppressed identity individuals on public lands.

Topics such as the practice of redlining contributed greatly to the divide between majority and oppressed communities' access to the outdoors and development of an outdoor identity but due to the constraints of a Master's capstone project, were left out of the literature review for time. Due to the universal presence of systemic oppression in the United States (U.S.), it is difficult to touch on everything that impacts historically excluded persons relationship with public lands. This complex relationship is also unique and though this capstone presents a big-picture overview of the topic, to address individual parks or areas relationship to these communities would require individualized attention and education.

As an interpreter working in the Seattle-Tacoma area of Washington State, my anti-oppression educational focus is on issues facing our local populations with intersectional diversity. My journey reflects my personal history, experiences, and the area in which I serve as a public lands interpreter. As I continue to grow in my profession, I am currently considering pursuing a PhD to study public lands exclusion and oppression as well as strategies to address that exclusion and oppression as an interpreter.

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