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The Foundation of John Muir's World View: A study of the Tlingit Kinship

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THE FOUNDATION OF JOHN MUIR'S WORLD VIEW: A STUDY OF THE TLINGIT KINSHIP

A THESIS

The Honors Program

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Distinction

In the Department of History

by

Molly Zender

April, 1998

The Foundation of John Muir's World View:
A Study of the Tlingit Kinship

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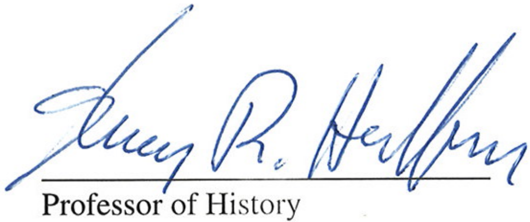

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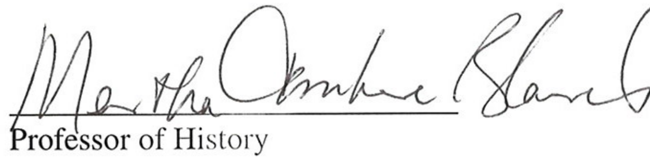

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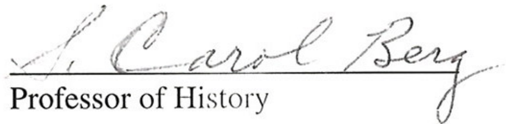

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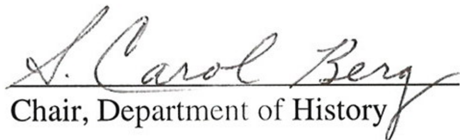

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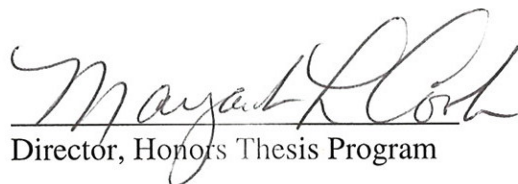

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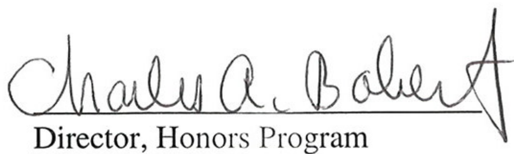

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"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home."[1] In the mountains he found his Faith and in the mountains he found himself. He unveiled a life different from anything he had known and his days were filled with climbs, hikes, wildlife studies and observations. He recorded his experiences and millions of Americans journeyed with him through the gift of his written word. His ideas inspired a movement and his philosophies have touched the life of a nation. John Muir's wilderness theology has proven timeless in its simple ideology: in the wilderness you shall unearth your one true home.

The wilderness was undoubtedly his refuge and house, but I believe he found his home among his soul mates in Alaska. Who were the people he felt most comfortable with and what culture provided him with the sense of home he yearned for? Perhaps Muir never realized he found much of what he sought in the wild of Alaska on the way to the end he set for himself. He had a perfect agenda to save the wilderness. His journey was clear and precise, set in terms of the conservation movement. But, it was on this journey that he discovered spirits akin to his own and the home he was unable to find in civilization. And it was in Alaska and the Tlingit Native Americans that he discovered the meaning behind the movement he lived for.

John Muir's legacy prevails more today than ever before. Muir is known for founding the Sierra Club, influencing the development of National Parks, engaging in scholarly dialogue with Ralph Waldo Emerson, camping out with President Theodore Roosevelt and numerous adventures all over the world. His years spent in the Sierra are well documented. The

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[1] John Muir, Our National Parks (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1901), 1-2.

fascination he had for the natural world and the great efforts he took in order to preserve it are commonly known. Scholars have accounted for these influencing factors in Muir's life. However, the connection Muir experienced with some Native American tribes has not been thoroughly discussed. A close study of Muir's primary accounts reveals an important interest in Native American people. This research paper will uncover the kinship Muir found in Native American tribes and illustrate the evolution of his appreciation for these cultures during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The evidence shows that Muir's feelings towards Native American cultures evolved from prejudice in his youth to a heartfelt admiration for their culture at the end of his life. As a young boy Muir knew the Winnebago and Menominee Native Americans of the Wisconsin frontier. Popular belief then taught that these people were lazy, dishonest and unintelligent. When Muir later encountered the Digger Native Americans in the Sierra he demonstrated a typical prejudice against them, most likely caused by the general ideas of American society in the late 1860's. Although he still manifested a lack of understanding for these cultures, he also regarded certain aspects of their life as interesting or useful. Unable to completely understand their lifestyle, he greatly admired their wilderness skills, which enabled them to live harmoniously in the Sierras. In 1879, at the age of 41 Muir took his first trip to Alaska and encountered the Tlingit and Eskimo Native American tribes. During his life he took five voyages to Alaska and these trips enabled him to develop intimate relationships with the Alaskan Natives. His accounts of these relationships depict a great respect for and identification with these cultures and their relationship with the natural world, but perhaps more significant is the indication that these people were

exercising his same beliefs.

WHAT DO HISTORIANS SAY?

Most historians studying Muir's relationship with Native Americans have pursued evidence suggesting a concrete influence affecting Muir. They seek tangible facts indicated in Muir's conscious thoughts and a public declaration of his feelings for Native American cultures. Furthermore, scholarly investigation of Muir's life and thought has rarely regarded his contact with Native Americans as a significant influence. For example, the collection of essays in John Muir: Life and Work focuses on Muir's relationship with his family, especially his father, and his spirituality. In one article about his father Stoll writes, "Across all of Muir's life and works lay the shadow of one man, without whom both Muir's boundless drive and departure from the religious mainstream are nearly inconceivable: his father, Daniel."[2] In Stephen Fox's John Muir and his Legacy, Thurman Wilkins' John Muir: Apostle of Nature and Frederick Turner's Rediscovering America: John Muir and His Time Outdoors Indians are mentioned only a few times. These authors summarize their thoughts on Muir's relationship with Native Americans in a few short statements, indicating their regard for the significance of these encounters.

Failure to examine the totality of John Muir's experiences will hinder a complete understanding of the man. Consequently, Muir's contact with Native Americans produces two important questions for historians to answer: Was Muir's wilderness world view reflected in the lives of Native Americans or were these encounters purely superficial? And did Muir accurately

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[2] Mark Stoll, "God and John Muir," John Muir: Life and Work (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 72.

interpret and portray the Native American teachings he came to know?

The majority of historians investigating this issue claim that Muir gave little thought to the Indians he met. These historians believe Muir was not affected by Native American cultures and find scant evidence in his personal accounts to prove otherwise. In the book, John Muir, Herbert F. Smith recognizes Muir's concern for the Native Americans, but does not interpret his views as recognition for a culture which must be maintained. In this passage Smith quotes Muir's feelings on a Native Alaskan tribe and interprets his ideas for their future:

> About two hundred perished here, and unless some aid be extended by our government which claims these people, in a few years at most every soul of them will have vanished from the face of the earth; for, even when alcohol is left out of the count, the few articles of food, clothing, guns, etc., furnished by the traders, exert a degrading influence making them less self-reliant, and less skillful as hunters. They seem easily susceptible of civilization, and well deserve the attention of our government.[3]

Smith then writes, "That a return to the old situation is no longer possible, Muir urges that the government complete the process of civilization for the Eskimos, taking them out of the balance in their environment entirely."[4] This interpretation offers Muir as a major advocate for civilizing these people. This, of course, was the very civilization Muir was attempting to escape. The same passage has been interpreted by Richard Fleck as implying Muir's insistance that the evils of civilization were the downfall of these people and something must be done to prevent their ruin. Smith analyzes both Travels in Alaska and The Cruise of the Corwin and claims that in

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[3] John Muir, Cruise of the Corwin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 122. This passage from Muir's book was quoted in Smith's John Muir and is followed with Smith's interpretation of the passage.

[4] Herbert Smith, John Muir (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), 121. This entire passage and Smith's interpretation of it are included here because he interprets it quite differently than Richard Fleck does and Fleck's opinion is discussed later in this paper.

both of these accounts Muir described the Native Tlingit and Eskimo people as more of a spectacle than a group of indigenous people.[5] Although Smith details Muir's accounts of the Native Alaskans, he views them as little more than detached "tourist" anecdotes.

In The Pathless Way: John Muir and the American Wilderness, Michael Cohen provides the most significant evidence against the influence of Indian cultures. "Though Muir never became fully aware of the kinship he shared with Indians," Cohen states, " he did know that his consciousness was new and old, revolutionary and eternal."[6] Throughout The Pathless Way: John Muir and the American Wilderness Cohen draws comparisons between Muir's philosophy and that of several Native American tribes, while questioning the inability of Muir to discern these similarities. Cohen claims that Muir studied squirrels and sheep with the same ecological spirituality that Eskimos used while studying wolves, yet he failed to recognize this commonality.[7] Furthermore, Cohen argues that if Muir had truly appreciated these cultures he could have enhanced his own wilderness ideas. He declares, "If Muir believed that wild animals deserved an undisturbed, happy, harmonious life in Nature, and further that they were necessary to civilization, then why did he not speak of Native American cultures as wild cultures, as essential resources for civilization? Just as he tried to learn something about living in the wilderness from animals who had adapted, so he might have learned from the primitive cultures

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[5] Smith, 119.

[6] Michael Cohen, The Pathless Way: John Muir and the American Wilderness (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984),340.

[7] Cohen, 180.

of North America."[8] In asking this question Cohen fails to recognize the prevailing prejudice Muir had to overcome before accepting this culture.

According to Cohen, Muir came to understand these people better after he knew them on a more intimate level. He writes about an encounter Muir had with one Digger Indian that worked in a lodge inYosemite. Muir said this man would enjoy the "luxuries" of civilization all year and spend his vacation in the wilderness with his tribe, away from all modern conveniences. Muir found great significance in this man's decision to take a vacation from civilization; however, he left it out of his publicized books and articles. Cohen puzzles over Muir's decision, asking why he would have left such a telling story out of his own work. Cohen states, "For whatever reason Muir never managed to integrate completely the figure of Native Man into his ecological vision of the American Wilderness, though he mourned the passing of Alaskan cultures in the newspaper articles collected as Cruise of the Corwin."[9] Ultimately, Cohen contends that Muir disregarded the Native American cultures he encountered.

Cohen and Smith never account for the fact that Muir pursued his goals in the Conservation movement with intense dedication and any public declaration concerning his connection with Native Americans may have jeopardized his lifework. In addition, his relationship with the Tlingit people may have been an unconscious and abstract thought rather than a totally cognizant awareness. Moreover, Cohen and Smith failed to acknowledge that Muir mourned the loss of these cultures in his articles; and he also expressed passionate emotions

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[8] Cohen, 185.

[9] Cohen, 189.

about a culture in which he felt at home. He described many of their beliefs with an intensity characteristic of people discovering a culture they can identify with. Living in the Sierra Mountains, Muir developed personal relationships with several Digger Indians, transcending many of his previous misconceptions. In his books, Travels in Alaska and Cruise of the Corwin, Muir embraced the practices and ideas of the Tlingit and Eskimo Natives with the passion of someone uncovering a culture they longed for. And in the book John of the Mountains Muir recorded his own wilderness ideas, many of which reflected the philosophies he discussed with the Native Alaskans. He also paid tribute to the friends he made in Alaska, describing their benevolent relationship with the natural world as an intrinsic and wild instinct.

WHO WAS JOHN MUIR?

As stated above, it is the intangible evidence we must search for in our analysis of Muir's relations with the Native Americans and more specifically the Tlingit people. Before we attempt to interpret his reactions to the people he met we must first understand the beginning and development of this man. I have discovered that many of his encounters with the Tlingit people are reflective of his past experiences.

John's childhood was spent doing hard physical labor in the fields of his family's Wisconsin farm in the mid nineteenth century, with only one day of rest, Sunday. At an early age John appeared to develop an appreciation for the wildness of the frontier, playing in the woods by himself on Sundays. He spent hours exploring the forests his father considered a waste of land. He essentially sought refuge in the same wilderness his father attempted to conquer.

Although his father, a Calvinist minister, strictly censored his reading to "practical" and Calvinist books, John was able to secretly indulge in authors such as Shakespeare and Milton via the libraries of neighbors. Muir called these books "a source of inspiring, exhilarating and uplifting pleasure."[10]

Muir demonstrated an exceptional ability to build new inventions at a very young age, which eventually captured the attention of professors at the University of Wisconsin in 1861. This acclaim ultimately enabled him to study at the University and explore writers such as Thoreau and Emerson, which probably fueled his already prevalent interest in preserving the wilderness. However, after two years Muir suddenly left for Canada, possibly to dodge the Civil War draft.

Muir eventually came back to the States and found work in a factory in Indiana. One night while he worked on a machine, the tool he was using slipped and pierced the cornea of his right eye, causing temporary blindness. A few days later his left eye also lost its sight due to sympathetic shock syndrome. His feelings at the time are reflected in a letter he sent to his friend, Jeanne Carr, "I am shut in darkness. My hard, toil-tempered muscles have disappeared, and I am feeble and tremulous as an ever-sick woman."[11] This accident proved to be an awakening for Muir because immediately upon regaining his sight he quit working at the factory and embarked on a journey down to the Gulf of Mexico. Muir suddenly realized he could spend the rest of his life working in factories or he could explore the wilderness; he chose the latter.

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[10] Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1981), 36. Fox found this quote in Muir's book The Story of My Boyhood and Youth.

[11] Fox, 49.

In 1867 he traveled the entire 1000 mile journey by foot and carried only one pack. He spent the majority of his time observing and studying the natural world. Upon reaching the coast he suffered from another sickness which became quite serious; however, he recovered strong. At this time he continued his journey and embarked on a ship to Cuba where he studied tropical wildlife. After his stay in Cuba he returned to the United States on a ship to New York. His short stay in New York left him overwhelmed and anxious to get back into the wild, which inspired him to head for California. When he arrived in San Francisco in 1868 he asked a passerby for directions to the nearest wilderness. The stranger directed him towards the Sierra Mountains, which became his home for the next several years.

During his stay in the Sierra Mountains, Muir discovered his passion for the wilderness. He spent most of his time hiking, climbing and camping, working just enough to support his lifestyle. As he became more familiar with this wilderness he began to develop a philosophy about his relationship with nature. For example, in the fall of 1872 he was climbing Mount Ritter and suddenly found himself high up on the rock with no more handholds. His body tensed up as he realized there was nowhere to go and a fatal fall was quite possible. He wrote:

> When this final danger flashed upon me, I became nerve-shaken for the first time since setting foot on the mountains, and my mind seemed to fill with a stifling smoke. But this terrible eclipse lasted only a moment, when life blazed forth again with preter-natural clearness. I seemed suddenly to become possessed of a new sense. The other self, bygone experiences, Instinct, or Guardian Angel,-call it what you will,-came forward and assumed control.[12]

In this passage Muir described a closeness with nature which enabled him to gain strength from

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[12] Richard F. Fleck, Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1985), 33.

the very wilderness which challenged him. Several years of experiences such as these caused Muir to develop a strong opinion about the wild and a well known reputation as a self taught expert on the area.

In 1871 the renowned transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson visited the Sierras, and Muir was ecstatic at the thought of exchanging ideas with him. Muir had discovered a kindred spirit in Emerson through his writings about transcendentalism and his abstract vision of nature. However, Muir was surprised to find that his mentor was not allowed nor inclined to accompany him on an excursion deep into the woods. Although Muir remained attentive to the teachings of Emerson he came to understand a stark difference between Emerson's ideological nature theology and his own unity with the wilderness. Muir commented, "His party, full of indoor philosophy, failed to see the natural beauty and fullness of promise of my wild plan, and laughed at it in good-natured ignorance, as if it were necessarily amusing to imagine that Boston people might be led to accept Sierra manifestations of God at the price of rough camping."[13]

Muir has often been described as a transcendentalist but a more accurate description may be a mystic theologian. Muir viewed the wilderness as a living being, each entity connected and dependent upon the other.

> Contemplating the lace-like fabric of streams outspread over the mountains, we are reminded that everything is flowing-going somewhere, animals and so-called lifeless rocks as well as water...Rocks flow from volcanoes like water from springs, and animals flock together and flow in currents modified by stepping, leaping, gliding, flying, swimming, etc. While the stars go streaming through space pulsed on and on forever like

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[13] Max Oelschlaeger, "John Muir Wilderness Sage" The Idea of Wilderness (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 181.

blood globules in Nature's warm heart.[14]

Some scholars consider Muir to be a pantheist reconciling the supernatural world or God with the natural world. He came to see the natural world as divinity, ever changing, growing and becoming. Furthermore, he saw himself as merely a piece of this grand operation and completely disregarded any claim of human superiority over other species. He celebrated the divine presence in the wilderness and turned to the trees, mountains, and animals as teachers of this religion.

Max Oelschlaeger suggests that Muir may also be viewed as an ecologist. According to Oelschlaeger Muir considered people "biotic citizens" of the organic whole, or world. Furthermore, he rejected the creationism theory of Christianity and sought a philosophy in which the natural world could be viewed as an equal living being as well as part of God. Lastly, Muir worked to stop the deforestation taking place in the United States. He actively campaigned to establish national parks and spoke for the preservationist school of thought. He found the assault on our nations forests the embodiment of the degradation of Western civilization and modern culture, driven by economic and political greed.[15] Since Western thought completely contradicted his ideology he sought, "to revivify an ancient idea of a living organic nature that can be known immediately and qualitatively."[16] He found this idea in the Tlingit philosophies of Alaska.

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[14] John Muir, My First Summer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 236

[15] Oelschlaeger, 198.

[16] Oelschlaeger, 203.

In 1890 Muir recorded his thoughts about his voyage to Alaska, "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world-the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and the wounds heal ere we are aware."[17] During his lifetime Muir made five excursions to Alaska. He took his first trip in 1879 at the age of 40 and centered the expedition around the exploration of the glaciers. The study of the glaciers brought Muir deep into the wilderness, the home of several Native American tribes. During these trips Muir lived among and worked with Native American people which enabled him to develop personal relationships with several Tlingit and Eskimo people. Although the trips were intended to discover glaciers, Muir's accounts describe his intimate relationships with the Native Alaskans in far greater detail than they do most of the glaciers.

In Alaska Muir unleashed the ties of civilization and came to know the teachings of the Tlingit Native Americans. On these journeys he encountered a people united with the natural world in the same fashion he aspired to secure. And only in the Tlingit people could he find the answers he searched for.

WHAT DID MUIR SAY?

Growing up on the frontier of Wisconsin during the 1840's and 50's Muir often heard stories of Indians stealing livestock and goods. Many whites viewed all Indians as thieves who could not be trusted. In The Story of My Boyhood and Youth, Muir recollected a horse his family owned which was stolen. Shortly after, a neighbor told the Muir family he repossessed

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[17] John Muir, John of the Mountains (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), 317.

the horse from the Indian who stole it. Unquestioningly Muir accepted the story and said he believed the Indian must have been cruel to the animal.[18] Muir felt different from Indians, as did most white people at this time. He remembered the time his dog, Watch, demonstrated his "keen" senses as he prowled around the outside of the house looking for someone or something. Muir followed the dog, and they soon discovered an Indian hunting for woodchucks. Muir commented, "Had the hunter been a white man, I suppose Watch would not have noticed him."[19] At this point in his life Muir probably thought less of Indians than he did of white people.

However, he still displayed a sense of compassion for their plight. Muir told a story about a discussion his father had with a neighbor concerning the welfare of the Indians in their area. The neighbor, Mr. Mair, explained his empathy for the Indians, "the children of Nature," pushed off their lands and robbed of their livelihood by the settlers. Muir's father responded by pointing to their poor farming skills, claiming the settlers made the land much more productive than the Indians ever did. Muir recounted Mr. Mair's final retort:

> Mr. Mair urged that such farming as our first immigrants were practicing was in many ways rude and full of the mistakes of ignorance, yet, rude as it was, and ill-tilled as were most of our Wisconsin farms by unskillful, inexperienced settlers who had been merchants and mechanics and servants in the old countries, how should we like to have specially trained and educated farmers drive us out of our homes and farms, such as they were, making use of the same argument, that God could never have intended such ignorant, unprofitable, devastating farmers as we were to occupy land upon which scientific farmers could raise five or ten times as much on each acre as we did? And I

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[18] Muir, John. Stories From My Boyhood and Youth (Dunwoody, Georgia :Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913),105.
This book was published shortly before he died in 1914.

[19] Muir, 82.

remember thinking that Mr. Mair had the better side of the argument.[20]

Although Muir grew up in an environment that harbored racism towards the Menominee and Winnebago Indians he was still capable of feeling compassion at this young age and later in his life he was able to transcend many of these prejudiced ideas.

Linnie Marsh Wolfe wrote the first scholarly biography on the life of John Muir and her book is based heavily on the firsthand accounts of Muir's children. Wolfe finds a strong appreciation for Native American culture in Muir's life. She begins her analysis of Muir's relationship with the Native Americans in his boyhood. As a child in Wisconsin Muir encountered the Winnebago and Menominee Indians, a culture nearly destroyed by European settlers. Wolfe explains that during the mid-nineteenth century the Native American people in Wisconsin were also disappearing due to force by the United States military and Muir expressed his sympathy for them in his book The Story of My Boyhood and Youth. Muir said these people were, "robbed of their lands and pushed ruthlessly back...by alien races. It then seemed to me...it was...only an example of the rule of might with but little or no thought for the right or welfare of the other fellow if he were the weaker."[21]

John Muir's fascination and habituation with Native American cultures developed and evolved throughout his life. This evolution had begun with his boyhood sympathy for the Winnebago and Menominee Indians. And it developed during his stay in the Sierras when he

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[20] Muir, 221.
This quote is referred to earlier in this paper in the discussion of the book To Yosemite and Beyond, written by Engberg and Wesling.

[21] Muir, John, The Story of My Boyhood and Youth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 27.

came to know one Native American tribe on a more personal level. Muir was able to observe the Digger Indians of the Sierra Mountains in their natural environment, the wilderness. Although he still held some misconceptions about their culture he manifested a definite interest in their lifestyle and philosophies. In a letter written to Mrs. Ezra Carr in September 1874 Muir explained an Indian ritual:

> About eight o'clock a strange mass of tones came surging and waving through the pines. 'That's the death song,' said Black as he reigned up his horse to listen. 'Some Indian is dead.' Soon two glaring watch-fires shone red through the forest, marking the place of congregation. The fire glare and the wild wailing came with indescribable impressiveness through the still dark woods. I listened eagerly as the weird curves of woe swelled and cadenced, now rising steep like glacial precipices, now swooping low in published slopes. Falling boulders and rushing streams and wind tones were in it. As we at length rode away and the heaviest notes were lost in distance, I wondered that so much of mountain nature should well out from such a source. Miles away we met Indian groups slipping though the shadows on their way to join the death wail.[22]

This account exemplifies Muir's enchantment with a culture he is only beginning to understand. He paid this ritual the most precious compliment he could in comparing it with several natural sounds, the sounds which inspired and absorbed him throughout his life.

In Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians, Richard Fleck advances an interpretation of the experiences Muir had with Native Americans. Fleck carefully analyzes the works of Muir written during every stage of his life and finds references made to Native Americans in several of these accounts. Although Muir's appreciation for Native Americans was

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[22] Muir, John. The Life and Letters of John Muir. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), 21.
This book is a compilation of the letters Muir wrote to various friends and family throughout his entire life. It was published shortly after his death. The letter cited in this paper was written to his friend Jeanne Carr, the wife of one of his professors at the University of Wisconsin. She was very supportive of his adventures and he was always very fond of her, probably because they shared a passion for the wilderness.

not fully developed until he began his excursions to Alaska, Fleck uncovers instances in which Muir demonstrated high regard for the Native Digger Indians he knew while staying in the Sierras. At this point in his career Muir was in his thirties and just beginning his lengthy wilderness expeditions. The prejudiced attitudes he grew up with were not far removed. Nonetheless, Fleck quotes Muir's thoughts on a Digger Indian he clearly admired:

> The Indian lay down away from the fire last night, without blankets, having nothing on, by way of clothing, but a pair of blue overalls and a calico shirt wet with sweat. The night air is chilly at this elevation, and we gave him some horse-blankets, but he didn't seem to care for them. A fine thing to be independent of clothing where it is so hard to carry. When food is scarce, he can live on whatever comes his way-a few being roots, bird eggs, grasshoppers, black ants, fat wasp pr bumblebee larvae, without feeling that he is doing anything worth mention, so I have been told.[23]

Fleck comments, "Whether or not this Indian inspired Muir's deeper appreciation for mountains, sometimes expressed in Shellyian 'bursts of ecstasy,' is a matter of conjecture, but I am inclined to think that there was, at least, an indirect influence."[24] Fleck is right; there was an influence. Shortly after he observed his traveling companion's skills, Muir began carrying fewer supplies with him on his own camping trips and depending more on the land. In general, Muir greatly respected many of the wilderness skills he observed among the Digger people. In some instances I think there may even be a tone of jealousy in his accounts. These people managed to live a life in nearly perfect harmony with the natural world, an ideal life in the eyes of Muir.

The experience Muir had in the Sierras with the Digger Indians gave him a better

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[23] John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierra (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 90.

[24] Richard Fleck, Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians (Hamden Connecticut, 1985), 41.

understanding of the predicament facing many Native Americans at this time. Perhaps more importantly, this experience gave him the opportunity to view the Digger culture in their natural setting. A setting in which they could live independently forever, surviving on fruits, berries, sequoia juice, grasshoppers and ants. Muir came to view these people as worthy and capable of inhabiting the sacred wilderness, which was no small feat.

Having thoroughly studied the books, letters and journals from each period in his life, Fleck concludes that Muir's admiration for Native Americans grew with each new encounter. Fleck says, "Muir, as a youth, quite naturally was somewhat affected by prevailing attitudes towards the Indians, and it wasn't until he had come to know individual Digger, Thlinkit [sic], and Eskimo natives that he was able to shed prejudice and learn from them. By the 1880's John Muir fully appreciated American Indian adaptiveness to the land so strongly reflected in their lifestyle, language, social customs, mythology, and religion."[25] Fleck contends that Muir's appreciation matured as he came to know Native American people and culture on a personal level.

During Muir's visits to Alaska he developed intimate relationships with the Tlingit and Eskimo Indians. Preceding his Alaskan experiences Muir had not formed any close personal relationships with Native Americans and his feelings towards these cultures appear directly proportional to his level of intimacy with them. Consequently, Fleck explains that Muir's curiosity about the Tlingit Indians increased the longer he stayed in Alaska. Muir attempted to learn several Tlingit words, often replacing the English word in many of his writings. He even

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[25] Fleck, 35.

included a glossary of Indian vocabulary in the back of his book Travels in Alaska. And on his third excursion he started speaking some Chinook [a dialect of the Tlingit people].[26] According to Fleck, Muir not only appreciated this culture but he also came to experience a connection with them on an entirely different level. This connection appears to be one which occurred because Muir allowed this culture to influence him. "To feel completely at home with a different people is to experience, in part, a oneness with them," Fleck declares, "Muir was brought back to his boyhood in bonny Scotland by experiencing such simple joys as eating sliced, raw turnips with the Indians. And when Muir stayed with the Indian chief on Admiralty Island, he 'never felt more at home. The loving kindness bestowed on the little ones made the house glow'."[27] Moreover, Fleck contends that Muir also overcame the cultural barriers with which people identify. Muir said he felt at home in this culture. Home is equated with the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish and the people we love. I think Muir used the word home in this instance precisely because of the powerful meaning it encompasses.

At the age of 40, when Muir began traveling into the backwoods of Alaska he came into close contact with Native Americans and this is reflected in his opinions of their culture. On several occasions he commented on the behavior and treatment of Tlingit children. For instance in Travels in Alaska he wrote, "The Thlinkits [sic] are fond and indulgent parents. In all my travels I never heard a cross, fault-finding word, or anything like scolding inflicted on an Indian

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[26] Fleck, 55.
The Chinook tribe that I refer to here was one of the Tlingit tribes that Muir came to know quite well.

[27] Fleck, 58.

Indians and I never felt more at home. The loving kindness bestowed on the little ones made the house glow."[30] Muir stated that he felt more comfortable in this environment than any other. Having lived most of his life in Western civilization he began to question this institution and compared it with the Native Alaskan society. He stated that scolding was very common in civilization. He seemed to be inferring that scolding children was a good general representation of the type of culture in which people lived.[31] Muir obviously placed a great deal of importance on the treatment of children within a culture, and his pleasure with the compassion he found in the Tlingit culture could not be more clear.

During his voyages with a few Chilcat men Muir experienced some profound moments in which he felt a special connection with them. Muir was not the only one touched by these encounters. In many instances described by Linnie Marsh Wolfe, Muir also had a meaningful impact on the native Alaskans. Wolfe recounts a story in which Muir heard about a baby whose mother had just died and was now suffering from lack of milk: "Muir at once woke up the crew's cook and ordered him to carry in all the cans of Eagle-brand milk they had brought along for their coffee. Eight cans were left, just enough to last them till they got back to further supplies. He opened these, mixed the contents with warm water, and, holding the baby in his arms, fed him. Then he walked the floor with him for several hours soothing his cries and feeding him at regular intervals. Later he bathed him."[32]

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[30] Muir, 131.

[31] Muir, 138.

[32] Wolfe, 212. The Chilcat tribe discussed here was a band of the Tlingit people.

Muir visited several villages in which he was warmly welcomed due to the reputation he established on previous visits with other tribes. Linnie Wolfe describes Muir's welcome at an Indian village he visited. Upon arriving he was warmly greeted and during his stay he was asked to make speeches. Muir gave five speeches during his stay there. He emphasized the fact that all men were brothers regardless of race or background. The people were delighted with his ideas and begged him to stay, promising him a wife.[33] Needless to say, Muir did not accept these generous gifts; however, Wolfe asserts it is illogical to argue that these experiences did not provide meaning for the life of John Muir.

As Muir came to understand the complexity and richness of the cultures he encountered, he exhibited increasing interest in their society. Muir remarked extensively on the incredible workmanship of the Native American totem- pole monuments he found in Alaska. He dedicated several pages to this topic and in one instance he commented on the totem-pole ruins they found in a deserted Stikeen village. He admired the great skill with which the artists sculpted men, women, and a wide variety of animals. He stressed the fact that none of civilization's skilled workers were capable of such an accomplishment and the craftsmanship which they displayed could only be compared to that of a woodpecker.[34] He was in awe of the talent demonstrated in the construction of these monuments and again he spoke in terms of the natural world, his ideal, when he discussed their skills.

Furthermore, Muir displayed a great deal of respect for the people themselves. During his

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[33] Wolfe, 211.

[34] Muir, 72.

first trip to Alaska in 1879 Muir came to know the man Toyatte quite well. Toyatte was a Stickeen Indian (which is a clan of the Tlingit) and the captain on one of Muir's canoe voyages. Muir described the honorable death of Toyatte in great detail. He explained that a member of the Stickeen tribe struck a member of the Taku tribe. The Taku tribe demanded restitution for this action which ultimately led to a battle. Although Toyatte was a baptized Christian and pacifist he explained to Muir that he needed to stand beside his sons even if he did not fight. Toyatte was shot through the chest early in the battle and died. Muir wrote fondly of his friend explaining that under all difficult circumstances Toyatte always demonstrated courage and dignity. His admiration for Toyatte was so great that Muir named one of the Stickeen glaciers after him.[35]

Muir considered himself fortunate for having the opportunity to meet several native Alaskan tribes and deemed his Alaskan friends exceptional teachers: "Looking back on my Alaska travels, I have always been glad that good luck gave me into confiding contact with the Thlinkit [sic] tribes, so that I learned their customs, what manner of men they were, how they lived and loved, fought and played, their morals, religion, hopes, and fears, and superstitions, how they resembled and differed in characteristics from our own and other races."[36] When interpreting his written word we must remember that, although he philosophized about religion and the wilderness, he wrote as if jotting his daily thoughts. Often times when people record their thoughts in a journal they rarely have time to process new ideas and philosophies. This is why Muir's mention of the morals, religion, hopes and fears of these people is much more

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[35] Muir, 204.

[36] Muir, 197.

significant than it may first appear. He began his Alaskan expeditions in his forties and took his last trip when he was 60 years old, but only later was he able to fully process many of the philosophies he discussed with the Alaskan Natives.

Again in The Cruise of the Corwin Muir depicted an indigenous culture for which he had incredible respect. Muir reached a point at which he began to embrace their cultural differences. He recognized that they had incongruous habits, characteristics, ideas and practices and he appreciated them not because they were different, but, rather for who they were. He spoke of their keen senses which largely outshined those of most people in civilization. He enjoyed their questioning and a expressive behavior.[37] He also spoke often of the benevolent relationships found in this society just as he did in Letters From Alaska. He stated that these people were of great interest to him and that it was worth coming far distances to know them. He then went on to describe the smile of an Tlingit baby and the stares of several young bashful boys. He said, "there was a response in their eyes which made you feel that they are your brothers."[38] At this point these people were his brothers and sisters; he passed over the societal boundaries which separate us from those we do not completely understand. Muir suddenly became aware of his kinship with this culture.

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[37] John Muir, The Cruise of the Corwin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 130. This book is an account of his trips through British Columbia, Southeastern Alaska, and Siberia, which he took after his first three voyages to Alaska. He encountered different Eskimos on these trips than on his first three Alaskan voyages.

[38] Muir, 76-77.

WHO WERE THE TLINGIT PEOPLE?

Did Muir accurately interpret the teachings of the Tlingit people or was he simply applying his personal agenda to this relationship? A close investigation of the Tlingit lifestyle, philosophies and wilderness world view indicates the accuracy of Muir's understanding for their culture. And this point is essential in relating the connection Muir felt with the Tlingit Native Americans.

The Tlingit people knew little about their "Ruler of the Sky", but they did know that he lived somewhere on a mountain top where the breeze was soft and cool. This mountain was covered with green grass and beautiful flowers that always grew.[39] Moreover, the road to the spiritual world was a journey over two high mountains and a valley after which one reached a river. Upon reaching the shore a soul could be carried over if they had earned the right to eternal happiness. And there a canoe awaited them and would bring them to "happy land."[40]

According to the Tlingit people all of the natural world had a spirit. They viewed these spirits as a sort of guardian angel who watched over and protected them; however, at any given time the spirit may abandon them. Each species had their own spirits and these were never inter-changed between different species. The wind, snow, storms, and glaciers had spirits as well. The shadow behind a tree was its spirit and the wind was said to be the breath of the ice spirit. On occasion the Tlingit would sacrifice a slave to a glacier if it was advancing towards their

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[39] Fr. Anatolii Kamenskii, Tlingit Indians of Alaska (Fairbanks: The University of Alaska Press, 1906), 57.

[40] George Thornoton Emmons/ Frederica de Laguna, The Tlingit Indians (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1991), 290.

camp. According to Frederica de Laguna the glaciers were often reported to retreat, but the Tlingit were not sure if it was out of respect for them or because the glacier was disgusted by the uncleanliness of the slave.[41]

John Muir also found spirits in the wilderness. As stated earlier, he discovered God among the natural world, but he also believed every aspect of this world embodied a piece of the Spirit. In 1873 he wrote:

> Now we observe that, in cold mountain altitudes, Spirit is but thinly and plainly clothed. As we descend down their many sides to the valleys, the clothing of all plants and beasts and of the forms of rock becomes more abundant and complicated. When a portion of the Spirit clothes itself with the lichen tissue, colored simply red or yellow, or gray or black, we say that is a low form of life. All of these varied forms, high and low, are simply portions of God radiated from him as a sun, and made terrestrial by the clothes they wear and by the modifications in of a corresponding kind in the God essence itself.[42]

Muir not only found spirits among the creatures of the wilderness, he found life as well. He believed that the trees were talking to him through the voice of the wind. He was told the trees were imperfect people, but he disagreed, claiming he had never known an unhappy or discontented tree. He marveled at the joyful travels of their roots and admired the peace they found in grasping the land.[43]

On his expedition to Alaska in 1890 he recorded his feelings while eating his lunch among the glaciers: "to dine with a glacier on a sunny day is a glorious thing and makes common

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[41] Emmons/de Laguna, 368.

[42] John Muir, John of the Mountains (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), 138.

[43] Muir, 313.

feasts of meat and wine ridiculous. The glacier eats hills and drinks sunbeams."[44] Although he never offered a sacrifice (that we know of) to the glaciers of Alaska he did find them living beings with movement and direction. Michael P. Cohen comments on Muir's view of the transformation of a glacier at Tuolumne Divide in Alaska, "a glacier had flowed uphill and over a ridge into Tenaya Canyon. This was a lesson about life. The tops of the mountains flowed into the bottom of heaven, the finite merged with the infinite."[45] He found all of the natural world sacred and part of the Spirit. And, analogous to the beliefs of the Tlingit, he "sees in the plants and animals, even the water and rocks, a world of living creatures and spirits that are more than mere matter-in-motion."[46] In accordance with the teachings of the Tlingit people Muir had discovered that life was not linear, but rather a cyclical pattern continuing from one being into another.

The Tlingit people had a crest system in which each clan chose crest animals to represent them. The crest embodied the clans past history, present situation, and future destiny. The use of crests dates back to ancient times and the way in which a clan acquired their crests was usually depicted in a myth. Some of the myths described people marrying animals, being assisted by an animal or simply encountering an animal.[47] As mentioned earlier, the Tlingit paid close attention

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[44] Muir, 317.

[45] Michael Cohen, Pathless Way (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 41.

[46] Max Oelschlaeger, "John Muir: Wilderness Sage" The Idea of Wilderness (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 182.

[47] Aldona Jonaitis, Art of the Northern Tlingit (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 68.

to the commonalities they held with animals and when choosing a crest animal they often picked one that resembled their behavior in some way. For example, the Tlingit had two moiety symbols, the wolf and the raven. The raven represented femaleness and violation of rules and laws, while the wolf represented maleness and strict observance of rules. Each clan picked either one depending on their own situation. In addition to the moiety symbol they chose several other crest animals to represent them.[48]

Crests were used as a unit of social organization. Their political, social and spiritual lives revolved around their crest and although it represented the clan as a whole, each member took a great personal pride in the crest. They displayed their crest on totem poles, canoes, ceremonial dress, facial painting, and tattooing and in this way they were able to communicate their myths, histories and beliefs. The expression and representation of animals and natural phenomena surrounded their lives. Not only were they living in harmony with the natural world, but they had come to find a unity with this world, a oneness which can be seen in their myths, religious practices, social events and artwork.

During the 1930's a group of surrealist artists began studying and interpreting the artwork of the Northwest coast Native Americans and more specifically the Tlingit people. In Art of the Northern Tlingit Aldona Jonaitis examined the views of some of these artists and comments here on a statement from Claude Levi Strauss:

> "Not only the art, but the artist himself, unified all sorts of things into a mystic oneness: 'the sculptor of Alaska and British Columbia is not only the sorcerer who confers upon the supernatural a visible form but also the inspired creator, the interpreter who translates into eternal *chefs d'oeuvre* the fugitive emotions. "They depicted their mythological

[48] Jonaitis, 84.

> gods and totemic monsters in abstract symbols, using organic shapes without regard to contours of appearance'. Thus the artist unites the physical, the spiritual and the psychological."[49]

Several of these artists found an interesting mystical union with the natural world in the Tlingit myths, crests, and artwork. Muir appears to feel a similar mystical union, but he portrays this in his written work rather than through artwork. Wolfgang Paalen expressed his fascination with the oneness depicted between men and women, people and animals and the living and the dead. Artists such as Barnett Newman pointed to the abstract union of organic shapes in their art. Newman claimed there was absolutely no social function served in their work, but rather a sacred purpose. At the Ideographic Picture Show for Northwest Coast art in 1947 Newman stated, "the abstract shape he used, his entire plastic language, was directed by a ritualistic will towards metaphysical understanding...To him a shape was a living thing, a vehicle for an abstract thought-complex, a carrier of the awesome feelings he felt before the terror of the unknowable."[50] The mystical representation found in the artwork of the Tlingit people reflected their relationship with the surrounding environment. They felt an intrinsic connection to the world around them and lived accordingly.

John Muir has dedicated countless pages to recording his own mystical experiences in the natural world. Having read several of his books I have yet to find one in which he failed to emphasize his innate union with the wilderness. He often described the sensation of stepping out of himself and feeling a connection with other living objects, depicting a sense of the same

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[49] Aldona Jonaitis, Art of the Northern Tlingit (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 10.

[50] Jonaitis, 9.

mystic oneness the Tlingit people expressed in their artwork. He was a master at relating his stories of hearing the gospel preached from the tops of trees and in the voices of the wind. It was only in the wilderness that he was able to receive his true baptism. His rock climbing adventures are exciting to read due to his risky endeavors and few are told without a description of his connection to the rocks or land. This passage clearly demonstrates the mystical union he felt in the wilderness:

> We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling, enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us. Our flesh-and-bone tabernacle seems transparent as glass to the beauty about us, as if truly an inseparable part of it, thrilling with their and trees, streams and rocks, and the waves of sun-a part of all nature, neither old nor young, sick nor well, but immortal. Just now I can hardly conceive of any bodily condition dependent on food or breath any more than the ground or the sky. How glorious a conversion.[51]

Muir wrote this in his journal on June 6, 1869 and he had yet to meet his Tlingit friends. It would be another ten years until he encountered the Alaskan natives and their similar perspective. But when he finally found them he uncovered a bridge connecting their philosophies, born and solidified in the wilderness.

The Tlingit found they had several other attributes in common with animals. This belief probably stems back to the myth they told about the beginning of their world. According to the myth, back when the earth was completely dark, the raven or creator stole the sun and released it into the world, but in order to do this he needed to first become a human. Disguising himself as a seed he was swallowed by a young woman and born a boy. His grandfather owned the sun, stars and moon, which the raven begged to play with. After receiving each one he released it into the

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[51] Sally Miller, John Muir: Life and Work (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1993), 121.

sky and when the sun was released all of the people became very frightened by the bright light. Many of them ran off into the forest or swam out to sea and they became the animals. The people remaining there stayed human.[52] This myth describes a kinship between the Tlingit people and the animals they knew. And this was a relationship they recognized and respected well into the twentieth century.

This relationship often inspired stories and ideas about the transformation of people to animals and vice versa. These myths were used to explain animals characteristics and their relationship with humans. One myth described a girl gathering berries with her friends. They came upon a bear and the girl taunted it, although she knew this was unwise. The Tlingit believed that the animals could understand when people were making fun of them and they had the emotions to feel hurt. When the girl started heading home she repeatedly spilled her berries and this caused her to fall behind the group. She quickly became lost and sat down by a tree to rest. She was awakened by her husband and he brought her further into the woods. Upon reaching the den of a bear the man told her step inside and as she did she saw two other bears. Once her husband stepped in he immediately transformed into a bear and began reprimanding her for laughing at him. Although she was frightened at first she came to understand that the bears lived much like her own people. She grew to love the young bear and soon started to look like a bear herself. In the spring her brothers came to hunt the bears and killed all of them except her. She managed to convince them she was their lost sister and they brought her back to the camp.

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[52] Emmons/de Laguna, 102.

When she arrived back home she explained how the bears lived and what they believed.[53] This story describes the daily life of a bear family and illustrates an attempt to better understand the them. The Tlingit people used myths in order to explain their relationship with the animals and most of the myths depict a culture with great respect and a well established belief about their connection with the animals.

According to Father Anatolii Kamenskii the Tlingit still believed that animals had human souls and could understand human speech early in the twentieth century. A story was often told of an otter stopping to speak with the hunter and asking him for mercy in a human voice. If a Tlingit went into the forest and worried about meeting a bear they would attempt to pacify the bear with compliments and pleasant nicknames. The Tlingit considered the bear to be honest, proud and generous. When hunting the bear they observed several religious rules. The hunter fasted and remained continent for four days. After killing a bear the hunter placed an ochre [flower] on its skin and brought the skin inside. Finally, the hunter decorated the head of the bear and placed it near the fire, singing songs in its honor.[54] "The soul of a bear remains alive after its death and can inform its relatives about the insults....For the same reason, women going into the woods to pick berries or gather roots sing songs in honor of the bear and, upon seeing its tracks, begin praising him, fearing that otherwise they would be taken to its den."[55]

In the forests, mountains, and animals Muir found his brothers and sisters, just as the

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[53] Kamenskii, 75.

[54] Emmons/de Laguna, 132.

[55] Kamenskii, 75.

Tlingit had for centuries. He praised their strength and wisdom with greater understanding than he demonstrated for most people. In 1908 he reflected back on the lessons he had learned from his Tlingit friends and concluded, "Great as they [trees] are and widespread their forests over the earth's continents and islands, we may love them all and carry them about with us in our hearts. And so with the smaller flower people that dwell beneath and around them, looking up with admiring faces, or down in thoughtful poise, making all the land or garden instinct with God." Similar to Tlingit beliefs Muir revealed his ideas about the connection between all living beings and their existence in 1913 when he wrote, "All are our brothers and they enjoy life as we do, share heaven's blessings with us, die and are buried in hallowed ground, come with us out of eternity and return into eternity."[56] Here Muir illustrates his kinship with the animals, but perhaps more significant is the indication that in the Tlingit people he uncovered his soul mates, subscribing to the same sacred doctrine he unveiled in the wilderness.

Throughout his life Muir felt strongly about his rapport with the natural world and more specifically with the creatures of the wilderness. Most scholars consider him a mystic, meaning he felt a oneness with every living creature. Furthermore, he felt he was a part of every animal and every animal a part of him. The Tlingit and Eskimo philosophies introduced to him seemed to complement many of the ideas he had previously contemplated. in sharing their ideas with Muir, the Native Alaskans were providing him with an affirmation of his own beliefs. Certainly Muir had developed a good deal of his wilderness theology before his encounters with the Tlingit

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[56] John Muir, John of the Mountains (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), 440.

people, but I notice a mature insightful tone in most of his ideas written after his contact with them. Muir recollected this discussion in which the Tlingits shared their history and ideas with him:

> I greatly enjoyed the Indians' camp-fire talk this evening on their ancient customs, how they were taught by their parents ere the whites came among them, their religion, ideas connected with the next world, the stars, plants, the behavior and the language of animals under different circumstances, manner of getting a living, etc. When our talk was interrupted by the howling of a wolf on the opposite side of the strait, kadachan puzzled the minster with the question, 'Have wolves souls?' The Indians believe that they have, giving as foundation for their belief that they are wise creatures who know how to catch seals and salmon by swimming slyly upon them with their heads hidden in a mouthful of grass, hunt deer in company, and always bring forth their young at the same time and most favorable time of the year.[57]

After his experiences in Alaska, Muir recorded his wilderness philosophies more explicitly than ever before. This was his most powerful declaration addressing this specific issue. The fact that this was written after his experiences with the Tlingits has significant meaning.

In John of the Mountains, Muir expressed his feelings about the Tlingit Indians he came to know. More specifically, he voiced his opinion of their fellowship with the natural world. In 1890 he wrote, "There is love of wild Nature in everybody, an ancient mother love ever showing itself whether recognized or no, and however covered by cares and duties. Hearts don't grow old, but shall ever get nearer to the Source Divine. To the Indian mind all nature was instinct with deity. A spirit was embodied in every mountain, stream, and waterfall. In the mountains, free, unimpeded, the imagination feeds on objects immense and eternal. Divine influences,

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[57] Muir, 124.

however invisible, are showered down on us as thick as snowflakes in a snowstorm".[58] Never before had Muir encountered a culture which embraced the Wilderness in this manner. He had never known people who transcended the idea of one separate immaculate God. Finally he found a society where the Wilderness and all its Creatures were worshiped as one Divine Being. In the Tlingits he found his brothers and sisters; he found his home.

In order to fully understand the connection Muir felt with the Tlingit people we must attempt to find his individual perspective. A careful analysis of his personal relationships and his youth is necessary for this analysis. For example, did his strict and overpowering father impact his view of the treatment Tlingit children received? Or did the role he played among his brothers and sisters affect the ideas he had about the relationships of the Tlingit people? These questions are difficult to answer, but his experiences certainly influenced his outlook on life and helped create his perspective. These factors come into play when a person encounters a new culture and the way in which they interpret the culture is often reflective of their past.

Growing up with a tyrannical and abusive father may have affected Muir's view of child parent relations. In the Story of My Boyhood and Youth, Muir recollected a time when he was burning a large pile of grass and brush. His father approached and chose this instance to lecture on the burning fires of hell. He told the children they would burn in fires such as this one if they

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[58] Muir, John, John of the Mountains: Unpublished Journals of John Muir (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), 315.
These journals were published by Muir's daughter, Wanda Muir Hana.

did not follow the word of God.[59] As a Calvinist minister, Muir's father preached the fire and brimstone mentality often and subjected his children to a life of rules, hard work, and very strict punishments. Although John wrote frequently to his family members, he never sent a single letter to his father. Upon leaving for his 1000 mile journey to the Gulf of Mexico he gave all of his possessions to his family members. He let his mother pick what she wanted, but his father received nothing. Perhaps most important for Muir was the way in which he chose to live, the teachings he practiced, and the ideas he preached. His wilderness theology was entirely opposite his father's Calvinist mentality. Muir cared for his children with indiscriminate kindness and love. And he greatly admired the relationships he witnessed between the Tlingit people and their elders. Muir sought a lifestyle with kindness and benevolence and he found the peaceful existence among the Tlingit a home he had never known among his own family.

Evidence suggests that Muir greatly cared for his family, with the exception of his father. He religiously wrote to his mother, brothers and sisters. As the eldest sibling he demonstrated a feeling of responsibility for his family. He often gave advice to his brothers and sisters, emphasizing the great importance of education and knowledge. He also financially assisted each sibling on at least one occasion. In 1870 he wrote to his sister Sarah, "No one reflection gives me so much comfort as the completeness and unity of our family, we stand like a family clump of trees...do not consider me absent-lost. I have but gone out a little distance to look at the Lord's

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[59] Muir, John, The Story of My Boyhood and Youth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 104.

gardens."[60] Muir expressed overwhelming joy in the love he felt for his family, but he rarely saw them. He spent the majority of his life on expeditions and voyages all over the world, often alone or with strangers. Perhaps his vivid memories of childhood would never allow him to totally embrace a family, enabling him to appreciate it better from afar. And when he encountered the Tlingit people and their compassionate familial relations he may have been witnessing a benevolent household for the first time in his life. His introduction into the Tlingit culture finally provided him with the evidence he needed to understand his own youth.

As stated earlier, Muir dedicated years of his life to saving the national forests. In relation to this cause, he also studied the glaciers of the Sierras and Alaska. This was his public domain, but who was the private and personal John Muir? What were the things he cherished and what were the virtues he expressed in his personal letters and journals? Certainly Muir had no trouble communicating his ideas concerning the degradation of the wild, but was he able to express his feelings towards people and cultures in a public sphere? And was he even fully aware of the aspects which attracted him to the Tlingit people? Much of his writing concerning the Tlingit depicts an appreciation for this culture that he appears almost unaware of until later in his life. Perhaps it took him years to process the lessons he learned among the Alaskan natives, or perhaps the overwhelming racism still existing in America veiled his feelings and governed his actions.

Although Muir's love for the Tlingit people was quite evident at the end of his life, he

[60] John Muir, The life and Letters of John Muir (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), 24.

never advocated improving their situation. He neither wrote nor spoke often of their plight, and we must ask why. First, it is necessary to assess whether Muir recognized or totally understood the situation facing the Tlingit people and Native Americans in general.

In the middle of the nineteenth century many scholars had begun to study scientific racism, the belief that each race is inherently different with superior and inferior races. In 1854 the scientist J.C Nott summarized popular belief at the time when he said:

> Lofty civilization in all cases, has been achieved solely by the "Caucasian" group. Mongolian races, save in the Chinese family, in no instance have reached beyond the degree of semi-civilization. Furthermore, certain savage types can neither be civilized or domesticated. The Barbarous races of America although nearly as low in intellect as the Negro races, are essentially untamable. Not merely have all attempts to civilize them failed, but also every endeavor to enslave them. Our Indian tribes submit to extermination, rather than wear the yoke under which our Negro slaves fatten and multiply.[61]

During Muir's childhood he witnessed the transition from the "civilization or extinction" doctrine to the "unfortunate necessity" attitude. As the race for the West quickened the conflict between Indians and settlers continued to grow. And suddenly people subscribed to the idea that although it was unfortunate the Indians were losing their land, it was an unavoidable conflict and there were simply no other options. At this time reservations were being established and some Americans started to view the Indians as a lesser people that simply needed guidance and protection. The public had a picture of "savage islands in the middle of civilized seas," carefully patrolled by the United States government.[62]

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[61] Robert F. Berkhofer, The White Man's Indian (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 58.

[62] Roy Harvey Pearce, Savagism and Civilization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 240.

In the 1870's Muir and the rest of America was introduced to evolutionary anthropology. This thinking stemmed from the contemporary ideas of evolution and applied them to different races. This doctrine claimed the Native American race was simply on a lower level of the evolutionary scale than whites were. However, at this time the Indian Service was purged and the new Secretary of Interior Carl Schurz heightened the efforts to educate and civilize the Native Americans.[63] At this point the attempts to Christianize and protect the "savages" were regarded as the most gallant of efforts. American civilization created the idea of the "savage" and their ideal of civilization would not withstand the existence of the savage, therefore, they needed to eradicate these people in some way. When the methods became education rather than death and supervision rather than war, American citizens may have started to consider these practices quite moral and just in comparison with past actions.

Muir was born into a period when people were preaching extermination of the Native American culture and this doctrine slowly changed into a more paternal and welcoming theory, giving the Indians the right to live in accordance with the expectations of civilization. His family, friends and colleagues most likely subscribed to these popular ideas. For example, Muir spent the majority of his time with the Tlingits also in the company of missionaries attempting to convert the Natives to Christianity. Although his agenda was quite the opposite of Samuel Young, a missionary, Muir befriended Young and they remained friends until the end of their lives. He demonstrated a complete lack of interest in the missionary work, mentioning it very few times. The newspapers and magazines reported the justness of the United States

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[63] Pearce, 242.

government. And although Muir was surrounded by these influences he did not actively support scientific racism or evolutionary anthropology. But could he help hearing these commonly understood doctrines and allowing them to seep into his subconscious thoughts? Ingrained in the back of his mind may have been the thought that these ideas were true and the Tlingit people merely needed his guidance. And if this were the case, why did he passionately describe their relationship with the natural world and why were his own beliefs so totally analogous to the Tlingit? It is difficult to ascertain exactly what his feelings for the implementation of "civilization" and Christian beliefs were because he rarely spoke directly of these subjects. But perhaps, from the descriptions he wrote of their relationships, lifestyle, artwork and beliefs we can infer that he found their culture advanced and exalted. I believe his thoughts on this culture were indisputably in favor of maintaining the teachings and ideas of people akin to himself.

Yet we are still left to wonder why he failed to publicly demand protection for the unique and valuable Tlingit culture. Muir was a well known writer and political activist, holding great influence in American society. He may have been able to use this position as an advantage for speaking on behalf of the Native American people. But, he had an agenda. His life was dedicated to the preservation of the national forests. Although he discovered the Tlingit people in Alaska he traveled there to study glaciers. In 1879, when he took his first trip to Alaska he had already dedicated twenty years to the preservationist movement. His conscious efforts remained focused on this movement throughout his life, but it is quite clear his subconscious thoughts depict a oneness with the Tlingit people.

Simply re-directing his lifework after decades of devotion would be an impossible task

for most people. Secondly, recognizing the significance of his relationship with the Tlingit people may have taken several years of reflection to fully process. Lastly, Muir may have understood the possibility of speaking on behalf of his Tlingit friends, but that may have jeopardized his lifework. Living in a period when Indians were considered child-like replicas of the superior white race Muir may have lost all credibility in describing their mystical connection with the wilderness. The primarily Christian Eurocentric American population would have begun to disregard Muir as an eccentric slightly delusional reporter, having lost much of his grasp on reality in the wild. And these possibilities were simply much too large a gamble for a man dedicating his life to the conservation of the natural world. He was totally dependent on the public reception of his respectability.

Bigotry and preconceptions veiled Muir's first experiences with Native Americans. He grew up immersed in the racist stereotypes and attitudes of his age; however, he surmounted this barrier of prejudice and his feelings towards Native Americans evolved into love and compassion. These powerful emotions inevitably invoked a deep sense of appreciation and respect for these people, thus obviously influencing his world view. Moreover, the Tlingit people of Alaska play an integral role in the study of John Muir and in discerning their culture we begin to grasp the meaning behind this relationship. Failure to study the Tlingit people and their connection with Muir will hinder a complete understanding of this man.

Muir was raised a Calvinist Christian, but he died a pantheist with belief in the Spirit of the wilderness. The Tlingit people found the wilderness sacred with spirits inhabiting all of the

natural world. Furthermore, they depicted a mystical connection with the natural world in their artwork, crests, and philosophies. As a young boy Muir sought refuge in the woods that his father considered dangerous and evil. The Tlingit people lived harmoniously among natural environment, solidifying the relationship by incorporating the wilderness into every aspect of their lives. Muir believed he rose out of the same origins that every living creature had, and he would eventually step into eternity with them, as equals. Moreover, the Tlingit felt the animals were their ancestors, originating from the same beginning, and connected in their lineage. It is an irrefutable fact that Muir practiced many of the same teachings the Tlingit had been using for centuries. He may have been influenced and inspired by his encounter with the Tlingit Native Americans, but I am entirely certain he discovered his kindred spirits in the Tlingit people. The Tlingit culture introduced him to a lifestyle he had been longing for and a sense of home he could find nowhere else.

John Muir's ideas concerning the natural world were cutting edge in the late nineteenth century and they still are today. He possessed the foresight which made his philosophies insightful and new a century later. What gave his theories the vitality to transcend time? Perhaps it was the right combination. His view of the wilderness encompassed a passion not found in most people's beliefs. I think his passion came from within, but I know he received strength from the kinship he found in the Native Alaskans. In them he discovered the truth behind his ideas. He witnessed the manifestation of his theories in their lives. The wilderness philosophies of the Tlingit people provided Muir with the proof that matched his passion.

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